

Sam 'warmly congratulates' Party on successful conclusion of Fourth Plenary Session



Xi Jinping, Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang and Li Xi raise their hands during this week's four-day fourth plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee in Beijing. The 20th Central Committee of the CPC convened its fourth plenary session in Beijing between Monday and yesterday. (The Communiqué of the 4th Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the CPC is available on our website: <https://www.macaupostdaily.com/news/26380>) – Xinhua

Staff Reporter

The four-day Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) concluded yesterday in Beijing.

According to a statement by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) last night, Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, representing the government of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR), yesterday conveyed warm congratulations to the Party on the successful conclusion of the meeting.

Sam emphasised that the meeting's conclusions will unite and lead all sectors

in Macau to earnestly study and implement the spirit of the Fourth Plenary Session, contributing Macau's strength to advancing Chinese-style modernisation.

Sam stated, according to the statement, that the convening of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th CPC was of great significance. General Secretary Xi Jinping delivered an important speech, and the meeting reviewed and approved the "Suggestions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development," establishing the principles that must be

followed during the "15th Five-Year" period.

The statement quoted Sam as saying that the plan aims to comprehensively advance the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through Chinese-style modernisation, coordinating the overall layout of "five-in-one"*, promoting the strategic layout of "four comprehensives"** and coordinating domestic and international situations.

The plan, Sam stressed, calls for the complete, accurate, and comprehensive implementation of the new development concept, accelerating the construction of a new development pattern, presenting the main

goals for economic and social development during the "15th Five-Year" period, while emphasising the promotion of long-term prosperity and stability in Hong Kong and Macau, advancing the peaceful development of cross-strait relations, and promoting the great cause of national reunification.

The statement quoted Sam as saying that this will certainly continue to write new chapters in the country's rapid economic development and long-term social stability, striving to create a new situation in Chinese-style modernisation.

Continued on page 6

Lula says will seek 4th term in 2026 elections

JAKARTA – Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who turns 80 next week, confirmed yesterday that he will run for a fourth term in office in 2026 elections.

"I'm about to turn 80 years old, but you can be sure I have the same energy I had when I was 30. And I will run for a fourth term in Brazil," Lula said at a joint press conference with his Indonesian counterpart Prabowo Subianto in Jakarta.

Lula is on a state visit to Indonesia as

he seeks to expand ties in a country Brazil sees as a fellow rising economic power with similar perspectives on global issues.

"I'm telling you this because we're still going to see each other many times," Lula told Subianto.

Lula had hinted in recent months at a fourth-term run, without confirming he would be a candidate.

In December, he underwent emergency surgery to stop a brain bleed linked to a bad fall two months prior.

Lula served as president for two terms between 2003 and 2010, but the man who rose from poverty to become an icon of the Latin American left had a dramatic fall from grace when he was imprisoned for corruption in 2018.

However, the controversial case was overturned and he made a spectacular comeback in a bitter 2022 election that deeply divided Brazil, with a narrow victory over right-wing incumbent Jair Bolsonaro.

That election sparked a political crisis

that still resonates today: Bolsonaro was sentenced to 27 years in prison for a botched coup attempt in the wake of his election loss.

Brazil's Supreme Court on Wednesday published his sentence, a step which gives Bolsonaro's lawyers a five-day deadline to appeal the sentence.

With Bolsonaro under house arrest and out of the running, Brazil's sizable conservative electorate is currently without a champion for next year's election.

– AFP

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Cambodia reaffirms determination to combat transnational crimes, online scams

Cambodia yesterday reaffirmed its strong commitment to combating and suppressing all forms of transnational crimes, including online scams, human trafficking and other cyber-enabled offences.

– Story on p. 9

No reduction in Gaza hunger since truce: WHO

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said yesterday there had been little improvement in the amount of aid going into Gaza since a ceasefire took hold – and no observable reduction in hunger.

– Story on p. 10

UK sexual abuse inquiry thrown into doubt

A UK inquiry into the sexual abuse of teenage girls by so-called grooming gangs was in turmoil yesterday after several survivors said they would only take part if a government minister quit.

– Story on p. 11

Local woman blackmails former sex client

Victim is an elderly deaf-mute male: police

Ida Cheong

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a local female on Wednesday for blackmailing an elderly deaf-mute man out of approximately 200,000 patacas, (PJ) spokesman Chong Kam Leong said during a special press conference yesterday.

Chong identified the suspect as a 54-year-old female, surnamed Lau, a former sex worker, who claimed to be jobless.

According to Chong, last Wednesday a staff member of a service centre for death-mute people accompanied the victim to a police station to report that the latter, who lives alone, had been extorted by a woman over a long period of time.

Chong noted that the victim receives a monthly government disability allowance, which is deposited directly into his bank account. Cheong also said that the victim has known the suspect for over a decade because of her work as a sex worker. Due to her work, Lau knew where the victim lives.

Although the victim and suspect had not been in contact with each other for some time, in 2024 Lau frequently visited the victim's flat in the city centre, where she threatened to assault him if he didn't give her money. The victim complied with her demands and withdrew over 5,000 to 10,000 patacas each time from his bank account, totalling

around 200,000 patacas, Chong said.

The case was uncovered after a local social worker accompanied the victim to the bank and noticed unusual withdrawals from his account.

Lau was arrested by the police at the Barrier Gate checkpoint on Wednesday. She claimed that because of her gambling debts she threatened and blackmailed the victim.

According to Lau, the Judiciary Police have confirmed there is evidence about Lau's blackmailing of the victim. She has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) for further questioning and the possible laying of charge. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded blackmail suspect from the PJ headquarters in Zape to a vehicle yesterday.

— Photo: Ida Cheong

MGM, DSAL hold annual occupational health, safety campaign



This undated group photo provided by MGM yesterday shows participants and representatives posing during the recent closing ceremony of the annual OHS promotion campaign co-hosted by the integrated resort operator and the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL).

Rui Pastorin

A closing ceremony took place at the back-of-house area of MGM COTAI for the annual occupational health and safety (OHS) promotion campaign co-hosted by MGM in partnership with the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL).

The campaign was themed "Safety First, Wellness Always" and featured a "dynamic series of knowledge-based and interactive activities" throughout its run from August through October, according to a statement by the integrated resort operator yesterday.

The statement said that this marked the seventh collaboration between DSAL with MGM on the OHS roadshow. DSAL Director Chan Un Tong was quoted as saying: "MGM continues to apply innovative technology to enhance the work environment. For example, it has introduced a recycling solution that transforms

used playing cards into eco-friendly packaging materials. The solution reduces the risk of repetitive strain injuries and accidents".

Kenneth Feng Xiaofeng, president and executive director of MGM China Holdings Limited, highlighted the prioritisation of the mental well-being of staff. He was quoted as saying: "In partnership with the bureau, we have hosted a series of workshops to equip our employees with stress management skills, while encouraging them to share these insights with their family and friends, helping to build a more harmonious, healthy, and thriving Macau."

Activities held during the "Safety First, Wellness Always" campaign were "OHS Flash Mob", roadshows, quizzes, stretching games, fitness workouts, and seminars, with the initiatives aimed at encouraging staff to "maintain a positive mindset while remaining vigilant in the

workplace", the statement noted.

Among the activities, the statement highlighted that the Safety Snap Quizzes held in staff canteens garnered over 1,300 visits, while game booths set up at the "Safety First, Wellness Always" roadshows at back-of-house areas had over 3,000 visits. Moreover, the statement said that MGM emerged as the highest-performing integrated tourism and leisure enterprise among 39 participating teams at "The 11th Regional Safety Quiz" in Macau, winning both the 1st and 2nd Runner-up in the Enterprise category. ■

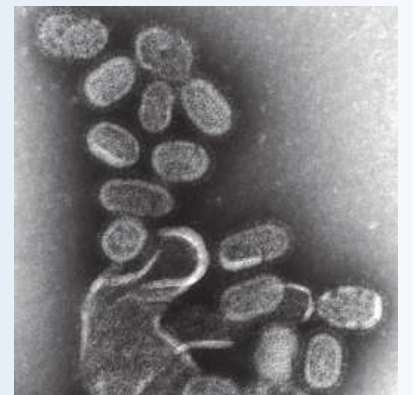
Health Bureau monitors 3 school flu clusters

Kristina Vallesteros

The Health Bureau (SSM) received reports of separate influenza-like illness clusters at three local schools on Wednesday, according to a statement issued on the same day.

The first cluster was reported at Lou Hau High School on Rua Dois do Bairro da Concórdia, involving six students, comprising four males and two females from a Form 3 class. The second cluster was identified at St. Joseph Parish Secondary School (English School) No. 5 on Rua de Lei Pou Chon, affecting twelve P3 students consisting of six males and six females. The third cluster involves five K1 students including three males and two females, at Pui Va Middle School Affiliated Primary School and Kindergarten on Rua do Minho.

The statement said that the students across all three schools began showing symptoms, including fever and cough, from October 19 onwards. While some of those affected have sought medical treatment, their conditions are relatively mild, with no severe cases or complications. The statement confirmed that nine



This negative stained transmission electron micrograph (TEM) downloaded from Wikipedia last night shows the influenza virus.

students from the combined clusters tested positive for Influenza A.

In response, the statement noted that the respective schools have implemented enhanced infection control measures, including thorough cleaning and disinfection, apart from enforcing isolation protocols for sick individuals. The Health Bureau also reiterated standard public health advice, urging residents to get vaccinated, maintain good personal hygiene, and stay home and seek medical attention when feeling unwell. ■

Police nab elderly man for sexually harassing female student

Ida Cheong

An 80-year-old local man was arrested on Monday for sexually harassing a female minor on Avenida da Nordeste (東北馬路), Public Security Police (PSP) spokeswoman Wong Chi Weng said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Wong identified the suspect as a man in his 80's. The victim is a female junior high school student.

According to the victim's statement to the police, she had been waiting for her mother at the entrance to a residential building on Avenida da Nordeste around 9:40 p.m. last Friday,

when someone slapped her on the buttocks. She turned around and saw a man walking away. The victim told her mother, after which they reported the case to the police right away.

The police identified the suspect through citywide CCTV footage. He was apprehended on Friday in Areia Preta (黑沙環區). The suspect denied the allegation and claimed that he did not remember anything about the offence.

The suspect has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), where he is facing a charge of sexual harassment. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows a PSP officer escorting the harassment suspect into a police station.

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Macau Weather

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Source: SMG

GEG event aims to promote Chinese & PSCs cultures



Wizard HTF, a singer of the Memu Sunhu ("Same Dream") band from Guinea-Bissau, poses during a media group interview on the sidelines of the first session of the "GEG Traditional Music and Dance Performances in Community" event in Iao Hon Park yesterday.

Ida Cheong

The first session of the "GEG Traditional Music and Dance Performances in Community" was held yesterday in Iao Hon Park, aiming to showcase Macau's rich diversity of cultural and artistic styles through the event spanning Chinese and Portuguese-speaking countries' cultures.

As part of the 7th "Encounter in Macao – Arts and Cultural Festival between China and the Portuguese-speaking Countries", the event, which started yesterday, presents 14 performances in various communities and at the Galaxy Macau integrated resort in Cotai, from the mainland and eight Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs) and regions, including Angola, Brazil and Cape Verde. It continues this weekend, next Thursday and next weekend.

The 7th China and PSCs cultural festival, jointly organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) and



Guinean-Bissau band Memu Sunhu performs in the first session of the "GEG Traditional Music and Dance Performances in Community" event in Iao Hon Park yesterday. – Photos: Ida Cheong

integrated resort operator Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) will continue into December, featuring over 80 programmes in seven categories, showcasing more than 780 artistes and performers.

Wizard HTF, a Guinean-Bissau singer with the band Memu Sunhu,* told reporters on the sidelines of the event that his band is visiting Macau for the first time and, consequently, has no experience of performing at the festival, adding that he adores the Portuguese culture in Macau.

About his performance, Wizard HTF said that his combined Afrobeat style and African cultural elements in the show, aim to

promote Macau and Africa cultural integration, and convey the concept of "peace, love and unity" to local audiences. He also said hopes that people in Guinea-Bissau and Macau can regard each other's place as their home.

Tan Jia, a representative of the School of Dance, Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University, told reporters that their show marks the team's first experience with community-based performances, which they believe can offer residents a unique viewing experience. Given their classical Chinese style, they are especially excited to experience distinctive

musical genres like rock at the carnival.

Tan noted that the group will perform the "Ladies of Lingnan" (Chinese classical dance) and "Spring Outing in the Mountains" (Han and Tang dynasty classical dance) during the festival. ■

*"Memu Sunhu" is a musical group from Guinea-Bissau whose name means "Same Dream" in the country's Creole language. Formed in 2021, the group has gained significant popularity for its versatile sound that blends various modern music genres with traditional Guinean-Bissau elements. - DeepSeek

2025 GEG Lusofonia Festival to kick off tonight



This poster recently provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) promotes the GEG Lusofonia Festival.

Rui Pastorin

The two-weekend "2025 GEG Lusofonia Festival" will start tonight at 7 p.m. at Taipa Houses, again showcasing the culture of Portuguese-speaking communities in Macau through a raft of activities, cultural booths, gastronomy, dance and music performances in its colourful programme.

This year marks the festival's 28th edition. The event is sponsored by integrated resort operator Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG).

Held in parallel with the 7th Encounter in Macao – Arts and Cultural Festival between China and the Portuguese-speaking Countries, the festival will run from tonight through Sunday and from next Friday through next Sunday.

According to a recent statement from the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), the event this year places a special focus on "Angolan culture with a presentation of local delicacies and visual arts".

Booths will be set up by local Portuguese-speaking Communities from Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe, East Timor, India's Goa, Damão and Diu, and the Macanese community, the statement said.

