

Sam rules out new round of consumption smartcards

Tony Wong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai yesterday ruled out the possibility of launching a new round of consumption smartcards, asking rhetorically whether government-issued consumption subsidies could still be effective in boosting local consumption and businesses in the current economic landscape where local residents travel to Zhuhai more often to dine out and shop.

The chief executive urged Macau's civil society to ponder on effective ways to encourage more local residents to stay in Macau to eat out and go shopping, instead of merely expecting another round of government-issued consumption smartcards, which, he said, would, in effect, become another form of cash handouts, which would be ineffective in stimulating local businesses due to local residents' changes in their consumption habits and patterns.

Sam made the remarks during a Q&A session in the legislature's hemicycle yesterday afternoon. The chief executive attended the 4.5-hour session, which was held a day after he delivered his 1.5-hour 2026 Policy Address on Tuesday. Yesterday, he answered questions from 32 lawmakers in the 33-member Legislative Assembly (AL) chaired by André Cheong Weng Chon. As is customary, the speaker of the legislature refrains from actively taking part in his peers' Q&A sessions, merely overseeing them.

Differences b/w pandemic and now

Sam pointed out that during the three-year COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 through 2022, the consumption smartcards issued by the government safeguarded Macau's



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai answers questions from lawmakers during yesterday's Q&A session about his 2026 Policy Address in the Legislative Assembly's (AL) hemicycle. – Photo: GCS

community economy and kept the operations of the city's civil society stable. At that time, he noted, residents had to stay in Macau to dine out and shop due to the strict travel restrictions implemented by the local authorities, because of which, he said, local government-issued consumption subsidies were very effective in boosting local businesses at that time, when Macau's gaming and tourism industries were

hit hard by COVID-19 travel curbs.

However, Sam said, with the resumption of travel between Macau and the Chinese mainland after the COVID-19 pandemic was over, there has been a growing preference among local residents to travel to Zhuhai and other places in the mainland more often to eat out and shop. He said that in the current landscape, he believed that local residents

would continue to frequent restaurants and hit the shops in the mainland rather often, irrespective of whether the local government issues another round of consumption smartcards.

Sam said that the issuing of consumption subsidies would be useless in generating extra consumer spending at local businesses. He mentioned the scenario where the beneficiary of a 5,000-pataca consumption card would possibly only use the 5,000-pataca consumption subsidy, without spending any extra money on dining out and shopping in Macau.

Pledge of alignment with nation's 15th Five Year Plan

Meanwhile, Sam also said during yesterday's Q&A session that his government is planning to establish an economic, trade and tourism office in Malaysia and one in Indonesia next year. In addition, Sam said, next year his government would also consider the possibility of setting up such offices in Japan and South Korea.

Meanwhile, Sam pledged to fully align Macau's development with the nation's 15th Five Year Plan (2026-30).

Sam underlined that the local government is intensively reviewing the implementation of its second five-year socioeconomic development plan (2021-25), based on which, he said, the local government was preparing the draft of its third five-year socioeconomic development plan (2026-30).

Sam noted that Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan will be drawn up in alignment with the nation's 15th Five Year Plan.

Continued on p.5

UK to ban concert ticket resales at inflated prices

Alexandra Bacon

LONDON – The UK government yesterday announced plans to ban the resale of tickets for concerts, sports matches and other events above their original price, targeting touts who profit from inflated prices.

Resale platforms and ticket touts often list tickets at a huge mark-up on their face value price, sparking outrage from the music industry and fans alike.

The issue was highlighted by widespread public anger over the exorbitant cost of some tickets to see the British leg of Britpop band

Oasis's reunion tour this year.

"The UK is home to a brilliant range of music, entertainers and sporting stars – but when fans are shut out – it only benefits the touts," Business Secretary Peter Kyle said in a statement.

"That's why we're taking these bold measures to smash their model to pieces and make sure more fans can enjoy their favourite stars at a fair price."

The ruling Labour party, elected in July 2024, vowed to introduce consumer protections in its election manifesto.

"For too long, ticket touts have ripped off

fans, using bots to snap up batches of tickets and resell them at sky-high prices," Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy said in the statement.

"They've become a shadow industry on resale sites, acting without consequence," she said, adding that the changes would benefit fans across a range of entertainment including theatre and comedy shows.

An investigation by consumer group Which? found that some tickets to see Oasis at London's Wembley Stadium were listed for more than £4,000 (US\$5,200) on ticket exchange platform Viagogo.

Under the government's plans, resale platforms will face capped service fees and individuals will be banned from reselling more tickets than they were entitled to buy in the initial sale.

The government estimated that the measures would save fans £112 million annually, cutting the average resale price by £37.

British music stars, including Coldplay, Dua Lipa, Radiohead, Sam Fender and Iron Maiden, last week signed a joint statement urging swift legislation to cap resale prices.

– AFP

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China urges US to act for peace, stability in LatAm & Caribbean

China urged the United States to choose the course of action that is conducive to peace and stability in Latin America and the Caribbean region, foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said yesterday.

– Story on p. 7

Trump's embrace of crown prince ushers in new era in US-Saudi ties

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's trip to Washington has been a triumph, with Donald Trump rolling out the red carpet for "the future king" and absolving him of the criticism he has faced for years.

– Story on p. 11

Portugal's TAP flies back into black amid Air France interest

Air France yesterday indicated its interest in taking a stake in TAP Air Portugal, as the Portuguese carrier flew back into the black in the third quarter.

– Story on p. 12

The 15th Five-Year Plan Proposal: Catalyzing Macao's Development

By **Frederico Ma Chi Ngai**
President of the Board of Directors,
Macao Chinese Chamber of Commerce

The Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China was successfully held in Beijing last month. The session reviewed and adopted the Proposal of the CPC Central Committee on Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (hereinafter referred to as the "Proposal"). The State Council will formulate a draft plan based on the Proposal and submit it to the National People's Congress for deliberation and approval in March next year.

As the Proposal clearly states, the 15th Five-Year Plan period is a critical stage for basically realizing socialist modernization. China faces profound and complex changes in its development environment: major-country relations shape the international landscape, which in turn exerts a profound impact on domestic development. This period is characterized by coexisting strategic opportunities and risks, with increasing uncertainties. As a golden business card of international metropolis and a hub connecting China's "dual circulation" development pattern, Macao closely monitors international developments. It is therefore crucial for Macao to deeply grasp the essence of the Proposal, align its own 3rd Five-Year-Plan with the national 15th Five-Year Plan, and seize opportunities to integrate into and serve the national development strategy, as well as the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

The Proposal outlines seven key development goals, including: achieving

remarkable progress in high-quality development; substantially elevating self-reliance and self-improvement in science and technology; making new breakthroughs in comprehensively deepening reform; significantly enhancing social civility; continuously improving people's quality of life; advancing the Beautiful China initiative with major new progress; and consolidating the national security barrier. Among these, "self-reliance and self-improvement in science and technology" stands out as a core keyword, requiring substantial upgrades to lead the development of new quality productive forces.

To achieve this, China will improve the new nationwide system for key scientific and technological innovation, adopt extraordinary measures, and promote full-chain breakthroughs in core and critical technologies. Efforts will be made to advance from "following" to "keeping pace" and ultimately to "leading" in key fields such as integrated circuits, industrial mother machines, high-end instruments, basic software, advanced materials, and biotechnology. The new nationwide system emphasizes not only "concentrating resources to accomplish major tasks" but also integrating the roles of an effective government and a dynamic market. It will increase government investment through extraordinary measures, uniting the efforts of governments, universities, research institutions, and enterprises to deploy a full-chain layout from basic research and applied research to industrialization.

Currently, the Macao Special Administrative Region Government is actively promoting the construction of the Macao Science and Technology R&D



Undated file photo of Frederico Ma Chi Ngai – Photo courtesy of CCTV News

Park, covering an area of approximately 240,000 square meters. This key project aims to optimize and advance appropriate economic diversification and establish a full-chain-driven development model. Plans are underway to announce arrangements for government industrial funds and technology achievement guidance funds by the end of the year, realizing the extraordinary allocation of intensive resources in four dimensions: land, capital, technology, and talent. Macao will contribute to the national drive for core technological breakthroughs in critical areas such as integrated circuits and biotechnology, proactively aligning with the goals and tasks outlined in the Proposal.

The Proposal also highlights the need to leverage Hong Kong's and Macao's unique advantages of being backed by the motherland and connected to the world, continuously enhancing Macao's role as "one center, one platform, one base" and building a highland for gathering international high-end talents. As noted in the Proposal, changes

in the international situation profoundly affect domestic development. Macao's unique strength lies in its role as a bridge between China and Portuguese-speaking countries and a key node in the Belt and Road Initiative, making it instrumental in China's high-level opening-up. Earlier this month, the Macao Chinese Chamber of Commerce successfully hosted the 18th World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention (WCEC), attracting over 4,000 participants—including Chinese entrepreneurs, experts, scholars, and representatives from government and business sectors—from more than 50 countries and regions to explore cooperation opportunities. With the theme "Jointly Building a Community with a Shared Future for Global Chinese Entrepreneurs," the convention symbolizes the interconnected, shared destiny of the influential global Chinese business network, with Macao serving as a key service provider for this network.

In his congratulatory letter to the convention, Wang Huning, Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), urged global Chinese entrepreneurs to leverage their advantages, seize opportunities, play a unique role in promoting China's economic and trade cooperation, technological exchanges, and cultural mutual learning with foreign countries, and make new contributions to realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. This provides profound inspiration for Macao to fulfill its role as a hub for "dual circulation," enabling it to better serve investors—including global Chinese entrepreneurs—as a two-way platform for "bringing in" and "going out" during the 15th Five-Year Plan period.

60 pct of elderly assessed as disabled: IAS chief

Armindo Neves

The Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) hosted yesterday an award ceremony aiming to encourage local restaurants to provide accessible dining experiences for persons with disabilities, titled "International Day of Persons with Disabilities – Plan for the Recognition of Restaurants Friendly to Persons with Disabilities".

The ceremony was held at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Nape.

According to IAS President Wilson Hon Wai, seniors aged 65 or above accounted for 14.6 percent of Macau's total population last year. The elderly (65+) accounted for nearly 60 percent of the holders of the bureau's Disability Assessment

Registration Card, Hon said

According to 2024 official population data, the total population of Macau at the end of last year amounted to 688,300, of whom 100,200 were elderly people.

However, only permanent residents are entitled to apply for the Disability Assessment Registration Card.

Hon also said that with the continuous increase in the elderly population, the construction of a barrier-free environment has become increasingly important.

He pointed out that public entities have fully implemented the "Architectural Standards for Designing Universal and Barrier-free Projects in the Macao SAR,"

set up by the government in 2018, in all new construction and renovation projects as well as public roadworks.

According to an IAS statement released during the ceremony, a total of 61 catering establishments, recommended by local rehabilitation organisations or through self-nomination, were honoured at yesterday's ceremony.

According to the statement, the ceremony involved around 200 participants, including representatives from co-organising and supporting units, the certified disability-friendly catering establishments, and persons with disabilities.

In order to ensure that the event was accessible to all, according to the statement, various accessibility facilities were provided at the venue, including sign language interpretation, AI-generated live

captions, audio description services, as well as barrier-free access routes.

The statement also said that the 61 catering establishments honoured this year were not only recommended or self-nominated through local rehabilitation organisations but were also voted for by individuals from four disability categories – visual, hearing and speech, physical, and intellectual.

The ongoing initiative, according to the statement, aims to encourage the catering industry to provide friendly reception and services for persons with disabilities, including courteous attitudes, thoughtful seating arrangements, assistance with ordering, and accessible facilities where available, working together to build a barrier-free travel environment. ■



Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) President Wilson Hon Wai addresses yesterday's award ceremony at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Nape.

– Photo: Armindo Neves

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MACAU POST

Macau Weather

**COLD AND DRY.
CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY
INTERVALS.
LIGHT RAIN AT FIRST.
FORCE 4 TO 5 NORTHERLY
WINDS WITH GUSTS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY
WILL RANGE BETWEEN
35% AND 65%.**



12°C~17°C

Source: SMG

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- Work at night (10 pm – 04 am (Sun -Thu))
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Interested parties are welcome to send their detailed resume with a recent photo and expected salary to joininmp@gmail.com. All personal data collected will be used for recruitment related purposes only.

Foodies & vendors share food-fest experience: vox pop

Rui Pastorin & Khalel Vallo

The 25th Macau Food Festival kicked off on Friday, again gathering food lovers to sample cuisine from different parts of the world.

Having entered the sixth of its 17-day run yesterday, the annual event in Praça do Lago Sai Van (西灣湖廣場) had several people waiting for the festival to open in the afternoon despite the cold and wet weather. Among them were a group of four local students aged between 18 to 20 who were all experiencing the festival for the first time.

“We’re excited”, the group told the *Post* yesterday, particularly for the Japanese food as they all enjoyed eating sushi, in addition to the fair’s Korean food and dessert selection. As they prepared to enter the venue, the youngsters, who had heard about the event through social media, joked that their only hope was that the food on offer would not be too expensive for them.

