

Life•
7 staycation
deals for June
school holidays
|C1&2



The Big Story•
Iran cuts off
peace talks as
Lebanon burns
|A4



World•
Johor set for
state election
amid Pakatan
turmoil |A6



THE STRAITS TIMES

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Explosion in Myanmar village kills scores



An explosion in Myanmar's Kaung Tat village, located near the Chinese border, has left at least 55 dead and hundreds injured. Mystery surrounds the detonation of explosives stored for mining operations by one of the country's rebel factions, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). It caused widespread devastation, with rescuers still searching for survivors. The TNLA, which controls the village, is currently in a ceasefire with the Myanmar military. PHOTO: EPA SEE WORLD • A7

S'pore to create a registry of AI agents for public officers

It will allow 150,000 officers to use AI for work without compromising data security

Irene Tham
Technology Editor

A registry of artificial intelligence agents is being developed for 150,000 public officers in Singapore to use cutting-edge AI in their work without compromising data security.

This registry is a safeguard to track the owners and activities of AI agents, which can make decisions and execute actions at machine speed.

It is part of a suite of tools being fast-tracked at the Government Technology Agency (GovTech) to provide greater oversight as government employees increasingly use AI for everything from coding to generating reports and scheduling meetings.

Dubbed AI Assistant Desk, the suite aims to provide a secure personal digital assistant for all government employees, GovTech chief executive Goh Wei Boon told The Straits Times.

"We want to have a layer of customisable rules, sanctioned AI tools and a registry to provide better visibility and security, so we can ensure that people use AI agents correctly," said Goh.

AI agents are able to use tools on a computer as a human user would by proactively figuring out the sequence of steps needed to make an online transaction or perform risk assessments with minimal or no human intervention, among other tasks. This has been made possible by advancements in natural language processing and reasoning, allowing AI to comprehend human language and respond dynamically.

AI Assistant Desk, which is still in development, is being tested by some public officers, ahead of a wider roll-out planned for later in 2026.

The use of AI agents by the public sector is part of a larger national goal to push the boundaries of AI automation. On Aug 28, 2025, Minister for Digital Development and Information Josephine Teo said the public sector was already experimenting with AI agents – for instance, to help navigate the multi-agency administrative requirements for business licence applications or paperwork for social aid.

Goh said that AI Assistant Desk's security layers remain unchanged even when third-party AI tools are added or replaced. The security measures could include disallowing agents from deleting files or e-mailing external recipients, and imposing recipient limits to minimise spam.

Automated hygiene checkers built by GovTech also ensure that no offensive language is used in prompts or present in AI outputs.

Having such granular control is in line with the original mission of GovTech: to enable the public sector to be a self-reliant technology user.

The agency has been at the helm of public-sector technology transformation since 2016, when it started with 1,800 employees. It now has 3,900 employees supporting the technology needs of more than 50 public agencies.

In addition to managing current IT infrastructure, GovTech is driving a massive AI roll-out for 150,000 public employees to integrate AI into their daily work.

"It is about bringing technology closer to the ground, enabling teams closest to real-world problems to develop more agile and impactful solutions," said Goh. "This evolution aims to transform agencies into stronger product owners by building deeper in-house capabilities."

GovTech maintains a continuous deployment of about 1,600 of its



GovTech chief executive Goh Wei Boon said the registry is part of the effort to ensure people use AI agents correctly. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

engineers to various government agencies for technical support. But with AI-assisted coding eliminating technical barriers, public servants without engineering backgrounds are increasingly also expected to actively design and propose workflow automations.

GovTech's inaugural hackathon – called {build} – in 2025 saw participation from 600 public servants. Some projects have since been developed into real-world prototypes currently undergoing testing.

One example is an AI marking assistant called Mark.ly, currently being trialled in 18 local schools. The tool aims to help teachers mark handwritten English, geography and history scripts faster and with greater consistency. There are plans to integrate the tool with Google classroom tools that teachers use today, as well as in future versions of the existing Student Learning Space e-learning platform.