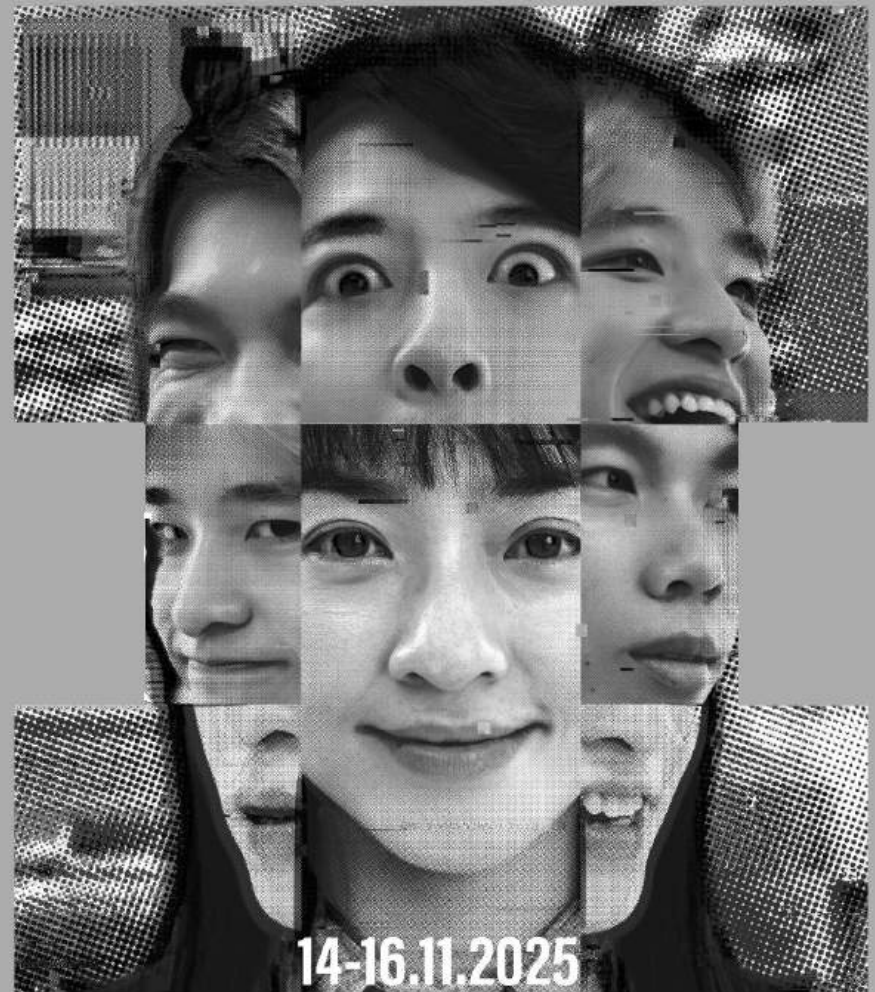
Customarily, the term "Macanese" denotes Macau's community of Portuguese-Asian extraction and its diaspora.

Music and dance artistes from the 10 Portuguese-speaking countries and regions, along with over 40 local Portuguese-speaking artistes, have been invited to perform at the Amphitheater of Taipa Houses and on the secondary stage in Largo do Carmo, the statement said.

Moreover, culinary delights will also be available along with a variety of games.

One can find more details, including the programme for this year's festival, on <https://www.icm.gov.mo/FCP/2025/en/events/Programme1> ■

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'Artletics' exhibition blends sport & sculpture at COD

Khalel Vallo

Currently on view at integrated resort City of Dreams (COD) in Cotai, the exhibition "Artletics" by French artist Laurent Perbos* transforms everyday sports into contemporary art, aiming to offer exhibitors an experience that connects athletic movement with aesthetic expression.

Drawing from the ancient Greek ideal where art and athletics reflected one another, the exhibition reinterprets modern sports through Perbos's signature concepts of "displacement" and "distortion," according to an information board at the entrance to the exhibition.

The exhibition features playful reconfigurations of familiar sports elements – including tennis courts, basketball structures, and ping pong tables – turning them into sculptural forms that blend humour, motion, and public engagement.

The message added that the exhibition aims to bridge French imagination and Chinese creativity, offering exhibitiongoers an immersive experience where the beauty of movement and the energy of sport meet artistic expression.

With free admission, the exhibition is open daily from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. next to LAN Bar at COD until January 4, 2026.

**Perbos, born in 1971 in Bordeaux, southwestern France, is a contemporary French artist known for his playful, poetic, and often humorous transformations of everyday objects. He lives and works in Marseille. His work, which spans sculpture, installation, and site-specific projects, reconfigures common, mass-produced items into unexpected and vibrant forms that challenge our perceptions of function, material, and art itself. – DeepSeek*



Photos by Khalel Vallo

3x3 GBA Tour 2025 tips off

Khalel Vallo

“The 3x3 Greater Bay Area (GBA) Tour 2025 – Macau Finals” tipped off at the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St. Paul’s and on Wynn Palace’s outdoor lawn in Cotai yesterday, marking the start



Basketball players from two Greater Bay Area (GBA) teams – Dongguan (left) and Super Battleship Overseas Elite – face off during yesterday’s “3x3 GBA Tour 2025 – Macau Finals” inauguration at the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St. Paul’s landmark.

– Photo: Khalel Vallo

of a four-day tournament running through Sunday.

The competition is co-organised by the Sports Bureau (ID) and StarMac Entertainment & Production Ltd, in conjunction with the Macau-China Basketball Association, Chaiioi Sports Company Limited, and Zhuixing Entertainment (Zhuhai Hengqin) Company Limited. Wynn Resorts provides one of the venues.

The event started with an opening ceremony, with seven guests attending followed by a cheerleader performance before its tip-off featuring 12 games at both venues. Among the guests were StarMac CEO Rio Lou Kit Long and Macau-China Basketball Association President Wu Chong Fai.

The competition is being held simultaneously at both venues during the four-day tournament. From 2:30 p.m. to 5:10 p.m., nine games will be held followed by round of 16 at 6:30 p.m. to 8:50 p.m. tonight at the Ruins of St. Paul’s.

The quarter-finals will be held from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. at Wynn Palace tomorrow, while the semi-finals, third-place playoffs and finals will be held on Sunday from 2:30 p.m. to 8:50 p.m. in front of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St. Paul’s.

According to an August statement provided by the bureau, with the four-day tournament being concurrently held in two venues, the 3x3 Greater Bay Area Tour 2025 aims to strengthen sports exchange, foster regional cooperation, and highlight Macau’s role in promoting sports tourism within the GBA. ■

Wynn, EHL conclude hospitality management programme



This undated handout photo recently provided by Wynn Palace in Cotai shows a group photo of participants in the recently concluded Certified Hospitality Management Programme 2025 posing with representatives.

Kristina Vallesteros

The Certified Hospitality Management Programme 2025 launched by Wynn in partnership with the Switzerland-based École hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL) has recently marked its successful conclusion, according to a statement released by Wynn Palace in Cotai early this week.

The programme was designed to “elevate the skills and expertise of hotel industry leaders and facilitate them to seize opportunities for future growth”, the statement said. It featured three core modules focusing on creating bespoke guest experiences, the role of human connections in modern hotel service, and using data analytics for business decisions.

Vice President of Learning and Advancement at Wynn Macau and Wynn Palace Barry Ip (葉華信) was quoted in the statement as saying: “We are thrilled with the programme’s outstanding results and the positive feedback from participants.”

The statement noted that EHL, recognised as the world’s top hotel management school, provided the “elite team of professionals and international lecturers” for the programme.

Looking forward, the statement added, Wynn is dedicated to furthering its support for the professional development of the hospitality sector to support the sustainable growth of Macau’s tourism industry. ■

7th ENCOUNTER IN MACAO Arts and Cultural Festival between China and the Portuguese-speaking Countries



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2025 GEG Lusofonia Festival

11/2025 – 3/2026
Spiritual Narrative –
2025 Annual Arts Exhibition between
China and the Portuguese-speaking Countries

24/10 – 2/11/2025
Chinese and Portuguese
Picture Book Fair

23/10 – 2/11/2025
GEG Traditional Music and Dance
Performance in the Community

14/11 – 5/12/2025
The 7th China and the
Portuguese-speaking Countries
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15/11/2025
Vanessa da Mata Concert with the
Macao Chinese Orchestra

1-2, 8-9, 15-16/11/2025
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Youths present AI solutions to global challenges at innovation competition

Interviews by Rui Pastorin

The finals of “AI for SDGs – Global Youth AI Future Innovation Competition” took place yesterday at The Londoner Macao in Cotai, where three teams from Macau and 12 from other parts of the world delivered their final pitches, while the winning teams received their awards at the end of the day.

Marking its inaugural edition, the competition is part of the United Nations University (UNU) Macau Milestone Series’ flagship events that celebrate both the UN’s 80th and the UNU’s 50th Anniversaries.

The competition, guided by the UNU, was organised by the UNU Global AI Network in conjunction with UNU Macau and Venture Cup China, with academic support from the Institute for AI International Governance at Tsinghua University and venue sponsorship by Sands China. Its theme followed “AI for the Environment: Ecological Environment and Green Transition Challenges” and featured four tracks: “Climate Change Adaptation”, “Environmental Protection and Conservation”, “Clean Energy” and “AI for Less Developed Countries”, challenging youths to come up with AI solutions.

Venture Cup China Executive Director and UNU Global AI Network Board Member Jane Wu told the *Post* that she deemed this first edition of the competition a



Venture Cup China Executive Director and UNU Global AI Network Board Member Jane Wu (1st row, 1st from right) and UNU Macau Senior Consultant Paula Hidalgo-Sanchis (1st row, 3rd from left) pose with other judges, representatives and competition participants attending yesterday’s award ceremony at The Londoner Macao. – Photo: Rui Pastorin

success, noting that they received diversified applications beyond what they had anticipated, garnering inspiring entries.

“I feel that this brings the next level of how to empower digital transition, green transition and also empowered together with youth-led technology to tackle the challenge of the SDGs [the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals].”

Wu further remarked on AI’s growing importance and why it is something that could be worth exploring for youngsters, noting that it could become a tool in the future. “It’s not something like super rocket science but rather, a skill set” and mindset that youngsters should

acquire and use together with other aspects.

She added that young people would benefit from applying it early into different areas such as their lives, studies or business and by having it at the back of their minds.

Moreover, UNU Macau Senior Consultant Paula Hidalgo-Sanchis, who was one of the jury members, told the *Post* that they saw interesting, provocative and creative ideas, which are necessary to address challenges in sustainable development.

She went on to highlight the power of youth innovation, noting: “I believe that there is a need for innovation to tackle the challenges

of today’s world and [the] youths are in the best position to have these ideas because they just think that everything is possible”.

Hidalgo-Sanchis also pointed out the importance of the youths’ positivity when it comes to the future and taking on its challenges given that they are naturally more optimistic and explore opportunities.

Looking ahead

Both Hidalgo-Sanchis and Wu were asked by the *Post* about the future of the competition. For Hidalgo-Sanchis, she encouraged anyone with a good idea to apply for the global competition, which

sees applicants from diverse backgrounds and countries. “It’s, of course, contextualised where we are in this part of the world, but it’s really open for anybody and it’s open for very diverse solutions. So, in that sense, many solutions can be fit into this competition”, she concluded.

Wu, meanwhile, spoke of its outcomes, saying that they might be able to see a potential proof of concept from participating teams as every solution has a fitting market, which offers good opportunities. “We would like to see how they [the teams] can go forward and test it and prove their concept in the market of Macau or in the market of ‘greater China’”.

Looking ahead at future editions, Wu said they are evaluating possible topics to explore such as looking at AI and its applications in green transition, finance, education and even health, aiming to evaluate the possibilities.

The UNU Macau Milestone Series event will continue with the UNU Macau AI Conference 2025 today, which marks UN Day, at the Galaxy International Convention Centre (GICC) in Cotai. The final event, UNU Macau AI Education Day, will take place at Wynn Palace.

One can find more information on <https://unu.edu/macau> ■

Sam ‘warmly congratulates’ Party on successful conclusion of Fourth Plenary Session

Continued from p.1

Sam pointed out that during the “14th Five-Year” period, the world has been undergoing significant changes at an accelerated pace, and the tasks of reform, development, and stability are unprecedentedly daunting.

Across the country, there is active engagement and determination to tackle challenges, solidly promoting high-quality development, Sam said, adding that Chinese-style modernisation is progressing rapidly, and new pioneering advancements, breakthrough changes, and historical achievements in economic and social development have been made.

The MSAR government will, Sam pledged, resolutely implement the spirit of President Xi Jinping’s important speeches during his inspection visit to Macau last year and the central government’s decision-making arrangements, striving to promote appropriate economic diversification and integrated development with Hengqin, achieving new progress and results.

Sam stressed that key industries will enhance their development. He underlined that significant projects with major implications for Macau’s

long-term development will be planned and carried out. Besides, by focusing on the new positioning of “Macao + Hengqin,” investment in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin will be increased, advancing the second phase of target tasks. At the same time, efforts will be made to consolidate and enhance Macau’s unique status and advantages, deepen international exchanges, showcase greater achievements on the international stage, and better integrate into and serve the national development strategy, Sam said. He emphasised that the MSAR government is comprehensively summarising the implementation of the “14th Five-Year” plan in Macau, preparing for the “15th Five-Year” planning work, aligning with national development strategies, and setting longer-term plans for Macau’s appropriately diversified economic development based on domestic and international market demands and development trends, combined with Macau’s development conditions, to add new momentum, create new advantages, achieve new breakthroughs, and open new situations for Macau’s future development.

Sam also emphasised that the local government will thoroughly

study and implement the spirit of the Fourth Plenary Session, pragmatically adopt a series of measures, continuously enhance governance efficiency, unite and lead all sectors of local society to seize new opportunities brought by the national “15th Five-Year” plan and comprehensively, accurately and firmly implement the “One Country, Two Systems” policy.

Sam was also quoted by the statement as saying that the local government will steadfastly safeguard the nation’s sovereignty, security, and development interests, further leverage the institutional advantages of “One Country, Two Systems” and Macau’s unique role as an international cooperation platform, and advance various construction projects in Macau, based on high-quality standards, making new and greater contributions to the comprehensive advancement of national construction and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through Chinese-style modernisation. ■

* The term “five-in-one” refers to a strategic framework established by China’s central authorities that integrates five key components for national

development. These components are:

1) *Economic Development:* Focusing on sustainable and high-quality economic growth.

2) *Political Development:* Enhancing governance, rule of law, and political stability.

3) *Cultural Development:* Promoting cultural advancement and strengthening national identity.

4) *Social Development:* Improving social welfare, education, and healthcare to enhance the quality of life.

5) *Ecological Development:* Emphasising environmental protection and sustainable resource management.

The “five-in-one” approach aims to create a comprehensive and coordinated strategy for advancing modernisation and achieving the goals outlined in national development plans, such as the Five-Year Plans. This holistic framework reflects the central authorities’ commitment to balanced and sustainable development across multiple dimensions. – Poe, MPD

** The term “four comprehensives” refers to a strategic framework used by the central authorities to guide national development and governance. It

includes four key objectives:

1) *Comprehensively Build a Moderately Prosperous Society:* This aims to improve the overall quality of life for citizens, ensuring that economic and social development benefits all segments of society.

2) *Comprehensively Deepen Reform:* This focuses on implementing broad reforms across various sectors, including the economy, governance, and social systems, to enhance efficiency and adaptability.

