

## Technology

# High-tech Tokyo Game Show: Old skool ones remains the best

## Manufacturers wheeled out revamped versions of their old games consoles

**MAKUHARI:** At the Tokyo Game Show, the world's top firms compete to show off their very latest in high-tech gaming gadgetry: from head-spinning virtual reality to cutting-edge multiplayer eSports. But crowds were flocking not only to the latest smartphone shoot-em-up, but classic games from the 1980s like Donkey Kong and Mario Brothers, as manufacturers wheeled out revamped versions of their old games consoles to capture a new market.

Alongside the top-of-the-range latest models such as the PS4, Japanese electronics giant Sony caught everyone off guard by announcing the release of a miniature console — designed like the original PlayStation — with 20 vintage games. Nostalgic fans and curious new gamers will find PlayStation classics such as the 1997 role-playing game Final Fantasy VII and 1998-1999 racing game Ridge Racer Type 4.

"Twenty-five years after we launched the first PlayStation in Japan, we are offering this version not only for fans from back in the day but also for those who never knew this console," said Shu Takura, spokesman for Sony Interactive Entertainment. Sony's move to roll back the years comes two years after bitter rivals Nintendo launched the NES, a palm-sized version of its eighties era games console, tapping into nostalgia for titles from the early era of home video games.

### 'Old memories'

The console — which retails for around \$60 — comes with 30 games including Nintendo's famed Super Mario and Donkey Kong characters. "These old games are not beautiful but we used to play them with school friends in the arcades and playing them makes you automatically think of this friendship and old memories come flooding back," said Soichiro Morizumi, a gamer and game developer himself. "Modern games may be beautiful but they do not fire the same emotions," Morizumi told AFP.

Other firms at the show are also jumping on the nostalgia bandwagon including Hamster, which has acquired licences to offer classics like Donkey Kong and Mario Brothers on the latest consoles like Nintendo's Switch, Microsoft's Xbox or Sony's PS4. "Games from the 1980s have become extremely popular in recent times and I think the market is exploding," said Satoshi Hamada, chief executive of Hamster. "Gamers from that era are over 40 now. They still want to play but today's games are too complicated for them. They want the same simplicity they had before, because they have grown old," he added. "As you can see from our stand, it is men in their 40s and 50s that are playing these games." The Tokyo Game Show is Asia's largest, with 250,000 visitors expected until Sunday in the suburbs of the Japanese capital. Some 668 firms from 41 countries are set to showcase their latest cutting-edge wares. — AFP



TOKYO: Visitors play at old video games at the Tokyo Game Show on September 21, 2018. — AFP

## Alcohol responsible for one in 20 deaths worldwide: WHO

**GENEVA:** Alcohol kills three million people worldwide each year — more than AIDS, violence and road accidents combined, the World Health Organization said Friday, adding that men are particularly at risk. The UN health agency's latest report on alcohol and health pointed out that alcohol causes more than one in 20 deaths globally each year, including drink driving, alcohol-induced violence and abuse and a multitude of diseases and disorders.

Men account for more than three quarters of alcohol-related deaths, the nearly 500-page report found. "Far too many people, their families and communities suffer the consequences of the harmful use of alcohol through violence, injuries, mental health problems and diseases like cancer and stroke," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement. Drinking is linked to more than 200 health conditions, including liver cirrhosis and some cancers.

Alcohol abuse also makes people more susceptible to infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, HIV and pneumonia, the report found. The some three million alcohol-related deaths registered globally in 2016 — the latest available statistics — account for 5.3 percent of all deaths that year. For young people,

the numbers are even more alarming, with a full 13.5 percent of all deaths among 20-29-year-olds considered to be alcohol-related, the study found.

### 'Unacceptably high'

In comparison, HIV/AIDS was responsible for 1.8 percent of global deaths in 2016, road injuries accounted for 2.5 percent and violence for 0.8 percent, it said. The latest numbers are lower than those in WHO's last report on global alcohol consumption, published in 2014. There are "some positive global trends", the agency said, noting shrinking prevalence of heavy episodic drinking and alcohol-related deaths since 2010.

But it warned that "the overall burden of disease and injuries caused by the harmful use of alcohol is unacceptably high," especially in Europe and the Americas. Globally, an estimated 237 million men and 46 million women suffer from alcohol use disorders, WHO said. Alcohol abuse affects nearly 15 percent of men and 3.5 percent of women in Europe, and 11.5 percent of men and 5.1 percent of women in the Americas, it pointed out. Alcohol consumption overall is unevenly distributed around the globe, with well over half of the world's population over the age of 15 abstaining completely. On average, the 2.3 billion people currently considered drinkers — meaning they have drunk alcohol at least once in the past year — consume 33 grammes of pure alcohol per day.

