

APEC tourism ministers meet in Macau, urge digital innovation

Culture and Tourism Minister Sun raises 3 insights

Tony Wong

Representatives of member economies of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) gathered in Macau for the 13th APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting on Saturday, during which they met for discussions themed “Digital Innovation, Collaborative Empowerment: Leveraging Tourism for an Asia-Pacific Community”, to consider new paths for tourism cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

During the ministerial meeting’s opening session on Saturday morning, Minister of Culture and Tourism Sun Yeli raised three insights regarding the meeting’s theme: first, to jointly seek digital innovation to promote the high-quality development of the tourism industry; second, to jointly discuss collaborative empowerment to fortify the foundation of tourism prosperity; and third, to share the value of tourism and work together to build an Asia-Pacific community.

The one-day ministerial meeting, which was held behind closed doors, was open to the media during its opening session.

The meeting was held at the Services Platform Complex for Commercial and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (aka Forum Macao Complex) in Sai Van.



Representatives of APEC member economies listen to Minister of Culture and Tourism Sun Yeli delivering a welcoming address during the opening session of Saturday’s 13th APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting at the Forum Macao Complex. – Photo: Tony Wong

Delivering a welcoming address during the meeting’s opening session, Sun, who chaired the 13th APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting, noted that Macau serves as an important bridgehead for China’s high-level opening-up to the outside world and a vital window for exchange and mutual learning between civilisations, and is fully dedicated to building itself into a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure.

Sun said that tourism is a core driving force for the Asia-Pacific region’s economic development, possessing a solid foundation, abundant potential, and a promising future.

In recent years, China has continuously expanded the scope of mutual visa exemptions, steadily enhanced the facilitation of cross-border tourism, and seen a continuous expansion in the volume of incoming and

outgoing tourists, Sun noted.

Pointing out that this year marks the third time that China hosts the APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting, Sun said that the 13th APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting in Macau, as a key component of APEC China 2026, marked a new starting point to deepen tourism cooperation among APEC member economies.

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Putin says Russia faces unprecedented Western pressure

MOSCOW – Russia is facing harsh, unprecedented pressure exerted by Western countries, Russian President Vladimir Putin said yesterday.

“Russia is facing harsh, unprecedented pressure from Western elites. Unable to deliver a strategic defeat or battlefield victory against Russia, these forces have sought to destabilize its political landscape and stoke internal unrest, yet all such attempts have ended in failure,” Putin stated at the plenary session of the 23rd Congress of the United Russia party.

He stressed that Ukraine has been weaponized as a “battering ram” in the West’s confrontation with Russia, with blatant disregard for the Ukrainian people.

Putin pointed out that the West deliberately

turns a blind eye to Kiev’s intentional strikes on civilian populations and infrastructure, as well as its near-open recruitment of domestic defectors in Russia to conduct sabotage and terrorist attacks. Despite these blatant provocations, the West continues to impose new, illegitimate sanctions exclusively targeting Russia, he said.

He added that Russia is firmly resisting all attempts to stifle its development, emphasizing that the country possesses ample capability to withstand such pressure, leaving no room for doubt.

Elections for deputies to the ninth State Duma are scheduled for September 20, 2026. The ongoing United Russia party congress serves as a key platform for the upcoming electoral campaign. – Xinhua



This photo taken on Saturday shows the cover of a Bruce Lee-themed magazine on display at an exhibition in Beijing. The exhibition highlighting friendly exchanges between the civilian sectors of China and the United States has opened at the Overseas Chinese History Museum of China in Beijing. The exhibition features a selection of 100 relics, including gold-mining tools, railroad spikes, documents and newspapers, as well as badges marking China’s war against Japanese aggression, showcasing the contributions made by generations of overseas Chinese throughout US history. – Xinhua

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Iran warns ships not to bypass its chosen Hormuz route

Iran’s top diplomat warned yesterday that any attempt by shipping to bypass its preferred route through the Strait of Hormuz would “increase tensions” in the Middle East, as US and Iranian forces again traded attacks across the vital seaway. – Story on p. 10

Europe swelters as heatwave moves east, excess deaths rise

Europe’s deadly heatwave pushed east yesterday with hundreds of millions still sweltering across the continent despite fleeting relief from overnight storms, notably in France and Belgium. – Story on p. 11

Venezuela twin quakes kill 1,450 as time running out to find survivors

Rescue crews raced yesterday to pull survivors from the rubble of Venezuela’s powerful twin earthquakes as the death toll reached 1,450 and hopes dwindled more than three days after the disaster struck. – Story on p. 12

Macau proves that cultural heritage is both object and subject of tourism



Following this past weekend's 13th Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Tourism Ministerial Meeting—hosted by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in its Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR), one of the world's most tourism-dependent economies—I have done quite a bit of thinking and reading about the role of cultural heritage as both an object and a subject of tourism.

After covering Macau's tourism industry firsthand for over four decades, I am convinced that cultural heritage is not merely the object of tourism (such as historic edifices and traditional folk dances). Rather, a centuries-long practice of tourism—which is precisely the case here—means that the history and culture of travel per se can become an integral part of a destination's cultural heritage. Indeed, that is exactly what has unfolded in Macau since at least the 18th century.

When a destination has been welcoming visitors for centuries, tourism fundamentally shapes the local architecture, customs, cuisine, collective memory and, last but not least, its identity.

Cultural heritage as the “object” of tourism is what visitors are eager to see and experience. The targets of these trips comprise tangible assets such as monuments, ancient and modern architecture, and heritage sites. The UNESCO World Heritage-listed Historic Centre of Macau, the A-Ma Statue, the Maritime Museum, and The Venetian Macao resort immediately spring to mind. Intangible objects include traditional festivals, local culinary traditions, and religious rituals—such as Macau's Catholic Procession of Our Lady of Fátima, the Taoist Na Tcha Float Parade, and Macanese fusion cuisine.

Conversely, cultural heritage acts as the “subject” of tourism because the industry itself, over decades and centuries, actively shapes the destination. In this context, cultural heritage becomes an “agent” moulding the tourist experience and even the host

community's own identity, which in Macau is proudly multicultural. Heritage dictates a destination's perception—and perception is how tourists, and humans in general, interpret reality.

Macau's dual nature as both an object and subject of cultural tourism began in the 18th and 19th centuries when it evolved into a recreational retreat and leisure destination for European traders. In the 1700s and early 1800s, merchants employed by foreign firms were permitted to stay in Guangzhou (then known in the West as Canton) only during specific trading seasons. In the off-season, these merchants “retreated” to Macau, transforming it into a peaceful, multicultural seaside resort.

For those interested in this era, I highly recommend Hong Kong-born writer Timothy Mo's 733-page historical novel, *An Insular Possession*¹—an extraordinary read detailing the intricacies of the First Opium War along the South China coast, featuring Macau and Canton, which touches beautifully on the beginnings of Macau's tourism industry.

The local tourism sector received a monumental boost in 1849 when Portuguese administrators licensed the city's first casino concessions in a desperate bid to fill empty public coffers. Since then, gaming has been the primary money spinner for Macau. Yet, even back in the 18th century, contemporary accounts show that Macau's multicultural heritage was already a major tourist draw. Of course, it is significantly easier for casinos to generate hard cash than historic monuments—a reality that obviously remains true to this very day.

Whatever one might think of legalised gambling, Macau's casinos (which now number 20, down from a peak of 42 in 2021) are the core engine of our tourism industry. Without them, the prosperous Macau we know today simply would not exist.

Macau's modern tourism era was born in 1961² when the local administration declared the city a “tourism zone”. In its wake, a monopoly concession was granted to Stanley Ho Hung-sun's STDM, whose mandate was not just to run casinos, but to build a comprehensive tourism sector

from scratch. The sector's most significant developmental leap came in 2002 when the MSAR's first Chief Executive, Edmund Ho Hau Wah (an accountant and auditor by profession), took the bold step of ending STDM's monopoly by liberalising the gaming industry. Following a brief transitional period, six rival operators have since run the gaming sector.

Around the same time, the Central People's Government in Beijing made the wise decision to designate Macau a “World Centre of Tourism and Leisure”. Today, Macau ranks among the world's top three territories regarding tourism receipts as a percentage of GDP, alongside Andorra and Aruba, with tourism accounting for around 70 per cent of its economy.³

Macau is now also firmly established among the world's 10 most visited cities. International analysts concur that Macau's integrated resorts and its rich cultural heritage (with cuisine being one of the most vital “ingredients” and core pillars of that culture) are the ultimate drivers of its success.

Nowadays, visitors from the Chinese mainland account for around 70 per cent of all arrivals. Macau has benefited immensely from the mainland's economic miracle; back in the 1980s, by contrast, the vast majority of visitors arrived from Hong Kong and Japan.

In the first five months of this year, Macau welcomed 18.1 million visitor arrivals—a year-on-year increase of 11.1 per cent—though 62 per cent of them were day-trippers. In May, daily visitor arrivals averaged 112,515, equivalent to a striking 16.6 per cent of the local population, all squeezed onto a mere 33.4 square kilometres. Meanwhile, Macau's 147 hotels (including 44 budget accommodation options) welcomed 6.0 million guests, representing a year-on-year growth of 14.3 per cent, last month.

In May, foreigners accounted for 6.7 per cent of all visitor arrivals and 9.9 per cent of hotel guests. I hope the proportion of international travellers will gradually rise to 20 per cent over the next five to 10 years, which would provide a welcome boost to our city's global image. However, I am realistic enough to believe that one-fifth is likely the maximum Macau can achieve in the medium term, given that we will always rely on a massive pool of 1.4 billion potential visitors from the Chinese mainland, the Hong Kong SAR, and China's Taiwan region.

Yet, thanks to this thriving industry, Macau enjoys what is, relatively speaking, the world's highest fiscal reserves, standing at nearly 0.7 trillion patacas.

The Minister of Culture and Tourism, Sun Yeli—whose dual portfolio is a perfectly appropriate combination—addressed Saturday's opening session of the ministerial meeting. On the sidelines, he told

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai that the Central People's Government will fully support the local administration's project to establish an integrated tourism and culture zone, thereby assisting Macau in raising its developmental quality and strengthening international cooperation to better integrate into the national development framework.

Saturday's ministerial meeting, which was preceded by the two-day 67th APEC Tourism Working Group Meeting on Wednesday and Thursday, was themed “Digital Innovation, Collaborative Empowerment: Leveraging Tourism for an Asia-Pacific Community”. In his speech at Saturday's formal opening ceremony, Minister Sun underlined the critical role of artificial intelligence (AI) in driving tourism and propelling socio-economic growth.

For Macau, sustainable growth in tourism remains indispensable to promoting the appropriate diversification of its economy. The local economy is currently navigating a somewhat bumpy transition towards deeper integration into the 11-city Greater Bay Area (comprising nine cities in Guangdong alongside the nation's two SARs) and the acceleration of the parallel Macau-Hengqin integration process.

Consumer patterns are also shifting noticeably among both mainland visitors and locals. While Macau residents increasingly head to Zhuhai to dine and shop across its string of excellent, affordable shopping malls, mainland tourists are no longer raiding local supermarkets. Some now even prefer staying in Zhuhai hotels, where room rates are far more competitive than their Macau counterparts.

Affordability is the crux of the issue. Local shop owners complain about Macau's prohibitively high rents, while shoppers gripe about high prices and substandard quality. In a complete reversal of the recent past, it is now the locals who descend on the well-stocked, affordable supermarkets of Zhuhai.

One can only hope that local businesses do not fall into the trap of pricing themselves out of the market. The challenge for the local commercial sector is to transition from a traditional mercantile mindset to a genuinely entrepreneurial approach. Startups launched by young entrepreneurs in the Macau-Hengqin zone offer a clear beacon of hope.

For Macau's tourism to sustain its growth—sustainability being an inherent challenge globally—it must integrate seamlessly into the GBA, and Hengqin in particular. The local government's target of boosting international visitor numbers can only be achieved by offering integrated, multi-destination itineraries that package Macau and Hong Kong alongside

mainland GBA powerhouses like Guangzhou, Zhuhai, and the futuristic metropolis of Shenzhen (which I visited recently and was, to put it mildly, deeply impressed by). Tourists taking intercontinental flights to the GBA naturally expect a multi-city experience; Macau is undoubtedly special, but so are its neighbours.

“Of all the ports of entry to Canton, the most flourishing is that of Macau,” Sam quoted from a classic Chinese poem during his welcome speech, noting that it serves as a vivid testament to Macau's historic role as an essential centre of commercial and cultural exchange between East and West. The Chief Executive also emphasised that hosting the APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting in Macau again after a 12-year interval holds profound significance for the city.

Furthermore, Sam invoked President Xi Jinping's address at last year's 32nd APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting: “We must stay true to APEC's founding mission of promoting economic growth and improving people's well-being, and uphold open development where everyone shares opportunities and achieves win-win outcomes.”

This hits the nail on the head. Improving the well-being of the population must always be the ultimate political objective of any responsible leader at the local, national, and global level. For me, that well-being includes offering residents and tourists alike a safe, easily accessible, affordable, and comfortable public transport network.

I would also like to see the local government accelerate the sprucing up of our city's old quarters, some of which are in urgent need of a facelift. In this regard, Macau could learn a great deal from the GBA cities I have visited over the past few months, namely Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Zhongshan.

Cultural heritage, both as the object and subject of tourism, must be meticulously curated so that locals and visitors alike can continue to reap its rewards. Only then can Macau truly fulfil its potential and solidify its status as a fully-fledged World Centre of Tourism and Leisure.

—Harald Brüning

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS.
OCCASIONAL SHOWERS.
A FEW THUNDERSTORMS.
FORCE 2 TO 4 SOUTH TO SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS WITH GUSTS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 75% AND 98%.



26°C~30°C

Source: SMG

Footnotes

¹ *Paddleless Press, 2002, ISBN 0952 4193 86*

² *For a comprehensive overview of Macau's gaming industry history, see Jorge Godinho's «Os Casinos de Macau» (Coimbra: Almedina, 2019), ISBN 978-972-40-7867-0.*

³ *Source: Commonwealth Union Data on Tourism-Dependent Economies (<https://www.commonwealthunion.com/the-worlds-most-tourism-dependent-economies/>)*

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IAM to host parent-child camp, workshops & theatre next month

Ida Cheong

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) will hold a raft of activities suitable for children, youths and families from next month to August, including a civic education camp, a Chinese culture workshop series, and the "Good Citizen Puppet Theatre". All residents are welcome to sign up via the "Macao One Account" free of charge, according to an IAM statement on Friday.

New civic education Hengqin tour

The statement noted that the bureau organises the "Civic Education Friendship Camp" programme for children and young people aged 6 to 18 in Macau, divided into friendship-camp and parent-child camp sessions every summer.