3) *Comprehensively Govern the Nation According to Law:* This emphasises the importance of the rule of law in governance, ensuring that laws are applied fairly and consistently, and promoting legal awareness among citizens.

4) *Comprehensively Strictly Govern the Party:* This aims to strengthen the governance and discipline within the Communist Party of China, ensuring its integrity, accountability, and capability to lead effectively.

Together, the “four comprehensives” serve as guiding principles for achieving the goals set out in the central authorities’ development plans, particularly in the context of modernisation and national rejuvenation.

CPC plenum concludes, adopting recommendations for China's 15th Five-Year Plan

BEIJING — The 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) convened its fourth plenary session in Beijing from Monday to yesterday.

Participants at the session deliberated over and adopted the Recommendations of the CPC Central Committee for Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development, according to a communique of the session released on Thursday.

The Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee presided over the meeting. Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, delivered important addresses, according to the communique.

The participants heard and discussed a report presented by Xi on the work of the Political Bureau.

Xi also delivered explanatory remarks on the draft recommendations.

At the session, the CPC Central Committee fully affirmed the work of the Political Bureau since the third plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee.

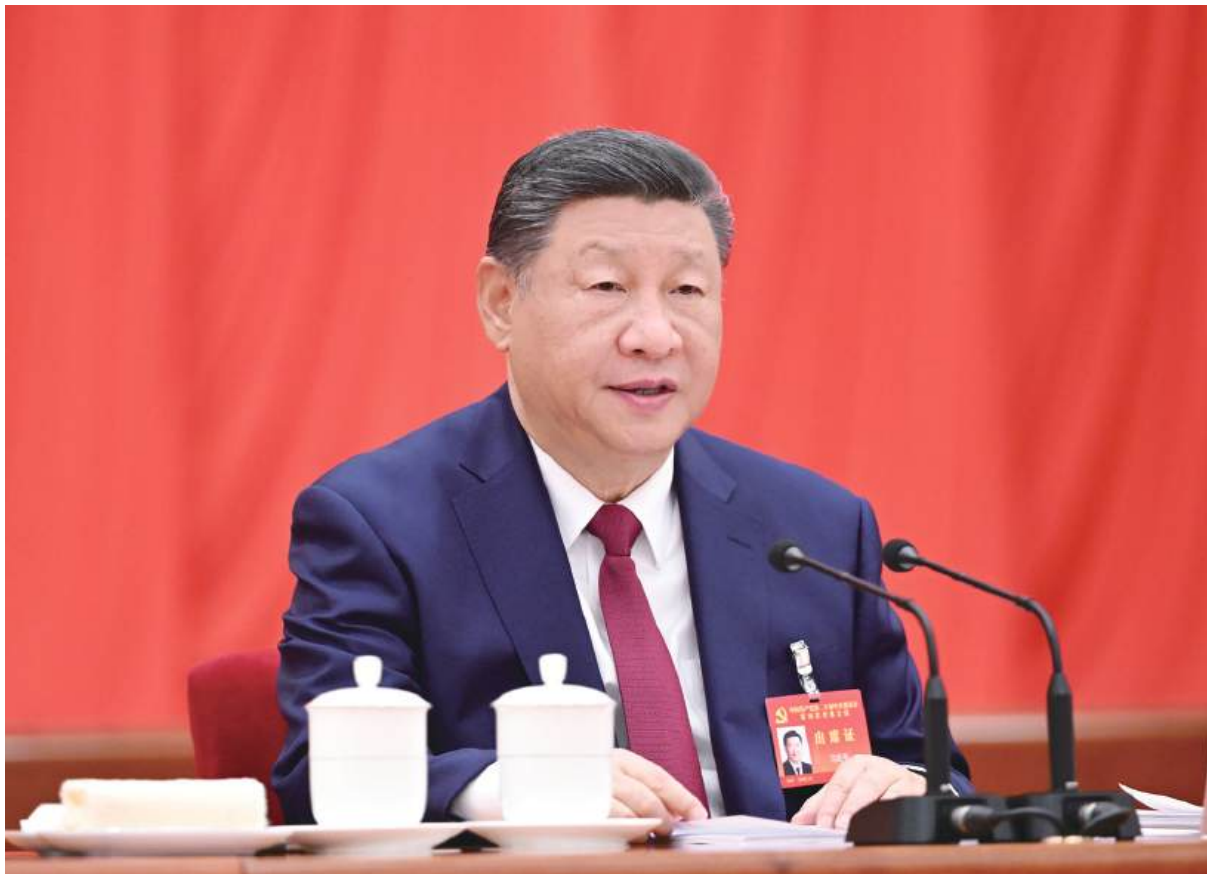
China is now on the verge of accomplishing the major objectives and tasks of the 14th Five-Year Plan, according to the communique.

Participants at the session gave a highly positive assessment of China's major development achievements during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), which has marked a momentous and extraordinary period in the country's development.

The 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030) will be critical as the country works to reinforce the foundations and push ahead on all fronts toward basically achieving socialist modernization by 2035, and it will thus serve as a key link between the past and the future, according to the communique.

At present, China remains in a phase of development where strategic opportunities exist alongside risks and challenges, while uncertainties and unforeseen factors are rising.

"All of us in the Party must acquire a deep understanding of the decisive significance of establishing Comrade Xi Jinping's core position on the Party Central Committee



Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, delivers an important address at the fourth plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee in Beijing, capital of China. The 20th Central Committee of the CPC convened its fourth plenary session in Beijing from Monday to yesterday.

— Xinhua

and in the Party as a whole and of establishing the guiding role of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," said the communique.

At the session, the CPC Central Committee established the following guiding principles for economic and social development during the 15th Five-Year Plan period: upholding the Party's overall leadership; putting the people first; pursuing high-quality development; comprehensively deepening reform; promoting interplay between an efficient market and a well-functioning government; and ensuring both development and security.

The CPC Central Committee also set the following major objectives for the 15th Five-Year Plan period: significant advancements in high-quality development; substantial improvements in scientific and technological self-reliance and strength; fresh breakthroughs in further deepening reform comprehensively; notable cultural and ethical progress across society; further improvements in quality of life; major new strides in advancing the Beautiful China Initiative; and

further advances in strengthening the national security shield.

China should build a modernized industrial system and reinforce the foundations of the real economy, said the communique.

The country should achieve greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology and steer the development of new quality productive forces.

It should build a robust domestic market and work faster to foster a new pattern of development, said the communique.

China should move faster to develop a high-standard socialist market economy and boost the momentum for high-quality development.

The country should promote high-standard opening up and create new horizons for mutually beneficial cooperation.

It should accelerate agricultural and rural modernization and take solid steps to advance all-around rural revitalization.

China should refine its regional economic layout and promote coordinated regional development, according to the communique.

The country should inspire the cultural creativity of the entire nation and foster a thriving socialist culture.

China should work harder to ensure and improve public well-being and promote prosperity for all, said the communique.

The country should accelerate the green transition across the board in an effort to build a Beautiful China.

It should modernize its national security system and capacity and advance the Peaceful China Initiative to a higher level.

China should work to achieve the centenary goals of the People's Liberation Army on schedule and modernize national defense and the armed forces, according to the communique.

The whole Party and all Chinese people should be united in a concerted endeavor to fulfill the 15th Five-Year Plan.

Studying and implementing the guiding principles from this plenary session represent a major political task for the entire Party and nation both at present and in the period to come.

"To run the country well, we must first run the Party well; only

a Party that is thriving can make our country strong," said the communique.

Participants at the session carried out an analysis of the present situation and the tasks China faces. It was highlighted that the country must remain firmly focused on accomplishing this year's targets for economic and social development.

The session decided to add Zhang Shengmin as a vice chairman of the CPC Central Military Commission (CMC), according to the communique.

The session decided in accordance with the Party Constitution that empty seats on the Central Committee will be filled by alternate members Yu Huiwen, Ma Hancheng, Wang Jian, Wang Xi, Wang Yonghong, Wang Tingkai, Wang Xinwei, Wei Tao, Deng Yiwu, Deng Xiuming and Lu Hong.

The session deliberated over and adopted the inspection report of the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection on grave violations of Party discipline and state laws by Tang Renjian, Jin Xiangjun, Li Shisong, Yang Fasen and Zhu Zhisong.

At the session, the CPC CMC's inspection report on grave violations of Party discipline and state laws involving He Weidong, Miao Hua, He Hongjun, Wang Xiubin, Lin Xiangyang, Qin Shutong, Yuan Huazhi, Wang Chunming and Zhang Fengzhong was deliberated over and adopted.

The Political Bureau's previous decision to expel He Weidong, Miao Hua, Tang Renjian, Jin Xiangjun, He Hongjun, Wang Xiubin, Lin Xiangyang, Qin Shutong, Yuan Huazhi, Wang Chunming, Li Shisong, Yang Fasen, Zhu Zhisong and Zhang Fengzhong from the Party was confirmed at the session.

At the session, a call was issued to the whole Party, the entire military, and Chinese people of all ethnic groups to rally more closely around the Party Central Committee with Xi at its core, work hard together toward the goal of basically realizing socialist modernization, and continue breaking new ground in the drive to build a great country and advance national rejuvenation on all fronts through Chinese modernization.

— Xinhua

CPC Central Committee to hold press conference on plenary session

BEIJING—The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) will hold a press conference today on the guiding principles from the fourth plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee.

The press conference, scheduled to start at 10 a.m., will be broadcast live by China Media Group, and on major news websites including people.com.cn, xinhua.net and china.com.cn.

Publicity Department of CPC Central Committee urges promoting guiding principles of key Party plenum

BEIJING — The Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee yesterday convened a teleconference to study, promote and implement the guiding principles of a key Party plenum that just concluded in Beijing.

The plenum, namely the fourth plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee, was held in Beijing between Monday and yesterday participants at the session deliberated over and adopted the

Recommendations of the CPC Central Committee for Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development.

Li Shulei, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and head of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, delivered remarks at the teleconference.

The teleconference stressed that it is at present and will remain for a period of time to come a major

political task for the whole Party and the whole country to faithfully study and implement the guiding principles of the Party plenum.

The teleconference also urged the publicity, ideological and cultural front to carry out solid work in studying, promoting and implementing these guiding principles, thus prompting Party-wide and society-wide enthusiasm to comprehend them and translate them into action.

— Xinhua

Myanmar scam centre raid sends hundreds fleeing to Thailand

Montira Rungjirajitranon

BANGKOK – More than 600 people fled one of Myanmar’s most notorious scam centres and crossed into Thailand, a Thai provincial official told AFP yesterday, after a military raid on the compound.

Sprawling compounds where internet fraudsters target people with romance and business cons have thrived along Myanmar’s loosely governed border during its civil war, sparked by a 2021 coup.

A highly publicised crackdown starting in February saw around 7,000 workers repatriated and Thailand enact a cross-border internet blockade.

But an AFP investigation this month revealed construction has continued apace at several compounds, while Starlink internet service receivers have been installed en masse, seeming to connect the hubs to the Elon Musk-owned satellite network.

Sawanit Suriyakul Na Ayutthaya, deputy governor of Tak province on the Myanmar border, told AFP “677 people fled from the scam centre”, known as KK Park, across the Moei river into Thailand as of yesterday morning.

Another crowd of more than 100 people gathered on the Myanmar side of the main local border crossing to Thailand early yesterday, an AFP journalist saw, many carrying large suitcases and backpacks.

A driver in the area, speaking anonymously for security reasons, estimated 700 people had made illegal overnight crossings.

While some scam workers are clearly trafficked into often fortified compounds, experts say others go voluntarily with hopes of earning more in the multibillion-dollar illicit industry than they can at home.

Sawanit said immigration police and the military had provided assistance “under humanitarian procedures”.

Those who crossed “will undergo screening” to determine whether they have been victims of human trafficking or if they may be prosecuted for crossing the border



This screengrab from Thai PBS video footage taken in Mae Sot on Wednesday and received by AFP TV yesterday shows people crossing a section of the Moei river near KK Park in Myanmar (right) to Thailand. – AFP

illegally, he said.

The Tak Provincial Administration office, which oversees the area, said the group entering from Myanmar comprised “foreign nationals” – both men and women – and authorities expected more to cross into Thailand.

Indonesian state news agency Antara reported around 20 Indonesians had “successfully crossed into Thai territory via the Moei River” as of Wednesday evening, according to the Indonesian embassy in Yangon, which cited Thai authorities.

Conned out of billions

Experts say Myanmar’s military has long

turned a blind eye to scam centres which profit its militia allies, crucial collaborators in their fight against rebels.

The junta has also faced pressure to shut down scam operations from its military backer China, irked at the number of its citizens both participating in and being targeted by the scams.

But military crackdowns on scam hubs are likely token efforts organised in cahoots with allied militias in an attempt to appease China without badly denting profits, analysts say.

“Because of the news it became a need for our organisation to resolve it carefully,” said Saw Tin Win, a senior figure in the most

powerful local militia.

“There is pressure from the military, so we warned people not to continue bad things,” he added, a Myanmar media outlet reported on Wednesday evening.

The transnational scam industry has ballooned in Southeast Asia in recent years, with thousands of scammers estimated to be involved.

Victims in the wider region were conned out of up to US\$37 billion in 2023, according to a UN report, which said global losses were likely “much larger”.

Thailand’s Anti-Money Laundering Office seized assets worth 70 million baht (US\$2.1 million) from Cambodian senator and tycoon Ly Yong Phat as part of an investigation into scam centres and his businesses, a senior police official told local media on Wednesday.

The US government sanctioned Ly Yong Phat last year for alleged abuses related to human trafficking in scam centres.

Thailand’s deputy finance minister Vorapak Tanyawong resigned on Wednesday following allegations linking him to Cambodian cyberscam operations.

Last week, Cambodia deported 64 South Koreans for alleged links to fraud networks.

Yesterday, Cambodian authorities said they arrested 57 more South Koreans this week for alleged involvement in cyberscams, as well as 29 Chinese citizens in the capital Phnom Penh.

But South Korea’s foreign ministry denied there were fresh arrests, telling AFP that the 57 nationals were apprehended by Cambodian authorities in July, and many of them were repatriated on October 18.

A representative of Cambodia’s anti-cybercrime commission could not be reached late yesterday for clarification. – AFP

S Korea halts tours in parts of DMZ ahead of Trump visit

SEOUL – South Korea has halted tours of the Joint Security Area in the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) separating the two Koreas, officials said yesterday, ahead of a visit by US President Donald Trump to the peninsula.