Waiting alongside the students were a 25-year-old first timer named Ira, who was accompanied by a friend who was attending her second food festival. The latter highlighted that the event served as a good platform to showcase international cuisine ranging from Chinese and Filipino fare to Korean and Thai food. “It’s not always that you can be in one place that gathers it all for you to try”, she

said, excited for what’s ahead. Ira, meanwhile, highlighted that the festival is a place where you can see people of different nationalities try food from different parts of the world, including those who might be encountering dishes from certain cultures for the first time.

When the opening time came, various fairgoers were looking to sample what was on offer. And among them were two 13-year-old local students named Jessie and Naomi, who said they attend the festival annually. They described this year’s edition as enjoyable with plenty of food choices and noted that the event was well organised, though the layout made it easy to get lost.

Another annual festivalgoer was 33-year-old Denver, who commented that this time, he felt that the selection was becoming repetitive. “Everybody’s doing the same thing. So, there’s no variety,” he said, adding that more international options could improve the experience. He pointed out the Japanese section as a standout, particularly highlighting the quality of the oysters, wagyu sandwiches, and sashimi.

Post reporters also spoke with several vendors participating this year, one of whom is Duc, who operates a stall with his team selling Vietnamese food. Marking their sixth year participating in the food



Fairgoers eat in a designated eating area or explore the various booths at the 25th Macau Food Festival yesterday afternoon. – Photo: Rui Pastorin

festival, the 60-year-old noted that it is not too different to previous iterations, with the weekend seeing a lot of customers while the event remains well-organised. “It’s always good”.

Duc, whose booth has had many customers, added that as Macau is an international city, having booths showcasing a variety of products from different places is good for Macau and for promoting the city. To take this further, he added that more promotion for the festival could be done across various platforms while taking advantage of the annual food fest coinciding

with the annual Macau Grand Prix (MGP) could also attract more visitors.

Moreover, participating for the second year is an Indian vegetarian restaurant presenting a number of dishes from dosa to vegetable biryani. A 69-year-old female representative highlighted that they are one of the booths offering vegetarian cuisine and that, so far, the festival has been great and has had more people visiting compared to the previous year. “For me, this year is better”, she said, noting that the increased number of festivalgoers might be due to the festival marking

its 25th edition, as well as that locals look forward to visiting the annual event. So far, she said, their booth has been doing “very good” and as the festival continues, they want to continue promoting vegetarian food to the fairgoers.

Another return participant is Tina, 40, who runs a booth selling Himalayan food. She said that her team has joined the festival for five or six consecutive years. This time, she noted, they aim for strong sales as the event continues. She added that the festival remains an important opportunity for her team, as the steady turnout each year helps introduce Nepali and Indian flavours to more festivalgoers.

Lastly, 40-year-old Nicole, who sells Australian-themed snacks, said the festival offers valuable visibility for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). “This is a very successful event that does let SMEs or vendors gain exposure on their products and their brands in Macau to tourists and to locals,” she said, adding that her goal this year was to expand awareness of her brand, and encourage visitors to try her products and direct customers to her shop.

The 25th Macau Food Festival runs through November 30, being open from 4 p.m. to 11 p.m. from Mondays to Thursdays, and 3 p.m. to midnight from Fridays to Sundays. ■

Macau records year’s 5th case of Legionnaires’ Disease

Armindo Neves

The Health Bureau (SSM) said in a statement yesterday that a 69-year-old local man has been diagnosed with Legionnaires’ disease (aka Legionellosis), becoming this year’s fifth reported case.

According to the statement, the patient has a history of chronic diseases. Last Wednesday, the patient visited the emergency department of the public Conde de Sao Januário Hospital Centre (CHCSJ) due to shortness of breath, the statement said.

Auxiliary examinations, the statement said, revealed right-sided pleural effusion and aspiration pneumonia*, prompting immediate hospitalisation.

Yesterday, according to the statement, a respiratory test sample from the patient tested positive for Legionella pneumophila, leading to a diagnosis of Legionnaires’ disease.

The statement pointed out that the patient is in critical condition, requiring ventilator support, receiving further treatment in the

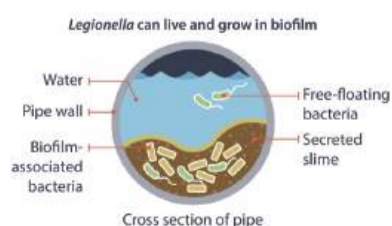
hospital’s intensive care unit (ICU).

The patient had no recent travel history prior to the onset of illness, and cohabiting family members have shown no symptoms of illness, the statement said.

The statement pointed out that Legionellosis, with an incubation period of between two and 10 days, is an infectious disease caused by Legionella bacteria thriving in warm water between 20 and 45 degrees Celsius and in warm and moist places, such as artificial water systems including massage pools, fountains, and household respiratory medical equipment.

The statement underlined that males, senior citizens, smokers, drinkers and those with weakened immune systems, especially those with chronic medical conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, chronic lung or kidney disease, and patients receiving steroids or other immunosuppressive drugs are at increased risk of catching the disease. ■

* *Pleural effusion is a condition where excess fluid builds up in the pleural space, i.e., the space between the lungs and the chest wall. It’s a finding, not a disease itself. Think of it as a symptom or a consequence of an underlying problem. Aspiration Pneumonia is an infection of the lung tissue caused by inhaling foreign material – like food, liquid, or stomach acid – into the lungs. It’s a disease process.* – DeepSeek



This image shows a Legionella-biofilm cross-section. Photo courtesy of the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

UM scholar wins INFORMS best paper award

Khalel Vallo

Zhang Hongcai, associate professor at the University of Macau’s (UM) State Key Laboratory of Internet of Things for Smart City (SKL-IOTSC), won the 2025 ENRE (Energy, Natural Resources, and the Environment) Best Publication Award in Natural Resources at the Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (INFORMS)* annual meeting last month, marking the first time the honour has gone to a scholar from a Chinese academic institution, according to a statement by the public university on Monday.

Presented annually to only one paper, the ENRE Best Publication Award in Natural Resources is regarded as one of the most “prestigious international distinctions in operations research and management sciences”, the statement said.

Zhang’s recognition reflects his ongoing interdisciplinary work in intelligent energy systems and sustainable transport, underscoring UM’s progress in green energy and clean mobility research, the statement added.

The award-winning paper, titled “From Curtailed Renewable Energy to Green Hydrogen: Infrastructure Planning for Hydrogen Fuel-Cell Vehicles”, was co-authored by He Long, associate professor at George

Washington University, who served as the first author, the statement said, pointing out that Zhang and Qi Wei, associate professor at Tsinghua University, were corresponding authors.

The study introduces a co-planning model that integrates renewable hydrogen production with transport energy systems, aiming to offer theoretical tools aimed at advancing low-carbon coordination between hydrogen mobility and energy networks, the statement said, adding that the paper comes out in *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management*, a leading journal in the field.

Zhang’s achievement places UM among contributors to global research in energy and transport systems, while marking a milestone for Chinese academia in the INFORMS community, the statement said. ■

*With almost 12,000 members from around the globe, according to its official website (<https://www.informs.org/About-INFORMS/>), “INFORMS is the leading international association for professionals in operations research, analytics, management science, economics, behavioural science, statistics, artificial intelligence, data science, applied mathematics, and other relevant fields.”

“Smarter Decisions for a Better World” is the organisation’s



This undated and unlocated handout photo provided by the University of Macau (UM) on Monday shows Zhang Hongcai, associate professor in the public university’s State Key Laboratory of Internet of Things for Smart City (SKL-IOTSC), who won the 2025 ENRE (Energy, Natural Resources, and the Environment) Best Publication Award in Natural Resources at the annual meeting of the Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (INFORMS) last month.

motto. The Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (INFORMS) is based in Catonsville, a suburb of Baltimore, in Maryland, US.

THE COURAGE TO CREATE: 'MACAU SPACE FOR DANCE IDEA' ON ITS GRAND FINALE

Interview by William Chan

Local art organisation “Macau Space for Dance Idea” is going to complete its two-year “Comprehensive Dancer Training Programme” with the show “Thanks for the Dance” on December 13 and 14 at the Macau Cultural Centre, theatre director Dicky Tsang (曾韋迪) and choreographer Leong Iek Kei told the *Post* in an exclusive interview last week.

Adapted from the fairy tale “The Ugly Duckling”, this dance theatre piece explores the theme of alienation in the mass and the feelings of anxiety, indifference, and conflict through dynamic physical movement.

The “Comprehensive Dancer Training Programme” which began in 2023, has reached its final phase, and the *Post* published an interview with the group last year.*

The programme, an ambitious project designed to cultivate a new generation of creative dancers, culminates in a performance that is as much a philosophical statement as it is a showcase of physical prowess. The journey has been a process of distillation. What started with nine hopeful participants has concluded with a core group of three dedicated dancers, a testament to the rigorous and often challenging path towards artistic self-discovery.

The path of art

“The path of art is a difficult one to walk,” Leong noted, who serves as the choreographer and physical training director. The programme deliberately steps away from conventional, academy-style training, which often prioritises technical replication. Instead, it pushes for something more profound: the ability to think, to create, and to possess a unique artistic voice.

“In Macau, there isn’t a great need for a large number of dancers, but there is a need for creative dancers,” Leong explains. “My own experience after graduating was that the skills I learnt were not directly applicable to the Macau market. You can’t just copy what the teacher taught you; you need to use your mind to transform it.”

This philosophy is the cornerstone of the programme. Tsang elaborated on the conceptual framework, which unfolded over three distinct stages. The final performance uses Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Ugly Duckling” as a blueprint to explore complex social questions. “It’s a story everyone is familiar with,” Tsang notes. “A creature that doesn’t belong to the group appears. It is bullied. This allows for a great deal of reflection on social norms. Must we all be the same? Or should one be outstanding? This is directly related to artistic creation and dance.”

For the directors, dance is a language of symbols, a medium for abstract expression that invites interpretation rather than providing simple answers. “We create symbols, and through the interpretation of these symbols, a bridge of imagination is opened between the dancer and the audience,” said Tsang. He views this process as an experiment, a “difficult thing” that challenges both the creators and the viewers. “If it’s easy, it’s not art,” he stated with conviction.

This sentiment is echoed by one of the remaining students, who spoke about their transformative experience. “Before, when I learnt to dance, it was about following the teacher. They gave me the

steps, I learnt them, and I performed on stage,” the student, Hun, reflected. “But now, right up to the moment I go on stage, I am still thinking, still exploring. It was unsettling at first, but also incredibly fun. It’s a contradictory feeling.”

This shift in perspective is precisely the success the programme aimed for. Hun now sees every element of a performance – the lighting, the props, the arrangement – as part of a larger symbolic language. “I try to understand now, even if I don’t get it at first. It has sparked a desire to think, ‘What movements can I create? In what direction can I go?’”

Tsang believes that true artistic development cannot be mass-produced in an academic setting. He champions a “master-apprentice” model, where nuanced, core principles are passed down through close mentorship. “The most unique methods of seeing art, which an academy can’t give you, are what we believe in,” he says. To this end, the programme invited masters from various disciplines, including Tai Chi and contemporary dance, to enrich the students’ creative palettes.

The final performance, “Thanks for the Dance,” is therefore not just an ending but a culmination of this intense, two-year dialogue. It is a reflection on the courage it takes to be different, the struggle for an individual voice in a world that often demands conformity, and a celebration of the few who have endured the challenging journey to emerge not as mere dancers, but as true artistes.

Tickets are now available online at 180 patacas: <https://form.jotform.com/252798867249480>

*<https://www.macaupostdaily.com/news/22658>



This undated file photo shows theatre director Dicky Tsang posing. – Photos provided by Macau Space for Dance Idea



This undated file photo shows choreographer Leong Iek Kei posing.



This undated file photo shows dancer Hun posing.

IC launches 3rd batch of digitised rare books

Rui Pastorin

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) said in a statement on Monday that more digital versions of rare books can be accessed via the “Collection of Valuable Electronic Rare Books” section of the bureau’s Public Library website.

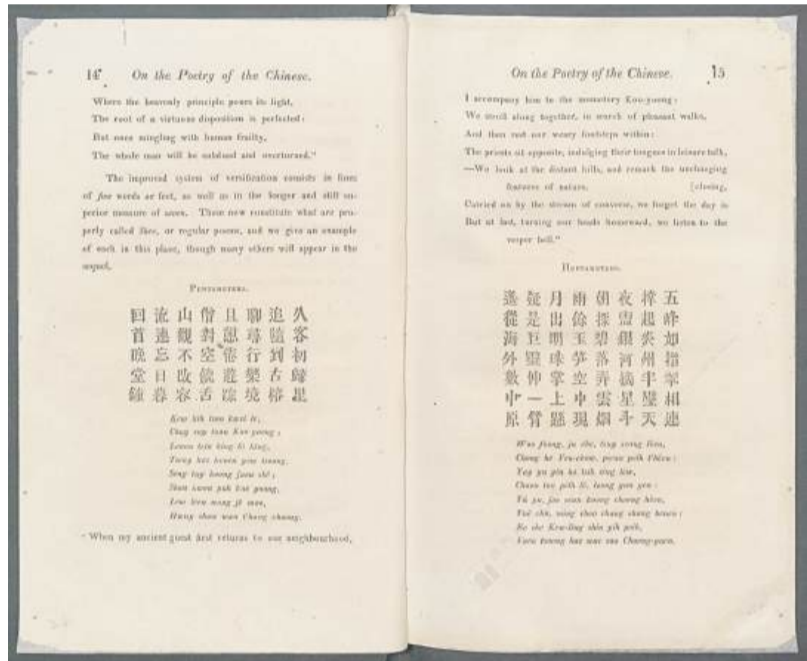
The third batch of digitised rare books has been uploaded and comprises 279 titles in 280 volumes written mainly in Portuguese and English, according to the statement, covering areas such as history, literature, education, and natural sciences, which are “of significant historical and research value”.