This year, the new "Civic Education Friendship Hengqin Tour" has been added, aiming to enable participants to learn about courtesy, cultivate a sense of responsibility and public mindedness through group games and outdoor competitions.

The friendship camp and the parent-child camp will be held at the Hac Sa Beach Training Centre, with a maximum of 30 participants per session, the statement said, adding that the friendship Hengqin tour is only open for group registration by schools or organisations. Participation in the parent-child camp requires accompaniment

by one parent or guardian.

The "Chinese Culture Fun Workshop" series, held at the Chinese Ethnicities Sculpture Park in Nape and the Civic Education Resource Centre, offers educational and entertaining creative experiences that allow residents to appreciate the profound heritage and unique charm of the diverse cultures of the Chinese nation through hands-on creation, the statement said.

The statement added that the "Paper Magic for Ethnic Girls" workshop, "Bamboo Blessing Wind Chimes" workshop, "Colour Collage Paradise for Ethnic Costumes" workshop and "Yi People*-Style Triangle Bags" workshop will take place from July through August. For details, please call 8591 2334 or 8591 2335,

In addition, two sessions of the "Good Citizen Puppet Theatre" will be launched in July and August, aimed at families with children aged 3 to 12. Children can learn about the importance of a courteous life. The sessions will be held on July 26 and August 23, from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., with a capacity of 40 participants per session. Registration will open next Monday and 3 August respectively. For enquiries, please call 2847 1371. ■

* Yi people (彝族) is one of the nation's largest ethnic minorities living primarily in the mountainous southwest (Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou). - Gemini

Na Tcha fair aims to encourage youngsters to preserve traditional culture



Na Tcha Temple Association President Ip Tat addresses Friday's Na Tcha-themed fair opening ceremony in front of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Na Tcha Temple near the Ruins of St Paul. - Photos: Armindo Neves



A visitor passes an incense burner in front of Na Tcha Temple on Friday.

Armindo Neves

The Na Tcha Temple Association launched its fair titled "Na Tcha Temple Lotus Door Three Banquets: Rites Banquet", in front of the Na Tcha Temple near the Ruins of St Paul's, on Friday.

Both locations are listed by UNESCO as World Heritage sites. The fair ends on Thursday. It is open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. each day.

According to Kuok Pak Yu, head of the association's youth division, the Rites Banquet (禮宴) focuses on traditional folk beliefs and rituals, as well as on the themes of "Intangible Cultural Heritage Transmission" and "World Heritage Preservation". It pays tribute to the Ruins of St Paul's and the Na Tcha folk belief, which is recognised as a national-level item of intangible cultural heritage.

She also said that the fair features three distinctive experiential highlights: an innovative market offering a wide range of attractions, from eight-character tarot readings and speciality cuisine to local handicrafts and creative intangible cultural heritage products; cultural heritage and trend-inspired workshops; and daily live performances and interactive game sessions.

Kuok underlined that the association's commitment to ensuring that traditional culture is not confined to temples and ancient texts, but is instead made visible, hands-on and tangible for both locals and visitors.

Through the festival, the association hopes to showcase Macau's unique cultural heritage, shaped by the blending of Chinese and Western traditions, and to inspire the younger generation to cherish and carry forward the deep roots of their intangible cultural heritage and folk beliefs, Kuok noted.

Ip Tat, president of the association and one of the eight official inheritors of Macau's seven statutorily protected items of intangible cultural heritage, said during Friday's opening ceremony that he has worked alongside the association's seventh-generation colleagues for 39 years, witnessing the transmission and development of the Na Tcha folk belief. He expressed his hope that the association's youth division, the eighth-generation of the association, would take over the reins of the association, continue to bring glory to the Na Tcha Temple, and help establish it as a cultural calling card for Macau. He also expressed his gratitude to the many volunteers, fellow members of the association, and sponsoring organisations for their support in making the market possible.

As previously reported by the *Post*, the Na Tcha folk belief and customs centre around the worship of Na Tcha (Nezha), a deeply revered child deity in Chinese folk religion, Taoism, and Buddhism. Traditionally depicted as a youthful, rebellious figure who flies on "Wind Fire Wheels" and wields a "Universe Ring," Na Tcha is celebrated as a powerful protector against evil spirits, plagues, and natural disasters. While Na Tcha is recognised across many Chinese communities, the specific "Na Tcha Belief and Customs" have a uniquely profound cultural footprint in Macau. The core elements of the Na Tcha belief focus on his role as a child protector, a shield against plagues, and a symbol of cultural harmony. Every year, around the 18th day of the fifth lunar month, Macau hosts vibrant celebrations to mark Na Tcha's birthday, which falls on July 2 this year. The Na

Tcha Procession, taking place this Wednesday and Thursday, is a grand procession where a statue of the deity is carried through the historic streets, accompanied by lion and dragon dances to bless the community.

Celebratory dinner marks fair, upcoming procession

Meanwhile, the Na Tcha Temple Association hosted its celebratory outdoor dinner on Friday night in front of the Na Tcha Temple next to the Ruins of St Paul's, featuring drinks and a variety of local delicacies for guests to enjoy.

Ip Tat thanked the volunteers at the market and the association members for their hard work, and wished the Na Tcha birthday celebration a complete success.

In addition to food and drinks, the evening featured singing and dancing performances to add colour to the celebrations.

Speaking to the *Post*, Teng Kam Chun, vice-president of the association, said the blessing ceremony for the Na Tcha Procession will take place at 9:30 a.m. tomorrow.

During the blessing ceremony, members of the association will accompany guests into the temple, where the statue of Na Tcha will be placed on the altar and a consecration and blessing ritual will be performed, praying for the well-being and prosperity of local residents, national strength, and the health of all citizens.

Blessing bags will be distributed and a "seal-opening for good fortune" activity will be held in the blessing ceremony, allowing members of the public to bring clothing items to be stamped with the temple seal as a harbinger for good health, Tang said. ■

Civic Education Friendship Camp
2026 Campismo de Formação Cívica

活動日期: 七至八月 (Julho-Agosto)
活動地點: 市政專員沙海邊培訓中心 橫琴粵澳深度合作區
費用: 全免 (Gratuita)
查詢電話: 2830 2600

詳情及網上登記
QR code for registration

This handout poster provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) on Friday promotes its "Civic Education Friendship Camp" programme from next month to August at the Hac Sa Beach Training Centre and Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.



Undated file photo of Oswaldo Veiga Jardim, chief conductor of the Macau Baptist College (MBC) 70th anniversary concert at the Macau Cultural Centre in Nape.



Concert aims to cultivate students' open, globally minded perspective

Armando Neves

Macau Baptist College has marked its 70th anniversary with a fresh departure from tradition. Forgoing a conventional celebration, the school chose instead to host a concert themed "Rowing Forward, For the Love of the Motherland" (黄河志 祖国心), featuring the majestic Yellow River Cantata as its centrepiece.

The concert was held at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape on April 21.

Interviewed last month, school principal Wong Chi Kong said that the Yellow River, as the "mother river" of the Chinese nation, symbolises an unceasing spirit of self-improvement. Through the stirring power of music, he hopes to enable students to deeply appreciate the country's historical weight through their own active participation.

Wong noted in the written interview that as the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) accelerates its integrated development, and Macau aligns itself with the nation's overall strategic goals, schools must take up the responsibility of national education.

According to Wong, the concert's theme carries profound hopes for the students' national sentiment, cultural confidence, and global outlook. It aims first to forge a resilient national character inspired by the spirit of the Yellow River; second, to build upon Macau's unique strengths to solidify a sense of national identity rooted in their shared heritage; and third, to remain grounded in Chinese culture while cultivating an open, globally minded perspective that embraces diverse cultures.

The anniversary preparations also coincided with the

120th anniversary of the birth of the renowned "people's musician", Xian Xinghai.

Wong Oi Peng, the school's vice-principal, pointed out that the deliberate choice of Xian's repertoire was intended to give students a genuine understanding of his fervent patriotic spirit and sense of national mission.

She said that the selected pieces span various periods of the composer's life, enabling students to trace his complete journey: from his return to China after studying in Paris, to his involvement in the War of Resistance against Japan in Yan'an, and finally to his untimely death in a foreign land – the Soviet Union.

Guided by the school's philosophy, "cultivating character through music", Wong Oi Peng said, students were led first to understand the composer as a person, then to perform the music, and finally to reflect on the era. "When students discover that a previous generation also experienced difficulties and uncertainty while youths, yet chose to dedicate their talents to serving society, a contemporary resonance naturally emerges", Wong Oi Peng said.

The concert's chief conductor, Oswaldo Veiga Jardim, admitted in the interview that leading the orchestra meant overcoming significant challenges. The ensemble performed the first movement of the National Liberation symphony, a piece Xian completed while ill and displaced in Moscow. Jardim noted that the masterpiece demonstrates Xian's ambition to fuse Chinese folk melodies with the academic rigour of Western classical music. As there is no established performance tradition or recording to refer to, Jardim and the school's music teachers had to painstakingly arrange

individual instrumental parts based on the only publicly available score, a 1955 Soviet edition.

The Yellow River Cantata presented a different kind of challenge for the Brazilian conductor. Jardim read extensively, consulted choir conductors from Guangzhou, and adopted a bold "cross-lingual interpretation". He retained the original Mandarin (Putonghua) for the choruses to preserve emotional authenticity, while rendering the soprano and baritone solos, alongside the recitations, bilingually in Chinese and English. This approach successfully broke down language barriers, fulfilling Xian's long-held wish to bring Chinese compositions to the international stage.

Lio Weng Cheng, a Form 6 student and violinist, found the chromatic passages in National Liberation the most difficult, requiring intense concentration. She believes the Yellow River Cantata serves as a poignant reminder to today's youth to remember past sufferings, cherish peace, and find the courage to shoulder the responsibilities of their era.

Cheng Chon In, also a Form 6 student and choir member, said his favourite movement was "Defend the Yellow River", noting that the ingenious use of alternating voices filled him with vigour. He remarked that performing a classic wartime work in Mandarin requires a solemnity and teamwork completely different to singing pop music. Immersed in the performance, Cheng said he truly understood that love for one's country is not an empty slogan, concluding that studying diligently is the best way to carry forward the spirit of previous generations.



Macau Baptist College Principal Wong Chi Kong (second from left), Vice Principal Wong Oi Peng (left) and other representatives pose at Macau Cultural Centre in Nape on April 21.



- Photos courtesy of MBC

UM expands research institute network to support economic diversification

Khalel Vallo

The University of Macau (UM) said in a recent statement that it will establish four new research institutes as part of a broader restructuring of its research system, creating a network of 11 institutes aimed at accelerating technology transfer and supporting Macau's appropriate economic diversification.

According to the statement, the initiative comes as UM marks its 45th anniversary and prepares for the launch of five new science and technology faculties in the 2026/2027 academic year. The statement said the expanded research framework will integrate faculties, research institutes and its three state key laboratories to strengthen collaboration in frontier research*, innovation and knowledge transfer, while speeding up the commercialisation of laboratory research.

The statement quoted UM Rector Yonghua Song (aka Song Yongshua) as saying that the university is establishing research institutes that meet high standards to encourage collaboration across disciplines and attract high-calibre talent worldwide, adding that the new framework will enable the university to continue supporting innovation and technology development in Macau, the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth

Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and the Chinese mainland.

The first two institutes – the Institute of Smart City Technologies and the Institute of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Brain Sciences – will begin operations on August 1, according to the statement.

Built on the State Key Laboratory of Internet of Things for Smart City (SKL-IOTSC), the Institute of Smart City Technologies will conduct research in intelligent sensing and network communication, urban big data and intelligent technology, smart energy, intelligent transportation, and urban safety and disaster prevention, the statement noted.

Meanwhile, the Institute of Artificial Intelligence and Brain Sciences will house four research centres dedicated to artificial general intelligence, robotics, cognitive and brain sciences, and data science, the statement added, pointing out that the institute will focus on interdisciplinary research combining intelligence science** and neuroscience to support healthcare, social governance and smart industries.

Coinciding with the launch of the Faculty of Medicine on August 1, the university is also establishing two additional research institutes



This undated handout photo provided by the public University of Macau (UM) recently shows its scientific research base on its campus in Hengqin.

specialising in life sciences and clinical and translational medicine***, the statement noted, adding that the life sciences institute will focus on fundamental research into medical and biological mechanisms, while the clinical and translational medicine institute will concentrate on clinical research and transforming scientific findings into practical applications.

Together with UM's existing institutes – including the Institute of Chinese Medical Sciences, Institute of Microelectronics, Institute of Applied Physics and Materials Engineering, the Institute of Collaborative Innovation, the University of Macau Advanced Research Institute in Hengqin, UM

Hetao Integrated Circuit Research Institute, and the Zhuhai UM Science & Technology Research Institute – the additions will bring the total number of research institutes to 11, the statement said, adding that the university is also restructuring its Faculty of Science and Technology (FST) and Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) while launching five new faculties: the Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Information Technology, and Faculty of Design.

Song said the expansion reflects the maturation of UM's high-level talent development model and strengthens industry-academia integration between Macau and Hengqin, the statement said. ■

* Frontier research is bold, curiosity-driven investigation at the absolute edge of human knowledge. It pushes beyond existing disciplinary boundaries, tackles high-risk scientific or conceptual questions, and operates in uncharted territory where success is highly uncertain but the potential for groundbreaking discovery is massive. – Gemini

** Intelligence Science is a contemporary, highly interdisciplinary field dedicated to the joint study of the basic theories, mechanisms, and implementation technologies of intelligence. Rather than focusing solely on coding algorithms or behavioural psychology in isolation, it fuses insights from both natural intelligence (how brains and minds work) and artificial intelligence (how machines process information). – Gemini

*** Translational medicine – often called “bench-to-bedside” research – is a rapidly growing discipline in biomedical research that aims to expedite the discovery of new diagnostic tools and treatments by using a multi-disciplinary, highly collaborative, “bench-to-bedside” approach. In simple terms, it is the bridge that connects basic laboratory science (the “bench”) with clinical practice and patient care (the “bedside”). – Gemini

Average age for first-time drug use falls to 22.8

Ida Cheong

According to Macau's latest data, a total of 132 drug abuse cases were reported in 2025, with a clear trend of users getting younger, as the average age for first-time drug use was only 22.8 years, Au Hon Sam Charity Association President Au Hon Chen said during an opening ceremony on Saturday.

Au made the remarks during the “2nd Macau Carnival on Drug Abuse Prevention and Healthy Lifestyle Promotion” opening ceremony at the Rotunda de Carlos da Maia sitting-out area, colloquially known as “Three Lamps”. The event aimed to support the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking on 26 June.