Trump is expected in South Korea next Wednesday for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum, and US media has reported officials from his administration have privately discussed setting up a meeting between him and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Trump has said he hopes to meet Kim again - possibly this year.

And the North Korean leader said last month he had “fond memories” of Trump and was open to talks if Washington dropped its “delusional” demand that he give up his nuclear weapons.

The two leaders last met in 2019 for a

surprise summit at Panmunjom in the Joint Security Area, the only place where soldiers from the two Koreas face each other on a regular basis.

“From late October to early November, there will be no unification ministry-operated special field trips to Panmunjom,” Seoul’s unification ministry, which handles fraught relations with the North, said in a statement sent to AFP.

The ministry had been operating a scaled-down tour of the JSA, which houses inter-Korean meeting buildings and a section of the border, for “policy customers”, including civil servants and diplomats.

Field trips were suspended in 2023 following a US soldier’s unauthorised crossing into the North at the village.

The United Nations Command, which oversees security and tours for the area,

declined to comment on “hypothetical scenarios”.

Seoul has said a meeting between Washington and Pyongyang “cannot be ruled out”.

And in an interview with CNN released yesterday, South Korean President Lee Jae-myung said he hoped that Kim and Trump “will be able to engage in dialogue”.

“President Trump wants to achieve world peace, and that is why I have made the recommendation for him to take on the role of a peacemaker,” he said.

Kim met Trump three times for high-profile summits during the US leader’s first term.

But talks collapsed over just how much of its nuclear arsenal the North was willing to give up and what Pyongyang would get in return. – AFP

N Korea says tested ‘cutting-edge’ new weapon system

SEOUL – North Korea said yesterday it had tested a “cutting-edge” new weapon system using hypersonic missiles aimed at bolstering its defences against Pyongyang’s foes.

The launch was detected by Seoul’s military on Wednesday and was Pyongyang’s first of its kind in months.

It came a week before world leaders, including US President Donald Trump, are set to descend on South Korea for a major regional summit.

Top military official Pak Jong Chon declared the “new cutting-edge weapon system is a clear proof of steadily upgrading self-defensive technical capabilities of the DPRK”, state news agency KCNA said, using North Korea’s official acronym.

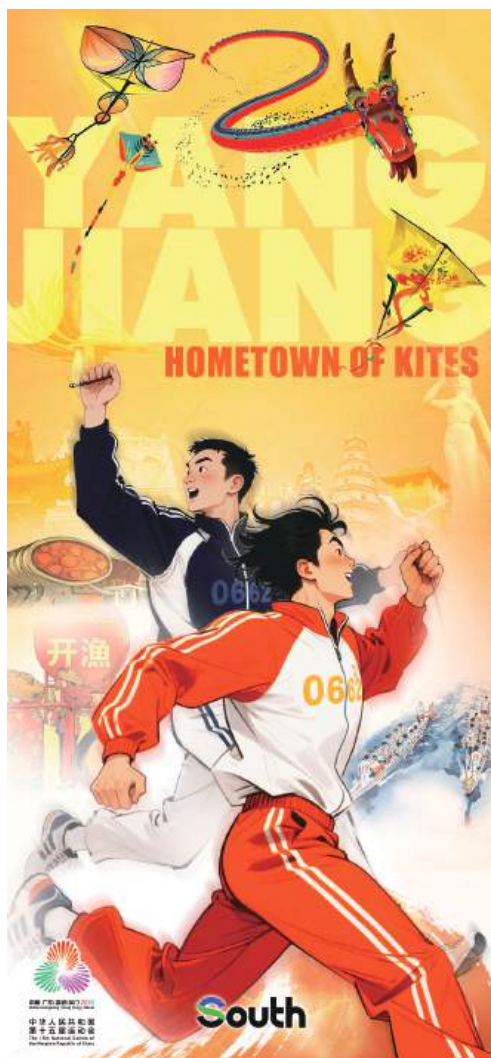
KCNA said the test was aimed at enhancing the “sustainability and effectiveness of strategic deterrence against potential enemies”.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was not reported to have attended the launch.

State media said the two “hypersonic projectiles” had been launched south of the capital Pyongyang and had hit a target in the country’s northeast.

Images shared by KCNA showed a missile flying through the air, before hitting a target and exploding in a hail of black dirt and smoke.

Hypersonic missiles travel at more than five times the speed of sound and can manoeuvre mid-flight, making them harder to track and intercept. – AFP



Cambodia reaffirms determination to combat transnational crimes, online scams

PHNOM PENH – Cambodia yesterday reaffirmed its strong commitment to combating and suppressing all forms of transnational crimes, including online scams, human trafficking and other cyber-enabled offences.

These crimes have threatened the safety, dignity, and welfare of individuals, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement, adding that the kingdom has made significant achievements in dismantling criminal networks and bringing perpetrators to justice.

“Over the past two years, Cambodia has intensified nationwide operations to identify, investigate, and dismantle online scam networks,” the statement said. “These efforts include strengthening and enforcing laws against trafficking, cybercrime, fraud, and money laundering.”

The statement said the government has taken decisive administrative actions, including the revocation of 120 business licenses, suspension of over 1,000 gambling-related websites, and

freezing of illicit bank accounts linked to digital fraud schemes.

“The Cambodian law enforcement agencies have conducted numerous targeted operations across the country,” it said. “These actions have led to the closure of multiple illegal compounds, the arrest of hundreds of suspects, and the rescue and protection of Cambodian and foreign victims of online exploitation.”

According to the statement, Cambodia is establishing a national cybercrime task force, upgrading digital forensics capacity, and working with all partners to strengthen cross-border enforcement and cyber-governance frameworks.

“These results underscore Cambodia’s firm commitment to eradicating online crimes, safeguarding digital integrity, and promoting a safer regional cyberspace,” it said.

The statement said Cambodia continues to work closely with its regional and international partners, including South Korea,



This handout from Agence Kampuchea Press (AKP) taken on Wednesday and released yesterday shows Kim Seok-ki of the main opposition People Power Party (centre) and fellow party member Song Eon-seog (left) walking with other representatives from a South Korean delegation and a Cambodian police official during a raid on a scam centre in Phnom Penh. Cambodian authorities arrested 57 South Koreans for alleged involvement in transnational cyberscams, a government commission said yesterday, days after dozens accused of working in the illicit networks were repatriated. – AFP

China, and ASEAN member states, through joint investigations, intelligence sharing, and mutual legal assistance.

“These partnerships have produced tangible results such as the disruption of major scam operations, successful prosecutions of organized crime

figures, and the repatriation of foreign victims to their home countries,” the statement said.

According to Cambodia’s Ad-Hoc Committee to Combat Online Scams, the kingdom arrested a total of 3,455 online scam suspects in 20 nationalities in the past four months. – Xinhua

Bangladesh court to deliver verdict against Hasina on Nov 13

DHAKA – The verdict in the crimes against humanity case against ousted Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina will be delivered on November 13, the attorney general said, as the trial ended yesterday.

Hasina, 78, has defied court orders to return from India to face charges of ordering a deadly crackdown in a failed attempt to crush a student-led uprising.

“If she believed in the justice system, she should have returned,” Attorney General Md Asaduzzaman said in his closing speech of the nearly five-month-long trial in Dhaka.

“She was the prime minister but fled, leaving behind the entire nation – her fleeing corroborates

the allegations.”

Her trial in absentia, which opened on June 1, heard months of testimony alleging Hasina ordered mass killings.

Up to 1,400 people were killed between July and August 2024, according to the United Nations.

Prosecutors have filed five charges, including failure to prevent murder, amounting to crimes against humanity under Bangladeshi law.

They have demanded the death penalty if she is found guilty.

Chief prosecutor Tajul Islam has accused Hasina of being “the nucleus around whom all the crimes were committed” during the uprising.

Her co-accused are former

interior minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, also a fugitive, and ex-police chief Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, who is in custody and has pleaded guilty.

‘We want justice’

Witnesses included a man whose face was ripped apart by gunfire.

The prosecution also played audio tapes – verified by police – that suggested Hasina directly ordered security forces to “use lethal weapons” against protesters.

Hasina, assigned a state-appointed lawyer, has refused to recognise the court’s authority.

Defence lawyer Md Amir Hossain said she was “forced to flee” Bangladesh, claiming that

she “preferred death and a burial within her residence compound”.

Her now-banned Awami League says she “categorically denies” all charges and has denounced the proceedings as “little more than a show trial”.

Asaduzzaman, the attorney general, said it had been a fair trial that sought justice for all victims.

“We want justice for both sides of the crimes against humanity case, that claimed 1,400 lives,” he said, listing several of those killed, including children.

The verdict will come three months ahead of elections expected in early February 2026, the first since Hasina’s overthrow. – AFP

Pakistan bans Islamist party after deadly protest

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan yesterday banned the far-right Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) under anti-terrorism laws, following deadly clashes during anti-Israel protests near Lahore that left at least five people dead.

The decision, announced after a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, marks the second time authorities have outlawed the group, which has led some of the country’s most violent protests in recent years.

“The Federal Cabinet unanimously concluded that TLP is involved in terrorism and violent activities,” the prime minister’s office said in a statement.

It noted that the group’s “violent protests, rallies, and demonstrations” have resulted “in

the deaths of security personnel and innocent bystanders”.

The latest unrest began on October 9, when TLP supporters, led by party chief Saad Rizvi, marched from the eastern Punjab city of Lahore towards the capital Islamabad to protest a US-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

At least five people including a police officer were killed when clashes erupted in Muridke, a town between Lahore and Islamabad, four days later.

Authorities have since launched a sweeping crackdown, sealing 95 bank accounts and several properties allegedly linked to the group.

Rizvi himself has gone underground to avoid arrest, Punjab government spokeswoman

Azma Bokhari said.

Thousands of zealous supporters

The group was previously outlawed in April 2021 after violent anti-France protests killed several police officers and civilians, but the ban was lifted seven months later.

The TLP contested the last two general elections, held in 2018 and 2024.

Although the party did not win any seats in parliament, it garnered over two million votes in each election.

In the February 2024 election, the TLP managed to win one provincial seat in Punjab.

The TLP has mobilised thousands of zealous supporters in recent years to paralyse cities,

demand the expulsion of Western ambassadors, target religious minorities and incite riots.

The party, also known as the Movement at the Service of the Prophet, rose to prominence in 2016 protesting the execution of Mumtaz Qadri. The bodyguard assassinated Punjab governor Salman Taseer in 2011 over his calls to reform Pakistan’s blasphemy laws, which still carry the death penalty.

Many Pakistanis saw Qadri as a hero – a sentiment that gave TLP founder Khadim Hussain Rizvi, Saad’s father, an opening to turn the group into a mass movement, analysts previously told AFP.

The TLP has its ideological roots in Barelvi Islam, a mainstream sect generally seen as moderate, but for whom blasphemy is a red line. – AFP

India plans tightening AI rules to stem deepfake surge

NEW DELHI – India has proposed sweeping new regulations to govern artificial intelligence (AI), aiming to curb a surge in misinformation and deepfake videos in the world’s most populous nation.

The Ministry of Information Technology announced the proposed amendments, citing “the growing misuse of technologies used for the creation or generation of synthetic media”.

“Recent incidents of deepfake audio, videos and synthetic media going viral on social platforms have demonstrated the potential of generative AI to create convincing falsehoods,” a briefing note from the ministry issued late Wednesday read.

“Such content can be weaponised to spread misinformation, damage reputations, manipulate or influence elections, or commit financial fraud,” it added.

India has more than 900 million internet users, according to the Internet and Mobile Association of India. China has more internet users, but India is more open to US tech companies.

The government has already launched an online portal called Sahyog – meaning “cooperate” in Hindi – aimed at automating the process of sending government notices to content intermediaries such as X and Facebook.

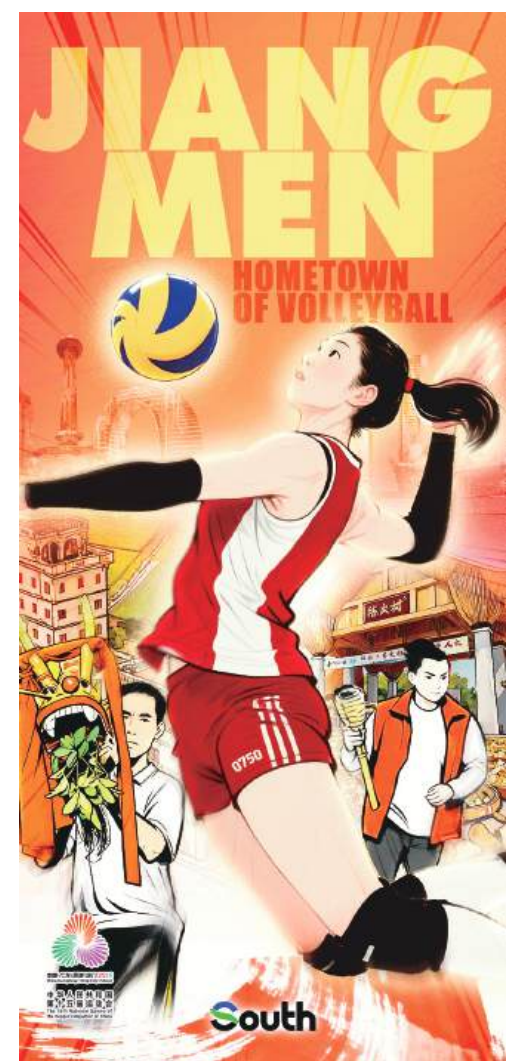
“These proposed amendments provide a clear legal basis for labelling, traceability, and accountability,” it added, saying it would “strengthen the due diligence obligations” of social media intermediaries.

Major AI firms looking to court users in the world’s fifth-largest economy have made a flurry of announcements about expansion this year.

This month, US startup Anthropic said it plans to open an office in India, with its chief executive Dario Amodei meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

OpenAI has said it will open an India office, with its chief Sam Altman noting that ChatGPT usage in the country had grown fourfold over the past year.

AI firm Perplexity also announced a major partnership in July with Indian telecom giant Airtel. – AFP



Trump says would pull US support if Israel annexes West Bank

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump said Israel would lose its crucial backing from the United States if it annexes the occupied West Bank, in a *Time* magazine interview published yesterday.

Trump's comments, which *Time* said were made by telephone on October 15, were published as both Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned against any annexation.

"It won't happen. It won't happen because I gave my word to the Arab countries. And you can't do that now. We've had great Arab support," Trump said when asked what the consequences would be for Israel if it did so.

"Israel would lose all of its support from the United States if that happened."

Trump also told *Time* that he believed Saudi Arabia would join the Abraham Accords, which normalise relations between Israel and Arab states, by the end of the year.