The digitised books in the batch include “On the Poetry of the Chinese: from the Royal Asiatic Transactions (1834) compiled by Sir John Francis Davis; Macao and Its

Future Port (1922); The Typhoon of August 20, 1927: Report by Captain Lieutenant Almeida Pinheiro; Portuguese Pioneers of Hong Kong: Horticultural Experiments at Kowloon (1930) written by José Pedro Braga; and Catalogue of Edible Fish of Macao (1959) by José da Silva Vidigal.

The statement said that since 2023, the bureau has launched two batches of digitalised rare books. The aim is to “preserve valuable local literature and provide convenient access for citizens and researchers”, according to the statement.

The statement said that the collection can be found by visiting www.library.gov.mo or the e-resources platform of the “My Library” app. ■



This photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) on Monday shows pages from “On the Poetry of the Chinese from the Royal Asiatic Transactions”.

Police nab local surveillance staff for stealing bike helmet

Ada Lei

A local man was arrested on Saturday for stealing a helmet valued at 850 patacas from a motorbike, Public Security Police (PSP) spokeswoman Lai In Hong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Lai identified the suspect as a CCTV room surveillance staff member in his thirties, surnamed Lei.

According to Lai, the police received a report on September 10 from the motorbike’s owner, who had left his helmet, worth 850 patacas, on the hook of his motorbike parked in Rua de Chaves (沙維斯街) in

Taipa. When the victim returned to retrieve his motorbike the next day, he discovered that the helmet had vanished. Suspecting that someone had stolen it, the victim immediately reported the case to the police.

Through their citywide CCTV surveillance footage, the police identified Lei as the suspect and apprehended him on Saturday in Rua de Foshan (佛山街) in Taipa. Under questioning, Lei admitted to stealing the helmet out of greed and handed it over to the police.

Lei has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a theft charge. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows PSP officers escorting the crash helmet theft suspect into a police station.

Mocha slot-machine parlour at Grand Dragon Hotel in Taipa to shut for good Monday

Tony Wong

The Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) announced in a statement yesterday that Melco will close its Mocha Grand Dragon slot-machine parlour in Taipa for good after midnight on Monday next week.

The slot-machine parlour located in Grand Dragon Hotel is one of Melco’s current five Mocha slot-machine parlours that are not housed on its own premises.

Yesterday’s DICJ announcement came after the Kuong Fat slot-machine parlour in Zape, one of Melco’s then six Mocha slot-machine parlours not housed on its own premises, closed for good in September. This slot-machine parlour was located in the Kuong Fat Commercial Centre office building in Zape.

Mocha Royal slot-machine parlour, according to government announcements in June, is scheduled

to close for good by December 31 this year. This parlour is located in Hotel Royal.

Currently, a Mocha slot-machine parlour is housed on Melco’s own premises, namely the one in the Altira Macau casino-hotel in Taipa.

Concerning the other three Mocha slot-machine parlours not housed on Melco’s own premises, namely Golden Dragon, Inner Harbour, and Sintra, Melco decided to continue operating them after December 31 this year through the hiring of management companies, according to June’s government announcements.

According to the gaming law’s newly amended version, all casinos and slot-machine parlours must be housed in premises that are owned by their respective gaming concessionaires.

After the three-year transition period stipulated by the new legislation amending the gaming law, which is scheduled to end on



This file photo taken in July this year shows a man crossing the road outside the Mocha Grand Dragon slot-machine parlour in Taipa.

– Photo: Maria Cheang Ut Meng

December 31 this year, all slot-machine parlours not housed on premises owned by the respective gaming concessionaires must close, unless the concessionaires choose to hire “management companies” to operate the parlours. ■

Sam rules out new round of consumption smartcards

Continued from p.1

Pledge to safeguard locals’ jobs

Meanwhile, Sam also pledged his government’s commitment to ensuring the full protection of local residents’ employment, including efforts to create various favourable conditions aiming to help young local people find and secure a job.

Sam underlined that the local government has rolled out various measures to help young local people join the job market, such as the organisation of occupational training programmes and a subsidy

encouraging them to work in mainland cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

Meanwhile, Sam also underlined that the local government will push ahead with its plan, laid out in Macau’s urban master plan (2020-40), to revitalise the Inner Harbour waterfront in alignment with the development of the waterfront in Zhuhai’s Wanzai, with the aim of creating a waterfront tourism cooperation zone between the two cities.

Sam underlined that the plan will be carried out in alignment with the Macau government’s

ongoing plan to improve flood-prevention facilities for Inner Harbour district.

Meanwhile, Sam also pledged that the local government aims to complete its various plans to restructure or merge public entities before 2029, required by a new administrative regulation governing the setting-up and organisational structures of public entities, which took effect last month.

Sam described the government’s ongoing drive to restructure and streamline its organisational structure as a “complicated and difficult” task. ■

Police nab currency dealer for cheating gambler out of HK\$500,000

Ada Lei

A man from the Chinese mainland was apprehended on Tuesday for defrauding a male gambler out of HK\$500,000 (515,000 patacas) in an illegal currency exchange deal, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 39-year-old male surnamed Wang who claimed to be jobless.

According to Cheong, the victim was alone in a smoking lounge of a casino in Cotai on Sunday when Wang approached and offered him a currency exchange deal. The victim was indeed looking to convert chips worth HK\$50,000, which he had won at the casino, into yuan for transfer back to his mainland bank account. The victim agreed to hand



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong looks on during yesterday’s regular press conference.

– Photo: Ada Lei

over the chips to Wang, after the latter promised to transfer 46,000 yuan into the victim’s mainland bank account.

Cheong noted that the victim showed Wang a QR code for online payment on his phone. Wang then

scanned the code and quickly presented the victim with a forged “transfer record”. Believing it to be genuine, the victim handed over the chips worth HK\$50,000 to Wang. After acquiring the chips, Wang hurriedly left the scene, raising the victim’s suspicions. Upon checking his banking transaction records on his phone, the victim discovered that no funds had been received. Realising that he had been scammed, the victim immediately reported the case to the police.

The police identified Wang as the suspect and apprehended him in a casino in Cotai on Tuesday. The police seized a smartphone from Wang. Under questioning, Wang refused to cooperate.

Wang has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a fraud charge. ■

Maritime Silk Road deepens collaboration, cultural exchange

Analysis

HANGZHOU – The deepening of cultural exchange and collaboration among Maritime Silk Road cities is underway, according to the ongoing 2025 Maritime Silk Road Urban Cooperation & Development Conference and the International Travel Agents Conference in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province.

With the theme “Integration and Innovation for Win-win Cooperation,” the event gathered nearly 400 participants from China, Italy, Indonesia and other countries to explore opportunities for collaborative growth.

Under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has blazed a trail of cooperation, opportunities and prosperity for common development with partner countries of the Maritime Silk Road, Fu Hua, president of Xinhua News Agency, said at the opening ceremony yesterday.

Looking ahead, Fu added that Xinhua will foster exchange and provide services to support multi-field collaboration among Maritime Silk Road cities and contribute to high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Lian Yimin, chairman of the Zhejiang Provincial Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, highlighted in his speech that Zhejiang will continue to promote innovation-driven cooperation and share development achievements with Maritime Silk Road cities.

The Maritime Silk Road offers a context of connections and collaboration, showcasing that respecting and trusting each other is the key to the solution of many practical problems, said Rosanna Binacchi, a professor at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Italy.

“The ancient Silk Road showed us that prosperity grows when nations open their borders and harbors to collaboration, innovation and understanding,” Kao Kim Hourn, secretary-general of ASEAN, said in a video speech, noting that the spirit of openness and mutual respect continues to guide ASEAN and China in the 21st century.

Participants have also underscored that when the Maritime Silk Road brings people closer, it inspires tourism cooperation and cultural heritage preservation.

“We expect to protect and utilize Maritime Silk Road heritage continuously to build international consensus,” said Qiao Yunfei, deputy head of China’s National Cultural Heritage Administration, noting the significance of exploring ways to integrate cultural heritage preservation with cultural tourism, creative industries and technology.

“By focusing on cultural tourism, commerce and regional connectivity, the conference offers a meaningful platform for dialogue that fosters shared benefits and concrete partnerships,” Ernesto Ottone Ramirez, assistant director-general for culture at UNESCO, said in his video speech.

“May the spirit of friendship and cooperation that once guided the ancient mariners continue to steer us toward peace, prosperity and sustainability for generations to come,” Kao said.

The conference, which began on Tuesday and concludes today, was organized by Xinhua News Agency’s Zhejiang branch, the Wenzhou Municipal People’s Government, the Zhejiang Provincial Department of Culture, Radio, Television and Tourism, and other authorities. – Xinhua

China welcomes Netherlands’ suspension of Nexperia order

BEIJING – The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said yesterday that the country welcomes the Dutch government’s move to suspend its administrative order regarding semiconductor manufacturer Nexperia, an overseas subsidiary of Chinese company Wingtech.

It is “a first step in the right direction toward a proper settlement of the issue,” said a spokesperson with the ministry.

Government officials of the two countries held two rounds of consultations in Beijing regarding the Nexperia issue on Tuesday and yesterday, during which the Dutch side offered to suspend the administrative order issued under the “Availability of Goods Act,” according to the ministry.

However, the suspension falls short of revoking the administrative order, a move that would address the root cause of the turbulence and chaos in the global semiconductor industrial and supply chains, the spokesperson noted.

Meanwhile, the erroneous ruling,

pushed by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, to strip Wingtech of its control over Nexperia remains the key obstacle to resolving the issue, the spokesperson added.

The source and responsibility for the current disruption in the global semiconductor supply chain lie with the Netherlands, the Chinese side has reiterated during the consultations.

China hopes the Dutch side will continue to demonstrate sincerity in cooperating with China and put forward genuinely constructive proposals to solve the problem, said the spokesperson.

Both sides have agreed to eliminate administrative intervention and support enterprises in resolving internal disputes through consultation in accordance with the law, which will not only protect investors’ legitimate rights but also create better conditions for restoring security and stability of the global semiconductor industry, according to the spokesperson.

– Xinhua

Advancing law-based governance strengthens synergy between development and stability

China Daily Editorial

Emphasizing that a framework for promoting law-based governance on all fronts has basically taken shape and the system of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics continues to improve, President Xi Jinping underscored the need to fully implement the thought on socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics for the new era in a recent instruction.

Xi’s instruction was conveyed at the central conference on work related to law-based governance held in Beijing on Monday and Tuesday.

Highlighting the necessity of safeguarding and promoting social fairness and justice, and enhancing the coordination between the rule of law and reform, development and stability, Xi called for comprehensively advancing the rule of law in all aspects of the country’s work.

At the heart of this process is Xi Jinping Thought on the Rule of Law – the guiding philosophy that continues to shape China’s long-term modernization and capacity for sound, effective governance. This charts the course for comprehensively advancing law-based governance in the country which is both the guarantee of national stability and the foundation for high-quality development.

Formally established as the guiding philosophy in the legal field in 2020, Xi Jinping Thought

on the Rule of Law provides clear answers to why China must comprehensively advance law-based governance in the new era and how it should do so.

Over the past five years, this guidance has steered the continuous improvement of the socialist legal system with the Constitution at its core and deeper reforms in ensuring scientific legislation, strict law enforcement, impartial justice and universal observance of the law.

This week’s conference made clear that on the new journey, fully implementing Xi Jinping Thought on the Rule of Law is essential for upholding the unity between the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the running of the country by the people and law-based governance, and making concerted efforts to break new ground in advancing the rule of law in China.

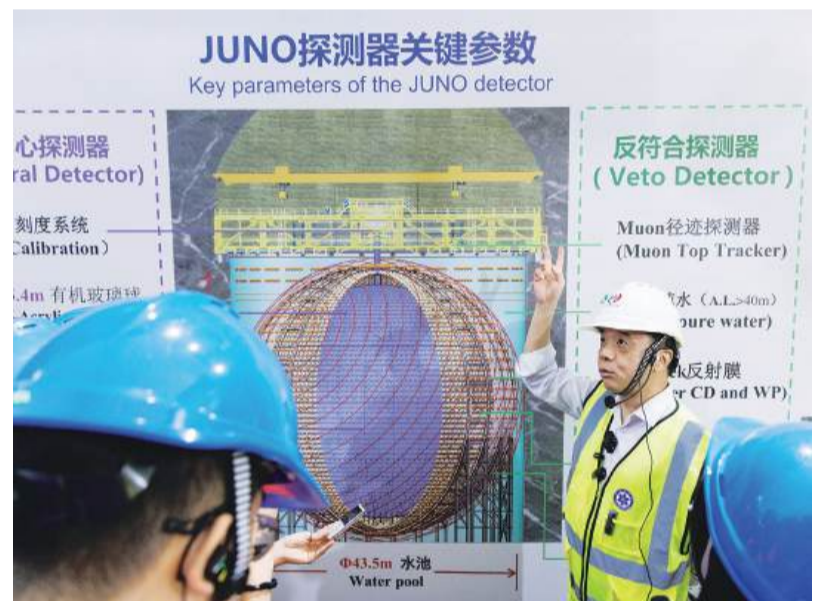
Zhao Leji, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, China’s top legislature, emphasized that accelerating the establishment of a well-developed system of laws and regulations, building a law-based government, promoting impartial justice and advancing the building of a law-based society are the legal underpinnings for high-quality development.