Au noted in a speech that many young people, influenced by peers or pressured by daily life, start taking drugs out of momentary curiosity and end up going down the wrong path. Meanwhile, the risk of new types of drugs entering Macau continues to rise, he said.

According to the United Nations' latest World Drug Report, the global number of drug users has reached an all-time high. Traditional drugs remain widespread, while highly concealable new substances such as etomidate (“space oil”) are quietly endangering the public, particularly threatening young people, Au said.

Au told reporters on the sidelines of the opening ceremony that as youth drug abuse becomes increasingly covert, with the trend of drug users



Au Hon Sam Charity Association President Au Hon Chen addresses the opening ceremony for the “2nd Macau Carnival on Drug Abuse Prevention and Healthy Lifestyle Promotion” at the Rotunda de Carlos da Maia sitting-out area on Saturday. – Photo: Ida Cheong

getting younger, the government is pushing ahead with amending tobacco control laws and plans to completely ban the possession and use of e-cigarettes, adding that he believes the regulation can effectively cut off young people's access to the new type of drug carriers at the source.

Au noted that the summer school holiday is a high-risk period for teenagers to come into contact with new drugs and addictive substances, as their freedom for social and outdoor activities greatly increases and covert sales channels for new drugs multiply. Au urged parents to pay close attention to their children's daily behaviour, social circles and types of out-of-school activities, and to watch for any unusual online or offline entertainment activities. ■

Macau-born giant panda twins to be moved to Chengdu

Khalel Vallo

Macau-born giant panda twins Jian Jian and Kang Kang celebrated their 10th birthday on Friday, with the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) announcing during the festivities that the pair will be relocated to the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding at the end of October.

The birthday celebration at the Macao Giant Panda Pavilion in Seac Pai Van Park in Coloane brought together dozens of local students who also turned 10 this year, alongside parents, teachers and officials from the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM).

Speaking to the media on Friday, IAM officials said that the pandas' move is part of national giant panda management arrangements coordinated by the Central People's Government, the Chengdu Research Base, and the local government.

The officials said that the local government will actively cooperate with the relocation plan, adding that, following the departure of Jian Jian and Kang Kang, the Giant Panda Pavilion will undergo renovation works, including upgrades to its air-conditioning system and the replacement of climbing structures inside the enclosure.

Regarding whether the twin brothers could return to Macau in the future, the officials said any such decision would be jointly coordinated by the Central People's Government, the Chengdu Research Base and the local government, adding that Macau's husbandry team will accompany the pandas during the journey to Chengdu to minimise travel-related stress and monitor their adaptation to their new environment.

Meanwhile, the “Nebula Pavilion” in Chengdu, where Jian Jian and Kang Kang will stay, has

already been upgraded in preparation for their arrival, the officials said, adding that Chengdu's care team will travel to Macau 10 days before the relocation to assist with preparations.

Many of the invited children expressed sadness upon learning that the pandas would be leaving Macau, according to public broadcaster TDM.

Born in Macau in 2016 to giant pandas Kai Kai and Xin Xin, Jian Jian and Kang Kang* have become one of the city's most recognisable animal attractions, according to a statement by the bureau last week. ■

* The names Jian Jian (健健) and Kang Kang (康康) carry a simple yet deeply meaningful wish for the people of Macau: “good health.” When combined, the characters Jian and Kang form the Chinese word for health (jiankang / 健康). In Cantonese, they are known as Kin Kin and Hong Hong (kin hong / 健康). – Gemini



These handout photos provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) on Friday show the two giant panda twins – Jian Jian (left) and Kang Kang – eating their icy birthday cakes in Seac Pai Van Park.

APEC tourism ministers meet in Macau, urge digital innovation

Continued from p.1

Sun raises 3 insights

In his welcoming address, Sun raised three insights regarding the meeting's theme: "Digital Innovation, Collaborative Empowerment: Leveraging Tourism for an Asia-Pacific Community".

First, to jointly seek digital innovation to promote the high-quality development of the tourism industry, Sun said.

Sun quoted President Xi Jinping's previous remarks as pointing out the need to create a new hallmark for a digital Asia-Pacific, and to construct a new economy, new business formats, and new business models.

Sun said that the digital empowerment and informational transformation of the tourism industry have become an irreversible trend, injecting fresh momentum into the high-quality development of tourism. "We need to work together to deepen the integration of tourism, culture, and technology, cultivate more new business formats, and drive the upgrading of the traditional tourism industry", Sun said.

"We need to enrich the tourist experience by utilising cutting-edge technological applications such as real-time translation glasses, exoskeleton devices, and virtual reality (VR) to break down language barriers, facilitate travel, and deepen cultural appreciation", Sun said.

The minister also called for initiatives to enhance the effectiveness of tourism governance, resolving challenges such as overcrowding at popular scenic spots and tourism safety issues through new models such as big data forecasting and artificial intelligence (AI) warnings.

The **second** insight Sun raised is to jointly discuss collaborative empowerment to fortify the foundation of tourism prosperity.

Sun underlined that China is willing to deepen practical cooperation with all parties, better leverage the guiding and driving role of the APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting, connect forces from all sectors including governments, enterprises, and civil organisations, and build a synergy to jointly promote the prosperous development of the tourism industry.

China is willing to strengthen policy alignment with various countries to introduce more facilitation measures in areas such as mutual visa exemptions, fast-track immigration clearance, cross-border payments, and departure tax refunds, thereby continuously improving the ease and convenience of travel, Sun said.



Representatives of APEC member economies watch a robot show at the Forum Macao Complex on Saturday during the cultural and tourism showcase and experience activities organised as part of the 13th APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting. - Photo: GCS

Sun called for efforts to support enterprises in jointly developing tourism products, designing transnational tourism itineraries, and increasing direct flights and cruise routes within the Asia-Pacific region to better satisfy diverse tourism demands.

The minister also underlined the need to encourage industry associations, higher education institutions, and think tanks to strengthen the exchange of experience and data sharing, promote the alignment of tourism industry standards, and jointly carry out talent cultivation, with the aim of providing support for the sustainable development of tourism.

The **third** insight Sun raised is to share the value of tourism and work together to build an Asia-Pacific community.

Sun said that the tourism industry is an important component of a better life, a vital engine for economic development, and an essential bridge for cultural exchange. It holds unique value in the historical process of promoting an Asia-Pacific community, he said.

"We need to continuously release the economic and social benefits of the tourism industry, allowing tourism to better serve its crucial functions of enhancing quality of life, boosting economic development, building a spiritual home, and promoting mutual learning between civilisations, with the aim of solidifying the economic foundation and strengthening the bonds of public support for creating an Asia-Pacific community", Sun said.

Sun also noted that in recent years, China's tourism industry has been thriving and continuously booming, becoming a major supporting force for economic development in the Asia-Pacific and providing a vast arena for corporate and talent investment.

The 33rd APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting will be held in Shenzhen on November 18 and 19.

It will be the third time that China hosts the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, after Shanghai in 2001 and Beijing in 2014.

Before the 22nd APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting was held in Beijing in November 2014, the APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting was held in Macau in September that year.

This time, it was the second time that Macau had hosted the APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting, after the one in 2014.

Macau was hosting the five-day 13th APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting and the 67th APEC Tourism Working Group Meeting between Wednesday and yesterday. As part of the ministerial meeting, the working group meeting was held on Wednesday and Thursday.

APEC tourism ministerial meeting affirms Macau's capacity to host large-scale int'l conventions: Secretary Ng

During the opening session of the 13th APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting on Saturday morning, MSAR Secretary for Economy and Finance Ng Wai Han said that being able to host such a grand event is not

only a full affirmation of Macau's capacity to organise large-scale international conventions and exhibitions, but also provides strong encouragement for the MSAR's ongoing efforts to position itself as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure.

On behalf of the MSAR, Ng expressed sincere gratitude to the Central People's Government for its support and trust.

The MSAR government and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism jointly hosted a welcome dinner on Friday to greet the high-level delegates attending the meetings.

Following the ministerial meeting on Saturday, representatives of APEC member economies yesterday conducted an inspection in Macau, including site visits and activities, for an immersive experience of Macau's rich cultural heritage and unique tourism appeal, according to a statement by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) yesterday.

Yesterday's inspection was jointly organised by the MSAR government and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

3 Spanish-speaking countries among 21 APEC members

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is an inter-governmental forum for 21 member economies in the Pacific Rim which promotes free trade throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

APEC held its first ministers' meeting in 1989 in Australia whose then prime minister, Bob Hawke, is regarded as the multilateral bloc's initiator. APEC's first leaders' meeting was held in the US, hosted by president Bill Clinton.

China will hold this year's 33rd leaders' meeting in Shenzhen on November 18-19, to be hosted by President Xi Jinping.

Unlike the Hong Kong SAR and Chinese Taipei (the name officially used by APEC for China's Taiwan region), the Macau SAR is not an APEC member economy. APEC is headquartered in Singapore.

In 1993, APEC declared a moratorium on admitting new members.

APEC has three official observers: ASEAN, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC).

Spanish is an official language in three APEC member economies – Mexico, Peru and Chile.

The Central People's Government has designated Macau as a platform to promote relations between China and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries. ■

Youngsters receive prizes for 'Draw My Story of Stamps Contest'

Rui Pastorin

"Postcard Day" was celebrated in the Macao 2026 Specialized World Stamp Exhibition at The Venetian Macao on Saturday, during which winning works were also awarded during the prize-giving ceremony of "Draw My Story of Stamps Contest".

The contest, organised by the Macao Post & Telecommunications Bureau (CTT), aimed to encourage and discover more "to participate in cultural creative arts and design through stamps", according to a Saturday statement by the bureau.

The statement did not say how many participants there were, nor how many awards were given out.

Winners were praised by CTT Acting Deputy Director Tam Van Iu for their

"innovative interpretations of stamps", the statement said.

The event also featured other activities including a workshop by local artist and stamp designer Wilson Chi Ian Lam where he guided a raft of participants to create stamps with Macau elements, the statement said.

The day also saw a seminar held by senior expert in Stamp Issuance Management, Liu Jianhui, during which he discussed printing techniques, design, artistic expression, and detailed analyses of several classic issues.

The ongoing free-admission exhibition, which its themed website described as "the first global-scale philatelic event to be held in Macau", continues through Wednesday, July 1, with more details on <https://www.macao2026.org.mo>. ■



This photo taken and provided on Saturday by the Macao Post & Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) shows the winning students of the "Draw My Story of Stamps Contest".

An insight into deafblindness through art, literature



Officiating guests and representatives including Fr. Cyril Axelrod OBE (first from left) pose for a group photo during yesterday's opening ceremony at Cardinal Newman Centre for Culture and Arts Performance of Macau (CCCN).

Rui Pastorin

"International Day of Deafblindness" was commemorated on Saturday, and in line with the event, the Macau Deaf Association (MDA) launched the city's first deafblind art exhibition "TOUCH the Heart" yesterday at the Cardinal Newman Centre for Culture and Arts Performance of Macau (CCCN) in Calçada da Vitória.

The June 27 date was designated by the United Nations last year, coinciding with the birthday of deafblind American author, disability rights advocate, and political activist Helen Keller (1880–1968), according to the UN website. She was also the first deafblind person to earn a bachelor's degree.

Supported by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS), the Macau exhibition showcases art created by deafblind individuals, with artworks ranging from paintings to calligraphy, while

writings and informative videos are also on show. But it goes beyond that, with interactive sections and a workshop also on offer to enable exhibitiongoers to experience how deafblind individuals navigate life through art, and the world around them.

Among the areas are a section presenting works by individuals from both Macau and Hong Kong, while another features pieces made from memory by 84-year-old Fr. Cyril Axelrod OBE, a deafblind priest and author who is known for his work with deaf and blind people. He is also the founding president of the Macau Deaf Association, which launched in 1994.

Having authored several books, yesterday also saw the launch of his latest work "Conquest of Darkness", which was published by the association. The bilingual (Chinese and English) book goes over his recent move back to Macau, challenges and how he faces them,



Participants take part in a workshop after the opening ceremony of the exhibition "TOUCH the Heart" at the Cardinal Newman Centre for Culture and Arts Performance of Macau (CCCN)

among others. In its preface, Axelrod notes: "My book is my way of opening the world of deafblindness and showing how someone like me manages to achieve things in life, accepting challenges, confronting difficulties and finding solutions, and reaching toward my dreams".

Born deaf in South Africa, Axelrod studied to be a priest and travelled across many countries to serve and minister to deaf communities. While set for missions in Southeast Asia, he went to Hong Kong in 1988, where he was also given the Chinese name Chan Man On, meaning "peace for people", according to the book, which notes that around this time, his eyesight had been deteriorating.

A year later, he came to Macau. During that time, he noticed services that the deaf community was in need of, working towards both providing them and changing things.

Among his accomplishments here are the setting-up of a special programme in a pre-school education centre for deaf and hearing-impaired children, along with his work towards the establishment of MDA.

According to the book, when he was 38, Axelrod was diagnosed with Usher Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that causes progressive hearing and vision loss, eventually becoming completely deafblind around the year 2000. By then, he was living in the UK.

Returning to Macau in 2024 under the association's invitation, Axelrod receives care and support from the association while he also continues to promote deafblind services and training programmes.

The exhibition is on until July 12, being open from 11 a.m. through 6 p.m. ■

*More details and photos in an upcoming page 4.

In Macao, APEC economies embrace connected, innovative tourism

Analysis by Xinhua writers Guo Yuqi and Zheng Jingxia

MACAO—The 13th Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Tourism Ministerial Meeting convened on Saturday in China's Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR), bringing together tourism officials from the 21 member economies to discuss the future of regional tourism cooperation.

Under the theme of "Digital Innovation, Collaborative Empowerment: Leveraging Tourism for an Asia-Pacific Community," delegates discussed ways to harness digital innovation and deeper collaboration to boost the region's tourism sector.

REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

As tourism continues to grow across the Asia-Pacific, delegates broadly agreed that stronger connectivity and policy coordination remain key to sustaining the industry's momentum.

Alongside the ministerial meeting, the 67th APEC Tourism Working Group Meeting was held from Wednesday to Thursday in the Macao SAR.

Julia Jesús Caldas Ramírez, head of the Peruvian delegation, said the APEC tourism working group meeting helps economies align priorities and translate them into practical initiatives. She added that the exchanges help people foster respect and appreciation for different histories and cultural backgrounds. "It goes beyond tourism itself."

Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture of Malaysia Tiong King Sing told Xinhua that better air connectivity, multi-destination travel, and the sharing of best practices among APEC economies would help make the Asia-Pacific a



This photo taken on Saturday shows a view of the 13th Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Tourism Ministerial Meeting in Macao.