"Yes, I do. I do," he said when asked if he thought Riyadh would join in that timeframe.

"See they had a problem. They had a Gaza problem and they had an Iran problem. Now they don't have those two problems," he said, referring to Israel's war in Gaza and Iran's nuclear programme, which US airstrikes targeted earlier this year.

Trump then said that he would be "making a decision" on whether Israel should release high-profile Palestinian prisoner Marwan Barghouti as part of peace moves.

Barghouti – from Hamas's

rival, the Fatah movement – was among the Palestinian prisoners Hamas wanted to see released as part of the Gaza deal, according to Egyptian state-linked media.

Trump has dispatched a stream of top officials to Israel in recent days to shore up the fragile Gaza ceasefire he brokered earlier this month.

But as Vance wrapped up his three-day visit and Rubio arrived, Israeli lawmakers advanced two bills paving the way for West Bank annexation.

Vance said it was a "very stupid political stunt and I personally take some insult to it."

As Rubio left Washington he warned Israel against annexing the West Bank, saying steps taken by parliament and settler violence threatened the Gaza truce. – *AFP*

Israeli minister regrets 'camel' remarks about Saudi Arabia

JERUSALEM – Israel's far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich yesterday expressed regret for what he called his "unfortunate" remarks about Saudi Arabia.

He had earlier told Saudi Arabia it could "keep riding camels" if it tried to demand an independent Palestinian state in return for normalising relations with Israel.

"My statement regarding Saudi Arabia was unfortunate, and I regret any offence it may have caused," Smotrich said in a video statement he posted on X.

But he said that he also expected Saudis not to offend Israel.

"I'm also not willing to accept hypocrisy. Just as I don't intend to offend the Saudis, I expect from them not to offend me, or rather, offend us," he said.

"And anyone who denies the living and very deep connection we have to the regions of our homeland in Judea and Samaria, offends us," he added, using the Israeli Biblical term for the occupied West Bank.

Smotrich, who lives in a West Bank settlement, is an outspoken supporter of annexing the Palestinian territory, which has been occupied by Israel since 1967.

Earlier yesterday, he had told a

conference in Israel that, "if Saudi Arabia tells us normalisation in exchange for a Palestinian state, friends, no thank you".

"Keep riding camels on the sand in the Saudi desert; we'll keep truly developing – with an economy, a society, a state and all the great and wonderful things we know how to do", Smotrich said, prompting sharp responses in Israel.

Opposition leader Yair Lapid had swiftly denounced the comments.

"To our friends in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Middle East, Smotrich does not represent the State of Israel", Lapid posted on X in Arabic, later calling for him to apologise.

Former defence minister Benny Gantz, another opposition figure, said that Smotrich's comments "indicate ignorance, and a lack of internalisation of his responsibility as a senior minister in the government and cabinet".

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Morocco normalised relations with Israel in 2020 under the US-brokered Abraham Accords.

But Saudi Arabia's own normalisation talks with Israel were frozen after Hamas's October 2023 attack sparked the Gaza war. – *AFP*

No reduction in Gaza hunger since truce: WHO



Displaced Palestinians gather to receive food portions outside the damaged Imam al Shafi'i Mosque, where families have taken shelter, in the Zeitoun neighbourhood of Gaza City yesterday. – *AFP*

GENEVA – The World Health Organisation (WHO) said yesterday there had been little improvement in the amount of aid going into Gaza since a ceasefire took hold – and no observable reduction in hunger.

"The situation still remains catastrophic because what's entering is not enough," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters, speaking at the UN health agency's Geneva headquarters.

Since the US-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas came into effect on October 10, there has been "no dent in hunger, because there is not enough food", he warned.

Israel repeatedly cut off aid to the Gaza Strip during the war, exacerbating dire humanitarian

conditions, with the United Nations saying it caused a famine in parts of the Palestinian territory.

But while the agreement brokered by US President Donald Trump provides for the entry of 600 trucks per day, Tedros said currently only between 200 and 300 trucks were going in daily.

And "a good number of the trucks are commercial", he said, pointing out that many people in the territory have no resources to buy goods.

"That reduces the beneficiary size," he said.

The WHO chief hailed that the ceasefire was holding despite violations, but warned: "The crisis is far from over, and the needs are immense."

"Although the flow of aid has increased, it's still only a fraction

of what's needed."

Gaza's health system had been ravaged during Israel's two-year war in the Palestinian territory following Hamas's deadly October 7, 2023 attacks.

"There are no fully functioning hospitals in Gaza, and only 14 out of 36 are functioning at all. There are critical shortages of essential medicines, equipment and health workers," Tedros said.

He said that since the ceasefire took effect, WHO had been sending more medical supplies to hospitals, deploying additional emergency medical teams and striving to scale up medical evacuations.

He warned that "the total cost for rebuilding the Gaza health system will be at least US\$7 billion". – *AFP*

Turkey in talks over Gaza task force role: defence source

ANKARA – Turkey is in talks with other countries over its potential participation in an international Gaza peacekeeping mission with its military "ready" if needed, a defence ministry source said yesterday.

"We are continuing contact with our counterparts regarding our participation in the task force to be established in Gaza," the source said.

The task force will operate as part of the US-led Civil-Military Coordination Centre (CMCC) for monitoring the ceasefire, which is based in the southern Israeli town of Kiryat Gat and was inaugurated on Tuesday by US Vice President JD Vance.

"The CMCC has been established to facilitate the formation of the Gaza task force. Under this structure, an International Stabilisation Force (ISF) will be set up that will be in charge of monitoring the ceasefire and preventing conflict," the source said.

"For now, nothing is confirmed about the level of Turkey's participation in such structures but it will probably be confirmed next week."

Asked if the Turkish military would participate, the source said it had "experience from previous peace missions" and was "ready to undertake any task assigned to it... to establish and maintain peace".

Israel's relationship with Turkey has nosedived since the Gaza war started in October 2023 with Israeli adamantly opposed to a Turkish presence in Gaza – but the source said as a guarantor of the ceasefire deal, Turkey had leverage.

"Israel might not be willing to accept Turkey's presence but there is an agreement and Turkey is one of

the guarantors," the source said.

Speaking at the inauguration of the CMCC on Tuesday, Vance also refused to rule out a Turkish presence.

"We're not going to force anything on our Israeli friends when it comes to foreign troops on their soil. But we do think that there's a constructive role for the Turks to play, and frankly, they've already played a very constructive role," he said.

Medical rescue experts waiting

Meanwhile, Turkish disaster response specialists sent to help locate Palestinian and Israeli bodies, remained near Egypt's border with Gaza on Thursday, awaiting Israeli authorisation to enter the territory.

Asked about their status, the defence ministry source said there was "no clear information".

"Israel is not complying with its obligations and isn't allowing in humanitarian aid, we hope they will let AFAD in to do its mission in Gaza as soon as possible," the source said.

The 81-member team from Turkey's AFAD disaster management authority are waiting to enter with life-detection devices, trained search dogs and other search-and-rescue equipment.

An AFP correspondent in Sheikh Zuweid, some 15 kilometres from the Rafah border crossing, saw several of them wearing T-shirts with the logo of Turkey's UMKE national medical rescue team.

They could be seen organising supplies in containers with the AFAD logo, some of which were marked "field hospital". – *AFP*

Judge clears UK ex-soldier of Bloody Sunday murders

Peter Murphy

BELFAST – A Belfast judge yesterday acquitted a British ex-paratrooper of killing unarmed civilians during the 1972 Bloody Sunday massacre, a verdict condemned by victims' relatives and Northern Ireland's political leader.

Judge Patrick Lynch told the court he was "satisfied that the soldier or soldiers who opened fire... did so with the intention to kill" but that the prosecution "cannot establish by whose hand the fatal shots were fired".

"I find the accused not guilty on all seven counts," he said, acquitting him of two charges of murder and five of attempted murder during one of the most bitterly contested events of the three-decade "Troubles" that plagued Northern Ireland.

The former soldier, identified only as Soldier F, listened to the verdict from behind a thick blue curtain, hidden from view in the packed courtroom.

He had been charged with murdering civilians James Wray and William McKinney, and attempting to murder five others during the crackdown on a civil rights protest in the city of Londonderry – also known as Derry to pro-Irish nationalists.

Northern Ireland's First Minister Michelle O'Neill, who is vice president of the Sinn Féin pro-Irish unity party, rejected the verdicts.

"The continued denial of justice for the Bloody Sunday families is deeply disappointing," she said on X.

British troops opened fire on protesters in the majority-Catholic Bogside area of the city on January 30, 1972, killing 13 people.

A 14th victim later died of his wounds.

The case is deeply divisive in Northern Ireland, where the decades of sectarian violence that began in the 1960s still cast a long shadow, even after a peace deal was brokered in 1998.

'Shooting unjustified'

Families of the Bloody Sunday dead reacted with anger outside court.

"Soldier F created two young widows on Bloody Sunday, he orphaned 12 children and he deprived dozens of siblings of a loving brother," said Mickey McKinney, the brother of one of the victims.

The families did "not lay the blame for



Family members and supporters of those killed in the 1972 "Bloody Sunday" massacre in Londonderry hold a banner reading "Towards Justice" as they walk towards Belfast Crown Court in Belfast, Northern Ireland yesterday. – AFP

today's decision" on the judge or the court, he said.

"The blame lies firmly with the British state, with the RUC [Northern Irish police] who failed to investigate the murders on Bloody Sunday properly, or indeed at all," he added.

During the month-long trial that ended last week, Soldier F remained anonymous at his request.

In previous interviews, he told police he no longer had a reliable recollection of the events and was not called to give evidence in his own defence during the trial.

The prosecution brought the case on the basis that the shootings were "unjustified".

"The civilians... did not pose a threat to the soldiers and nor could the soldiers have believed that they did," prosecutor Louis Mably told Belfast Crown Court at the trial opening.

The prosecution submitted that it was "implausible" that Soldier F could not recall whether or not he opened fire during the incident.

Apology

Bloody Sunday galvanised support for the Provisional IRA, the main paramilitary organisation fighting for a united Ireland and

against British rule in Northern Ireland.

It was one of the bloodiest incidents in the conflict known as the Troubles, during which around 3,500 people were killed.

It largely ended with the 1998 peace accords.

Northern Irish prosecutors first recommended Soldier F stand trial in 2019.

A 1972 inquiry into the killings cleared the soldiers of culpability but was widely seen by Catholics as a whitewash.

That probe, the Widgery Tribunal, closed off prosecutions, and only after the 1998 peace accords was a new investigation, known as the Saville Inquiry, opened.

That 12-year public inquiry – the largest investigation in UK legal history – concluded in 2010 that British paratroopers had lost control and that none of the victims had posed a threat.

The probe prompted then prime minister David Cameron to issue a formal apology for the killings, calling them "unjustified and unjustifiable".

Northern Irish police then began a murder investigation and submitted their files to prosecutors in 2016.

The case against Soldier F faced multiple delays, and bringing other ex-soldiers to trial is widely seen as unlikely. – AFP

Fashion house McQueen to cut 20 pct of London jobs: Kering

PARIS – Fashion house Alexander McQueen is cutting 55 jobs at its London headquarters, representing 20 percent of its staff, as it struggles with falling sales, its French parent company Kering confirmed yesterday.

Women's Wear Daily (WWD) first reported the layoffs, part of a strategic review across Kering's brands with the arrival of its new chief executive Luca de Meo.

Kering, which hired De Meo away from automaker Renault in June to halt a revenue slump and cut debt, posted a 10 percent drop in overall sales in the third quarter on Wednesday as revenues fell at most of its top brands.

It did not break out sales for McQueen but said its "decline in revenue moderated thanks to higher women's ready-to-wear sales."

"When it comes to the portfolio, I want to be very clear, we will review, of course, in a very open manner, as we already always did, the relevance of the assets we have in the portfolio," Kering's CEO Jean-Marc Duplaix said in presenting the quarterly results.

In a statement to *WWD*, McQueen said that "As part of a comprehensive strategic review of our global operations, we are restructuring our UK head office and reducing complexity across our international markets."

But Kering's third-quarter sales came in well ahead of analyst expectations, sending its shares up 11 percent on the Paris stock exchange yesterday afternoon (local time).

"Kering published results even better than expected, and expectations were already high," Deutsche Bank analyst Adam Cochrane said in a research note.

The company also said this week that it would sell its beauty products division to L'Oreal for 4.6 billion euros (US\$5.3 billion).

– AFP

UK sexual abuse inquiry thrown into doubt

LONDON – A UK inquiry into the sexual abuse of teenage girls by so-called grooming gangs was in turmoil yesterday after several survivors said they would only take part if a government minister quit.

Thousands of mostly white, working-class girls and women are believed to have been raped over several decades in a number of English towns by mostly men of South Asian origin.

Official reports have blamed authorities for failing to intervene for fear of being seen as racist, while far-right figures have used the scandal as a rallying cry against multiculturalism and immigration.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer initially resisted a national probe before finally announcing one in June following weeks of pressure, including from US tech billionaire Elon Musk.

But difficulties getting it off the ground were laid bare earlier this week when it was revealed that two candidates had withdrawn from the running to chair the inquiry.

One, a police officer, cited a "lack of confidence" in him among some survivors "due to my previous occupation", while the other drop-out had a background in social work.

Then on Wednesday, four women who resigned from the inquiry's victims' liaison panel said they would be prepared to return if Labour MP Jess Phillips stepped down as safeguarding minister*.

In a letter to Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood, they accused Phillips of "betrayal" after she denied allegations that the probe could be diluted to downplay racial and religious elements.

Starmer has publicly backed Phillips, who has a long history of supporting victims of sexual violence, including when she worked for the charity Women's Aid before becoming a lawmaker.

Starmer insisted in parliament on Wednesday that the inquiry "will never be watered down".

"It will examine the ethnicity and religion

of the offenders, and we will find the right person to chair the inquiry," he said.