The improvement of governance is inseparable from progress in the legal field. China’s legal system now comprises a large

number of laws and regulations, while legislative outreach offices across the country give citizens channels to participate in lawmaking, embodying whole-process people’s democracy. Courts and procuratorates continue to safeguard fairness and justice, combat crime, and expand public legal services, ensuring that the people can feel fairness and justice in every case and every matter.

As China prepares to enter the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period, the fourth plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee has made achieving a higher level of socialist rule-of-law development a central goal. Xi has repeatedly stressed the need to define clearer boundaries for government power, strengthening protections for all market entities and building stronger systems for foreign-related legal work. The recent publication of the newly revised Study Outline of Xi Jinping Thought on the Rule of Law and Volume I of the Selected Works on the Rule of Law by Xi Jinping provides authoritative guidance for advancing this cause.

Under the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee, China will continue to consolidate the power of the rule of law, modernize its governance system and capacity, and ensure that the country’s modernization proceeds steadily, confidently and on a solid legal foundation. – Xinhua



Wang Yifang (right), project manager and spokesperson of the Jiangmen Underground Neutrino Observatory (JUNO), briefs visitors about the project in Jiangmen, Guangdong Province, on Tuesday. The world’s largest transparent spherical neutrino detector reported its first achievement yesterday, marking a major step of its decade-long construction. Using 59 days of effective data after the start of operation on August 26 this year, JUNO has already measured two of the solar neutrino oscillation parameters with a factor of 1.5 to 1.8 better precision than previous experiments, Wang pointed out. – Xinhua

China becomes Germany’s top trading partner in first 3 quarters

BERLIN – China reclaimed its position as Germany’s largest trading partner in the first nine months of 2025, according to data from the Federal Statistical Office (Destatis) released yesterday.

Germany’s total trade with China reached 185.9 billion euros (US\$215.13 billion) from January to September, up 0.6 percent from the same period last year, Destatis said.

It noted that Germany imported 124.5 billion euros worth of goods from China during the period, up 8.5 percent from a year earlier, driven mainly by electrical equipment, clothing and machinery.

Meanwhile, German exports to China fell 12.3 percent to 61.4

billion euros over the same period, it said.

It added that German trade with the United States declined 3.9 percent to 184.7 billion euros in the first three quarters of the year. While exports to the United States fell 7.8 percent to 112.7 billion euros, imports rose 2.8 percent to 71.9 billion euros.

Destatis attributed the changes to weak global demand, a complex trade environment and adjustments in traditional German industries, such as automobiles.

According to the organization, China had been Germany’s largest trading partner from 2016 to 2023 before being briefly overtaken by the United States in 2024. – Xinhua

Int'l community must resolutely thwart any attempt to revive militarism: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – A foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday that the international community must stay highly vigilant and resolutely thwart any attempt to revive militarism, in response to a related query about the recent blatant remarks by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi regarding Taiwan.

Analysts have pointed out that among all the prime ministers of Japan, Takaichi was the first to clearly state a “Taiwan contingency” could constitute a “survival-threatening situation” for Japan. In such an event, Japan

may invoke the so-called right to collective self-defense to interfere militarily in the Taiwan Strait.

Spokesperson Mao Ning said the right of collective self-defense set forth in the UN Charter is created to safeguard the collective security of the international community and prevent the revival of fascist forces. Japan has been restricted from exercising this right since the end of World War II.

Mao told a daily press briefing that a review of history shows that launching

aggression against other countries under the pretext of so-called “survival-threatening situation” and “self-defense” has always been a convenient tactic of Japanese militarism.

She went on to point out in 1931, Japan called whether it could seize “Manchuria” as “survival-threatening,” and used that as a pretext to carry out the September 18th Incident and invaded and occupied Northeast China. Japan later claimed that to defend “the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” was an existential battle for Japan, enlarging its

war of aggression to the entire Asia. Whether to attack Pearl Harbor was also deemed as “survival-threatening” to Japan, which ignited the Pacific War.

On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, the international community must guard against and firmly thwart any attempt of reviving militarism, and jointly safeguard the post-war international order and world peace, Mao added. – *Xinhua*

China-Russia Years of Culture warm hearts across borders

Feature by Xinhua writers Zhang Chaoqun, He Yiran, Zhao Yilin

MOSCOW – Amid the melodious tunes played by the balalaika and pipa at the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, the 2024-2025 China-Russia Years of Culture have drawn to a graceful close, highlighting growing cultural ties between the two nations.

The program featured more than 400 cultural events in both countries, “vividly showcasing the depth and vitality of our cultural cooperation,” said Zhanna Alexeyeva, Russia's state secretary and deputy minister of culture, at the closing ceremony on Monday.

In early 2025, Moscow hosted the “Chinese New Year in Moscow” festival at Manezhnaya Square, followed by Chinese-themed events at two dozen venues across the capital. Participation reached about 1.5 million, doubling last year's number. In addition, a Chinese New Year-themed metro train marked the celebration of the Spring Festival.

Joint concerts, exhibitions and youth programs boosted mutual understanding. Chinese and Russian orchestras performed classical works from both nations to enthusiastic audience responses.

“We hope to see more Chinese and Russian ensembles onstage and performing for wider audiences,” said Luan Dong, head of the Chinese Orchestra at the China National Opera and Dance Drama Theater.

Film cooperation also surged. The co-produced movie “Red Silk,” shot in both countries, was released in Russia in February and in China in September. It resonated strongly with viewers and helped strengthen cultural bonds.

The 2025 China Film Festival was held in major Russian cities, including Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kazan, while the 2025 Russia Film Festival took place in Beijing and two other Chinese provincial capitals, Xining and Lanzhou.

A series of joint exhibitions and performances were staged during the closing events of the Years of Culture.

An art exhibition titled “From Beijing to Moscow: Dialogue of Cultures” opened at the State Tretyakov Gallery on Monday. Visitors wandered slowly through the halls to examine 14th- to 19th-century Chinese paintings and calligraphy from the collection of the National Museum of China.

Earlier this year, the National Museum of China launched “Ilya

Repin: Encyclopedia of Russian Life,” an exhibition that offered Chinese audiences a comprehensive insight into Russian artistic traditions and social history, further enriching cultural dialogue between the two countries.

Zheng Yan, curator of both exhibitions, said the exhibitions aimed to deepen mutual understanding and help people in both nations gain a better understanding of each other's culture.

Exchanges between Chinese and Russian stage artists were equally remarkable.

In April, the Chinese original dance drama “Wing Chun” was staged at Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre. The harmonious blend of Chinese kung fu and dance won prolonged applause from Russian audiences.

Russia's BRICS TV reported that “Wing Chun” touched the in-person audience with its dynamic rhythm and delicate, heartfelt emotional expression. “Through this work, Russian viewers gained a deeper understanding of Wing Chun, a school of traditional Chinese martial arts with unique charm,” it said.

Meanwhile, a selection of classic Russian works has been staged in China: Ballets such as “Swan Lake,” “Sleeping Beauty,” and “The Nutcracker” have brought authentic “Russian-style aesthetics” to Chinese audiences. Meanwhile, stage plays and musicals adapted from classic literary works like “Anna Karenina” and “War and Peace” have offered a fresh and engaging experience.

Wang Ning, president of China's National Center for the Performing Arts, noted that the arrival of numerous high-caliber Russian art troupes for performances in China not only shares the essence of Russian culture with Chinese audiences but also provides Russian artists with opportunities to experience and understand China.

Alexander Ryzhinskii, rector of the Gnessin Russian Academy of Music, said both countries boast a long history and brilliant culture. Artistic exchanges, through sensory pleasures such as visual and auditory experiences, deepen mutual understanding of each other's cultures and foster closer bonds between both peoples.

“Cultural exchanges help bridge the distance between people's hearts, and cultural cooperation serves as the foundation for mutual understanding,” said 90-year-old Galina Kulikova, first deputy chairperson of the Russia-China Friendship Association. – *Xinhua*



A Long March-2C carrier rocket carrying three new satellites blasts off from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center yesterday. The rocket blasted off at 12:01 p.m. and sent the Shijian-30A, Shijian-30B, and Shijian-30C into the preset orbits. These satellites will be mainly used for space environment exploration and related technology verification.

– *Xinhua*

Global mayors discuss urban governance in Nanjing

NANJING – A forum bringing together mayors and mayoral representatives from 10 countries opened yesterday in Nanjing, the capital of eastern China's economic powerhouse province of Jiangsu.

Themed “Flowing Rivers, Converging Future,” the Global Mayors Dialogue in Nanjing focuses on sharing urban governance experience and exploring future trends in urban development, offering insights to advance sustainable development among global waterfront cities.

Delegates from countries including Brunei, Egypt, Germany, Malaysia and China are set to engage in a series of dialogues on detailed topics such as cultural heritage protection, green ecological development and smart-city construction.

During the three-day event, they are also scheduled to visit campuses, scenic areas along the Yangtze River, and historic and cultural sites to learn about Nanjing's experience in ecological

protection, urban renewal, culture and modern development.

After touring Nanjing's city wall, which has a history of over 600 years, Gan Tian Loo, chairman of the working committee for the historic urban area of Malaysia's Malacca, expressed his admiration for the wisdom of ancient Chinese people.

“Nanjing boasts rich historical and cultural heritage, alongside a vibrant modern cultural and artistic vibe, making it an increasingly attractive destination for Malaysian youth,” Gan said. He added that he looks forward to strengthening cooperation on tourism, the economy, trade and education between Malacca and Nanjing.

Li Zhongjun, acting mayor of Nanjing, said the dialogue aims to share Chinese practices to address development challenges in urban governance. He noted that the city will also enhance its exchange with other cities, and strengthen sci-tech, economic and trade cooperation. – *Xinhua*

China urges US to act for peace, stability in Latin America and Caribbean region

BEIJING – China urged the United States to choose the course of action that is conducive to peace and stability in Latin America and the Caribbean region, foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said yesterday.

According to media reports, US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth unveiled Operation Southern Spear that aims to remove “narcoterrorists” from the Western Hemisphere. The US State Department this week announced to designate Cartel de los Soles “headed by Nicolás Maduro” as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, effective Nov. 24, 2025. The United States also said it would not rule out sending US troops into Venezuela.

In response, Mao told a regular press briefing

that China firmly supports the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace released by the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States in 2014.

China opposes any moves that violate the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and other countries' sovereignty and security, and the interference of external forces in Venezuela's internal affairs under any pretext, Mao noted.

“We hope the US will engage in normal law enforcement and judicial cooperation through bilateral and multilateral legal frameworks, and choose the course of action that is conducive to peace and stability in Latin America and the Caribbean region,” said the spokesperson. – *Xinhua*

Myanmar junta says raided online scam centre, arrested over 300

YANGON – Myanmar's military said yesterday it raided an internet scam hub on the Thai border, arresting nearly 350 people, part of a highly publicised crackdown against the booming black market compounds.

Sprawling fraud factories have ballooned in war-torn Myanmar's border regions, housing scammers targeting internet users with romance and business cons worth tens of billions of dollars annually.

Myanmar's junta has long been accused of turning a blind eye but has trumpeted a crackdown since February after being lobbied by key military backer China, experts say.

Additional raids beginning last month were part of a propaganda effort, according to some monitors, choreographed to vent pressure from Beijing without too badly denting profits that enrich the junta's militia allies.

Myanmar's military descended on gambling and fraud hub Shwe Kokko on Tuesday morning, according to state media The Global New Light of Myanmar.

"During the operation, 346 foreign nationals currently under scrutiny were arrested," it said.

"Nearly ten thousand mobile phones used in online gambling

operations were also seized."

Since a 2021 coup sparked a civil war, Myanmar's loosely governed borderlands have proven fertile ground for scam hubs which analysts say are staffed by thousands of willing workers as well as people trafficked from abroad.

But the junta's military backer China has been increasingly irked at the number of its citizens who are both perpetrators and victims of the scams, experts say.

The junta yesterday blamed armed opposition groups for allowing scam centres to operate under their protection, but said it had taken action

after wresting back territorial control.

The Global New Light of Myanmar said the Yatai firm of Chinese-Cambodian alleged racketeer She Zhijiang was "the entity involved" in running the Shwe Kokko area.

She was arrested in Thailand in 2022 and extradited last week to China where he faces allegations of involvement in online gambling and fraud operations.

She and his company Yatai were previously under British and US sanctions.

Washington says he transformed a village on the Myanmar-Thai border into Shwe Kokko – "a resort

city custom built for gambling, drug trafficking, prostitution, and scams targeting people around the world".

In October, Myanmar's junta announced raids on nearby scam centre KK Park, where it says it is currently demolishing more than 600 buildings.