— Xinhua

more attractive destination for tourism.

Several attendees pointed out that travel facilitation was a foundation for deeper tourism cooperation. Irina Kozlova, delegate of the Russian Federation, said measures such as electronic visas and visa exemptions have made travel easier and strengthened cultural exchanges, which she described as "a bridge" connecting economies.

"We are looking at how seamless travel can be facilitated and how the visa issue can be addressed across the region," said Sarah Wang, regional director for Asia of World Travel & Tourism Council.

SMARTER TOURISM

In Wang's view, technologies such as AI are transforming tourism across the entire

travel chain, from trip planning and border management to destination management through data-driven insights.

Minister of Tourism of Indonesia Widiyanti Putri Wardhana underscored the role of digital technologies in creating seamless travel experiences. Technologies can enhance the visitor experience through easier access, faster immigration services, and more convenient payment systems, she said.

Delegates also mentioned that technology should enhance, rather than replace, the human side of tourism.

Noting China has done well with smart attractions, digital payments, AI services, and modern transport, Tiong underlined that as tourism becomes more competitive, economies need to embrace innovation. He

also pointed out that though technology is an important tool, warm service and human connection are still the heart of hospitality.

Caldas said that one of China's efforts that other economies can follow, in the area of digital innovation, is its capacity-building for small and medium-sized enterprises and other local communities, so they are included in the sector.

In Peru's case, she continued, smart tourism can help villages, rural areas, and living cultures to "grow in a way that is sustainable" while preserving and conserving the spaces and the people.

BEYOND MEETING

Macao — as a "guest economy" under the designation "Macao, China" — participated in the working group meeting and delivered a presentation, providing an overview of the current situation and future direction of its tourism industry.

Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), sees the event as an opportunity to showcase Macao's hospitality and capability, local cuisine, creative industries, and the integration of Chinese and Western cultures.

Yesterday, the delegates had a chance to tour the city. From an exhibition on ancient China and cultural creative products to making local snacks, and to a touch of history at the Macao Museum, the guests experienced various aspects of Macao.

China, as the APEC host in 2026, will hold the 33rd APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, in November.

— Xinhua

Indonesian police charge four after anti-government protest

SURABAYA – Indonesian authorities charged four people after an anti-government rally in the country's second largest city, a local police official said yesterday.

Around 100 people gathered near a government building in Surabaya on Friday, AFP journalists estimated, to protest a fuel price hike and a free school meals programme which has been blighted by mass food poisonings and corruption claims.

Some demonstrators hurled objects including firecrackers and rocks, Surabaya police chief Luthfie Sulistiawan told reporters, prompting officers to take "firm actions" to disperse them.

Protests erupted in several Indonesian cities this month after the government hiked prices of non-subsidised gasoline by around 30 percent, seeking to alleviate budget pressures as the Middle East war chokes global oil supplies.

Indonesia, Southeast Asia's largest economy where fuel is heavily subsidised, is an oil producer but nevertheless a net importer.

Authorities arrested 24 people on Friday and released most of



Indonesian police arrest a student following clashes during a protest against a rise in non-subsidised fuel prices, inefficient government spending and military involvement in civilian affairs and the government's free school meals programme (MBG) in Surabaya on Friday. – AFP

them without charge, Luthfie said yesterday.

"We had named four people as suspects for property destruction and assault against officers," he said.

Six people are still under investigation after authorities detected drugs in their systems, Luthfie added.

Thousands of students have taken to the streets in the capital Jakarta to oppose both the fuel

price hikes and to demand a halt to a multi-billion-dollar free meal scheme, touted by the government as a way to tackle child malnutrition.

Critics argue that programme, which has been partly suspended, is costly, mired in accusations of corruption and linked to mass food poisonings, after tens of thousands of people fell ill since it was launched. – AFP

French teen in Singapore straw-licking case to enter plea

SINGAPORE – A French teen facing criminal charges in Singapore for a straw-licking stunt will enter a plea next month in a case that could land him in jail on conviction, a court heard Friday.

Didier Gaspard Owen Maximilien, who turned 19 on Thursday, is accused of posting to social media a video of himself putting a straw he had licked back into the dispenser on an orange juice vending machine.

His clip went viral and triggered a backlash that led to his arrest in Singapore, which has a reputation for not tolerating bad behaviour.

His lawyer told a district court on Friday that his client – who was not present at the hearing – would enter a plea on the afternoon of July 13.

Maximilien, who is studying in Singapore, is out on bail.

He had uploaded the video on Instagram knowing that it "would

or would probably cause annoyance to the public", according to court documents detailing the charges.

If convicted of causing a public nuisance, he could receive a jail term of up to three months and a fine.

A second charge of committing mischief said Maximilien knew that he was "likely to cause wrongful loss or damage" to iJooz, the company operating the vending machine, which had to replace all 500 straws in the dispenser.

The mischief offence carries a punishment of up to two years in jail on conviction and a fine, according to the charge sheet.

Both offences were allegedly committed on March 12.

In late April, the court allowed Maximilien to leave Singapore for a three-week internship in Manila, a requirement for him to graduate. He has since returned. – AFP

Thailand arrests Australian after teen's body found in suitcase

BANGKOK – Thai police have arrested an Australian man after the body of a 17-year-old girl was discovered in a suitcase, authorities said Saturday.

The suspect, who denies involvement in the teenager's alleged abduction and murder, was taken into custody after an interrogation, a police official in the resort city of Pattaya told AFP.

Investigators were awaiting the results of a post-mortem examination and "other evidence" in the case before filing charges, the official said.

The charges could include child abduction, murder, hiding a corpse and "abduction of a minor for sexual purposes", added the official, who was speaking on condition of anonymity.

Media reports said the 46-year-old suspect was apprehended on Friday at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, where he was trying to

purchase an airline ticket to Perth in Australia.

CCTV footage showed the suspect entering a condo in the seaside resort of Pattaya in the early hours of Thursday along with the 17-year-old Thai girl, according to the reports.

He emerged from the building several hours later, the reports said, carrying a large black suitcase which he then transported on the back of a motorbike.

Police found the suitcase on Friday near a railway track, discovering the victim's body inside of it bearing signs of violence, local website Pattaya News reported.

Thailand drastically cut the length of visa-free stays for tourists last month following a series of high-profile arrests of foreigners over drug offences, sex trafficking and operating unlicensed businesses. – AFP

Magnitude 6.5 quake hits off southern Philippines

MANILA – A 6.5-magnitude earthquake struck off the southern Philippines on Friday, the United States Geological Survey said, less than three weeks after a major tremor in the same area left more than 80 people dead.

The quake struck at 7:42 p.m. [local time] at a depth of 52.4 kilometres in the waters about 35 kilometres southwest of Mindanao island's Jose Abad Santos town, according to the USGS, which revised the magnitude from an initial 6.7.

No tsunami alert was issued.

Santa Maria town rescue official Jerson Talahig told AFP there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

"It was kind of strong, but it was quick. We saw the table and some of the lights shaking," he said.

The 7.8-magnitude tremor that hit Mindanao on June 8 brought down buildings, triggered landslides and displaced thousands on the southern island, while also setting off tsunami warnings across the region.

The powerful quake forced the seabed upwards by two metres on a long stretch of the coast, pushing previously submerged coral above the water and extending the shoreline by as much as 200 metres in a geological phenomenon known as "coastal uplift".

A series of strong aftershocks

rocked the area from about two hours after the first quake, including a 6.5 magnitude tremor.

As of Friday, the June 8 quake had killed 81 people and injured more than 1,300.

Earthquakes are a near-daily occurrence in the Philippines, which is situated on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic activity stretching from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin.

The Cotabato Trench, which lies as close as 50 kilometres off the coast of southern Mindanao, is the site of frequent seismic activity, including a "swarm" of thousands of mostly small earthquakes recorded in January. – AFP

Mayweather-Pacquiao rematch postponed indefinitely

MANILA – A highly anticipated rematch between boxing legends Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao has been postponed indefinitely, Pacquiao's camp in the Philippines said on Friday.

The news followed ESPN reporting that a planned Mayweather exhibition in Greece had been called off after an events company connected to the Pacquiao bout had sought an injunction.

The two hall of famers, whose 2015 bout drove 4.6 million pay-per-view buys, have been at loggerheads since Mayweather stunned the boxing world by declaring a rematch announced by Netflix for September would only be an exhibition – something bitterly contested by Pacquiao.

On Friday, the Pacquiao camp released a statement blaming the postponement on "a volatile mix of federal lawsuits, scheduling overbooks, and financial gridlock completely surrounding the Mayweather camp".

Events company CSI sued Mayweather last week seeking to recover at least US\$4.65 million the company says it paid the fighter for exclusive rights to promote the Pacquiao rematch and an exhibition bout with former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson that failed to materialise.

Friday's statement said the earliest a Pacquiao-Mayweather fight could now take place would be early 2027.

"Should Mayweather and

CSI settle their internal contract disputes out of court, promoters will immediately pivot to rescheduling a postponed exhibition between Mayweather and Mike Tyson, tentatively targeting September 12," the Pacquiao team statement said.

Mayweather, 49, retired from boxing in 2017 with a perfect 50-0 record.

He was to have fought an exhibition against Greek kickboxing star Mike Zambidis on Saturday in a pay-per-view event to be held at the Telekom Center at the OAKA Olympic Complex in Athens.

The now-shelved Pacquiao bout would have rematched the fighters in the top money-spinner in boxing history. – AFP



Members of the Royal Malaysian Customs pose for photographs with computers equipped with AI chips confiscated during a press conference in Sepang, Malaysia on Friday.

Malaysian authorities foiled an attempt to smuggle advanced artificial intelligence chips through the country's main airport, customs officials said on Friday, in a case worth nearly US\$13 million.



Gender rights activists and supporters of the LGBTQ community take part in a Pride March in Chennai, India yesterday. — AFP

Top officials quit at key India temple after theft arrests

LUCKNOW, India—Top members of an Indian temple trust resigned on Friday after police arrested eight people accused of stealing donations at a Hindu shrine central to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Hindu-first politics, officials said.

The Ram Mandir temple in Ayodhya in northern Uttar Pradesh state, built on grounds where a mosque stood for centuries before being torn down by Hindu zealots, was inaugurated in 2024 with great fanfare by Modi himself.

The case has sparked anger amongst the devotees who have donated to the US\$240 million temple, which was funded entirely by public donations, according to the trust managing the site.

More than 50 million people visited the temple in the year after its consecration alone, according to the temple trust.

Police registered a criminal case on Thursday over alleged irregularities in the handling of donations and arrested eight people, including temple employees, according to a government statement issued late that day.

Most were involved in counting or handling cash and valuables donated by devotees including gold and silver, media reports said.

They face charges of criminal breach of trust, theft, criminal conspiracy and corruption, the government statement said.

‘So shameful’

The government has not disclosed the scale of the alleged embezzlement.

Opposition parties and media reports say it could amount to more than US\$20 million.

“It is so shameful that a shrine of such supreme importance is being discussed for all the wrong reasons,” said Viti Saxena, a 44-year-old homemaker who had donated to the temple.

“I now wonder if that actually went into the temple coffers or not. It is a matter of global shame now,” Saxena told AFP. “The faith of countless Hindu believers is shaken.”

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, a firebrand Hindu monk whose state government ordered the investigation into the case, has vowed that “no guilty person will be spared”.

On Friday, the top official of the Ram Mandir Trust, Champat Rai, and another prominent member stepped down from their positions on “moral grounds”, a temple management official told AFP.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, also said a larger management body, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Trust, is likely to be dissolved and reconstituted soon by the government.

Devout Hindus believe that the god Ram was born in the town of Ayodhya – home to the temple – more than 7,000 years ago, but that the Babri mosque was built over his birthplace by a 16th-century Muslim emperor.

India’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – then in the opposition – played an instrumental role in public campaigning that eventually led to the mosque’s demolition in 1992.

It helped propel Modi’s BJP as an unstoppable electoral juggernaut. In 2014, it displaced the secularist Congress party that had dominated India since independence from Britain. — AFP

Pakistani news channel apologises after ban over documentary

ISLAMABAD – A major Pakistani news channel apologised yesterday after it was handed a 15-day suspension by a regulator for airing a documentary that included “religious visualisation”.

Geo News aired the clarification and apology over the programme named ‘Safar-e-Ishq’, and published an article on its website.

“Geo News has acknowledged an editorial error regarding content aired during its 10th Muharram transmission,” the article said, referring to the ongoing first month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

The programme had depicted “certain rituals practised by a limited number of people in Iraq and some

other Middle Eastern countries”, the channel said, without providing further details.

Geo News said it “never intended to represent, endorse, or promote any broader religious viewpoint”.

A statement from the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) on Saturday said the “broadcast of such visual representation, given the religious, cultural and social sensitivities, constitutes a serious regulatory concern”.

The regulator’s statement gave no details of the documentary’s content, but said it was “liable to hurt the religious sentiments of viewers... and create a risk of disturbance to public peace”. — AFP

Magnitude 6.1 quake hits Afghanistan: AFP, USGS

KABUL – A 6.1-magnitude earthquake hit Afghanistan on Saturday, the United States Geological Survey said, with AFP journalists in the capital Kabul and elsewhere reporting strong shaking.

The quake was widely felt by AFP journalists across multiple Afghan provinces, as well as in the Pakistani capital Islamabad.

The USGS recorded the epicentre in northeastern Afghanistan at a depth of 208.3 kilometres.

Buildings rattled in Kabul, with one AFP journalist reporting a large crack stretching across an internal wall.

Journalists also felt the quake in Balkh and Badakhshan provinces,

which border multiple countries including Tajikistan and Pakistan.

To the east, it was felt in provinces including Nangarhar and Khost.

Details on casualties and damage were not immediately available.

Earthquakes are common in Afghanistan, particularly along the Hindu Kush mountain range, near where the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates meet.

In April, a 5.8-magnitude quake in Badakhshan province killed 12 people and shook many parts of the country.

In August 2025, a shallow 6.0-magnitude quake in the country’s east wiped out mountainside villages and killed more than 2,200 people.

Weeks later, a 6.3-magnitude quake in northern Afghanistan killed at least 27 people.

Large tremors in western Herat, near the Iranian border, in 2023 and in eastern Nangarhar province in 2022 killed hundreds and destroyed thousands of homes.

Many homes in the predominantly rural country – devastated by decades of war – are shoddily built.

Poor communication networks and infrastructure in mountainous Afghanistan have hampered disaster responses in the past, preventing authorities for hours or even days from reaching far-flung villages to assess the extent of the damage. — AFP

Bangladesh’s fugitive ex-PM says will return to Dhaka ‘this year’

NEW DELHI – Bangladesh’s fugitive former leader Sheikh Hasina has vowed to return to her country “this year”, according to an interview published yesterday, months after she was sentenced to death in absentia for crimes against humanity.