That is roughly equivalent to two glasses of wine, a large bottle of beer or two shots of spirits. Europe clearly has the highest per capita consumption, which despite a more than 10-percent drop since 2010 still regis-

tered a per capita consumption of 10 liters of pure alcohol or more per year. Alcohol consumption has dropped in three-quarters of European countries, with the biggest declines seen in Russia, Moldova and Belarus.

In Russia, average annual alcohol consumption plunged from 18.7 liters of pure alcohol per person over 15 in 2005 to 11.7 liters in 2016, the report said. This "dramatic decrease" is linked to a range of "positive policies" introduced by Moscow, Vladimir Poznyak, who coordinates WHO's substance abuse unit, told reporters. He pointed to the introduction of a minimum price for vodka and an alcohol advertising ban.

WHO however warned that outside of Europe, alcohol consumption has continued to rise, especially in Asia, with China and India registering significant hikes. It urged countries to do more to counter harmful drinking and to reach a goal of cutting global consumption by 10 percent between 2010 and 2025. "Based on all trends and predictions, we can expect an increase in overall alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm in the next 10 years," Poznyak warned, stressing that "this will definitely result in increased number of deaths and suffering around the world."

WHO is urging countries to tax alcohol and ban advertising of such beverages to reduce consumption. Poznyak said blocking alcohol companies from sponsoring big sporting events could make a big difference. "These events are being watched by millions and sometimes billions of young people, and it's impossible to prevent exposure to this kind of advertising to those who are under the legal age," he said. — AFP

## NASA telescope discovers two new planets five months after launch

**ORLANDO:** A planet-hunting orbital telescope designed to detect worlds beyond our solar system discovered two distant planets this week five months after its launch from Cape Canaveral, Florida, officials said on Thursday. NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite, better known as TESS, made an early discovery of "super-Earth" and "hot Earth" planets in solar systems at least 49 light-years away, marking the satellite's first discovery since its April launch. TESS is on a two-year, \$337 million mission to expand astronomers' known catalog of so-called exoplanets, worlds circling distant stars.

While the two planets are too hot to support life, TESS Deputy Science Director Sara Seager expects many more such discoveries. "We will have to wait and see what else TESS discovers," Seager told Reuters. "We do know that planets are out there, littering the night sky, just waiting to be found." TESS is designed to build on the work of its predecessor, the Kepler space telescope, which discovered the bulk of some 3,700 exoplanets docu-

mented during the past 20 years and is running out of fuel. NASA expects to pinpoint thousands more previously unknown worlds, perhaps hundreds of them Earth-sized or "super-Earth" sized — no larger than twice as big as our home planet.

Those are believed the most likely to feature rocky surfaces or oceans and are thus considered the best candidates for life to evolve. Scientists have said they hope TESS will ultimately help catalog at least 100 more rocky exoplanets for further study in what has become one of astronomy's newest fields of exploration.

MIT researchers on Wednesday announced the discovery of Pi Mensae c, a "super-earth" planet 60 light-years away orbiting its sun every 6.3 days. The discovery of LHS 3844 b, a "hot-earth" planet 49 light-years away that orbits its sun every 11 hours, was announced on Thursday. Pi Mensae c could have a solid surface or be a waterworld as the composition of such planets is a mixed bag, Martin Spill, NASA's program scientist for TESS, said in a phone interview. — Reuters

## First to Mars will become Martians: Canada astronaut

**OTTAWA:** Astronauts traveling through space on the long trip to Mars will not have the usual backup from mission control on Earth and will need to think of themselves as Martians to survive, Canada's most famous spaceman half-jokingly said Friday. Current predictions are that humans will reach Mars — up to 400 million kilometers (250 million miles) from Earth — in the coming decades.

But the vast distance means communications with mission control would be delayed by up to 22 minutes. As a result, astronauts would need to be self-reliant on the voyage, which clocks in at 2.5 years round trip in travel time alone. "If I were commander of that crew as soon as the Earth started fading in the rearview mirror, I would get the crew together and say: 'We are no longer Earthlings, we are now Martians. That's who we are. We need to redefine our relationship with the planet that birthed us,'" former

astronaut Chris Hadfield said.

"It's going to be very difficult not having Mother Earth next to you and it's going to be really important for that crew to define who they are as the most distant explorers in human history," he said. Hadfield, whose 2013 rendition of David Bowie's "Space Oddity" aboard the International Space Station was watched by millions, was taking part with fellow astronauts in a fireside chat with students at the University of Ottawa.