Another example is LangBuddy, a web-based AI voice-enabled chatbot designed to help students brush up on their mother tongue. The virtual bot can converse with students in Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. If a student trips up, say, by using an English phrase in a sentence, the bot will jump in to provide the translation. LangBuddy is currently being trialled by around 300 students from 10 secondary schools and junior colleges, with

plans for more schools to be involved.

Leading by example in the public sector, GovTech engineers are already using AI-assisted development tools, while non-engineering teams are increasingly using low-code AI tools to help with their work.

This reflects a broader national effort to achieve AI fluency, defined as the ability to combine professional domain expertise with AI know-how to solve real-world work problems. Singapore's aim is to have 100,000 AI-fluent individuals across all sectors by 2029 through tailored upskilling programmes.

Already, more than half of Singapore's 150,000 public officers regularly use Pair, the Government's AI chatbot, to enhance their productivity, writing and research, said GovTech.

Cybersecurity is another critical pillar in Singapore's national push to embrace advanced AI.

GovTech is developing an AI tool to conduct automated penetration testing on some 2,000 government systems that contain citizen data and transactions. Penetration testing – "pen test" in tech slang – is a simulated, authorised hacking into computer systems to identify and fix vulnerabilities before malicious hackers cause actual damage.

"This process is very laborious. You can either do it manually yourself or engage a vendor. It can take a couple of months for each engagement, which is not very sustainable," said Goh. "If you 'pen test' yearly, you are only secure once a year, correct? With AI automation, we can test our systems continuously."

The use of AI has become critical following cyberespionage group UNC3886's attack on Singapore's telcos in 2025.

Since January, GovTech has been using automated penetration testing tools. Plans are under way to progressively scale the use of AI tools for automated penetration testing across the whole of government.

Since October 2025, GovTech has also been incorporating AI smarts into its threat detection tools to secure public-sector systems. These AI tools are designed to proactively identify traffic anomalies, helping agencies detect stealthy cyberthreats.

"These developments are crucial to Singapore's ongoing digital transformation to ensure better public service delivery and national security," said Goh. "With higher expectations and a faster-evolving threat environment, our work goes beyond mere maintenance."

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As Singapore ramps up psychiatric nursing home capacity, focus shifts to social care

Joyce Teo
Senior Health Correspondent

Singapore is increasing its long-term mental health services capacity with the opening of a new psychiatric nursing home in May, a psychiatric rehabilitation home in July, and a second nursing home slated for 2029.

This expansion is accompanied by a gradual shift towards providing residents with more choices and activities to foster recovery, preserve their dignity and reduce social stigma, experts said.

Vanguard Care Home (Hougang), a psychiatric nursing home repurposed from the former Bright Vision Community Hospital, began operations on May 4.

Vanguard Healthcare, which manages it, said the 257-bed facility is for frail seniors with stable psychiatric conditions.

The facility is co-located with Vanguard Compass Home (Hougang), which is set to open on July 6. This 48-bed psychiatric rehabilitation home is designed to help individuals aged 21 to 60 with stable conditions in their recovery and community reintegration.

St Andrew's Mission Hospital (SAMH) will open another psychiatric nursing home in 2029.

Managed by St Andrew's Nursing Home (SANH), the 377-bed project will be next to SANH's existing psychiatric nursing home in the Buangkok Green Medical Park, which also houses the Institute of Mental Health.

These homes are part of a broader effort here to improve mental healthcare in a rapidly ageing society. They were announced under the National Mental Health and Well-being Strategy launched in 2023 to meet a growing demand for psychiatric step-down care.

Singapore currently has 10 nursing homes that offer psychiatric beds. They provide long-term care for individuals with chronic, severe mental health conditions such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorders.

Capacity is expected to reach about 1,800 psychiatric beds by the end of 2026, said a Ministry of Health (MOH) spokesperson.

Additionally, the three psychiatric rehabilitation homes here offer a total of 377 beds to support individuals in their recovery, help them build essential life skills and reintegrate into the community.

The high demand for specialised psychiatric care is underscored by the situation at SANH, which manages about a third of Singapore's psychiatric nursing home beds.

Its 300-bed Buangkok home is constantly at 100 per cent occupancy, while its Taman Jurong and Aljunied facilities, which

have 144 and 112 beds for psychiatric residents respectively, typically operate at 97 per cent to 99 per cent occupancy.