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

Scam victims in Southeast and East Asia alone were conned out of up to US\$37 billion in 2023, according to a UN report, which said global losses were likely "much larger". – AFP

Shipwreck migrants face charges in Malaysian court

KUALA LUMPUR – Eleven survivors of a deadly boat capsized two weeks ago appeared in a Malaysian court yesterday, charged with illegally being in the Southeast Asian country, officials said.

The accused – nine Myanmar nationals and two Bangladeshi citizens – were among 14 people rescued after the November 6 shipwreck off a Thai island near the Malaysian maritime border.

They are said to be from a group of around 70 undocumented migrants, mostly from Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya community,

who were trying to reach Malaysia when their vessel overturned.

A charge sheet seen by AFP said the group, aged between 17 and 43, was accused of entering the country around the Malaysian island resort of Langkawi "without valid passes".

Langkawi police chief Khairul Azhar Nuruddin told AFP the charges were read in court "but they [the suspects] did not understand".

The case was postponed to December 21 in order for interpreters to be arranged, Khairul said.

If convicted, offenders faced a fine of up to US\$2,400 or five

years' imprisonment, or both, and up to six strokes of the cane.

At least 36 people died in the sinking with rescue authorities calling off a search for survivors on Monday.

Relatively affluent Malaysia is home to millions of migrants from poorer parts of Asia, many of them undocumented, working in industries including construction and agriculture.

But sea crossings, facilitated by human trafficking syndicates, are hazardous and often lead to overloaded boats capsizing. – AFP

Illegal crypto mining drained US\$1 billion of Malaysian power: ministry

KUALA LUMPUR – Malaysia's electricity utility lost US\$1.1 billion worth of power to illegal cryptocurrency mining since 2020 in thefts the energy ministry said posed a "serious threat to the national energy supply system".

National power provider Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB) also uncovered 13,827 premises that were suspected of being illegal cryptocurrency mining hubs, the ministry said in a parliamentary reply tabled on Tuesday.

"These activities not only threaten

user safety, but also jeopardise the nation's economic stability, increase public safety risks... and pose a serious threat to the national energy supply system," it said.

Cryptocurrency mining is not illegal in Malaysia but operators must comply with government regulations, including registration, environmental assessments and energy efficiency audits.

TNB has set up a database with records of owners and tenants suspected of stealing electricity to power bitcoin mining operations,

the ministry said, and was working with law enforcement authorities to curb illegal mining.

Malaysian police are also ramping up operations against illegal mining, with several raids carried out on suspected dens across the Southeast Asian country since January.

Police arrested eight men in northern Malaysia two weeks ago, seizing bitcoin machines and four-wheel drive vehicles as part of the blitz targeting illegal cryptocurrency mining, the Bernama national news agency said. – AFP

Philippines, Palestine mark first ministerial visit

MANILA – Philippine Foreign Secretary Ma. Theresa Lazaro on Tuesday welcomed Palestinian Foreign Minister Varsen Aghabekian Shahin here, marking the first visit by a Palestinian foreign minister since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1989.

Lazaro said the historic visit reflects a "growing partnership" and a shared commitment to deepen cooperation across multiple sectors.

During bilateral talks, the two officials agreed it was "high time" for the Philippines and Palestine to pursue more practical cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

Earlier in the day, both sides signed a Memorandum of Understanding

on Political Consultations, creating a structured mechanism for regular dialogue.

Lazaro added that the Philippines is ready to provide technical and capacity-building assistance to Palestine, particularly in technical and vocational education and training.

Shahin, meanwhile, updated Lazaro on developments in the Gaza peace process.

Lazaro reaffirmed the Philippines' "unwavering and unequivocal" support for a two-state solution, calling it the only viable path to lasting peace and stability in the Middle East.

Shahin is on an official visit to the Philippines from Sunday to tomorrow. – Xinhua



A man sells toys as Balinese people enjoy their meal after praying as they celebrate the religious festival of Galungan at Jagatnatha temple in Denpasar, on the Indonesian resort island of Bali yesterday. Balinese Hindu adherents celebrate Galungan Day or the Earth's celebration to thank God for the creation of the Earth and its contents.

– AFP

Indonesia raises alert level as volcano near Bali erupts

SURABAYA – A volcano on Indonesia's main island of Java erupted yesterday, throwing ash and gas kilometres into the sky and forcing officials to raise the alert status to its highest level.

Mount Semeru in eastern Java, about 310 kilometres west of the tourist hotspot of Bali, erupted at 2:13 p.m. local time, spewing what are known as pyroclastic flows, Indonesian geological agency head Muhammad Wafid said.

"The public is advised not to engage in activities within an 8

kilometre radius of the crater or peak of Mount Semeru due to the risk of being struck by ejected rocks," he said in a statement.

The national disaster agency said the plume of ash had risen as far as 13 kilometres into the air.

Its spokesman Abdul Muhari said at least 300 villagers living near the volcano have been evacuated to two temporary shelters. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

The geological agency also said that seismic activity at Mount Semeru remained high.

Authorities at Ngurah Rai airport in Bali said flight schedules were operating as usual so far.

An eruption by Semeru in 2021 killed more than 50 people and damaged more than 5,000 homes, forcing almost 10,000 people to seek refuge.

Indonesia sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", where the meeting of continental plates causes substantial volcanic and seismic activity.

The Southeast Asian archipelago has nearly 130 active volcanoes.

– AFP



Miss Philippines Ahtisa Manalo walks on stage during the 2025 Miss Universe national costume presentation in Nonthaburi, north of Bangkok, yesterday. – AFP

NZ smoking rate drops to 6.8 pct: survey

WELLINGTON – New Zealand’s daily smoking rate has fallen to 6.8 percent, slightly down from 6.9 percent in the previous year, reflecting significant progress over recent years, according to the latest New Zealand Health Survey released yesterday.

The 2024/25 survey, whose data collection was completed between July 2024 and July 2025, has found 6.8 percent of New Zealand adults were daily smokers, down significantly from 16.4 percent in the 2011/12 survey.

“The number of daily smokers has nearly halved since 2011/12, and New Zealand now has around 278,000 fewer daily smokers,” the survey said.

The latest data highlights a significant decline in second-hand smoke exposure, with 1.3 percent of children exposed to second-hand smoke inside the home in 2024/25,

down from 3.3 percent in 2015/16.

Youth smoking rates have declined over time, the survey said, adding the daily smoking rate for young people aged 15-24 is now 3.2 percent, down from 19.2 percent when the survey began 13 years ago.

However, the prevalence of daily vaping has increased markedly, reaching 11.7 percent in 2024/25 compared to just 0.9 percent in 2015/16, statistics show.

Work continues towards achieving the Smokefree 2025 goal by ensuring smokers have practical tools and supports to quit smoking, including being able to access less harmful alternatives like vapes, according to the survey.

Associate Health Minister Casey Costello said the challenge now is helping older, long-term smokers to quit. – *Xinhua*

Japanese court orders Cloudflare to pay US\$3.2 million over manga piracy

TOKYO - Tokyo’s district court yesterday ordered Cloudflare to pay US\$3.2 million to major Japanese publishers after the US firm was accused of hosting servers for manga piracy sites.

Piracy is a long-running problem for Japan’s internationally renowned manga industry, with publishers saying they lose millions in revenue as a result.

Four major publishing firms - Kodansha, Shueisha, Shogakukan and Kadokawa -- accused Cloudflare of copyright infringement for its role in hosting sites that distribute pirated copies of manga titles.

The companies filed a suit in Tokyo in 2022.

“The court ruling orders [Cloudflare] to pay a total of 500 million yen,” they said in a joint statement,

calling the decision “significant”.

Cloudflare provided a server for “two massive manga piracy sites that distribute over 4,000 manga titles without permission and rack up 300 million views a month”, the publishers said.

Piracy sites, where copies of graphic novels are distributed for free, have long tormented publishers of manga epics such as “One Piece” and “Attack on Titan”, with losses estimated at millions of dollars in Japan alone.

The four publishers have requested Cloudflare to stop providing its services for a piracy site before, and they reached a settlement in 2019.

But the US firm continued to provide servers for piracy sites, they said.

Cloudflare plans to appeal, according to Japanese media. – *AFP*

Vietnamese beauty queen jailed for fibre gummy fraud

HANOI – A court in Vietnam sentenced a former beauty queen to two years in jail yesterday for falsely promoting gummies as rich in fibre on her social media channels, state media reported.

The judges found Nguyen Thuc Thuy Tien guilty of deceiving customers, saying she was aware the fibre content of the candy was low at just 0.935 percent, VnExpress reported.

A former winner of the Thailand-based Miss Grand International beauty competition, Tien received a certificate of merit from Vietnam’s prime minister.

She promoted Kera Supergreens Gummies along with fellow social media influencers Pham Quang Linh and Hang Du Muc, both of whom also received two-year sentences.

“They committed the offence intentionally and gained a large illicit profit, so strict punishment is necessary,” the court said of Tien

and her co-defendants, according to VnExpress.

The court said Kera Supergreens Gummies was a joint venture between Tien and a company set up by the two other influencers, with Tien holding a 30 percent stake.

Last December, Tien promoted the product with the other two as a healthy sweet containing the equivalent of a plate of vegetables per gummy.

Investigators said the gummies contained more than 30 percent sorbitol, an artificial sweetener with laxative effects, along with undisclosed additives.

The court said more than 129,000 packs had been sold to over 56,000 customers for more than US\$650,000, with the three influencers netting a US\$473,000 profit.

Tien gained popularity in Vietnam after winning the Bangkok beauty pageant in 2021 and received advertisement deals with brands. – *AFP*

Massive fire kills one, damages 170 buildings in Japan city

TOKYO – One person was killed as a major fire damaged 170 buildings in a residential area of the Japanese city of Oita, the local government said yesterday.

Firefighters were still struggling to extinguish the blaze in the southern city as it spread to a forested mountain nearby.

Footage showed firefighters hosing ferocious flames as they ripped through houses on Tuesday night, while people were taken to a makeshift evacuation centre.

“The flames rose high, turning the sky red. The wind was strong. I never thought it would spread so much,” one man in the city on the southern island of Kyushu told public broadcaster NHK.

“I was shaking with fear. I’ve never seen a pillar of fire like that,” said another man.

At least 170 buildings were damaged in the blaze which broke out late on Tuesday, with 188 people evacuated from their homes, the regional government said in a statement.

It confirmed one death without giving further details, while NHK reported that police officers searching for a missing 76-year-



Smouldering buildings are seen following an overnight fire at a residential area near the Saganoseki Fishing Port in Oita City, Japan yesterday. One person was unaccounted for while 175 others were evacuated as a major fire engulfed a residential area in Japan, the local government said yesterday. – *AFP*

old man found a body at his home.

Mayor Shinya Adachi who visited the site said “the situation may be brought under control by yesterday if the source of the fire can be put out,” according to Kyodo News.

But “it will likely take several more days for the fire to be fully extinguished,” he said.

The fire rapidly spread possibly due to little rain, dry air and congested wooden houses in the area, NHK reported. – *AFP*

Roblox game platform launches age checks for chat

SYDNEY – Gaming giant Roblox Corp says it will roll out compulsory facial recognition or ID checks from next month for players wanting to access its chat features.

It aims to stop under-nines from chatting without parental consent and to curb conversations between adults and minors online by placing users into six age bands ranging from under-nines to over 21s.

The requirement for joining chats will launch in the first week of December in Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands before expanding globally in early January, it said.

“Roblox is the first online gaming or communication platform to require facial age checks to access chat, establishing what we believe will become a new industry standard,” the California-based company said in a statement released Tuesday.

The new system will require users to take a photo of their face or use identification to verify their age.

All players can undergo age

checks now on a voluntary basis before it becomes a requirement, said Roblox, which is hugely popular with young players.

Facial age estimations will be conducted by ID verification company Persona on the Roblox app, with images and video to be deleted “immediately” after processing.

“Age checks are completely optional; however, features like chat will not be accessible unless the age check is complete,” said Roblox, whose platform allows players to create their own online gaming worlds.

Social media ban

The Roblox announcement comes weeks before Australia’s ban on under-16s joining social media such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok comes into effect on December 10.

Social media platforms that fail to take reasonable steps to detect and deactivate accounts held by under-16s may be slapped with fines of up to Aus\$49.5 million (US\$32 million).

Roblox is among several platforms, including Discord, WhatsApp and Lego Play, that have been deemed to be exempt from the Australian social media law.

But the Australian authorities have reserved the right to force excluded platforms to comply with the legislation if required.

On paper, the ban is one of the strictest in the world.

But some experts are concerned that the law will be merely symbolic because of the difficulty in implementing and policing online age verification.

Tech companies have been critical of Australia’s ban, describing it as “vague”, “problematic” and “rushed”.

New Zealand’s Prime Minister Christopher Luxon will introduce a similar bill to restrict children’s social media use.

The Dutch government advised parents this year to forbid children under 15 from using social media apps like TikTok and Snapchat.

– *AFP*

Sri Lanka records 125,000 domestic violence complaints each year

COLOMBO – Sri Lankan police receive around 125,000 complaints of domestic violence against women each year, a deputy minister told parliament yesterday.