Robert Thirsk — who holds the Canadian record for the most time spent in space — said new Canadian Space Agency recruits Joshua Kutryk and Jenni Sidey-Gibbons "are going to go to deep space, returning to the moon, to an asteroid... and then 20 years from now we're going to be on the surface of Mars exploring." In the short term, "the idea of living on the moon... is becoming very, very real," said Kutryk. — AFP

## Facebook dating service rolling out in Colombia

**BOGOTA:** Facebook said Friday a dating service it teased early this year is being rolled out in Colombia. The social media giant chose the Latin American country as its test lab because Colombians are particularly avid fans of using social networks and websites to find partners. The new feature, rolled out in Colombia this week, allows users to create a separate "dating" profile not visible to their network of friends, with potential matches recommended based on preferences and common interests.

The service is programmed not to link up people who are already connected as family or friends, and users of Facebook Dating will also be able to block people if they wish. A basic chat service will be available, and the site will bar strangers from sending photos, videos or links.

Some 21 million people log in to Facebook every day in Colombia, a country of 50 million people, according to the company. "We view this as an incredible opportunity to continue helping people build relationships in meaningful ways on Facebook," said Facebook Dating product manager Nathan Sharp. Facebook's chief Mark Zuckerberg in May announced plans for the new dating feature at the world's leading online social network-while vowing to make privacy protection its top priority in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal.

Zuckerberg was emphatic that the focus would be on helping people find partners, not flings. "This is going to be for building real, long-term relationships, not just hookups," Zuckerberg said in presenting the new feature. He said the dating offer was built with privacy and safety in mind. Facebook faced intense global scrutiny over the mass harvesting of personal data by Cambridge Analytica, a British political consultancy that worked for Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign. The company has admitted up to 87 million users may have had their data hijacked in the scandal. — AFP

## 'Fat' traces confirm weird fossils were earliest animals

**WASHINGTON:** A strange fossil that looks a bit like a giant leaf, or a fingerprint the size of a coffee table, has intrigued scientists for decades. Thousands of the fossils have been found over the past seven decades, revealing that it lived at the bottom of the ocean, without a mouth, intestines or anus, half a billion years ago. Was it a mossy plant? A giant single-celled amoeba? A failed experiment of evolution? Or the earliest animal on Earth?

After digging one of these fossils off a cliff in Russia and analyzing its contents, researchers discovered molecules of cholesterol, a type of fat. This confirms that the creature, known as Dickinsonia, is the Earth's earliest known animal, said the report Thursday in the journal Science. "Scientists have been fighting for more than 75 years" over the nature of these "bizarre fossils," said associate professor Jochen Brocks from the Australian National University Research School of Earth Sciences. "The fossil fat now confirms Dickinsonia as the oldest known animal fossil, solving a decades-old mystery that has been the Holy Grail of paleontology."

### Edge of cliff

Dickinsonia contained rib-like segments the length of its oval-shaped body, which came in a variety of sizes and could grow as large as 4.6 feet. The

analysis showed the animals were abundant 558 million years ago, millions of years earlier than previously thought, according to Brocks. The creature was part of the Ediacara Biota that lived on Earth during a time when bacteria reigned, 542-635 million years ago.

The Ediacarian Period was about 20 million years prior to emergence of modern animal life — a period known as the Cambrian explosion. "The question has been, is that real? Is that an event that happened in Earth history? Or have we just not found the older fossils?" David Gold, geobiologist and assistant professor at the University of California, told AFP. "This paper is another really good line of evidence to support the idea that it is in fact an animal, and that animals are much older than the Cambrian."

Dickinsonia could be an ancestor of "many forms of animal life today" including worms and insects, added Gold, who was not part of the current study. Scientists had a difficult time finding Dickinsonia fossils with organic matter still attached. Many of the known fossils were in Australia, and had been exposed to too many elements over many millions of years. The fossil for the current study came from cliffs near the White Sea in the northwest of Russia.

"I took a helicopter to reach this very remote part of the world — home to bears and mosquitoes — where I could find Dickinsonia fossils with organic matter still intact," said Ilya Bobrovskiy, a doctoral researcher at ANU. "These fossils were located in the middle of cliffs of the White Sea that are 60 to 100 meters high. I had to hang over the edge of a cliff on ropes and dig out huge blocks of sandstone, throw them down, wash the sandstone and repeat this process until I found the fossils I was after." — AFP



In this NASA file photo taken on December 25, 2012, Canadian Space Agency astronaut Chris Hadfield strums his guitar in the International Space Station's Cupola. — AFP