Daniel Lee, the cluster chief executive of SANH, said this high occupancy reflects a shifting social landscape of smaller family units and more single seniors. This signals that its facilities must move beyond providing entirely clinical care to connecting residents with community-based activities to improve their well-being and help them foster meaningful connections.

The residents at the Buangkok home range in age from 40 to 90, with the majority aged 65 to 74. Many are there because their psychiatric conditions alienated them from family, or because their previous caregivers had died, Lee said.

At the upcoming SANH facility in Buangkok Green, plans include putting in a community cafe run by staff and residents, in collaboration with community partners, said Lee.

The space will be designed to provide opportunities for next-of-kin and the wider public to connect meaningfully with the residents, he said.

Additionally, there will be a mini-mart and barbershop that will provide residents with opportunities to participate in micro-job roles and community engagement activities.

At Vanguard Healthcare's new psychiatric nursing home and rehab home, residents live in a safe, home-like environment, with a structured care support system that promotes dignity and a sense of purpose, said CEO Chan Wei Ling.

The facilities help individuals in their mental health recovery, with different levels of support at different stages of their care needs, she said.

At SANH (Buangkok), executive director Kelvin Ng said the home was retrofitted in late 2025 to add an outdoor pavilion with karaoke facilities and an outdoor garden with a compound for two silkie chickens that have helped to improve interaction among the residents.

SANH had also sought feedback from residents regarding certain services, which led to the home hiring its own chefs instead of relying on catered food.

In late 2025, three residents obtained food hygiene certification, Ng said.

One of them, Alvin Teo Say Siong, 59, who has lived at the home since it opened in late 2013, is employed at an on-campus cafe. Besides schizophrenia, he also has other health conditions, including cataract and ankylosing spondylitis, a painful inflammatory arthritis that affects the spine.

It is not his first job outside of

CONTINUED ON PAGE A2

Chronic kidney disease • Offering early palliative care

A new \$9 million four-year programme, operated by the National Kidney Foundation and three major public hospitals, is integrating palliative care into the treatment of patients with advanced chronic kidney disease to relieve their symptoms, pain and stress.

Called Renalssance, the pilot, which is supported by the Lien Foundation, aims to challenge the "dialysis by default" mindset.

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President Tharman in Tanzania from June 8 to 10 for state visit

Chin Soo Fang
Senior Correspondent

President Tharman Shanmugaratnam will be in Tanzania from June 8 to 10 for the first-ever state visit by a Singapore head of state to the East African country.

His visit is at the invitation of Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan and marks the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on June 1.

President Tharman will participate in an official welcome ceremony and meet President Hassan in Dar es Salaam, where he will be hosted at a state banquet.

The two heads of state will also speak to the media together and

witness the signing and exchange of several agreements.

The pacts expected to be inked during the visit will deepen bilateral cooperation in areas such as carbon credits, capacity building, skills development, and technical and vocational training.

President Tharman will also visit the University of Dar es Salaam and deliver a speech.

In addition, a Singapore-Tanzania joint business roundtable, co-organised by the Singapore Business Federation (SBF), will be held to enable business leaders from both sides to network and explore opportunities for collaboration.

The visit comes as Singapore steps up ties with Africa, the world's second-fastest-growing region. In November 2025, Prime Minister Lawrence Wong visited

Ethiopia, where he announced Singapore would open an embassy in the capital Addis Ababa.

Tanzania is a key node in East Africa, as it is the headquarters for the East African Community, a subregional bloc that covers eight countries. Singapore intends to negotiate a free trade agreement with the grouping.

President Tharman will also make a stop in Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous archipelago within Tanzania. He will meet Zanzibar President Hussein Ali Mwinyi, who will also host him to lunch.

Zanzibar has historically served as a commercial, maritime and cultural hub linking East Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and Europe.

President Tharman will visit Darajani Souk at the edge of Stone Town, a designated UNESCO

World Heritage Site. Since 1904, the market has served as the island's primary trading hub.