Hasina, 78, fled to neighbouring India in August 2024 after a student-led uprising ended her 15-year, iron-fisted rule.

She has not been seen in public since, except for a rare speech broadcast to a packed press club in New Delhi in January.

In an interview with Indian broadcaster NDTV, Hasina said

she was not afraid of death and that the verdict against her was “part of an illegal, unconstitutional and politically motivated process”.

“Many conspiracies have been hatched against me. But breaking through every web of conspiracy... I was elected prime minister five times by the people’s vote and worked for the country’s unprecedented development,” Hasina said.

“I want to say clearly: overcoming every obstacle and every conspiracy, I will return to my country this year,” she added in response to a question on whether she would return despite the death penalty verdict.

Last November, Hasina was found guilty by a Dhaka court of incitement, order to kill and inaction to prevent atrocities, and sentenced to be hanged.

The activities of her former ruling Awami League, once one of the country’s most popular, have been outlawed.

Ties between India and Bangladesh have improved since Prime Minister Tarique Rahman won a landslide election victory in the South Asian nation of 170 million people in February.

But frictions remain, with Bangladesh repeatedly demanding the extradition of Hasina. — AFP

Australia to double fine for flouting teen social media ban

SYDNEY – Australia will double the financial penalty on platforms flouting its world-leading social media ban for under-16s to stem widespread evasion of the restrictions, the government said on Saturday.

New legislation will lift the maximum fine to Aus\$99 million (US\$68 million) for systemic breaches of the regulation and arm the eSafety online watchdog with greater powers to curb the platforms, it said.

The independent regulator was “actively investigating” potential non-compliance by Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube, the government said in a statement.

“It’s clear big tech are not doing enough to comply with the law – there are still too many children on social media,” Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said.

“These changes reflect the seriousness with which we take any failure by social media companies to comply.”

Underage users have been dodging the restrictions by using accounts registered to older people, setting up fake accounts, or by logging into private browsers.

The success of the Australian restriction is of intense interest to a growing number of nations that have introduced or are mulling similar bans – including Britain, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates and New Zealand.

One of the first peer-reviewed evaluations of the Australian measure, published this month in the *British Medical Journal*, found “insufficient evidence” that it had much impact on social media use by youngsters.

The researchers surveyed more than 400 young people immediately before the restrictions came into effect, and again three months after, finding “substantial circumvention” of the rules.

There was little change for users aged 12-13, a slight decrease for the 14-15 age group, and an increase in use for those aged 16 and older.

‘Bare minimum’

The government says it is clear the regulator needs more powers even though more than five million accounts held by under-16s have been blocked since the ban came into force on December 10.

Under the new laws, the eSafety Commissioner will be able to compel social media companies to provide evidence of what they have done to prevent under-16s from getting an account.

It will be empowered to demand information and documents from the social media companies and also from third parties such as age assurance or app store providers to help it check the platforms’ claims.

Communications Minister Anika Wells said she was not satisfied the platforms were doing enough.

“Based on the regular updates I receive from the eSafety Commissioner, it is clear to me that social media platforms are adopting tricks straight out of the big tech playbook and doing the bare minimum to get by,” Wells said.

“Social media platforms are some of the richest and most powerful companies in the world, and we’re serious about holding them to account,” she said.

“These tough new penalties and powers show we will not back down. Instead, we are doubling down on our efforts to hold big tech to account.”

A growing body of research suggests too much time online is taking a toll on teen well-being, and Australia’s ban has been hailed as a godsend for parents sick of seeing children glued to their phones.

Although platforms have pledged to abide by the laws, they have warned the measures could instead push teenagers into dark, unregulated corners of the internet.

Social media companies bear sole responsibility for checking that Australia-based users are 16 or older, and must prove they have taken “reasonable steps” to weed out young teenagers.

Some platforms are using AI tools to estimate ages based on photos, while users can also choose to prove their age by uploading a government ID.

— AFP

Iran warns ships not to bypass its chosen Hormuz route

TEHRAN – Iran’s top diplomat warned yesterday that any attempt by shipping to bypass its preferred route through the Strait of Hormuz would “increase tensions” in the Middle East, as US and Iranian forces again traded attacks across the vital seaway.

The exchanges underscored the fragility of a Pakistan-brokered agreement aimed at ending the war launched by the United States and Israel in February, which disrupted shipping through the strait and rattled global energy markets.

Although a ceasefire took effect in April, sporadic violence has continued in the Gulf region, with ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz often the spark.

Early yesterday, US Central Command (CENTCOM) said it had attacked 10 Iranian military targets over “continued Iranian aggression against commercial shipping”.

Iran then said it had carried out retaliatory strikes against US bases in Kuwait and Bahrain in response. Both Kuwait and Bahrain denounced the attacks.

Tehran has continued to insist on controlling passage through the vital strait, through which a fifth of the world’s oil and liquefied natural gas travel in normal times, something it did not have before the war.

At the moment, Iran insists ships transiting the strait pass through a corridor close to its own shores, though this week dozens of vessels have travelled along the opposite side of the waterway, hugging the Omani coast.

“Any attempt to adopt new or separate arrangements compared



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (left) speaks as Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein looks on during a joint press conference following a meeting in Baghdad yesterday. Araghchi called for the establishment of a security framework with Gulf countries, after Iranian strikes against US bases in the Gulf in retaliation for American attacks. – AFP

to what is underway by the Islamic Republic of Iran, will only lead to more complicated situations and delays in the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, and will increase the tensions,” Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said.

“I urge all parties... to adhere to the memorandum of understanding and not to allow this MoU to deviate from its course.”

Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said yesterday they were taking measures to control traffic in the strait and that vessels in violation of those measures would be dealt with more firmly than before.

Mohammad Mokhber, adviser to Iran’s supreme leader, wrote on X that as long as Iran managed the strait,

Washington’s “hegemonic dreams in the region will not be realised”.

In the memorandum of understanding reached this month – aimed at putting a lasting end to the war – Iran had agreed “safe passage of commercial vessels with no charge, for 60 days only, from the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman, and vice versa” in the strait.

Iran would ‘no longer exist’

Experts said there would likely be more Hormuz incidents.

For Iran, “a drawn-out negotiation accompanied by controlled pressure in the strait can work to its advantage”, said HA Hellyer, of London think tank the Royal United Services Institute.

The agreement signed by the US and Iran said both countries, and their respective allies, were “not to initiate any war or any military operation against each other and to refrain from the threat or use of force against each other”.

But both countries have since traded accusations of violating their fragile ceasefire.

US President Donald Trump said on Saturday that Iran would “no longer exist” if the US were “forced” to resume the war.

“United States aircraft just struck Iranian missile and drone storage locations, and coastal radar sites, for violating the Cease Fire Agreement, AGAIN!” Trump wrote on Truth Social.

CENTCOM said the strikes

were in response to an Iranian drone attack on the Panama-flagged oil tanker “Kiku”.

Washington had carried out similar strikes on Friday.

Israel strikes Lebanon

Israel, meanwhile, launched strikes in Lebanon as Hezbollah’s leader Naim Qassem rejected a deal to end that conflict, which has also threatened to derail the wider US-Iran peace effort.

Iran called them “a blatant violation” of the truce deal.

Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah warned yesterday of “internal conflict” in Lebanon over the country’s agreement with Israel, signed last week, predicting the deal would not be implemented.

The agreement, which aims to pave the way to peace between the neighbours, includes plans to disarm Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war in early March, when Hezbollah launched rockets at Israel in support of Iran, and Israel responded with heavy airstrikes and a ground invasion.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesperson Esmail Baqaei said yesterday that Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon was “an essential condition for reaching a final and lasting agreement” that establishes security in the region.

Iran’s chief negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, meanwhile, said Iran was “seriously pursuing this issue” of ending the Israeli occupation in Lebanon in a call with Lebanese speaker of parliament Nabih Berri. – AFP

Tehran-Dubai flights to resume today: Iranian media

TEHRAN – Flights between Tehran and Dubai are to resume today, Iranian state media reported, just weeks after Iran hit targets in the UAE with drones and missiles during the Middle East war.

Iranian state TV and other media quoted Ramin Kashefazar, the head of Tehran’s Imam Khomeini Airport, as saying that “the necessary arrangements have been made to reopen the Tehran–Dubai route at Imam Khomeini Airport”.

Tickets were available to buy

on the website of Iranian airline Sepهران for today’s 10:40 a.m. flight to Dubai.

Dubai airport was repeatedly targeted by drones during the Middle East war, forcing it to suspend flights at times.

Video footage of one strike early in the war showed a drone crashing to the ground close to the passenger concourse.

Iran retaliated against US-Israeli attacks with missile and drone launches across the Gulf, but

said it had targeted US interests and not civilian infrastructure.

Before the war Dubai airport was the world’s busiest for international passengers, although numbers sank 66 percent year-on-year during the conflict.

The war has been halted by a ceasefire since April, despite regular exchanges of fire, while United States and Iran are currently part way through a 60-day period to negotiate a lasting peace deal. – AFP

Israel military says soldier killed in south Lebanon fighting

JERUSALEM – The Israeli military said a soldier was killed yesterday in fighting in southern Lebanon, two days after Israel and Lebanon signed an agreement aimed at ending hostilities.

Captain David Hazutt, 21, a platoon commander “fell in combat” in southern Lebanon, the military said.

Hazutt was killed when soldiers encountered a “Hezbollah terrorist after entering a suspicious

structure in the area of Deir Seryan in southern Lebanon,” a military official said in a separate statement.

In the incident an additional Israeli soldier was slightly injured, the official said.

“Following the incident, the soldiers began searching for the terrorist and struck targets in the area,” the official added.

Later yesterday, in a separate statement, the military said “the terrorist was located in one of the

structures near the point of the encounter and was eliminated by the soldiers.”

Yesterday, the Lebanese state news agency reported a new Israeli attack targeting the outskirts of the towns of Deir Seryan and Taybeh in southern Lebanon.

Hazutt’s death brings Israel’s military losses to 38 soldiers and one civilian contractor since the war between Israel and Hezbollah erupted in early March. – AFP

Car bombs, shootings kill 5 Arab Israelis: police

JERUSALEM – Car bombs and gun attacks killed five members of Israel’s Arab minority yesterday, the latest violence to hit a community that has already recorded more than 140 deaths this year.

Criminal violence has escalated among Israel’s Arab minority in recent years, where gangs extort residents and business owners for protection and frequently kill those who fail to pay.

In Jaffa, part of the Tel Aviv municipal area, a car bomb killed a man in his 40s, police and emergency services said, while Israeli news reports reported that the blast left the man’s six-year old son injured.

“The background is criminal,” the police said.

A second car bomb struck in Holon, south of Tel Aviv, severely injuring a man who later died at hospital, the force said.

The victim had been known to police for his involvement in disputes, Tel Aviv police district commander Major General Haim Sargarof told journalists.

A man was shot dead and another injured in the Arab-majority town of Taybeh in central Israel, in what the police described as “apparently a

family dispute.”

Hours later, two more men were gunned down in the nearby town of Qalansawe, emergency service Magen David Adom reported.

“A preliminary inquiry indicates that the background to the incident is apparently a family feud,” police said.

Violent crime among Israel’s Arab minority has reached unprecedented levels in recent years, as the community grapples with criminal gangs, easy access to firearms and what it complains is a lack of police enforcement.

Yesterday’s bloodshed pushed the toll of Arab citizens killed in such violence to 142 so far this year, according to the Abraham Initiatives, an Israeli NGO promoting Arab minority inclusion – an 11 percent rise over the same period last year.

If the current rate continues, Israel looks set to surpass the record 252 killings among its Arab citizens recorded in 2025.

Arab Israelis, descendants of Palestinians who stayed on their land after Israel’s creation in 1948, comprise around 21 percent of Israel’s population of more than 10 million. – AFP

Non-independence parties gain ground in New Caledonia local elections

Mathurin Derel and Thibault Marchand

NOUMÉA – Non-independence parties made gains in yesterday's elections in the French overseas territory of New Caledonia, according to provisional results in a vote set to shape talks with France on the territory's future status.

Turnout was lower in the first provincial elections held since 2019, which will determine the balance of power on the archipelago, where independence remains the defining political issue.

In the Southern Province, home to the capital Nouméa, the joint list of the two main non-independence parties – Les Loyalistes and Le Rassemblement – won around 50 percent of the vote, according to provisional results.

They were projected to secure 24 of New Caledonia's 54 seats in Congress – up from 19 – becoming the largest bloc but short of the 28 seats needed for an absolute majority.

Pro-independence parties were projected to retain 26 seats, buoyed by voters in the Northern Province, a stronghold of the independence movement.

But those seats will be divided among three lists: 16 for the main independence group FLNKS, seven for UNI-Palika and three for Dynamique Autochtone.

Eveil Oceanien – a group founded in 2019 to defend the interests of some 22,000 Wallisians and Futunians in New Caledonia – was estimated to win four seats.

Moderate non-independence parties failed to win any seats, with none reaching the five-percent threshold of registered voters required for representation.

Final returns are expected today.

'Find common ground'

Some 192,500 voters had been eligible to elect 76 councillors for three provincial assemblies – 40 in the South Province, 22 in the North Province and 14 in the Loyalty Islands.

Fifty-four of those elected will become members of the Pacific archipelago's Congress, the territory's main governing institution and the only body authorised to pass local laws.

Members of Congress will then elect up to 11 members to the executive branch known as the collegial government.

Final voter turnout stood at 63.71 percent, down from 66.50 percent in the previous election in 2019, according to local authorities.

The poll took place peacefully, an AFP journalist in the capital Nouméa observed,

with additional security deployed two years after deadly riots erupted over a plan to extend voting rights in the territory.

"My grandparents fought hard to secure the right" to vote, said Cédric Ixeco, a 43-year-old who hails from the indigenous Kanak group, adding he "wants to see things change" in people's day-to-day lives.

For Barbara Meylan, 53, the election was a crucial moment for the archipelago, which she said is in need of a way forward.

"Above all, I hope we can stabilise the country and manage to find common ground," she said.

Negotiations ahead

The elections come after the main pro-independence group rejected a deal with France intended to bring stability to the overseas territory.

The so-called Bougival Accord would have created a Caledonian state and established a Caledonian nationality enshrined in the French constitution, but would have scrapped any future referendums on independence.

Three referendums held in 2018, 2020 and 2021 returned majorities in favour of remaining part of France, although pro-independence groups boycotted the third vote, which was held during the COVID-19 pandemic.

But the independence movement retains strong support, particularly among the indigenous Melanesian Kanak population.