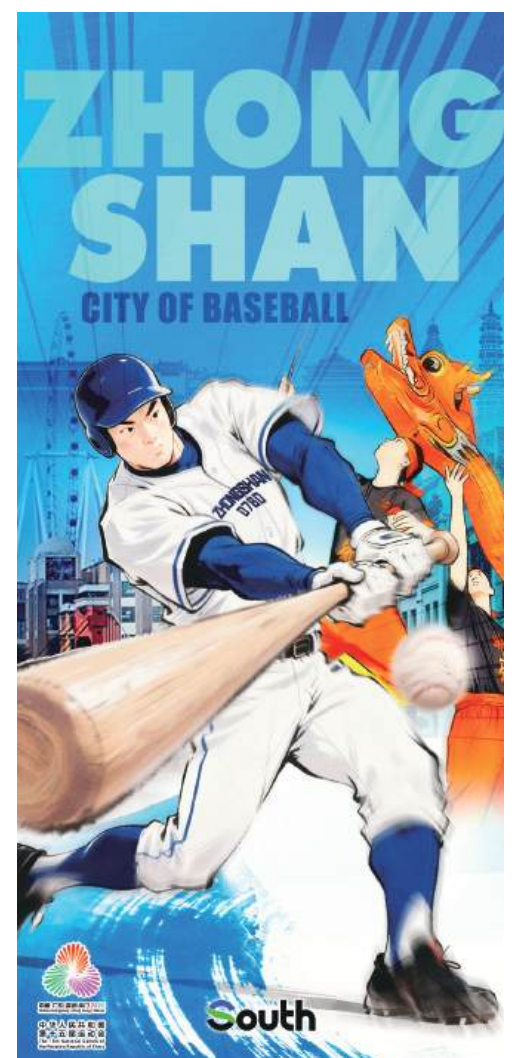
His government has so far resisted calls to appoint a former or sitting judge to lead the probe, saying doing so would delay the inquiry's conclusions.

A report written by parliamentarian Louise Casey and published earlier this year found that gangs would frequently target vulnerable adolescents, often those in care or with learning or physical disabilities.

She concluded that institutions failed victims, often blaming them for their own abuse, and that authorities often shied away from discussion of "ethnicity or cultural factors".

The row is the latest to rock Starmer's government, coming a week after a furore over a collapsed China spying case, as poll suggest he is struggling to convince Britons he can change the country for the better. – AFP

*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls – Poe



German ‘Maddie’ suspect living on streets: report

BERLIN – The German prime suspect in the disappearance of British toddler Madeleine “Maddie” McCann is living on the streets after being released from prison last month, German media reported yesterday.

Christian Brückner, who was revealed as a suspect in the “Maddie” case in 2020 but never charged, was released from prison in Germany on September 17 after serving a sentence on separate rape charges.

Brückner is now sleeping in a tent in a park in the northern city of Kiel, according to *Der Spiegel* magazine, with two police officers constantly protecting him from “possible attacks by the public”.

After his release from jail, Brueckner was taken to a halfway house in Neumünster, the magazine said.

But when local residents found out he was living there, they “verbally abused and threatened him”, forcing him to leave nine days later escorted by police.

Brückner then travelled to Braunschweig (Brunswick), where he tried to confront the prosecutors who accuse him of abducting Maddie, but was turned away, the report said.

He then moved on to Kiel, where his lawyers are based, staying in a series of cheap hotels only to be thrown out when people recognised him.

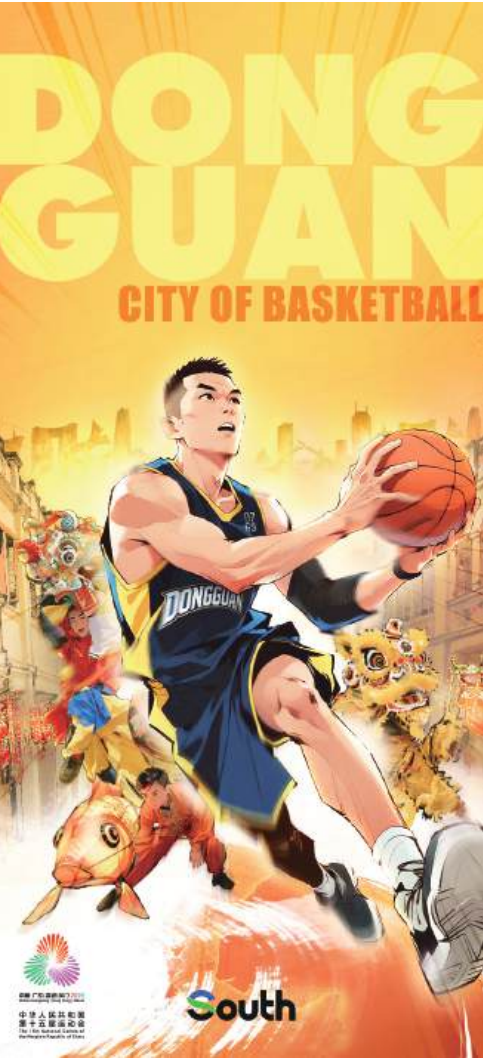
Three-year-old Maddie vanished from her family’s holiday apartment in Portugal’s Praia da Luz in May 2007 while her parents had dinner at a nearby restaurants.

Despite a huge international manhunt and global media attention, no trace of her has been found and no one has been charged over her disappearance.

German prosecutors in a bombshell announcement in 2020 named Brückner, who is known to have lived in the area on and off at the time, as their top suspect.

They have said they have “concrete evidence” – but not enough to secure a conviction, and have therefore refrained from charging him over Maddie’s killing.

Brückner has a string of previous convictions for crimes including theft, drug trafficking, assault, child pornography, child abuse, and rape. – AFP



Indonesia, Brazil strike cooperation deals as leaders meet

JAKARTA – Indonesia and Brazil agreed to boost ties and struck a series of agreements yesterday as their leaders met in Jakarta, with Southeast Asia’s biggest economy looking to make further inroads into South American markets.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was greeted by a marching band and national anthems at a ceremony at the presidential palace in Jakarta before talks with Indonesian counterpart Prabowo Subianto.

The pair witnessed the signing of agreements on oil, gas, electricity, technology, mining and agriculture, coming several months after US President Donald Trump imposed a tariff rate of 19 percent on imports from Indonesia under a new pact, and a 50-percent tariff on Brazilian products.

“How is it that two important countries in the world, such as Indonesia and Brazil, which together have a population of almost 500 million, only have a trade volume of US\$6 billion?” said Lula at a joint press



Brazil’s President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (left) and Indonesia’s President Prabowo Subianto embrace during a press conference after their bilateral meeting at the presidential palace in Jakarta yesterday. – AFP

conference after talks.

“This is not enough for Indonesia, and it is not enough for Brazil.”

The Indonesian leader said both countries were working to establish a free trade agreement (FTA) between the Southeast Asian powerhouse and the South American bloc Mercosul*, which

consists of Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia and Uruguay.

“I believe this will strengthen our relations and will make both of our economies and the economies of Latin America grow rapidly,” Prabowo told Lula.

In the press conference Prabowo called both countries “two new economic powers that

are rising” which must “increase trade”.

Brazil has deepened relations with Southeast Asia in recent years, and Lula’s participation in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Malaysia that starts on Sunday – the first by a Brazilian president – marks the country’s growing political engagement in the region.

Brazil is also one of Indonesia’s main trading partners in South America.

Total trade between the two nations between January and August was worth US\$4.3 billion, according to Statistics Indonesia data.

The Southeast Asian nation is looking to bolster ties in Latin America, and in August signed a trade agreement with Peru.

It also joined the BRICS bloc of major emerging economies, of which Brazil is a member, in January. – AFP

*The Southern Common Market’s acronym in Portuguese is Mercosul and Mercosur in Spanish.

Brazil auctions off 5 oil blocks ahead of COP30

RIO DE JANEIRO – Brazil awarded exploration rights to five offshore oil blocks on Wednesday, doubling down on a controversial drive to boost production in the run-up to UN climate talks it is hosting next month.

The auction came two days after state oil giant Petrobras was granted a controversial licence to explore near the mouth of the Amazon river, a sensitive and biodiverse region.

Brazil awarded rights to five of seven blocks on offer, raising 103.7 million reais (US\$19.1 million) from several major foreign groups, including Norway’s Equinor and China’s CNOOC.

The oil blocks are located in Brazil’s southeast, off the coast of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

It is a “pre-salt” area that contains oil deposits trapped under a thick salt layer in deep water, and has already helped Brazil become the world’s eighth-largest oil producer.

The winning companies have committed to donating a portion of their profits to the Brazilian government. The minimum investment planned for the five blocks is around US\$83 million.

“We are very satisfied with the result, which exceeds our expectations,” Artur Watt, director general of the National Petroleum Agency (ANP),

which organised the auction, told a press conference.

Equinor won two blocks, one of which it will operate alone, and another with Petrobras.

Petrobras said it had already begun drilling 500 kilometres from the mouth of the Amazon River on Monday, the same day the licence was granted.

The region, known as Foz de Amazonas (“Mouth of the Amazon”), is part of a promising new offshore oil frontier, with nearby Guyana emerging as a major producer in less than a decade following large offshore discoveries.

Environmentalists criticise the project as risky and

unnecessary in a world which should be moving away from fossil fuels.

However, Lula and his government staunchly defend it as necessary to secure the energy supply and a means to fund the climate transition.

“Maintaining [oil] exploration and production is fully compatible with the energy transition,” said Watt.

He said the shift from fossil fuels to renewables must be accelerated, but “we can never consider voluntarily restricting supply [in Brazil], as it would quickly be filled by other countries, to the detriment of national interests.” – AFP

Cuba nabs suspected Chinese fentanyl kingpin wanted by Mexico, US

MEXICO CITY – Cuba has arrested a suspected Chinese fentanyl kingpin who escaped from custody in Mexico and is also wanted by the United States, the Mexican government said on Wednesday.

The trafficker Zhang Zhidong, known by the alias “Brother Wang,” is alleged to have worked closely with Mexico’s Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation drug cartels, designated “foreign terrorist organisations” by Washington.

His arrest was confirmed by Cuba’s Security Secretariat.

Security sources told AFP it was not yet clear if the suspect will be deported from Cuba back

to Mexico or a formal extradition process needs to be undertaken.

Detained in Mexico in October 2024, Zhang was held in a prison in Mexico City awaiting a hearing for his extradition to the United States, where a warrant has been issued for his arrest on money laundering charges.

He was granted house arrest, from which he escaped in July.

Zhang is considered “a major international money laundering operator,” Mexican Security Secretary Omar García Harfuch said last year.

The trafficker was responsible for “establishing connections with other cartels for the transfer of fentanyl from

China to Central America, South America, Europe, and the United States,” he added.

Washington under President Donald Trump has been applying pressure on Mexico and China to curb drug trafficking, particularly of fentanyl, the powerful painkiller behind an overdose epidemic in the United States.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 50 times more powerful than heroin and much easier and cheaper to produce.

It has largely replaced heroin and prescription opioids such as oxycodone as a cause of overdoses in the United States.

President Claudia Sheinbaum’s government has

ramped up drug seizures under tariff pressure from Trump, who has threatened further punitive measures unless the problem is solved.

Although Mexico has been the main source of fentanyl sold in the United States, Washington has increasingly focused its attention on China-based suppliers of precursor ingredients.

From Havana, two sources close to the case told AFP the detainee would be extradited to Mexico, but did not specify a date or provide details about the process.

Cuba has not officially commented on the reported arrest. – AFP



Paraguay's forward 18 Claudia Martinez celebrates after scoring her team's second goal during the Women's Copa America 2025 football match against Bolivia at the Gonzalo Pozo Ripalda Stadium in Quito, Ecuador on July 13. Nine women's national teams are lacing up their boots for a historic step: the first South American World Cup qualifying tournament, which experts predict will have new "seasonings" to elevate the competition in women's football. — AFP

Eddie Jones plots shock against much-changed Australia in Tokyo

Rugby

Andrew McKirdy

TOKYO — Australia made 13 changes and named Nick Champion de Crespigny captain as they begin a five-Test tour tomorrow in Tokyo against Eddie Jones's Japan, with the former Wallabies coach plotting a shock.

Joe Schmidt's men will afterwards head to Europe to take on England, Italy, Ireland and France on successive weekends.

Champion de Crespigny was named captain in just his third Test, having made his debut against the British and Irish Lions in July.

The 29-year-old will line up in the back row alongside Carlo Tizzano and Rob Valetini, and Schmidt said his new captain would take it in his stride.

"Nick has been with us consistently week to week throughout and is part of the leadership group anyway, so it was a natural enough progression for him," Schmidt said as he named his team yesterday.

"Nick is very much a leader by actions and he'll want to be in the thick of the action as much as he can be."

Schmidt made wholesale changes to the team that lost 28-14 to New Zealand earlier this month to draw the curtain on a frustrating Rugby Championship campaign won by South Africa.

The head coach said his selections were about "energy management" after a gruelling few months that have included a home Test against Fiji, the Lions series and the Rugby Championship.

"There is definitely a risk - part of the job of the coaching staff is to manage risk as best we can," said Schmidt.

"If we don't give opportunity to the squad, we start to lose energy towards the end of a five-Test window, particularly when you're travelling such long distances."

Tane Edmed keeps his place at fly half despite the return of Carter

Gordon to the squad after a stint in rugby league.

Gordon was not named in the matchday squad and Schmidt said it was too early for the playmaker after being rushed back into the fold following his move to Super Rugby's Queensland Reds.

"In such a pivotal position as 10 it's very hard to go straight in and start leading the team," said Schmidt.

'Extreme competitive spirit'

Australia will face a formidable opponent in Jones, who faces his home country for the first time since stepping down as Wallabies coach following their disastrous 2023 Rugby World Cup campaign to begin a second stint in charge of Japan.

The move sparked anger in Australia, after Jones had repeatedly denied reports that he was set to take the Japan job.

The 65-year-old has led teams against Australia in the past and said he was looking forward to upsetting his countrymen again.

"I enjoy beating Australia. I coached against them 10 times for England and beat them nine times," said Jones.

"Playing against your own country, there's always a certain amount of different feeling involved in it, but it just brings out the extreme competitive spirit within yourself."

Jones said there was "a winning opportunity" for Japan if they could unsettle an unfamiliar Wallabies line-up.

"When you're playing a team that has got a lot of players that are playing for a spot and they want to be the starting guys, if things don't go their way at the start of the game they can get frustrated," he said.

"Our job is to bring out that frustration. Our job is to be at them the whole time."

Japan also head to Europe after tomorrow's game, taking on world champions South Africa, Ireland, Wales and Georgia. — AFP



Messi signs new Inter Miami contract until 2028: club

MIAMI — Lionel Messi has agreed a contract extension with Inter Miami which will see the Argentine superstar remain in Major League Soccer until the end of the 2028 season, the club confirmed yesterday.

Inter Miami's X feed posted a video of Messi signing a contract sitting at a table in the middle of the club's new Freedom Park stadium, which is under construction, with the simple caption: "He's Home."

"It makes me really happy to stay here and to continue with this project that, besides being a dream, has become a beautiful reality - playing in this stadium, at Miami Freedom Park," Messi, 38, said in a club statement.