Darajani Souk is a community rejuvenation public-private partnership project that includes Singapore agro-commodities company Nomanbhoy & Sons.

President Tharman will be accompanied by his spouse Jane Ittogi Shanmugaratnam, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Finance and National Development Indranee Rajah, Minister of State for Trade and Industry and National Development Alvin Tan, and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Social and Family Development Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim.

Others on the trip include some MPs, as well as officers from various ministries, Enterprise Singapore and Singapore Cooperation

Enterprise.

A business delegation from the SBF will also be part of the visit. It will be led by Mark Lee, vice-chairman of the SBF and a Nominated MP, who is taking over the duties of chairman Teo Siong Seng, who is on leave of absence.

Tanzania is the second-largest economy and second-most populous country in East Africa. In 2025, Tanzania was Singapore's 12th-largest trading partner in Africa. Total bilateral trade in goods amounted to \$227.7 million in 2025.

Singapore's commercial interests in Tanzania have primarily been in transport and logistics, trade, infrastructure and built environment, hospitality, and oil and gas sectors. Singapore companies operating in Tanzania include Pacific International Lines, Wilmar

International, Gas Supply and Nomanbhoy & Sons.

Before his stop in Tanzania, President Tharman will make a working visit to the Republic of South Africa from June 2 to 8. He will have meetings with South African leaders in Cape Town and Johannesburg, including President Cyril Ramaphosa, Deputy President Paul Mashatile and Speaker of Parliament Thoko Didiza.

He will also chair a meeting of the World Bank Group's High-level Advisory Council on Jobs (HLACJ). In his capacity as chair of the board of the Group of Thirty (G-30), he will participate in a G-30 plenary hosted by the South African Reserve Bank and a joint HLACJ-G-30 seminar.

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Initiative to integrate palliative care into chronic kidney disease treatment

It challenges 'dialysis by default' mindset, eases patients' symptoms, pain and stress

Joyce Teo
Senior Health Correspondent

The National Kidney Foundation (NKF) and three major public hospitals here are providing palliative care to patients with advanced chronic kidney disease (CKD), under a \$9 million, four-year pilot programme supported by the Lien Foundation.

Called Renalssance, the initiative seeks to challenge the "dialysis by default" mindset by integrating palliative care into the treatment journey much earlier, relieving patients' symptoms, pain and stress alongside active medical care.

The hospitals – National University Hospital, Singapore General Hospital (SGH) and Tan Tock Seng Hospital – each represent one of the three healthcare clusters that oversee care across Singapore.

Renalssance is expected to benefit more than 5,260 patients over four years – 1,500 from each hospital, and 760 from NKF.

Taking palliative support upstream ensures that CKD patients

also have the option of choosing not to do dialysis but to get palliative care, the five partners said in a joint statement on June 1.

This allows for care plans that address not only the patients' medical needs, but also their functional, emotional and psychosocial well-being.

Many people often assume dialysis is the default treatment for kidney failure because it is widely recognised and commonly presented as the only alternative to a transplant.

However, it is not always the best choice. For frail seniors and those with severe medical conditions such as cancer and cardiovascular disease, it is often less effective in extending lifespan. They can also suffer from nausea, muscle cramps, headaches and other issues, said Kwek Jia Liang, a senior consultant at SGH's renal medicine department.

International studies have shown that for patients aged 80 and above who have multiple illnesses, starting dialysis may extend their lives by only about two years. Much of

this remaining time, however, is spent in healthcare settings owing to dialysis complications, he said. CKD affects 14 per cent of Singaporeans today – higher than the global average of 10 per cent. This disease is projected to affect one in four by 2035.

Previously, palliative care would be offered towards the end of life, if it was made available at all. Renalssance hopes to change that. It involves training nurses to proactively identify and counsel CKD patients earlier on their options, before they reach end-stage kidney failure.

At SGH, for instance, two nurses have been having palliative care conversations with patients.

"We identify patients who are going to reach kidney failure in a year or two. Even though they are still feeling pretty okay, that's when we should start talking to them about all the options they have," Kwek told The Straits Times.

However, it can be a challenge. "There are patients asking us, 'Why am I seeing you?', even though their kidney function is at less than 20 per cent," he said.