A law approved in May added around 10,575 previously excluded "native-born" residents to the electoral roll, including more than 4,000 people with so-called "customary civil status", which denotes Kanaks.

The change increased the number of eligible voters for yesterday's poll, after the electoral roll had been frozen under a landmark 1998 agreement.

A previous plan to extend voting rights to thousands of non-Indigenous long-term residents sparked deadly riots in 2024.

The election took place under close scrutiny more than two years after the violence, which left 14 people dead and caused more than two billion euros worth of damage.

France has deployed around 2,400 law enforcement officers to New Caledonia, where they are to remain until mid-July.

French Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu has promised negotiations on the overseas territory's future will resume next month, with the goal of reaching an agreement before the year's end. – AFP

Europe swelters as heatwave moves east, excess deaths rise

PARIS – Europe's deadly heatwave pushed east yesterday with hundreds of millions still sweltering across the continent despite fleeting relief from overnight storms, notably in France and Belgium.

The heat remained intense across central and eastern Europe, with the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland hit hard as temperatures soared and records fell. At least 191 million Europeans were expected to face temperatures above 35C during the day, according to AFP estimates.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said it had recorded more than 1,300 excess deaths in Europe since June 21. Overall, some 381 million Europeans were set to experience temperatures exceed 30C, according to analysis based on forecasts from the German Meteorological Service and population data.

This heatwave is the most severe ever recorded in Europe, and would have been "virtually impossible" in June without climate change, the World Weather Attribution group of scientists said.

All-time temperature records have been broken in Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as for the month of June in the UK and in Switzerland.

'Not a fiasco'

"Right now 150 million people are living under extreme heat, hundreds have died, schools are shut, grids are buckling," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X.

Storms brought some respite overnight, particularly in France after several days of temperatures close to 40C. But they also caused damage, as a man died near Brussels when a tree fell on his car, local media reported.

In France, the highest-level heat alerts were expected to ease yesterday evening, although millions continued to endure sweltering conditions.



Pedestrians use emergency blankets to protect themselves from the heat as they arrive at the Olympic stadium for a concert of US singer Bruno Mars yesterday, in Berlin, as the German capital was expected to reach temperatures of around 40 degrees Celsius during the current heatwave in Europe. – AFP

Still marked by the 2003 heatwave – Europe's worst in centuries, which killed around 15,000 people – French authorities feared a rising death toll.

The country's national health agency said yesterday it had tallied around 1,000 more deaths than expected from June 24, and warned the figure was likely to increase further.

Many of those fatalities are among those aged 65 and over, it said.

But Health Minister Stephanie Rist said France would "probably" avoid a repeat of the devastating death toll during the 2003 heatwave, citing better preparation in care homes for the elderly.

Interior Minister Laurent Nunez rejected criticism over the response, insisting: "This is not a fiasco – we were prepared."

Records tumble

Temperatures soared above 40C in several countries yesterday as the heatwave shattered records across central and eastern Europe.

Poland recorded a new all-time high of 40.5C in the western town

of Slubice, according to the national meteorological institute.

Germany set a new national high of 41.7C at Coschen, near the Polish border, surpassing a high set just a day earlier, while the Czech Republic also broke records for a second consecutive day, with 41.1C recorded in Doksany, north of Prague.

France's National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) said rising temperatures were clearly affecting marine life and biodiversity.

Speaking from a beach at Wimereux in northern France, CNRS research director Gregory Beaugrand told AFP the warming of the Channel was disrupting the food chain, as "fish that like cold waters are disappearing".

French paleoclimatologist Jean Jouzel told the *Tribune* newspaper he feared political attention would quickly shift once the heatwave ends.

Urging people to heed scientific warnings, he said: "People are closing their eyes – but it is extremely serious."

– AFP

Skydiving plane crash kills 11 in France

TOMBLAINE – A skydiving plane crashed yesterday in eastern France, killing all 11 people on board, local authorities said, in the country's deadliest ever general aviation accident.

The crash in the town of Tomblaine killed five instructors, five students and the pilot, said Yves Ségué, the prefect of the Meurthe-et-Moselle department.

The students were a group of nurses, according to a source close to the case and confirmed by the head of Meurthe-et-Moselle's nursing council, Thierry Pêchey.

"They were colleagues who had decided to go on a first skydiving jump, no doubt to unwind, as we're going through a difficult time with the heatwave," he said.

Mayor of the nearby city of Nancy, Mathieu Klein, said the

victims "died in full view of their loved ones, who were preparing to film the tandem skydives".

Medical and psychological support teams were caring for relatives of the victims who were present, as well as other witnesses, according to local authorities.

The incident is "the most serious general aviation accident in terms of loss of life", excluding military and commercial aviation, according to France's BEA aviation safety agency.

The aircraft, registered in Germany, crashed in a grassy area near the runway of the Nancy-Essey aerodrome, close to a residential area and two roads, an AFP journalist reported.

"It's tragic, but it could have been even worse," said Klein, noting the plane crashed "just a few metres from homes".

Tomblaine mayor Herve Féron said the plane fell "in a completely unexplained manner... during the ascent", describing it as crashing "straight down".

The aircraft had been "chartered for the occasion, for the skydiving weekend, as is regularly done", he added.

The cause of the incident was not immediately clear and a technical investigation had been opened, said Amaury Lacote, deputy public prosecutor in the eastern city of Nancy.

Police urged people on the social media platform X to "strictly avoid" the area around the airport to allow emergency services access.

French Interior Minister Laurent Nunez and Transport Minister Philippe Tabarot are expected to visit the scene of the accident later this afternoon. – AFP

Venezuela twin quakes kill 1,450 as time running out to find survivors

Margioni Bermudez and Brian Contreras

LA GUAIRA – Rescue crews raced yesterday to pull survivors from the rubble of Venezuela’s powerful twin earthquakes as the death toll reached 1,450 and hopes dwindled more than three days after the disaster struck.

Tens of thousands of people were reported missing as collapsed buildings dotted cities in a country already enduring an economic crisis and political upheaval after US forces captured former president Nicolás Maduro in January.

Millions of people across the country were also feared to lack sanitation and other basic needs after one of Latin America’s most devastating earthquakes.

In one of the worst hit areas, the coastal city of La Guaira, Héctor Aguilera came to search for four family members buried in the rubble since the back-to-back quakes of magnitude 7.2 and 7.5 struck on Wednesday. Two other of his family members were rescued.

“We don’t have the support to get our family out – we can’t do it alone. They are buried there: we know they are dead, but here we are,” he said.

“We have no hope left, all I have are memories.”

Experts say the first 72 hours after natural disasters – which have now passed – are the key, narrow

window for finding the living. After that the search becomes one of recovering bodies.

In the Caracas neighborhood of Chacao, large electronic screens on a building usually used for advertising were showing the faces of missing people in a bid to help find them.

On Saturday, National Assembly President Jorge Rodríguez reported 1,450 dead and 3,238 people injured – a toll that was expected to rise.

‘Source of hope’

Interim Venezuelan President Delcy Rodríguez said late Saturday rescuers had pulled 33 people from the ruins.

International rescue teams with dogs scoured the rubble and US helicopters ferried in aid, but hope was running out for more people to be pulled out alive.

A Salvadoran rescue worker who declined to give his name put it this way: “At this point, they are probably dead bodies. Thanks to God maybe we can find people still alive.”

An 11-year-old boy was rescued from the rubble in Caraballeda, north of Caracas, on Saturday, Rodríguez said.

“Every life is a source of hope for Venezuela,” she said in a post on X, accompanied by a video of the rescue.

Facing public outrage at the response by local officials, Rodríguez thanked other countries for the outpouring of aid.



Costa Rican rescuers search through the rubble of a collapsed building in Catia La Mar, La Guaira State, Venezuela, yesterday, following last Wednesday’s twin earthquakes.

– AFP

Twenty-four countries have sent 521 tonnes of supplies, 86 units with dogs trained to locate people trapped beneath the rubble and more than 2,700 search-and-rescue personnel, she said.

The United States said on Saturday that one runway at Simon Bolívar International Airport, which serves the capital, was partially functioning to receive US military planes, while a naval ship had arrived off the coast. The US has also sent a 250-strong disaster response team.

UN aid chief Tom Fletcher told AFP on Friday that the death toll could continue to soar, adding that more than 50,000 people were missing.

Foreign nationals confirmed dead include 28 Portuguese, nine Spaniards, seven Chinese, two Brazilians, one Chilean, one Italian-Venezuelan and one Uruguayan.

The search for survivors saw desperate attempts by local residents to claw away rubble from collapsed buildings.

“It’s just very chaotic, hot and unorganised,” said Australian firefighter Craig Demeillon, 43, who travelled alone to La Guaira from Miami to help. “Hopefully there’s more people to find.”

Economic impact

The UN migration agency

said it had examined available population and damage data and had determined that “up to 6.76 million people could be affected,” and would “require emergency shelter, safe water, sanitation and hygiene services, healthcare, protection support and essential relief items.”

Venezuela’s worst earthquakes in more than a century have come after the oil-rich country endured more than a decade of economic collapse.

The crisis has hollowed out hospitals and public services, driving millions to leave the country.

The United Nations estimated US\$6.7 billion in physical damage from Wednesday’s earthquakes – equivalent to six percent of Venezuela’s GDP.

Venezuelans – already battered by years of a failing economy and the turbulence of the US intervention to topple Maduro – were furious at the government over its response to the disaster.

The government has restricted access to La Guaira state, deployed the military to the area and required volunteers to obtain a safe-entry pass.

Anger among those impatiently waiting to volunteer surged as they waited for passes outside a concert hall in the capital.

“You need a permit to save lives – just imagine,” complained Carlos Itriago, 27.

– AFP

With Fujimori in lead, Peru to announce final election tally Friday

LIMA – Peru will reveal the final result of its razor-thin presidential runoff on Friday, election authorities said last week, with current tallies giving conservative candidate Keiko Fujimori an unassailable lead.

The election has been one of the tightest Latin American contests in decades, with crime and political instability dominating a race to choose the country’s ninth leader in a decade.

“We can now say with complete confidence that the final declaration of the runoff results

will not go beyond July 3,” said election chief Roberto Burneo.

With 99.88 percent of the ballots counted, Fujimori had secured more than 44,500 votes over her leftist rival Roberto Sánchez.

Since only 33,300 ballots remain to be tallied, it is now impossible for Sanchez to get ahead.

The winner will be recognised as the country’s next leader at Lima’s National Theatre on July 15, Burneo said.

Fujimori’s victory would mark the return of her family name to power, more than two decades

after the fall of her father, former president Alberto Fujimori.

He led Peru through the turbulent 1990s, crushing Maoist Shining Path rebels and taming hyperinflation but was later disgraced, exiled and jailed for corruption and crimes against humanity.

Sánchez has said he would not recognise a government headed by Fujimori, alleging administrative irregularities in the handling of the overseas portion of the vote.

The winner will replace interim president José María Balcázar on July 28 for a five-year term. – AFP

US-sanctioned Cuban military group cedes key assets: sources

HAVANA – Cuba’s US-sanctioned military conglomerate GAESA, which controls much of the island’s economy, has spun off its port management business seeking to unlock stalled foreign supplies, several industry sources told AFP on Friday.

GAESA was the main target of sweeping sanctions announced by US President Donald Trump on May 1 targeting the country’s energy, defence, mining, security and financial services sectors – all dominated by the sprawling group.

The sanctions also punish foreign companies and shipping companies that work with GAESA, causing an exodus of investors in the midst of a crippling US fuel blockade against the communist-ruled island.

AFP learned that Terminal de Contenedores Mariel S.A., which is part of GAESA’s logistics arm and operates Cuba’s biggest commercial port, Mariel, sold its assets to a company run by the transport ministry.

“The company Terminal de Contenedores Mariel S.A. has sold its assets to the commercial company Coral Marítima S.A.,” the firm announced to its clients in a June 16 statement, a copy of which was obtained by AFP.

Coral Marítima, part of a state port business group, manages

investment in the shipping sector but is not officially linked to GAESA.

Two of the world’s largest shipping companies – France’s CMA CGM and Germany’s Hapag-Lloyd – suspended their freight deliveries, including deliveries of aid, to Cuba in mid-May over fears of being tainted by their links to GAESA.

It was not yet clear whether the conglomerate’s withdrawal from Mariel would allow the shipments to resume.

GAESA has also pulled out of a joint venture that runs the new Miramar Trade Centre in Havana, where several foreign companies are based.

The Guernsey-based fund CEIBA Investments Ltd, which jointly operated the trade centre with GAESA, said on its website that it now has a “100% interest” in the facility.

The developments appear to be part of a process to dismantle GAESA, which was founded in the 1990s as a way of bringing in foreign currency following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba’s chief financial backer.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has lambasted GAESA as a “state within the state” that “hoards the profits from its businesses for the benefit of a small elite.”

The State Department estimates that GAESA controls between 40 and 70 percent of Cuba’s economy. – AFP

Mexico, US launch plant producing flies to fight cattle parasite

MEXICO CITY – Mexico and the United States on Saturday inaugurated a factory that will produce sterile flies meant to combat a livestock pest that can kill cattle.

The sterile insects are supposed to break the reproductive cycle of the so-called the New World screwworm (NWS) fly.

The US\$61-million factory was inaugurated by President Claudia Sheinbaum and US Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins.

Both countries chipped in to build it in less than a year in the

southern state of Chiapas.

The plant is designed to yield 10 million sterile flies per week once it is running at full capacity. A similar plant is operating in Panama.

Mexico detected its first case of the fly in 2024 in Chiapas.

The United States had eradicated the parasite in 1966 but Florida had an outbreak in 2016 that mainly hit deer.

The United States killed off the pest largely with this same technique of releasing millions of sterile flies to mate with wild females.

Early this month the US Agriculture Department said a case was detected in Texas.

Last summer the United States banned livestock trade with Mexico over reports that cattle there tested positive for the pest.

The flies lay their eggs in open wounds or mucous membranes of warm-blooded animals, where they hatch into larvae and feed on flesh.

Left untreated, the infestation can be deadly and the parasites can quickly spread. – AFP

Match Times shown in Macau time.

Tuesday

Brazil  **01:00**  **Japan**

Round of 32 • Houston Stadium (Houston)

Germany  **04:30**  **Paraguay**

Round of 32 • Boston Stadium (Boston)

Netherlands  **09:00**  **Morocco**

Round of 32 • Monterrey Stadium (Monterrey)

Africa the winner of expanded World Cup amid mixed fortunes for minnows

Kieran Canning

ATLANTA - Cape Verde have captured the imagination and secured a World Cup showdown with Lionel Messi's Argentina, but they are just part of a success story for African football as the group stages come to a close.