Deputy Minister of Women and Child Affairs Namal Sudarshana told lawmakers that by the end

of September 2025, police had already recorded about 113,000 such complaints.

He said the government has taken several measures to reduce domestic violence, with a key focus on shortening the time police take to respond to these complaints.

The deputy minister added that the government has also moved to establish the National Commission on Women under the Women’s Empowerment Act, No. 37 of 2024. The act aims to safeguard women’s rights and provide effective remedies for rights violations. – *Xinhua*

The gruelling search for Gaza's dead under the rubble

GAZA CITY, Palestinian Territories – Standing beside the mound of rubble that was once his home, Ahmed Salim cannot hold back the tears as he struggles to retrieve the bodies of loved ones trapped underneath tonnes of debris.

Over 30 people were killed when his home was struck, he told AFP, among them “my wife, my children, my mother, my father”.

“I’m the only one who survived,” he told AFP, pointing to the pile of broken concrete and twisted metal that was once a five-storey building in Gaza City’s Zeitoun neighbourhood.

The building was destroyed on December 24, 2024 and he has been waiting ever since to retrieve their bodies and give them a proper burial.

“The only thing that matters to me is to be able to bury them,” the 43-year-old said.

After two years of war between Israel and Hamas that ravaged the Gaza Strip, thousands of other Palestinians are in a similar situation.

According to UN data, as of late September, the Israeli military had damaged or destroyed around 83

percent of the buildings in Gaza that stood prior the war.

The densely-populated Palestinian territory is covered in 61.5 million tonnes of debris: nearly 170 times the weight of New York City’s Empire State Building.

Mahmud Bassal, spokesman for Gaza’s civil defence agency, estimates that about 10,000 bodies are buried under the rubble.

“We cannot extract thousands of bodies without heavy machinery. We need the means to lift the roofs and the tonnes of cement,” said Bassal, whose organisation conducts search and rescue operations in Gaza.

‘Help me retrieve them’

Iyad Rayan holds out the same hope as Salim: burying his wife and children with dignity.

“My wife, my son Samir and my daughter Lana are still here under the rubble,” he told AFP by the wreckage of his Gaza City home, which he said was destroyed in early October this year.

“I want to send an appeal to the whole world: help me retrieve

them,” the 55-year-old said.

Amal Abdel Aal is waiting for heavy equipment to enter the Gaza Strip so the bodies of her son and brother can be recovered.

They have been under the rubble in the Sabra neighbourhood of Gaza City since the early days of the two-year war.

“They never leave my thoughts. My heart aches at the thought of dogs reaching their bodies and eating them,” said the 57-year-old woman now living in southern Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of people have sought shelter during the war.

“I will only find relief when I have buried them, even if only a single bone remains.”

After the ceasefire began on October 10, Israel allowed Egyptian bulldozers to enter Gaza to help recover the remains of hostages, to be returned under the US-brokered truce deal.

“The world is unfair. We see bulldozers digging to retrieve the Israeli prisoners, while no one cares about the thousands of our martyrs,” said Abdel Aal.



Flames and smoke erupt from the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted a house in the southern Lebanese village of Tair Filsay yesterday. The Israeli military launched strikes on two south Lebanon towns yesterday, saying it was targeting militant group Hezbollah after warning civilians of the impending raids. – AFP

Netanyahu visits Israeli troops beyond Syria ceasefire line

JERUSALEM – Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday told Israeli troops deployed in Syria in a buffer zone intended to separate the two countries’ forces that their presence was hugely important for safeguarding Israel.

When Syrian president Bashar al-Assad was ousted from power in December last year, Israel sent troops into the UN-patrolled buffer zone separating Israeli and Syrian forces on the Golan Heights since 1974.

Netanyahu visited a military outpost in the buffer zone and spoke with troops as he inspected the site, in a visit slammed by Syria.

“We attach immense importance to our capability here – both defensive and offensive,” Netanyahu told soldiers, in a video released by his office.

He said they were “safeguarding the State of Israel and its northern border opposite the Golan Heights”.

“This is a mission that can develop at any moment, but we are counting on you,” he added.

Damascus called the visit “a new attempt to impose a fait accompli that contradicts relevant Security Council resolutions”.

Syria “condemns in the strongest

terms the illegal visit... considering it a serious violation of Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity”, the foreign ministry said in a statement.

“Syria reiterates its firm demand that the Israeli occupation withdraw from Syrian territory and affirms that all measures the occupation has taken in southern Syria are null and void and have no legal effect according to international law,” it added.

Netanyahu was accompanied by Defence Minister Israel Katz and Foreign Minister Gideon Saar, as well as military chief Eyal Zamir, the Shin Bet security agency’s director David Zini, and Israel’s ambassador to the United States Yechiel Leiter.

Netanyahu met with regular and reserve soldiers, “observed the sector, and later held a security discussion”, his office said.

Video footage released by the Israeli government showed Netanyahu stepping out from the back of a helicopter and being shown to a waiting vehicle.

He was also seen talking to troops in a lookout position.

Sharaa’s US trip

Netanyahu’s visit came the week

after Syria’s President Ahmed al-Sharaa, once a jihadist detained in Iraq by US forces, met American President Donald Trump at the White House for unprecedented talks.

Washington – Israel’s key ally – has been pushing for a security pact to end decades of enmity between Syria and Israel, part of Trump’s goal to shore up the fragile Gaza ceasefire with a broader Middle East peace settlement.

While Syrian and Israeli officials have held repeated rounds of talks, Sharaa has ruled out the possibility of Syria joining the Abraham Accords, under which a handful of Arab countries have normalised ties with Israel.

In an interview with Fox News last week, Sharaa said Syria’s ongoing dispute with Israel over the Golan Heights would make entering peace talks difficult.

But he suggested talks facilitated by Trump and Washington could help start negotiations.

Israel captured the Golan Heights, a strategic mountain plateau, from Syria during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and later annexed it, in a move not recognised by most of the international community. – AFP

US asked Yemen to join int’l Gaza force: Yemeni officials

DUBAI – The United States has approached Yemen about joining an international force to be deployed in Gaza as part of President Donald Trump’s peace plan, five Yemeni government sources, including top officials, told AFP.

The UN greenlit Trump’s peace plan this week, but its realisation faces major hurdles, with Arab and Muslim nations hesitant to participate in an International Stabilisation Force (ISF) that could clash with Palestinian militants.

The Yemeni government is yet to make a decision, the sources, including a top Yemeni diplomat, a military official and an official from the Presidential Leadership Council, said.

They all spoke on condition

of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

A source at the presidential council and the Yemeni diplomat said any contribution to the force would be largely symbolic.

A senior military official said Yemen’s “participation in the international force has been discussed with the Americans, but we have not yet received an official request” to join the force.

Yemen’s internationally-recognised government is largely fractured and weakened.

It was kicked out of the capital Sanaa by the Iran-backed Huthi rebels in 2014, who now control most of Yemen’s population centres.

Hamas is opposed to the establishment of the force, with its Huthi ally likely to be infuriated over Yemeni participation. – AFP



A Palestinian woman hangs clothes to dry amid the ruins of a destroyed building in Gaza City on Tuesday. – AFP

Trump's embrace of crown prince ushers in new era in US-Saudi ties

David Stout and Sofiane Alsaar

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia – Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's trip to Washington has been a triumph, with Donald Trump rolling out the red carpet for "the future king" and absolving him of the criticism he has faced for years.

The heir to the Saudi throne was given a lavish welcome during his visit to the White House on Tuesday on par with what American leaders regularly receive when they visit the kingdom.

The trip marked the first visit by the prince to the US since the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents sparked global outrage and transformed the heir into a pariah.

The state visit was all the more surprising because the prince is not the kingdom's official head of state – a fact that did not stop President Donald Trump from rolling out the literal red carpet for the de facto ruler.

Here's a quick rundown of what the Saudis achieved during this trip and what it means for the future of the relationship.

What was different this time?

Despite being long-time allies, there has been unease between the Americans and Saudis for years.

US concerns over human rights

issues, memories of the September 2001 attacks carried out by mostly Saudi hijackers and fears over the kingdom's links to extremism have cast a long shadow over the partnership.

But the relationship is undergoing a striking upgrade.

On Tuesday, the heir to the Saudi throne was treated to a fly-over by military jets, an escort by an honour guard mounted on horseback and a red-carpet reception accompanied by trumpets.

There was also a candle lit, black-tie dinner on Tuesday night with the likes of footballer Cristiano Ronaldo, tech titan Elon Musk and Apple CEO Tim Cook ahead of a major Saudi-backed investment conference later this week.

There was no lecturing about human rights during this visit. Instead, Trump went on the offensive to defend Prince Mohammed when the subject of Khashoggi's murder was broached by reporters in the Oval Office.

"This lavish reception in Washington with Donald Trump definitively establishes MBS as a privileged partner of the United States and shows that the centre of gravity of the Arab world is now located in Riyadh," Karim Bitar, professor at Sciences Po in Paris, told AFP, referring to the prince by his initials.



US President Donald Trump (right) meets with Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC, on Tuesday. – AFP

But what did Riyadh actually secure?

The Saudis received US commitments on a variety of issues and a major defence deal that the kingdom has spent years lobbying for.

Deals included the future sale of the US's most advanced aircraft – the F35 stealth fighter jet – along with an agreement paving the way for a potential civil nuclear power programme in the kingdom and the naming of Saudi Arabia as a major non-NATO ally.

But beyond deals, the trip also cemented the US's backing of

Prince Mohammed following years of strained ties over the Khashoggi murder.

"The main thing Saudi Arabia gained from this was really about MBS, showing that he is an integral part of the US-Saudi relationship ahead of him becoming king," said Andrew Leber is a nonresident scholar in the Carnegie Middle East Program.

On Trump's goal of normalising ties between Riyadh and Israel, Prince Mohammed said it remained possible, but insisted a "clear path" to Palestinian statehood was needed first.

How is the trip being received back home?

Saudis were gushing over the treatment the crown prince was treated to in Washington, and headlines in the papers dripped with approval.

"Mohammed bin Salman and Trump... a partnership without limits" proclaimed one banner in the *Asharq Al Awsat* newspaper.

Broadcasters have also been airing highlights of the meeting and the embrace between Trump and the crown prince on repeat yesterday.

Saudis on social media also praised the regal reception, while others were also quick to point out that First Lady Melania Trump's evening gown matched the colour of the Saudi flag.

One social media user called the fashion diplomacy move "a smart protocol gesture" that was full of "respect" for the crown prince.

"The relationship is no longer confined to oil and security," wrote Faisal J. Abbas, the editor-in-chief of Arab News in an editorial in the Saudi daily.

"Nuclear cooperation, space exploration, artificial intelligence and advanced technologies are now on the table. This is not just a bilateral upgrade – it is a strategic leap."

– AFP

White House slams Democrats' call for US military to refuse 'illegal orders'

WASHINGTON – The White House yesterday slammed a call by six Democratic lawmakers for US military and intelligence personnel to refuse "illegal orders" from President Donald Trump's administration.

"Top Democrats openly appeal to CIA and military officials to engage in rebellion against their Commander-in-Chief. Do not underestimate how dangerously radicalized the Democrat party has become," White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller posted on X.

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth also hit back against the message, describing it on X as "Stage 4 TDS," or "Trump Derangement Syndrome" – a term used by the right to mock the president's opponents.

The group of Democratic senators and representatives – who themselves all have military or intelligence service backgrounds – said in a video posted on Tuesday on X that "this administration is pitting our uniformed military and intelligence community professionals against American citizens."

"Right now, the threats to our constitution aren't just coming

from abroad, but from right here at home," they said, adding: "You can refuse illegal orders."

They did not specify which orders they were referring to, but Trump's administration has come under fire for its employment of US forces both at home and abroad.

Inside the United States, Trump has ordered the National Guard into multiple US cities – in many cases against the wishes of local officials, who have responded with legal challenges – in a bid to bring allegedly rampant unrest under control.

And abroad, Trump has ordered strikes on a series of alleged drug-smuggling vessels in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean that have left more than 80 people dead since early September.

Experts say the strikes are illegal and amount to extrajudicial killings even if they target known traffickers.

The lawmakers in the video appeal included Senator Mark Kelly, a former member of the Navy and NASA astronaut, and Senator Elissa Slotkin, who served with the CIA in Iraq.

– AFP

Christie's suspends Paris sale of world's 'first calculator'

PARIS – Christie's said yesterday it was suspending the Paris auction of one of just a handful of examples of the world's first calculating machine, developed by French mathematician and inventor Blaise Pascal in 1642.

The auction of "La Pascaline" had been scheduled for yesterday afternoon (local time), but late on Tuesday a Paris court suspended authorisation for export – meaning buyers would not be able to take it abroad.

This example is one of only nine still existing and the only one believed to be in private hands – others are held in museums.

Christie's had dubbed the box, decorated with ebony, as "the most important scientific instrument ever offered at auction" and it had been expected to fetch 2-3 million euros.

The auction house had described the machine as "nothing less than the first attempt in history to substitute the work of a machine for that of the human mind".

It said it had halted the sale at the instructions of the piece's owner, after the Paris administrative court suspended an export authorisation in a provisional ruling.

The sale, part of an auction of the library of late collector Leon Parce, would be suspended pending the final decision by the court, Christie's said.