This occurs when the patient is in the fourth of the five stages of CKD. They may start to have sleeping problems and feel weaker, but



Renalssance is set to benefit over 5,260 patients over four years. Under it, patients with advanced chronic kidney disease will be offered early palliative care, regardless of whether they opt for dialysis or non-dialysis care. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

they tend to view these as part of ageing rather than signs of a progressive illness, he said.

At some point, patients at this stage of kidney disease and their caregivers will have to think about whether or not to go for dialysis.

With Renalssance, patients with advanced CKD at the three hospitals will eventually be offered early palliative care, regardless of whether they opt for dialysis or non-dialysis care.

This involves providing treat-

ments that relieve symptoms and suffering, identifying and honouring patients' wishes, supporting caregivers, and striking a balance between medical intervention and quality of life.

For patients who opt for dialysis, palliative care will be provided concurrently with their dialysis treatment.

At NKF dialysis centres, patients who have commenced dialysis will now be monitored more closely for their overall well-being.

Those who choose non-dialysis care will be referred to suitable community care providers such as active ageing centres, home care services or hospices, depending on their needs.

They will continue to be overseen by their primary nephrologist at the hospital, who will drive each patient's treatment plans. They can opt for dialysis, should they change their minds.

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Providers practising person-centred care

FROM A1

the home, as he had worked for four years at home-grown Western food chain Astone Specialties before the Covid-19 pandemic.

The other two are waiting for job opportunities, including Poh Lian Heng, 62, who used to do clerical work and has some experience in the food and beverage sector.

After being admitted to the Institute of Mental Health for delusional disorder and depressed mood, he was transferred to SANH (Buangkok) eight years ago. "I got used to the life here. It's very meaningful – everybody can understand me, and there are a lot of activities to attend."

He found the weekly sessions led by a peer support specialist particularly helpful. "He told us not to be so sad... not to be disappointed with life," said Poh, who previously spent about 15 years caring full-time for his late mother, who lived with a memory loss condition.

"A lot of our psychiatric home residents are physically able. They tend to be very healthy and stable if you keep them behaviourally engaged," said SANH cluster chief executive Lee.

"In our Taman Jurong and Buangkok homes, we allow them to take up jobs as laundry assistants, as mini-mart assistants, and even cafe assistants so that they can gain the purpose and the dignity of their lives living here."

Lee said a September 2025 visit to the renowned Hogeweyk dementia village in the Netherlands had inspired the SANH team to integrate fresh concepts into their seven nursing homes.

"From them, we learnt that we are really working in the residents' home; they are not living in our office," said Lee.

"So, we need to change the way we think, and see what the residents want... rather than when do I want them to eat, when do I want them to shower?"

The team plans to keep the doors to the ground-floor wards in Buangkok unlocked so that residents can freely walk to the outdoor areas, he said.

Fung John Chye, an associate professor who is co-director of the Centre for Environment and Ageing Well at the National University of Singapore, said most care service providers here and overseas are practising person-centred care, prioritising residents' needs over the strict adherence to institutional imperatives, such as operational efficacy.

"It requires a holistic transformation of long-term care, encompassing elements such as improvements in care service delivery, the design of physical environments, social care initiatives and strategies to reduce caregiver stress."

He said this is especially crucial for psychiatric nursing homes, as Singapore faces an ageing demo-



St Andrew's Nursing Home (Buangkok) residents doing cognitive art and craft with therapy assistants Kelly Poh (left) and Rekha Chandran on May 20. The residents at the 300-bed psychiatric nursing home range in age from 40 to 90, with the majority aged 65 to 74. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

graphic and an expected rise in mental health conditions and dementia cases.

Fung said these homes should feature varied spatial environments because sensory perception

is often a trigger of negative behaviours, while well-designed spaces can help soothe agitated residents.

Spaces should cater to various scales of usage, from a personal quiet space to small group gather-

ings and larger group activities.

Concerns regarding space efficiency often result in social areas being poorly integrated or omitted entirely from nursing home designs. Fung said it benefits resi-

dents to have the freedom to use a space for self-initiated activities, such as listening to music or reading.

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