"Since I arrived in Miami, I've been very happy, so I'm truly glad to keep going here," Messi added.

Inter Miami co-owner David Beckham said Messi's decision to extend reflected his "commitment to the city, to the club, to the game".

"He's still as committed as he's ever been and he still wants to win," Beckham said. "As owners to have a player that loves the game as much as he does, and who has done as much for the game in this country and to inspire the next generation of young talent as he has, we feel very lucky."

The World Cup-winner's current contract expires at the end of the 2025 MLS season.

A new deal had been viewed as a formality after club sources told AFP last month that the franchise had reached an agreement on an extension.

Messi's contract ensures he will remain in competitive action until and long after the 2026 World Cup hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Messi moved to Inter Miami in 2023 after an unhappy spell at Paris Saint-Germain and has since had a transformative effect on the league, driving record attendances and ticketing revenues.

"When Lionel Messi made MLS his league of choice, it marked a turning point - not just for Inter Miami, but for our entire sport in North America," MLS Commissioner Don Garber said yesterday as he welcomed news of Messi's contract extension.

Messi spent the bulk of his stellar career at Barcelona, where he played from 2004 to 2021 after coming through the youth system at the Spanish giants.

At Barcelona, he won the La Liga title 10 times and lifted the UEFA Champions League trophy on four occasions.

In 2022, he led Argentina to World Cup glory in Qatar and has expressed a desire to try to retain the trophy next year.

He has scored 114 international goals and also won the Copa

America twice with Argentina, in 2021 and 2024.

MLS goals history

Messi could play at a sixth World Cup next year, which would set a new all-time record, although he could be matched by long-time rival Cristiano Ronaldo of Portugal.

The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner is also just three goals short of Miroslav Klose's record of 16 career World Cup goals.

Argentina comfortably booked a spot at next year's finals, finishing nine points clear at the top of the South American qualifying table.

Messi finished as the top scorer with eight goals, including a brace in what may have been his last competitive match on home soil against Venezuela two weeks ago.

He was named the MLS Most Valuable Player in the 2024 season even though Inter Miami were eliminated in the playoffs.

In 2025, he became the fastest player to reach 40 goals in MLS history.

This season, Messi has led Miami back into the playoffs after finishing in third place in the Eastern Conference.

He wrapped up Inter Miami's regular season campaign with a superb hat-trick last Saturday in a 5-2 demolition of Nashville SC, leaving him with 29 goals from 28 matches to win MLS's Golden Boot award. — AFP

Injured MotoGP champion Marquez to miss rest of season

MotoGP

PARIS — MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez will miss the rest of the season due to an injured shoulder, his Ducati team announced yesterday.

"Marc will have to spend four weeks with the arm completely immobilised before beginning rehabilitation, so it's impossible to think about his return to competition this year," Ducati said in a statement.

Marquez, 32, suffered a fracture and ligament injury after crashing on the opening lap of the Indonesia Grand Prix at the start of the month and underwent surgery in Madrid a week later.

He has since missed the Grand Prix in Australia but has now been ruled out of the final three races of the season in Malaysia, Portugal and Valencia.

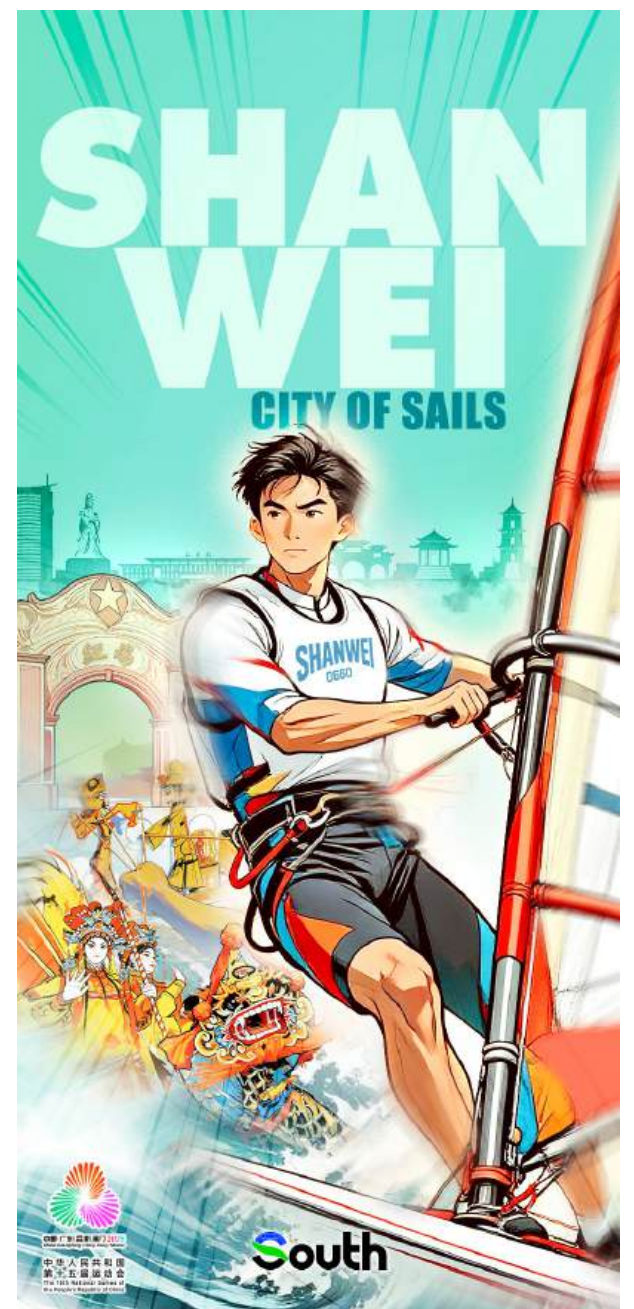
An emotional Marquez had already secured his seventh MotoGP world title - and first since 2019 - with five races to spare when finishing second in the Japan Grand Prix last month.

"This must not overshadow or make us forget the great goal we achieved this year: becoming World Champions again, and soon we will all celebrate it together," Marquez said in Ducati's statement.

The Spaniard dominated the MotoGP season, winning 11 races.

Ducati had hoped he could make a comeback for the season finale in Valencia but said that "the priority is to recover and return 100 percent fit for the next season".

He will be replaced by Italian Michele Pirro in Malaysia. — AFP



Indonesia defiant after IOC calls for no events over Israeli gymnast ban

JAKARTA – Indonesia vowed yesterday to play an “active role” in global sports after the IOC urged federations not to stage events there following the country’s ban on Israeli gymnasts.

The International Olympic Committee’s executive board said Wednesday it would “recommend to all international federations not to host any international sports events or meetings in Indonesia” until it provided guarantees over access for all participants in competitions.

The board said it also ended dialogue with the world’s most populous Muslim-majority nation on hosting any future Olympic events.

It came after Indonesia denied visas for Israelis to compete at the on-going world artistic gymnastics championships in Jakarta, citing support for the Palestinians.

In a show of defiance, Sports and Youth Minister Erick Thohir said yesterday that Jakarta was aware its ban on Israelis “carries consequences”.

But he wrote on X: “Indonesia will continue to play an active role in various sports events at the Southeast Asian, Asian and global levels, so that Indonesian sports can serve as an ambassador and a reflection of the nation’s strength in the eyes of the world.”

“We... adhere to the principle of maintaining security, public order and public interest in every international event organised.”

“On that basis, Indonesia has taken steps to avoid the arrival of the Israeli delegation at the Gymnastics World Championships.”

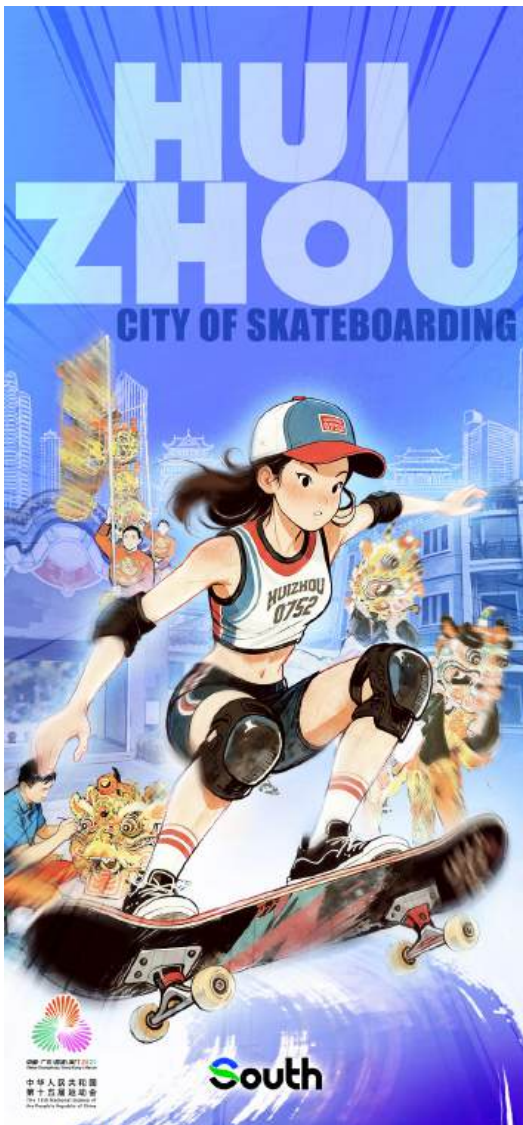
Indonesia’s National Olympic Committee declined to comment on the IOC move because it said discussions were ongoing.

Israel’s gymnastics federation appealed against the ban to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), but it was rejected.

In July 2023 Indonesia pulled out of hosting the World Beach Games following controversy over Israel’s participation.

In March that year, Indonesia lost the hosting rights to the FIFA Under-20 World Cup after two governors objected to Israel’s participation.

Both of those occurred before war between Israel and armed group Hamas broke out in Gaza, where there is currently a ceasefire in place. – AFP



Saudi Arabia to host ATP Masters 1000 tennis event from 2028

Tennis

PARIS – The ATP announced yesterday the creation of a new Masters 1000 event which will take place annually in Saudi Arabia from as early as 2028.

The new event will be played on hard courts and take place “at the start of the season” in a city yet to be determined, and will last “one week”, ATP chairman Andrea Gaudenzi said at a press conference in Paris.

The long-expected move marks the first ever expansion of the top-tier category of men’s tennis since its creation in 1990.

The Saudi tournament will join the nine existing Masters events, which take place in Indian Wells, Miami, Monte Carlo, Madrid, Rome, Toronto/Montreal, Cincinnati, Shanghai and Paris.

Gaudenzi called the expansion to 10 events “a proud moment for us and the result of a journey that’s been years in the making”.

The addition of another tournament to the tennis calendar comes at the end of a season marked by complaints from some

players about the demanding pace of the tour, whose tournaments run from January to November.

However, unlike the majority of its counterparts, the new Saudi tournament will not be a mandatory event.

“Our open system has a lot of pros because it provides a lot of freedom, options and choices for the players” in choosing which tournaments they want to compete in, said Gaudenzi.

“But the downside is that they obviously can’t play Slams, Masters, (ATP) 500s, 250s freely. On top of the fact that they also play team events and exhibitions like the Six Kings Slam,” he added.

The Six Kings Slam last week in Saudi Arabia attracted stars from the men’s game, including world number one Carlos Alcaraz, Jannik Sinner and Novak Djokovic.

‘It ticks all the boxes’

In a statement published yesterday, the ATP said that the new Masters tournament would be launched as part of a deal with

SURJ Sports Investments - a company with links to Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF).

The amount invested by SURJ to secure the organisation of the event has not been disclosed.

Saudi Arabia has increased its presence in world sport - particularly tennis - in recent years and has hosted the WTA Finals in Riyadh since 2024.

“Tennis is one of the sports that we think will grow massively,” said a Saudi source close to the deal.

“There is already a lot of infrastructure in Saudi Arabia, (tennis) has a great access to the young generation... It ticks all the boxes in terms of the thinking of PIF.”

The PIF has also attached its name to the ATP rankings and formed partnerships with several existing Masters 1000 tournaments such as Indian Wells, Miami and Madrid.

The Next Gen ATP Finals, which bring together the eight best players aged 20-and-under at the end of every season, have been held in the kingdom since 2023. – AFP

Billups, Rozier on ‘immediate leave’ after arrests in betting probe: NBA



LOS ANGELES - Portland Trail Blazers coach Chauncey Billups and Miami Heat guard Terry Rozier have been placed on “immediate leave” following their arrests for alleged involvement in illegal gambling, the NBA said yesterday.

In a brief statement issued after news of the arrests sent shockwaves through the sport, the league said it was co-operating with authorities in the investigation.

“We are in the process of reviewing the federal indictments announced today,” the NBA statement said.

“Terry Rozier and Chauncey Billups are being placed on immediate leave from their teams, and we will continue to cooperate with the relevant authorities.”

“We take these allegations with the utmost seriousness, and the integrity of our game remains our top priority.”

Billups, a former Detroit Pistons star and a member of the National Basketball Association Hall of Fame, was arrested in connection with rigged illegal poker games tied to Mafia crime families, FBI Director Kash Patel said earlier in New York.

Rozier and a former NBA player and assistant coach, Damon Jones, were among six people arrested in a sports betting case, Patel added.

– AFP



French basketball player Victor Wembanyama (right) and US player De'Aaron Fox pose for promotional photos during the San Antonio Spurs media day at the Victory Capital Performance Center in San Antonio, Texas on September 29. Wembanyama scored 40 points in a sensational NBA return on Wednesday, leading the San Antonio Spurs to a 125-92 season-opening victory over the Dallas Mavericks. The 21-year-old French star hadn’t played since he was diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis in his shoulder that required surgery in February.

– AFP

No Russian or Belarusian athletes ‘likely to qualify’ for Winter Paralympics



PARIS – No Russian or Belarusian athletes “are likely to qualify” for the 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Paralympics, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) said in a statement yesterday.

In September, the IPC unexpectedly decided to lift a partial suspension of Russia and Belarus imposed since Moscow’s 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

However, the IPC reiterated yesterday that the “international federation for each sport on the Paralympic Games programme is responsible for determining the qualification pathway for its sport, as well as the eligibility of athletes to compete”.

The body announced it had “received confirmation from each of the four international federations with sports on the

Milano Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games programme... that, in practice, no athletes from the two nations are likely to qualify for March’s Games”.

The federations in question are the International Ski and Snowboard Federation (FIS), the International Biathlon Union (IBU), World Curling and World Para Ice Hockey.