This photo shows La Pascaline, the world's first mechanical calculating machine invented by French polymath Blaise Pascal, displayed at the Christie's auction house in Paris, on September 11, 2025. – AFP

"Pending the final judgment, given the provisional nature of this decision and in accordance with the instructions of its client, Christie's is suspending the sale of La Pascaline," it told AFP.

Scientists and researchers had urgently appealed to the administrative court to block the potential export of the machine.

They want the instrument to be classified as a "national treasure".

The culture ministry said an export certificate had been issued in May following standard procedures.

Two experts – one from the National Centre of Arts and Crafts

(CNAM) and the other from the Louvre Museum – approved the decision, the ministry said.

Blaise Pascal was only 19 when he developed the machine to help his father, who was in charge of a court that was tasked with restoring order to tax revenue collections in northern France, Christie's said.

"To simplify these tasks, Blaise Pascal designed calculating machines that, for the first time in history, allowed for the mechanisation of mental calculation," it said.

The final court decision could take several months. – AFP

Portugal's TAP flies back into black amid Air France interest

LISBON – Air France yesterday indicated its interest in taking a stake in TAP Air Portugal, as the Portuguese carrier flew back into the black in the third quarter.

After losing money in the first half of the year, TAP reported a net profit of 125.9 million euros (US\$145 million) between July and September, as revenue rose 2.7 percent and interest costs fell.

The uptick comes after the Portuguese government announced in September it was seeking a major international airline to buy most of the 49.9 percent stake in the carrier which it plans to privatise.

Air France-KLM, Lufthansa as well as the IAG group that includes British Airways and Iberia have already expressed an interest, notably for TAP's links between Europe, Brazil and Portuguese-speaking Africa.

Yesterday, an Air France spokesman said that "Air France-KLM has submitted today to Parpublica its Expression of Interest to participate in the privatisation process of TAP, ahead of the deadline of November 22nd. It demonstrates the strong interest of Air France-KLM in this process. We look forward to the next steps."

A Lufthansa spokesperson yesterday told AFP that the German airline remains interested in a stake in TAP, without indicating if it has taken any official steps.

Lufthansa, which owns Swiss and Austrian Airlines, recently took control of Italy's ITA Airways, formerly Alitalia.

The government in Lisbon has made maintaining routes to Portuguese-speaking parts of the world a priority in any deal.

Portugal nationalised TAP



A TAP airline jet comes in to land at Humberto Delgado Airport in Lisbon yesterday. Air France-KLM, which aims to strengthen its connections to South America, officially announced yesterday its interest in the privatisation of TAP, a company coveted by other European airline groups. – AFP

as losses mounted during the COVID-19 pandemic, injecting 3.2 billion euros into the airline as part of a restructuring plan agreed with the European Commission. Five percent of the privatised stake will be reserved for TAP workers.

Over the first nine months of this year, TAP made a profit of 55.2 million euros, though that was down 35.2 percent from the same period last year.

TAP, the largest European carrier on routes linking the continent to Brazil, had turnover of 1.3 billion euros in the third quarter as it transported 4.8 million passengers, up 4.2 percent.

"It was one of the busiest summers in recent years, with increased capacity, more passengers carried, and more flights operated," said TAP CEO Luis Rodrigues in a statement.

"However, it was also one of the most challenging, marked by

persistent competitive pressures and operational disruptions," notably strikes and border control issues, but also adverse weather conditions, he added.

On Tuesday, the Portuguese judiciary carried out searches as they pursue an investigation into the previous privatisation of TAP in 2015, as well as allegations of corruption and tax fraud in the financing of Airbus aircraft purchases.

The investigation, opened in December 2022, aims to clarify the conditions under which the state sold off 61 percent of TAP's capital in 2015 to the Atlantic Gateway consortium, led by American businessman David Neeleman and his Portuguese partner Humberto Pedrosa, head of the Barraqueiro transport group.

Two companies and two individuals have been indicted, according to the public prosecutor's office. – AFP

Guinea-Bissau: coups, cashews, cocaine

Analysis

BISSAU – Portuguese-speaking Guinea-Bissau, which heads to the polls on Sunday for presidential and legislative elections, is historically one of the most unstable and coup-prone countries in the world.

The poor west African nation's chronic instability has made it vulnerable to corruption and South American drug cartels.

Coups, political instability

Located close to the tip of Africa's western bulge, the former Portuguese colony fought an 11-year armed struggle for independence that ended in 1974.

The effort was led by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC), the country's longtime ruling party which is presently out of power and barred from the upcoming election.

Guinea-Bissau has been through four successful coups since independence, the last being in 2012 as well as more than a dozen attempted, plotted or alleged coups.

The constant instability and conflict have hobbled its development.

Guinea-Bissau's last presidential election in November 2019 was followed by a political crisis, with two rivals claiming to be head of state. That only ended in April 2020 when the west African regional bloc, ECOWAS, recognised Umaro Sissoco Embaló as the winner.

Embaló, a reserve brigadier general, previously served as prime minister under his predecessor José Mário Vaz, the first head of state since multiparty elections in 1994 not to have been killed or overthrown.

Crushing poverty

Sandwiched between Senegal and Guinea, tropical Guinea-Bissau is slightly larger than Belgium and includes the Bijagós archipelago of some 88 islands scattered along its Atlantic coast.

Its population of around 2.2 million in 2025, according to World Bank figures, includes a large range of

ethnic groups, languages and religions.

Guinea-Bissau is ranked 174th out of 193 on the UN's Human Development Index.

Although extreme poverty is expected to fall in 2025, the rate is still predicted to be a staggering 41 percent.

Average life expectancy is 64 years, according to 2023 World Bank data, largely as a result of poor healthcare services.

Cocaine, corruption

Poverty and chaotic administration have made the country a fertile ground for Latin American drug lords smuggling cocaine to Europe.

Malam Bacai Sanhá Jr, the son of a former Bissau-Guinean president, last year was sentenced to jail in the United States for involvement in a transnational heroin trafficking conspiracy.

Sanha hoped the trafficking proceeds would enable him to finance a coup aimed at installing him as president, according to US authorities.

Five Latin Americans were arrested in the capital Bissau in September 2024 with 2.6 tonnes of cocaine on an aircraft coming from Venezuela. Four were subsequently handed over to the United States, with one dying in custody.

Guinea-Bissau is also among several west African nations grappling with the spread of kush, a cheap and highly addictive drug which has ravaged the region's disaffected youth.

The country was ranked 158th out of 180 countries by Transparency International in 2024 for perceived levels of corruption.

Cash for cashews

Agriculture is the main economic driver of Guinea-Bissau, one of the biggest cashew nut producers in the world.

The crop dominates the country's economy, with cashews accounting for more than 80 percent of its exports, according to the World Bank.

The economy has expanded robustly in recent years, with growth projected at 5.1 percent in 2025, up from 4.8 percent in 2024, according to the lender. – AFP

Lula back in Belém to press for climate deal

BELÉM – Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva arrived in Belém yesterday to press negotiators to reach an early deal at UN climate talks as nations remain far apart on contentious issues.

COP30 host Brazil released a draft pact on Tuesday, hoping to get nations to agree on the most contentious points as soon as yesterday, two days before the conference is scheduled to end in the Amazonian city.

Lula flew in to bring the weight of the presidency to the talks, in a rare late-stage visit by a head of state or government at the annual gathering.

The Brazilian president has invested a lot of political capital to achieve success in what he has promised would be a "COP of truth" and a victory against climate deniers.

Lula was due to meet with representatives of emerging countries, European countries, island states, indigenous groups and civil society.

The head of COP30, Brazilian diplomat André Correa do Lago, has pressed negotiators to work around the clock in an effort to bridge

divisions between the world's wealthiest nations, developing countries and oil-rich states.

The disagreements centre on the impact of trade measures, language on transitioning away from fossil fuels, and demands for developed countries to provide more climate finance to poorer nations.

French ecological transition minister Monique Barbut knocked back Brazilian hopes of securing a deal as soon as yesterday.

"No, there will not be a COP decision today. I don't see how that could happen," Barbut told AFP yesterday.

"However, yes, there is a little bit of movement. But we are still far from the mark because for us, it must be a comprehensive package," Barbut said after a coordination meeting with European colleagues.

She added, however, that she was "more optimistic" than she was the day before.

No more money

The draft underscores the gulf between a broad coalition – led by

Europe and island states – pushing for a "roadmap" on phasing out fossil fuels, and an opposing bloc led by oil-producing countries.

"Whether we're going to call it the roadmap or we're going to use a different wording, I think is secondary. But once again, we very much like the idea," EU climate commissioner Wopke Hoekstra said at a news conference.

Negotiators are also at loggerheads over pressure from the developing world for developed countries to provide more finance to help vulnerable nations adapt to climate change and deploy renewable energy.

The EU, where many countries are facing economic headwinds and soaring debt, has led opposition to those demands.

"We're not looking at any increases in adaptation finance," Irish climate minister Darragh O'Brien said.

A new text was due to be published yesterday.

COP30 is due to end tomorrow, but climate summits regularly run into overtime. – AFP

White rhino born at Spanish zoo in conservation success

VALENCIA, SPAIN A southern white rhino calf has been born at a zoo in eastern Spain, in a success for a European programme aimed at preserving the threatened species.

After a 491-day pregnancy, mother Kwanza gave birth to the male calf in early November, the Bioparc Valencia zoo said.

The zoo released a video showing the birth and the jubilant reactions of caretakers who had long awaited the event.

"We are very happy because we tried both artificial insemination and natural breeding, and finally we succeeded," the zoo's technical director for animals, Loles Carbonell, said in the video, without explaining how the conception occurred.

It is the first birth of a southern white rhino at the zoo since it opened nearly 18 years ago.

The conception of the rhino was

part of the European Endangered Species Programme, which aims to conserve populations of endangered species kept in European zoos, helping to ensure their long-term survival.

"This birth is very important for the international conservation programme, as this is a highly threatened species," said Raul Olmo, a member of the zoo's animal care team.

The calf, dark in colour with pointed ears, will be named through a public vote from a list of options proposed by the caretakers.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature currently classifies southern white rhinos, which are prized by poachers for their horns, as "near threatened".

The species is found almost exclusively in southern Africa. Females give birth to one calf roughly every 3-4 years. – AFP

Football shorts

Real's Militao suffers groin injury



MADRID – Real Madrid's Brazil defender Eder Militao has suffered a groin injury, the Spanish giants confirmed yesterday, without specifying how long he would be sidelined.

"Following tests carried out today (yesterday) by Real Madrid's medical team, our player Eder Militao has been diagnosed with a muscle injury" to his groin, the club said in a statement.

The Brazilian felt a sharp pain in the 58th minute of Tuesday's international friendly against Tunisia in Lille, which ended 1-1, prompting him to ask to come off.

Spanish media have reported the centre-back will be out for around two weeks, meaning he would miss Sunday's La Liga clash with Elche and next week's trip to Girona, as well as next Wednesday's Champions League tie away to Olympiacos. – AFP

Norway's Schjelderup sentenced for sharing sex video of minor

COPENHAGEN – Benfica's Norwegian forward Andreas Schjelderup was handed a 14-day suspended sentence in Denmark yesterday for sharing a video of a sexual nature involving minors, Norwegian media reported.

Schjelderup admitted sharing the 27-second video on Snapchat.

Danish prosecutors had called for the 21-year-old to serve 20 days behind bars as part of a deal for pleading guilty, but the Copenhagen court gave him a 14-day suspended sentence and a year's probation.

"You're getting a yellow card," judge Mathias Eike said as he read out the verdict, according to Norwegian daily *Verdens Gang* (VG).

The incident took place two years ago when Schjelderup played for Danish club Nordsjaelland.

During proceedings yesterday, Schjelderup admitted sharing the video as "a bad joke" with four friends on Snapchat, *VG* said.

The striker apologised on November 8 in a post to Instagram, admitting to having made a "stupid mistake".

He said he deleted the clip shortly after sending it, when a friend pointed out that it contained illicit content.

Schjelderup played in Norway's World Cup qualifier against Estonia on November 13 but warmed the bench on Sunday against Italy, when the country secured their first qualification for the global football showpiece in 28 years.

The Norwegian football association has not imposed any additional sanctions on the player.

– AFP



John Weaver

LONDON - Bleary-eyed Scotland fans woke up yesterday pinching themselves after their World Cup dream finally came true on a night of intense drama in Glasgow following decades of pain.

The Scots have not played at the finals since 1998 - missing six straight tournaments - but they will be packing their bags for North America next year.

Supporters at Hampden Park on Tuesday were taken on an emotional rollercoaster ride in their 4-2 win against Denmark, pegged back twice before sealing victory in the dying minutes.

Midfielder Scott McTominay scored a breathtaking early overhead goal, only for Rasmus Hojlund to level from the penalty spot.

Lawrence Shankland then restored the home side's lead in the 78th minute but the Danes, who only needed a draw to secure automatic qualification for the World Cup, equalised again.

As the clock ticked down it appeared Scotland were heading for the play-offs.

However, they had other ideas. First Kieran Tierney coolly swept the ball home from 25 yards before Kenny McLean scored an astonishing goal from the halfway line, sparking scenes of unbridled joy.