A record 10 African nations qualified for the expanded 48-team tournament and only Tunisia are headed home before the last 32.

Spain, England, Portugal and Brazil are among the pre-competition favourites that have failed to beat African opposition, with Morocco confidently talking up their chances of becoming the first world champion from the continent.

"That shows the quality of African football," said Algerian star Riyad Mahrez.

"When you see nine out of 10 teams going through for the next round in the biggest tournament, that shows a lot."

Cape Verde's fairytale has been manna from heaven for FIFA as they defend their decision to increase the tournament by 16 teams - a move critics say is designed to rake in record revenues for football's governing body.

The smallest nation ever to reach the knockout stages of the World Cup, the archipelago of just over 500,000 people, resisted the might of Spain to secure a draw on their tournament debut.

Forty-year-old goalkeeper Vozinha instantly became an internet sensation for his man-of-the-match display against the European champions and now boasts 17 million Instagram followers as a result.

Further draws against two-time winners Uruguay and 2034 hosts Saudi Arabia saw them eliminated at Cape Verde's expense.

'A matter of time'

Africa's allocation of qualifiers was doubled from the last World Cup and other than a troubled Tunisia, who conceded 12 goals in three defeats, they have more than merited more representation on the global stage.

"I have been working on the African continent for 15 years now. I see federations becoming better organised, coaches improving and players getting better - Africa keeps

progressing," said DR Congo coach Sebastien Desabre.

"For me that won't stop because there is still room for growth. I think and hope that an African team will win the World Cup this year or in the coming years. To me, it is just a matter of time."

Morocco, the first African semi-finalists four years ago, have proved an inspiration for others on the continent.

The Atlas Lions dominated Brazil for long spells of their opening 1-1 draw and are in confident mood despite a tough last 32 showdown against the Netherlands.

"We need to believe in this objective, this target (to win the World Cup)," said Morocco coach Mohamed Ouahbi.

"Morocco have entered a whole new dimension. The players, the fans believe in their team and our opponents respect our team."

The tiny Caribbean island of Curacao also had their moment of World Cup glory in securing a 0-0 draw with Ecuador.

However, Curacao bowed out alongside Haiti and Panama, who both failed to register a point, as all three qualifiers from a weakened CONCACAF qualifying pool without co-hosts USA, Mexico and Canada ended winless.

In contrast to Africa's surge, Asian sides have failed to justify a similar increase to nine teams.

Only Japan and Australia have progressed from the Asian Football Confederation region.

Jordan and Uzbekistan ended their World Cup debuts without a point, while Iraq shipped 12 goals after being handed a nightmare draw up against France, Senegal and Norway.

A goal-laden group stages has been blessed by prolific performances from some of the game's biggest names such as Lionel Messi, Kylian Mbappe, Vinicius Junior and Erling Haaland.

But amid suggestions the World Cup could eventually grow to 64 teams, there has also been plenty of evidence that expansion has diluted the depth of quality on show.

There have been eight victories by a four-goal margin in the group stages, just one less than in the entirety of the past three World Cups combined.

S Korea's coach quits after early World Cup exit

GUADALAJARA, Mexico - South Korea coach Hong Myung-bo resigned yesterday, a day after his side's group-stage exit from the World Cup and following condemnation from the country's president.

The 57-year-old former captain, in his second stint as coach, oversaw an early World Cup departure for the second time to go with the failure in 2014.

South Korea were expected to get out of a Group A that included co-hosts Mexico plus South Africa and the Czech Republic.

But they lost 1-0 to South Africa and Mexico, and finished on three points, their only success a 2-1 win over the Czechs.

It left them hoping to squeeze into the knockout rounds as one of the eight best third-placed finishers.

That hope was extinguished on Saturday by results elsewhere, with Hong taking responsibility yesterday.

"Over the past two years I asked myself the same question whenever I had to make important decisions, select players or prepare for training session and matches: Is this the right choice for Korean football?" Hong told reporters in Mexico, according to Yonhap News Agency.

"I cannot say every decision has been the right one, but I can tell you that I have made every decision with Korean football in mind."

Hong's resignation came hours after South Korean President Lee Jae Myung lashed out at the team's performance, pointing the finger at "incompetent people" and apologising to the nation.

"When loyalty and factionalism



South Korea's forward Son Heung-min applauds the fans at the end of the 2026 World Cup Group A match against South Africa at the Monterrey Stadium in Guadalupe, Mexico, on Wednesday. - AFP

are valued over competence, and incompetent people are appointed to leadership positions, the outcome is all but inevitable," Lee said in a post on X.

"I offer my deepest apologies to the public for the profound disappointment caused by this unacceptable outcome.

"We will move swiftly to reform sports administration to ensure that nothing like this happens again," he added, without elaborating.

The much-maligned Hong was deeply unpopular with fans and South Korean media even before the tournament flop.

He dropped veteran skipper Son Heung-min for the South Africa game, in which they only

needed a draw to progress, but the gamble backfired.

Son, who turns 34 next month, has played his last World Cup and hinted previously at retiring from international football.

Hong, who was booed during home matches following his appointment in July 2024, said after stepping down that he will always be a fan.

"Even though I am leaving the national team, I am not abandoning Korean football altogether," Hong said.

"I will cheer for the national team from the bottom of my heart and hope that the team will be trusted and loved by the people once again." - AFP

Japan, Australia keep Asia's World Cup hopes alive

Cao Jianjie and Li Jia

MIAMI - The final whistle on the World Cup group stage brought mixed emotions for Asian football. Japan and Australia marched on, but seven of the continent's representatives were heading home.

Japan was the standout performer, finishing second in Group F after an unbeaten campaign against the Netherlands, Tunisia and Sweden.

Hajime Moriyasu's side scored seven goals in three matches, Japan's highest tally at a single World Cup.

A 1-1 draw with Sweden on Thursday sealed Japan's place in the round of 32 and set up a meeting with five-time champions Brazil.

"We do believe there's a chance for us to win," Moriyasu said. "And then we hope that we will be able to move one step further, move on to the next stage."

Australia, which left the Oceania Football Confederation and became a full member of the Asian Football Confederation

in 2006, also progressed after a goalless draw with Paraguay in Santa Clara, placing second behind the United States in Group D.

Tony Popovic's side came away with four points after opening with a 2-0 win over Türkiye before losing to the United States.

The Socceroos will face Egypt in the round of 32, giving Asia another chance to extend its presence in the tournament.

Iran came closest to joining them after finishing unbeaten in Group G.

Amir Ghalenoei's side drew with New Zealand, Belgium and Egypt, but missed out after unfavorable results elsewhere.

Its most painful moment came against Egypt, when Shoja Khalilzadeh's stoppage-time goal was ruled out for offside after a VAR review.

Rather than dwell on the disappointment, Iran left a handwritten note in its dressing room, thanking Seattle and the

team's supporters for their backing.

South Korea also saw its campaign end in disappointment after a 1-0 defeat to South Africa left it third in Group A.

Head coach Hong Myung-bo said his team had struggled to impose itself after captain Son Heung-min started on the bench.

"We prepared well, but compared to our previous matches we made too many mistakes in midfield," Hong said. "Today's performance was simply not good enough."

Saudi Arabia entered its final Group H match with a chance to progress, but fell short after taking only two points from three games.

Qatar, Iraq, Jordan and Uzbekistan were also eliminated after difficult campaigns.

The exits of Iran and South Korea illustrated how fine the margins were for Asia's challengers.

Japan and Australia now carry Asia's hopes into the knockout stage, where tougher tests await.

- Xinhua

Russell holds off Verstappen to win Austrian Grand Prix

F1

SPIELBERG, Austria - George Russell returned to winning ways after a series of disappointments yesterday when he claimed a measured victory for Mercedes ahead of Red Bull's four-time champion Max Verstappen in a thrilling Austrian Grand Prix.

The 28-year-old Briton, the pre-season favourite for the drivers' title and winner of the opening race, secured his second win of the year and the seventh of his career in a close race, declared to be a 'heat hazard' event, at the Red Bull Ring circuit.

Russell came home 1.611 seconds ahead of a charging Verstappen who in turn resisted championship leader Kimi Antonelli, in the second Mercedes, to finish 0.375 seconds in front of him as they crossed the line.

McLaren's Oscar Piastri was fourth, 20 seconds adrift, ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton of Ferrari, Isack Hadjar in the second Red Bull and world champion Lando Norris in the second McLaren.

Charles Leclerc was eighth in the second Ferrari ahead of the two Red Bulls of Liam Lawson and rookie Arvid Lindblad.

"It's beautiful to be back on the top step," said Russell.

"It's been a while so I'm definitely going to enjoy this one tonight. Max and Red Bull were incredibly quick this weekend, so kudos to them. I had to push every single lap - and I'm looking forward to a drink now."

Russell's win trimmed Antonelli's advantage ahead of him in the title race by 10 points to 40, the Italian teenager having reeled off five straight wins to establish a clear lead earlier in the season.

Verstappen, who started fifth, made light of the temperatures of 37C (air) and 62C (track). He said: "It was a very good race for us.



Second placed Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen (left), winner Mercedes' British driver George Russell (second left) and third placed Mercedes' Italian driver Kimi Antonelli (right) celebrate on the podium after the Formula One Austrian Grand Prix at the Red Bull Ring race track in Spielberg, Austria yesterday.

- AFP

The first laps were fun and then I managed the tyres."

Antonelli said: "I was a bit too excited in the first laps and I didn't drive well, but after changing tyres, I re-set and the pace was strong. It's a shame I joined the party a bit too late."

Shifting strategies

On an afternoon of searing heat in the Styrian Alps, Russell made a clean start from his 11th career pole to lead while, behind him, Hamilton passed Leclerc for second and Antonelli, in pure exuberance, ran off twice on the opening lap.

He passed Leclerc on lap two, but had to give the place back, offering Verstappen a chance to sweep through for third.

By this stage, both Cadillacs had retired with overheating and Verstappen closed on Hamilton before diving past him on lap 11, prompting a wheel-to-wheel battle as the Briton hung on to second before pitting.

He returned on hards in 11th, with instructions to push as Russell pulled 5.4 seconds clear of Verstap-

pen and Antonelli rose to third.

Verstappen pitted on lap 19, returning two seconds behind Hamilton before Russell came in and gave Antonelli the lead on lap 20, as Verstappen snatched third with a bruising move on Hamilton.

Antonelli then pitted on lap 24, seconds before a brief Virtual Safety Car when Carlos Sainz stopped on the main straight. He rejoined fifth while Hamilton pitted again for used softs for another spell of spicy racing.

All this left Russell leading ahead of Verstappen and Antonelli at half-distance with Hamilton chasing Piastri for fourth before both pitted on lap 43 followed by Russell.

Verstappen delighted his 'orange army' in the grandstands, with Antonelli 4.3 adrift and Russell third, but more stops loomed as a tactical race of shifting strategies and degrading tyres took shape.

The Dutchman pitted again on lap 50, handing the lead to Antonelli who in turn pitted once more to give the initiative to Russell. With 21 laps to complete, Russell resisted as Verstappen chased him home. -AFP

Japan's Ogura wins maiden MotoGP as Bezzecchi crashes in Assen

MotoGP

ASSEN, Netherlands - Japanese rider Ai Ogura claimed his maiden MotoGP win as Aprilia achieved another 1-2-3 finish but Marco Bezzecchi crashed and surrendered the overall championship lead to Jorge Martin in yesterday's motorcycling Dutch Grand Prix.

At the heart of MotoGP thanks to their riders and manufacturers, Japan had been waiting nearly 22 years for a victory in the premier class.

And it was ultimately Ogura, the 2024 Moto2 world champion, who ended that interminable wait with a first Japanese win since Makoto Tamada in 2004.

The 25-year-old, who had already shown great promise ahead of his 2025 debut in the elite class, has confirmed his talent this year.

Ogura delivered a masterful display in the Dutch heat, despite being hampered by a technical issue early in the race.

Initially trailing and holding third place for much of the race, he once again produced a blistering finish.

Ogura finished over two seconds ahead of his Trackhouse teammate Raul Fernandez with another Spaniard Martin in third a further 1.5sec back on a winding and undulating track.

"It's fantastic, I don't have much to say but I'm really very happy. Many thanks to my team," said Ogura.

Fernandez, winner of Saturday's sprint, spent two-thirds of the race behind Martin before managing to overtake him only for Ogura, who had been biding his time, to pass his teammate shortly after and pull away for a scorching victory.

Ogura took pole last week in the Czech Republic but came second.

He also finished third at

Le Mans in France in May to become the first Japanese rider to finish on a MotoGP podium since Katsuyuki Nakasuga at the Valencia Grand Prix in 2012.

Bezzecchi scare

In the championship, Martin takes the lead seven points ahead of Bezzecchi with Italian Fabio Di Giannantonio 16 behind the leader.

Bezzecchi crashed heavily on lap three at over 200kph.

The Italian Aprilia rider was fortunate to separate from his bike early in the fall and was transferred to hospital, conscious but suffering "intense pain".

Ogura moved up to fourth position, 25 points behind the leader, while Marc Marquez, the reigning world champion, is 40 points behind his compatriot in fifth.

"It's incredible to lead the championship; the important thing for me is that I've made good progress with this bike and am increasingly adapting my riding style to this Aprilia," said Martin.

This tenth round of the season at Assen's "Cathedral of Speed" confirmed Aprilia's superiority over Ducati, a manufacturer that had dominated MotoGP for over five years.

Ducati's Marquez, who had won the previous two Grands Prix just a month after undergoing double surgery on his right shoulder and foot, was unable to match the Aprilias in the Netherlands.

Penalised one position for exceeding track limits, the 33-year-old Catalan finished a disappointing seventh and now trails Martin by 40 points.

However, the final round before the summer break, taking place in two weeks at his favourite circuit, the Sachsenring in Germany, where he has won nine times in MotoGP, could allow the seven-time world champion to narrow that gap. -AFP

Stokes announces shock England exit as Mitchell bats NZ into commanding lead

Cricket

Julian Guyer

NOTTINGHAM, United Kingdom - England captain Ben Stokes stunned the cricket world by announcing his upcoming retirement from international duty in the middle of a Test match yesterday as an unbeaten hundred from New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell batted the Black Caps into a commanding position at Trent Bridge.

Stokes confirmed he would end his celebrated England career after the ongoing third and final Test against New Zealand in Nottingham, adding more drama to a three-match series locked at 1-1.

But Mitchell's 100 not out took New Zealand to 288-9 declared in their second innings and left England needing an imposing 373 to win on a wearing pitch of

increasingly uneven bounce.

Stokes's announcement was made public shortly before tea on the fourth day with the 35-year-old, one of the outstanding all-rounders of his generation, having informed his team-mates in the dressing room before the start of yesterday's play.