On Tuesday, the FIS voted “not to facilitate the participation of athletes from Belarus and Russia in its qualification events”, while the IPC stated the IBU had confirmed that athletes from the countries “remain suspended from its competitions”.

As for wheelchair curling, the international federation had extended the exclusion of Russia and Belarus from its competitions “until the end of the 2024-2025

season”, meaning the two nations “cannot qualify” for Milan-Cortina.

While Russia have the right to compete in Para ice hockey competitions, the sport’s federation said “it is not possible in practice for the nation to qualify” for the Paralympics.

“The IPC fully respects the decision of the IPC General Assembly not to maintain the partial suspensions of NPC Belarus and NPC Russia, we also fully respect the decisions of each international federation regarding the sports they govern,” said IPC president Andrew Parsons.

The Brazilian added now that the positions of the four federations were “clear”, he hoped the “focus will now be very much on the outstanding athletes and NPCs that will compete at Milano Cortina 2026”. – AFP

Grandchildren of last woman executed in UK seek her pardon

Helen Rowe

LONDON – The grandchildren of the last woman to be executed in Britain have called for Ruth Ellis to be pardoned, 70 years after she was sent to the gallows for murdering her “abusive” lover, their lawyers said on Wednesday.

Ellis, a 28-year-old nightclub hostess, was hanged in July 1955 for shooting dead racing driver David Blakely as he came out of the Magdala pub in London.

The case gripped Britain and was turned into the 1985 film “Dance with a Stranger” starring Miranda Richardson and Rupert Everett.

Four of Ellis’s six grandchildren have formally applied to Justice Minister David Lammy for a posthumous pardon.

The application highlights the “repeated and long-standing sexual, emotional and physical abuse Ellis suffered” at the hands of Blakely legal firm Mischon de Reya, which is representing the family, said in a statement.

Such abuse was poorly understood at the time, but would in a modern-day case likely result in a charge of manslaughter not murder, the firm said.

Granddaughter Laura Enston, 46, told AFP a conditional pardon would correct a longstanding “injustice”.

Battered woman

Enston’s mother Georgina was just three when Ellis was hanged

at London’s Holloway Prison after the trial jury took just 20 minutes to find her guilty.

Enston said her grandmother would now have been considered a victim of battered woman syndrome and treated very differently by the justice system.

“At the time there was no appetite to give Ruth a fair chance and we now realise how much social bias was at play,” she said.

The glamorous single mother-of-two from a modest background had shown no emotion during her trial.

“She inadvertently played up to that sort of cold-blooded killer persona that she’d been portrayed to be, but knowing what we know now about trauma and slow-burn provocation, Ruth was traumatised... and typical of domestic abuse victims,” Enston said.

The abuse included an incident 10 days before the killing when Ellis suffered a miscarriage after Blakely, the baby’s father, punched her in the stomach.

James Libson of Mischon de Reya, said Ellis “suffered considerably” at the hands of her “abusive, violent partner”.

Public outcry

“While there is no dispute that Ruth Ellis killed David Blakely, the weight of evidence of her vulnerability makes it absolutely clear that she should never have

been executed,” he said in a statement.

Ellis’s hanging provoked a public outcry and helped swing public opinion against the death penalty.

Following a number of other controversial executions and a series of miscarriages of justice it was permanently abolished for murder in 1969.

Two years after Ellis’s execution the law was also changed to allow a defence of diminished responsibility.

The Court of Appeal in 2003 upheld Ellis’s conviction after the family mounted an earlier attempt to clear her name.

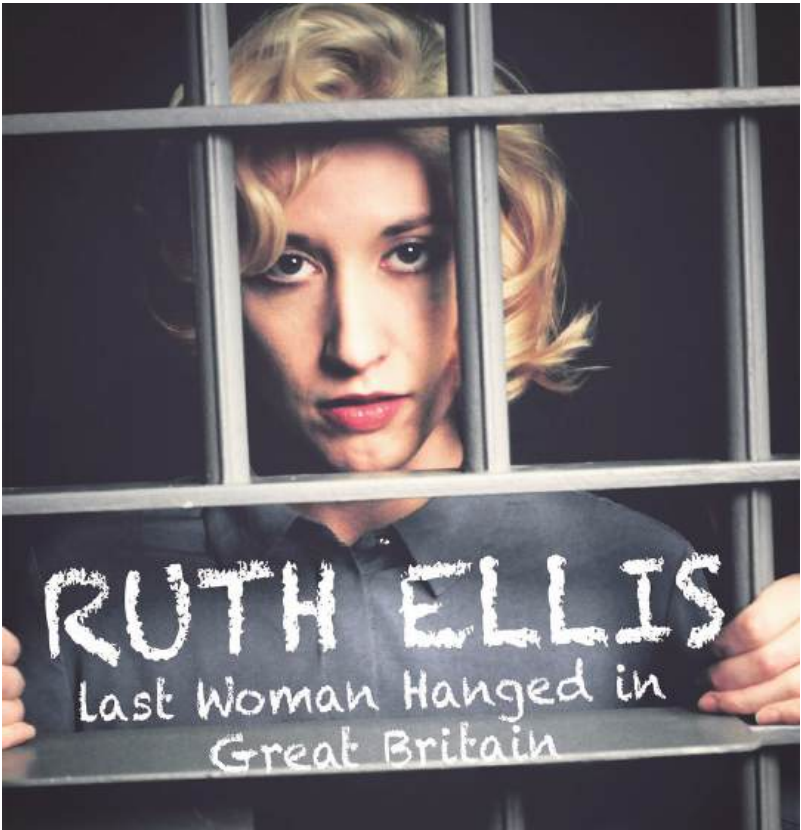
Unlike court appeals however, pardons can be issued on the grounds of broader factors that may render a conviction unfair.

Enston, whose own mother sat her down to watch the film about Ellis when she was seven years old, said it had had a “devastating” effect on the family.

Her mother and uncle never really recovered and the grandchildren had felt the “ripple effects”.

She said they were determined to correct the narrative around the case for themselves and their grandmother – but also for the thousands of women who endure domestic violence every day and are “let down by the criminal justice system”.

– AFP



Theatrical release poster for “Ruth Ellis: Last Woman Hanged in Great Britain” (2020) – Image courtesy of IMDb

Lizzo sued over Sydney Sweeney jeans reference track

LOS ANGELES – US pop star Lizzo is being sued in a California court over a snippet of an unreleased song that went viral because of a reference to Sydney Sweeney.

The post blew up in August after a reference to the US actress whose appearance in a jeans advertisement had already set the internet ablaze.

The social media post in question for the track “I’m goin’ in till October” has the four-time Grammy winner wearing not very much as she washes a car and says “I got good jeans like I’m Sydney.”

But lawyers for a firm called GRC Trust say the clip of the track – which has never been sold – uses a sample of “Win or Lose (We Tried),” a ‘70s soul ballad by American band Windy City, without permission.

The firm, which owns the copyright for the track, wants Lizzo to compensate them because she “obtained profits they would not have realised but for their infringement” of the rights of the song.

Lawyers say they tried to come to an informal agreement

with Lizzo’s team, “but reached an impasse, necessitating the filing of this case.”

The suit seeks an injunction to prevent the Lizzo song being distributed and money equal to the “defendants’ profits, plus all GRC’s losses.”

A representative for Lizzo told AFP: “We are surprised that the GRC Trust filed this lawsuit.”

“To be clear, the song has never been commercially released or monetised, and no decision has been made at this time regarding any future commercial release of the song.”

The American Eagle ad starring the blonde-haired, blue-eyed star of “The White Lotus” and “Euphoria” sparked accusations it was a white supremacist dog whistle because of its word play in the tagline “Sydney Sweeney has great jeans.”

While the outrage was confined to a small number of activists, senior Republicans like Ted Cruz lashed out at the “crazy Left” which the Texas senator said had “come out against beautiful women.”

– AFP



(From left to right) US musician Patti Scialfa, US singer Bruce Springsteen, US actor Jeremy Allen White and US director Scott Cooper attend the AFI opening night premiere of “Springsteen: Deliver Me From Nowhere” at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California on Wednesday.

– AFP

‘I’m doing well’: French film star Bardot plays down health fears

PARIS – French 91-year-old film icon Brigitte Bardot on Wednesday sought to quell persistent speculation over her health on social media, criticising “idiot” internet users.

“I’m doing well,” the ‘60s star and outspoken animal rights activist posted on X.

“I don’t know which idiot

started this ‘fake news’ story about my death tonight, but rest assured that I am fine and have no intention of bowing out.”

The health of Bardot, star of classic films such as “And God Created Woman” and “Contempt”, has been the subject of persistent rumours in recent days.

She underwent surgery last week

at a private hospital in southern France for what her office told AFP was a “minor” procedure that “went particularly well”.

Bardot swiftly returned last Friday to her home in Saint-Tropez, the glitzy riviera resort town to which she retreated in 1973 after turning her back on her film career.

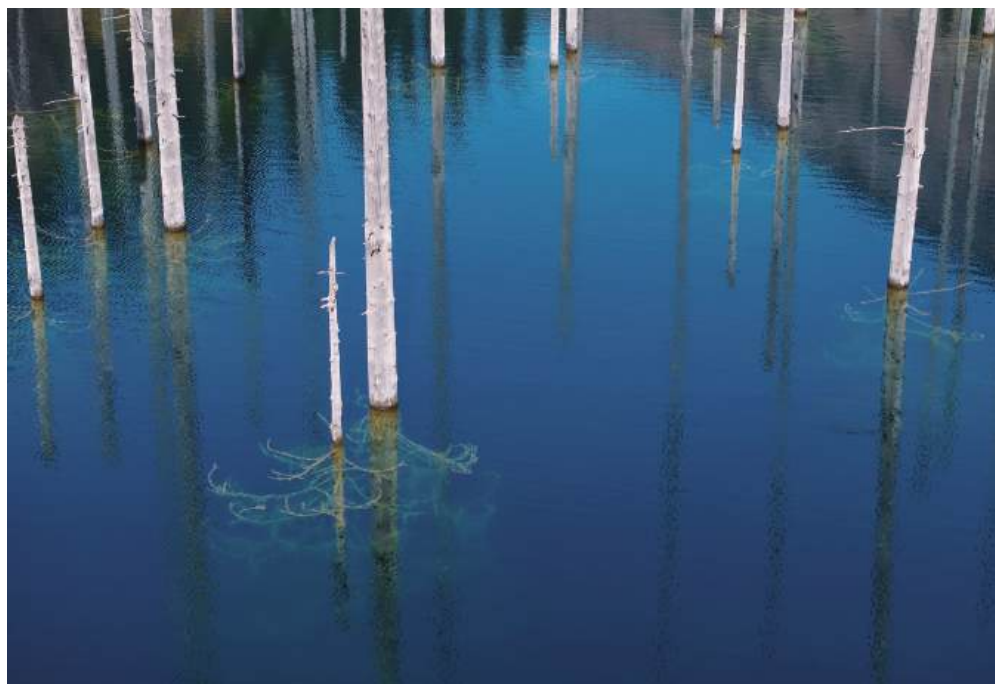
– AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 5°C~14°C	Manila 23°C~31°C	New York 6°C~15°C	Lisbon 18°C~23°C
Shanghai 16°C~23°C	Bangkok 23°C~32°C	London 8°C~13°C	Rio de Janeiro 16°C~24°C
Hong Kong 21°C~26°C	Tokyo 11°C~19°C	Frankfurt 7°C~11°C	Luanda 22°C~28°C
Taipei 23°C~26°C	Singapore 24°C~32°C	Vancouver 8°C~13°C	Maputo 16°C~30°C
Guangzhou 17°C~26°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~30°C	Paris 8°C~13°C	Dili 21°C~33°C
Nanjing 11°C~20°C	Jakarta 24°C~30°C	Moscow 6°C~9°C	São Tomé 25°C~27°C
Guilin 12°C~22°C	Seoul 10°C~20°C	Las Vegas 13°C~26°C	Praia 21°C~32°C
Xi'an 8°C~11°C	Sydney 14°C~23°C	Monte Carlo 13°C~21°C	Bissau 22°C~33°C



Not the witching hour!

An artwork made from the remains of bullets and shells by Lebanese artist Charles Nassar is displayed at the Shazaya Museum in Remhala, Lebanon, yesterday. — Xinhua



Drowning trees

This aerial photo taken on Tuesday shows the inverted forests of Lake Kaindy in Almaty Region, Kazakhstan. — Xinhua



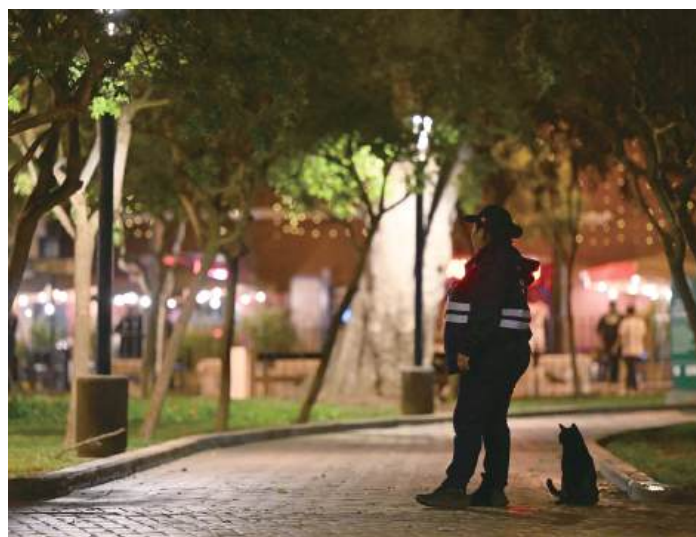
Picture perfect

This aerial drone photo taken on Sunday shows the sunset view over the Shanglong Village of Longzhou County, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. — Xinhua



Furry fireworks

This photograph shows a firework display entitled "Le Dernier Carnaval" (The Last Carnival), orchestrated by artist Cai Guo-Qiang with AI assistance, at the Centre Pompidou (Beaubourg) to mark its closing for a five-year renovation project, in Paris on Wednesday. — AFP



Security cat

A security guard stands next to a cat at the Miraflores Central Park, commonly known as the "Cats Park" in Lima, Peru, on Wednesday. The cats first appeared in the park in the 1990s, when the municipality introduced them to help control a rat infestation. Today, more than a hundred cats live there, cared for by a group of volunteers who feed them, provide medical treatment when needed, and promote their adoption. — AFP



Passing time

A man cycles past clocks of the art installation "Zeitfeld" (time field) by German artist Klaus Rinke in Düsseldorf, western Germany, yesterday. Daylight Saving Time will end on Sunday, and clocks will be turned back one hour for winter time. — AFP