He was in the middle of a lengthy bowling spell, with news filtering into a stunned crowd as he was about to start his 11th over.

Stokes then received a standing ovation from spectators at Trent Bridge.

And in a moment of pure sporting theatre, Stokes had Zak Foulkes caught at slip with his next ball to spark yet more raucous cheers.

Yesterday's shock announcement came after Stokes returned to England duty at Trent Bridge following the fall-out from a London nightclub incident also involving

teammate Gus Atkinson earlier this month.

Stokes was back after being omitted from England's 253-run defeat in the second Test at the Oval for breaking a midnight curfew, alongside Atkinson, while celebrating at a London nightclub following the first-Test win over New Zealand.

"There's something that I know is going to happen over the next two days, which is my last two days as your captain and my last two days representing England," said Stokes in a clip of his dressing-room speech released by the England and Wales Cricket Board.

Tough task

But for all his latest on-field heroics, with Stokes receiving applause when he led the team off at tea and a guard of honour after

the resumption, England still had a tough task to avoid a seventh defeat in nine Tests.

Mitchell batted for more than six-and-a-half hours, facing 241 balls including 10 fours, as well as a six off Josh Tongue.

He also shared a fourth-wicket partnership of 129 with Rachin Ravindra, who fell agonisingly short of a century before being dismissed for 94.

Mitchell also received good support from tailender Ben Sears.

Having retired hurt, Sears returned at the fall of the ninth wicket when Mitchell as on 92 to ensure his team-mate could complete his sixth century in 39 Tests.

Fast bowler Jofra Archer, who had reduced New Zealand to 12-2 on Saturday, took two more wickets to finish with fine innings figures of 4-53 in 20 overs.

New Zealand, however, were still well-placed for what would be just their fourth series win in England in 20 attempts.

Mitchell, 47 not out overnight, showed plenty of resilience after struck several painful blows by both Stokes and express quick Archer.

Stokes, who finished with 2-50 in 22 overs, had previously dragged England back into the match with the ball.

Stokes ended a first-innings opening stand of 317 between New Zealand captain Tom Latham (151) and Devon Conway (157) during a return of 4-70, with the Black Caps dismissed for 438 when a total in excess of 500 once seemed likely.

New Zealand were on the brink of batting through yesterday's morning session without losing a wicket until off-spinner Shoab Bashir had Ravindra lbw. -AFP

Olivia Wilde looks at evolving relationships in 'The Invite'

Paula Ramon

LOS ANGELES – As she directed and starred in the sexy romantic comedy “The Invite,” Olivia Wilde took a deep dive into discussions about relationships and how they survive – conversations her co-stars joined with open arms.

“There was an amazing kind of collective catharsis,” Wilde told AFP at the recent Hollywood premiere of her new film, in which she shares the screen with Seth Rogen, Edward Norton and Penelope Cruz.

“I think we all walked away feeling like we had gained a little bit of knowledge, a little perspective from each other, because everyone had been so vulnerable.”

“The Invite,” which had its world premiere at the Sundance festival earlier this year and was released in select US cities on Friday, tells the story of two couples at different moments in their relationships.

When the frustrated and tired Joe and Angela (Rogen and Wilde) host the charismatic Hawk and Pina (Norton and Cruz) for a dinner party,

the night takes some unexpected turns.

The film is both funny and dark, and allows viewers to ponder their own relationship issues.

“It was a really great and honest examination of how relationships evolve as the people in them evolve,” Rogen told AFP.

The 44-year-old actor – coming off a banner year of awards for his Hollywood satire “The Studio” – said relationships are always box office gold because “it’s high stakes, very personal, very relatable.”

‘Really relatable’

The cast said the film works because of its screenplay, written by Rashida Jones and Will McCormack (who also wrote 2012’s “Celeste & Jesse Forever”).

The movie was inspired by the work of Spanish director Cesc Gay, who wrote the play “The Neighbours from Upstairs,” which was made into the Spanish-language film “Sentimental” in 2020.

Jones, also known for acting in



US-Irish actress and director Olivia Wilde poses upon arrival for the Los Angeles premiere of “The Invite” at the Directors Guild of America Theatre in Los Angeles last Tuesday. – AFP

“Parks and Recreation,” said the film clicks “even though we’re talking about very dysfunctional people and dysfunctional relationships” – or maybe even because of that fact.

“We tried to layer things into

those relationships that didn’t feel only dramatic, but also really relatable to anybody who’s been in a long-term relationship, and I think people see themselves in it,” she said.

The script attracted Cruz to the project. The Spanish Oscar winner said she could not stop laughing when she first read it.

“I’m always looking for smart comedies, comedies that move you – which is a genre that isn’t the easiest for sure,” she told AFP.

Beyond offering audiences a good laugh, the 42-year-old Wilde – in her third directorial effort – wanted to convey some life lessons.

For starters, relationships change, just like the people in them, and both parties need to accept those changes if the relationship enters a new phase.

“Also the movie is saying sometimes it’s better not to stay in the relationship,” said Wilde, who has two children with her ex, actor Jason Sudeikis, and dated singer Harry Styles.

“You have to take responsibility for your happiness and never stay out of resentment or inertia or acceptance,” she said.

“It’s about making a choice.”

– AFP

California appeals court orders Weinstein resentencing for sex assault

LOS ANGELES – A California appeals court on Friday upheld the conviction of disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein for rape and sexual assault, but vacated his 16-year prison term and said he must be resentenced.

The decision from the three-judge panel came in relation to Weinstein’s conviction in 2022 for the 2013 rape and assault of an actress in a Los Angeles hotel room.

“The sentence is vacated and the matter is remanded for resentencing,” said an online docket update posted on Friday by the California 2nd District Court of Appeal. “In all other respects, the judgment is affirmed.”

The full ruling was not made available and it was not immediately clear on what basis it had been made.

The decision came one day after prosecutors in New York said they would drop a sex assault

case against Weinstein over an alleged 2013 attack on an aspiring actress after three trials fell apart.

The now-74-year-old Oscar winner is still awaiting sentencing in New York for sexually assaulting former “Project Runway” assistant Miriam Haley.

Weinstein once ruled Hollywood as a producer powerful enough to make or break projects – and careers.

But after years of rumours, 2017 investigations by The New Yorker and The New York Times exposed a raft of abusive behaviour and prompted an avalanche of allegations from more than 80 people.

The ensuing furore snowballed into the global Me Too movement and a reckoning that rocked the world of entertainment, with multiple men called to account for abusing their positions to exploit young women in the industry.

– AFP

Movie theatres are allies for streamers like us, Apple executive says

Paula Ramon

PARIS – Tech giant Apple views movie theatres as allies in its fight to carve out a space for its platform in the competitive streaming sector, a top company executive told AFP in a recent interview.

The firm, which launched Apple TV+ in 2019 without any third-party content, has won over critics in recent years, and is so far the only streaming platform to win the best picture Oscar, with “CODA” in 2022.

It also shook up the box office with “F1: The Movie,” the high-octane motor racing drama starring Brad Pitt, which grossed US\$634.1 million worldwide and earned the company another Academy Award this year, this time for best sound.

After years of wariness between

movie theatres and streaming services, Eddy Cue, the company’s senior vice president of services and health, said Apple is committed to producing films for both platforms, allowing them to play out their theatrical runs based on audience demand rather than adhering to rigid release windows.

“If a movie like ‘F1’ was on theatrical longer than 45 days [it was] because people wanted to watch it theatrically, they wanted to watch it in an IMAX theatre,” he told AFP.

“Theatrical is a great experience, it’s here to stay, and I think it’s growing.”

While viewers might initially want to see a blockbuster on a big screen, they love the chance to

rewatch it when it turns up on the streaming service, now rebranded as Apple TV.

Cinema and streaming are “very complementary. I think they can both work together,” Cue said.

The company, headquartered in California, is gearing up to produce a sequel to “F1,” with Cue saying the plot and script are currently in development.

It “was the biggest sports movie of all time. It was Brad Pitt’s biggest movie of all time, and I do think that people want to see another one,” he said.

Cue, who has been credited with revolutionising Apple’s services sector, was recognised last week as the Entertainment Person of the Year at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity. – AFP

Will Taylor Swift & Travis Kelce wed in New York? Clues abound

NEW YORK – Will Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce’s “Love Story” culminate in a Big Apple wedding? Increasing signs point to a mega-bash for the A-list celebrity couple at Madison Square Garden next week.

Rumours have run rampant for weeks that the 36-year-old pop superstar and the three-time NFL Super Bowl winner, both 36, could wed at the storied sports arena, home to the New York Knicks, the newly crowned NBA champions.

The couple, who announced their engagement in August last year, have been seen in various spots around New York of late, and clues have multiplied that the Garden could be their venue of choice.

The New York Times reported on Thursday – citing an entertain-

ment industry executive and another informed source – that Swift had booked the arena for an “intimate” gathering of around 100 people on July 2, and for a larger event the following day with around 1,000 guests.

The New York Times, along with other outlets including CNN, reported that a company specialising in wedding planning had obtained a permit to close the streets around the venue between July 2 and July 4, and erect a tent.

The permit application said the event would host from 500 to 999 people.

The Garden boasts both the arena space and a smaller theatre traditionally used for concerts and meetings.

It is perhaps not a traditional wedding venue, but Swift would not

be the first musician to marry there.

Sly Stone, who died last year, was married there in June 1974 to actress Kathy Silva during a concert by his band, Sly and the Family Stone.

Swift, a 14-time Grammy winner, is coming off a huge year with the success of her album “The Life of a Showgirl,” induction into the Songwriters Hall of Fame, and a new song on the “Toy Story 5” soundtrack.

Kelce, a tight end for the Kansas City Chiefs, has signed to play for a 14th season in the National Football League.

If the wedding plans come to fruition, it could be a huge weekend in New York, with July 4 celebrations culminating in a huge fireworks show, and World Cup action scheduled for July 5. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 20°C~29°C	Manila 24°C~33°C	New York 20°C~29°C	Lisbon 17°C~31°C
Shanghai 24°C~29°C	Bangkok 25°C~35°C	London 16°C~24°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~28°C
Hong Kong 24°C~30°C	Tokyo 20°C~27°C	Frankfurt 18°C~28°C	Luanda 17°C~23°C
Taipei 25°C~33°C	Singapore 24°C~31°C	Vancouver 13°C~19°C	Maputo 17°C~29°C
Guangzhou 24°C~31°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~32°C	Paris 14°C~18°C	Dili 21°C~31°C
Nanjing 22°C~31°C	Jakarta 23°C~33°C	Moscow 12°C~21°C	São Tomé 24°C~31°C
Guilin 23°C~30°C	Seoul 20°C~32°C	Las Vegas 21°C~35°C	Praia 21°C~29°C
Xi'an 22°C~35°C	Sydney 12°C~19°C	Monte Carlo 24°C~32°C	Bissau 24°C~32°C



WORLD CUP



Portugal's defender Joao Cancelo talks with his daughter after the 2026 World Cup Group K match against Colombia at the Miami Stadium in Miami Gardens on Saturday. - AFP



Supporters of Cabo Verde's national football team celebrate after their team qualified for the knockout stage of the 2026 World Cup in Praia, Cabo Verde on Saturday. - AFP



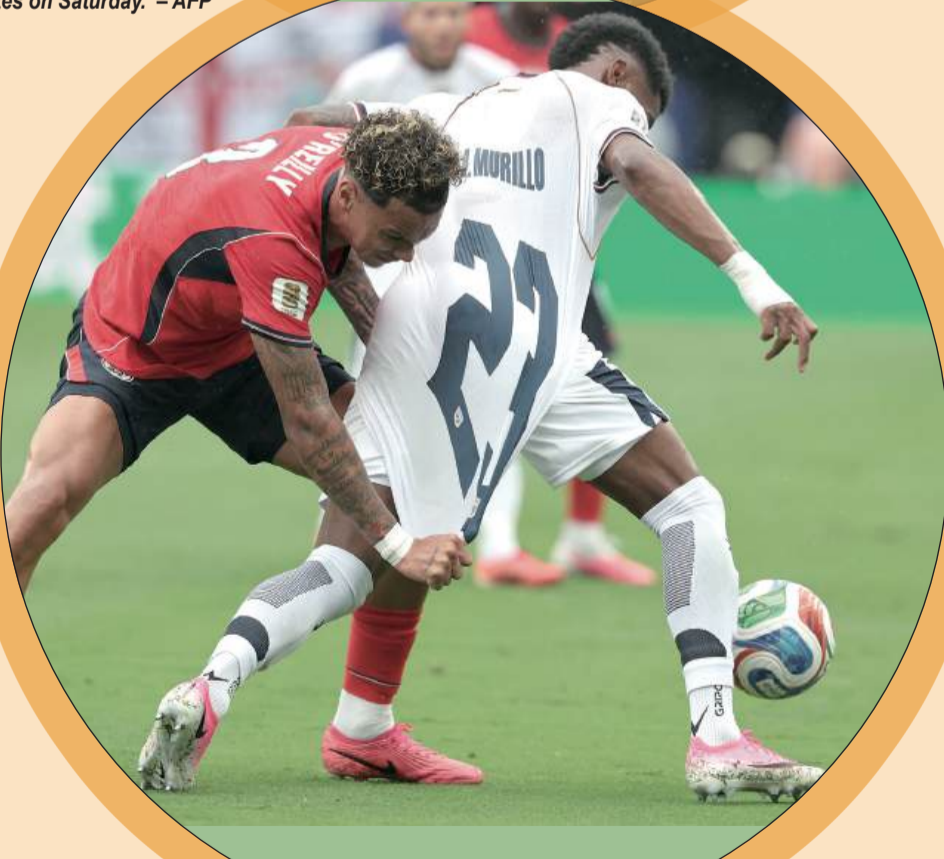
Abduvohid Nematov (centre), goalkeeper of Uzbekistan, saves the ball during the group K match against the Democratic Republic of the Congo at the 2026 FIFA World Cup at Atlanta Stadium in Atlanta, the United States, on Saturday. - Xinhua



An Algeria fan poses with a sign reading "44 years later, revenge for Gijon" in reference to the 1982 World Cup, ahead of the 2026 World Cup Group J match against Austria at the Kansas City Stadium in Kansas City, the United States on Saturday. - AFP



Congo DR players celebrate after the 3-1 win, allowing them to qualify for the knock out stages, during the FIFA World Cup 2026 Group K match against Uzbekistan at Atlanta Stadium on Saturday in Atlanta, Georgia. - AFP



England's defender Nico O'Reilly (left) and Panama's defender Michael Amir Murillo fight for the ball during the 2026 World Cup Group L match between Panama and England at the New York/New Jersey Stadium in East Rutherford, the United States on Saturday. - AFP