It left Scotland top of Group C and heading to the World Cup in Canada, Mexico and the United States, while Denmark now face the lottery of the play-offs.

Manager Steve Clarke, 62, who has guided Scotland to two European Championships since taking over in 2019, said: "Tonight, it feels pretty special.

"This is the best feeling, I've waited a long time. I've spoken before about how much I want to go to a World Cup with my country.

"I had a chance as player, but it passed me by for various reasons."

Former tennis world number one Andy Murray tweeted: "Yessssssssssssssssss! Never in doubt Scotland - North America here we come".

Scotland's First Minister John Swinney, who was at Hampden, tweeted: "Such a joy to watch such an amazing, spirited performance."

Scotland parties after ending World Cup drought



Scotland's midfielder Scott McTominay scores the opening goal with this overhead kick during the FIFA World Cup 2026 European qualification football match against Denmark at Hampden Park in Glasgow on Tuesday. – AFP

Rollercoaster ride

Scotland only had a chance to seal automatic qualification thanks to Denmark's shock 2-2 draw at home to bottom side Belarus on Saturday, with Clarke's men losing 3-2 in Greece on the same night.

The manager's joy on Tuesday was in stark contrast to his mood last month after his side laboured to an unconvincing 2-1 win against Belarus, when he said it was the most disappointed he had been since taking charge.

Scotland midfielder John McGinn, even in the warm glow of victory against Denmark, admitted the team had underperformed.

"I thought we were pretty rubbish to be honest, but who cares?" he said. "To get over the line was such an amazing feeling. The gaffer's team talk was exceptional."

Scotland fan Lewis Connolly, an 18-year-old army recruit, told AFP the feeling was "unreal".

"This just means so much to my country, you know? Years in the making. We're all here tonight. I think it's just amazing. It's amazing what our country's done, to get this far."

Nick, a 40-year-old chef, who did not give his surname, said he was pleading with the referee to give enough time for Scotland's dramatic fourth goal to hit the back of the net.

"I was calling for the whistle, saw it, I was like, 'No, don't blow the whistle! Don't blow the whistle!' In it went, 4-2 -- what more can you say? We're going, we're there - USA, here we come."

Scotland's next challenge will be progressing beyond the group stage at the World Cup - something they have never managed.

But for now they can bask in their triumph as they contemplate a return to football's biggest stage.

– AFP

UEFA approves Barcelona's Camp Nou return in Champions League



BARCELONA - UEFA has given Barcelona the go-ahead to play Champions League matches at their partially rebuilt Camp Nou stadium, the La Liga giants said yesterday.

The news comes just a couple of days after Barca announced their long-awaited return to league action at the stadium, which had been beset by construction chaos, after more than two years in exile.

The Spanish champions will host Eintracht Frankfurt at the Camp Nou on December 9, just over two weeks after reinaugurating the stadium against Athletic Bilbao in domestic action on November 22.

Barcelona said in a statement that "UEFA accepted the request, considering that all the necessary requirements have been met."

The Camp Nou return will end a messy saga in which Barcelona repeatedly had to postpone their announced reopening of the stadium as construction delays and a failure to secure safety licences curtailed their plans.

The Catalans were humiliatingly forced to play two matches at their 6,000-capacity Johan Cruyff training ground stadium in the first weeks of the season after failing to get the permit they needed for Camp Nou, because of safety reasons.

They have since then been playing in the 55,000-seater Olympic stadium on Montjuic hill.

Barcelona will open the Camp Nou against Bilbao with a temporary capacity of 45,401 spectators, with space for 105,000 when the top tier is eventually completed.

They opened the stadium up for 23,000 fans to watch a training session earlier in November as a test event in the reopening process.

The delay in the work represents a huge financial loss for the club, which needs the revenue generated by its stadium to regain stability.

Financially troubled Barcelona are estimated to be spending 1.5 billion euros (US\$1.74bn) on the rebuild.

– AFP

Block out boos and think of World Cup, urges S Korea's Lee

Football

SEOUL – South Korea's Lee Kang-in urged his team-mates to ignore the critics and focus on the World Cup after fans booed during their underwhelming 1-0 friendly win over Ghana.

The Koreans scraped the victory on Tuesday to round off a year that saw them qualify for an 11th straight World Cup but fail to sparkle on the pitch.

Hong Myung-bo's side were hammered 5-0 by Brazil in a home friendly last month in front of 63,000 spectators before beating Paraguay and Bolivia in performances that left fans distinctly unimpressed.

In contrast, only 33,256 showed up against Ghana and many of them jeered Hong.

Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Lee acknowledged that the Koreans were not at their best but called on his team-mates to keep believing in what they were doing.

"There are all sorts of perspectives among football fans and even among us players, the way we watch and understand the game differs, so I think it's only natural for those opinions to come up," said the 24-year-old.

"But rather than paying attention to that, our players and the coaching staff focus on what the team needs to perform at its best and produce the best possible results."

Lee Tae-seok headed the winner in the 63rd minute before Wolves forward Hwang Hee-chan missed a penalty around 10 minutes later.

Fans cheered when captain Son Heung-min was shown on the big screen but showed their displeasure towards the coach.

"Of course it would be ideal if we could deliver a style of play that satisfies everyone, and we will work towards that," said Lee Kang-in.

"But as we prepare for the World Cup, our priority has to be playing in a way that benefits the team, supporting one another, and focusing on what helps us function as a team."

Hong was not impressed with the performance, saying he did not "think the first half went smoothly".

"We had some problems with our play in midfield and early phases of play did not go the way we wanted," said the coach.

"But we made adjustments, changed some players, and our substitutes performed better."

– AFP



National Games round up

Discus world champion Feng Bin retains title

GUANGZHOU – World champion Feng Bin successfully defended her title at the 15th National Games, throwing 65.46m in her fourth attempt to secure the women's discus gold here yesterday.

Representing Shandong, Feng delivered a dominant victory. Henan's Wang Fang threw a personal best of 62.30m to take silver, while Feng's teammate Jiang Zhichao rounded out the podium in third place.

Feng had clinched the gold at the previous National Games in Shaanxi Province in 2021. The 31-year-old achieved her personal best of 69.12m at the 2022 World Athletics Championships in Eugene, United States and took an Olympic silver medal at Paris 2024.

– Xinhua

Shandong claims women's table tennis team title

MACAO – Shandong defeated Hebei 3-2 to clinch the women's table tennis team title in the best-of-five final series at the 15th National Games here last night.

At Macao's Galaxy Arena, Chen Meng and Wang Xiaotong of Shandong swept Hebei pair He Zhuojia and Wang Tianyi 11-8, 11-7, 11-5 in the opening doubles match. World No. 1 Sun Yingsha of Hebei then beat Shandong's Fan Siqui 11-5, 11-9, 10-12, 11-5 to tie the series.

Although Chen beat Wang Tianyi in the third match 11-8, 11-7, 11-6, Sun took floor again to

dominate Wang Xiaotong 11-2, 11-4, 11-7.

In the decisive fifth match, Hebei's He won her first two games 11-6, 11-4, but Fan bounced back to take the following three games 11-6, 11-7, 11-6 to grab the win.

Earlier in the day, Shanghai cruised past Heilongjiang 3-0 to take bronze in the same event.

The Games' men's table tennis team title will be decided today.

– Xinhua

16-year-old Chen Yujie claims 200m title

GUANGZHOU – Chen Yujie, 16, won the women's 200m gold medal in 23.02 seconds at the 15th National Games here yesterday, two days after having won the 100m title.

Representing Zhejiang, Chen had won the 100m in a new Asian U20 record of 11.10 seconds. Her victory in the 200m marked the fastest winning time in the event since the 9th National Games.

"I didn't know that," she said when informed of the milestone. "But I believe there will be even faster finish in the future."

"I've been focusing more on the 100m, so my condition for the 200m wasn't fully there. The 200m result is a satisfying one for me, though it's not my personal best," said Chen.

Asked how she held off a fierce challenge in the final stretch, Chen credited the presence of other top runners. "I just told myself to push a little harder."

On whether she favors the 100m or 200m, Chen was non-committal. "Right now, I don't

really prefer one over the other. I'll keep working on both."

Chen admitted that even with strong expectations, she did not take victory for granted.

"I didn't think about winning both races. I knew my fitness wasn't quite ready," she said.

With the two gold medals around her neck, Chen described her National Games journey as "a satisfying conclusion." Despite her breakthrough, Chen is already looking ahead.

"I'm excited, but now it's over. I want to focus on the long term and keep training well," she said. "Staying humble and working hard. Now, it's time to look forward."

The young champion will now shift focus from the track back to the classroom.

"I'll rest a little and then return to school," Chen explained. "I have exams coming up in January next year."

– Xinhua

Jiangsu sweeps Shandong to claim women's volleyball gold

MACAO – Jiangsu claimed the women's volleyball title at the 15th National Games with a 3-0 win over Shandong yesterday.

Featuring several international players, including Zhang Changning, Wu Mengjie, and Diao Linyu, three-time finalist Jiangsu entered the final round as one of the favorites, having lost only a single set across the previous eight matches.

Both teams were tied at 4-4 in the opening set before Jiangsu took the lead with a 6-1 run and closed out the set 25-15. The second set

was even more one-sided. After a deadlock at 8-8, Jiangsu scored ten consecutive points to win it 25-13 and then took the third set 25-16.

"We performed quite well today, and we had made detailed plans for Shandong's blocking and defense," said Jiangsu head coach Shi Hairong.

Shandong head coach Wen Yuan said he was pleased with his charges' effort. "Although we lost the final, I believe we fought hard. Our overall strength just wasn't on par with Jiangsu, but we will keep pushing forward."

The bronze medal match saw Fujian edge past Shanghai 3-2. Fujian narrowly took the first two sets 29-27 and 28-26, but dipped in the third and fourth, allowing Shanghai to respond with scores of 25-15 and 25-17 to force a decider.

In a dramatic fifth set, Shanghai wasted three match points before Fujian won three points in a row to seal an 18-16 comeback victory.

"After winning the first two sets, our players became impatient, and their mindset wavered," Fujian head coach Shen Ze noted. "Fortunately, they held their nerve on several crucial points in the fifth set."

Shanghai head coach Wang Zhiteng admitted that his players felt too much pressure in the first two sets, which put them at a disadvantage.

"It's a pity that we couldn't take those key points in the fifth. We need to reflect on those matches, and I hope we can perform better at the next Games," he added.

– Xinhua

LeBron rules out 2028 Olympic return, Curry doubtful

Basketball

LOS ANGELES – LeBron James has ruled out playing in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and USA teammate Stephen Curry says he is highly unlikely to feature in the Games.

James and Curry teamed up in a star-studded USA line-up last year to win gold at the Paris Olympics, defeating hosts France in a memorable final.

But Los Angeles Lakers star James, who would be 43 by the time of the next Olympics, says there is no chance of a reunion.

Speaking on an episode of his "Mind the Game" podcast released Tuesday, basketball great James told co-host Steve Nash he planned to watch the Olympics from afar.

"You already know my answer," James told Nash when asked if there was any chance of him returning for one last Olympic hurrah.

"Don't even ask. I will be watching from Cabo... I'm done."

Golden State Warriors star Curry, who also appeared on the episode, was not as definitive but said he doubted he would be part of the US campaign.

"It is the opposite answer of what I told him last year," Curry said, referring to the conversation he had with James when he was recruited to the Paris team.

"It was like, God willing, I still have the choice and the physical option to be like, I could actually impact the team. Never say never, but I highly doubt it."

Curry was one of the stars of the victorious USA Olympic campaign last year, scoring 24 points - including a flurry of three-pointers - in the gold medal match against France.

"We can't top what we just did," James added. "We can't top that ... We literally played France in Paris in the final."

– AFP

LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers looks on against the Utah Jazz during the second quarter at Crypto.com Arena on Tuesday in Los Angeles, California.

– AFP



New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner plays a shot during the second one-day international cricket match against West Indies at McLean Park in Napier, New Zealand yesterday. Santner delivered late fireworks with the bat as New Zealand beat the West Indies by five wickets in the second one-day international yesterday to win the series. Santner smashed 34 not out off 15 balls to carry the hosts home at 248-5 with three deliveries to spare after the tourists posted 247-9.

– AFP

Daly returns as England ring changes for Argentina Test

Rugby

Julian Guyer

BAGSHOT – Elliot Daly will play his first game since breaking his arm while on British and Irish Lions duty in Australia after being named in England's side for their Autumn Nations series finale against Argentina on Sunday.

Daly is one of six changes to the starting 15 announced by coach Steve Borthwick yesterday following last week's 33-19 win over New Zealand, with the experienced back replacing injured wing Tom Roebuck.

Daly, a veteran of 73 Tests for England, broke his arm against Queensland Reds in Brisbane in July, when he was in prime form and making a case to be included in the Test side.

The 33-year-old, whose injury required the insertion of a plate containing multiple screws, has not played for Saracens or England since, but was cleared by a specialist to return to full-contact training early last week.

Borthwick has been forced to reshuffle his back line for the game against Argentina at Twickenham, with centre Ollie Lawrence, a try-scorer against New Zealand, and Tommy Freeman both sidelined by hamstring trouble.

The experienced Henry Slade takes Lawrence's place, the Exeter centre partnering Fraser Dingwall in midfield. Ben Spencer starts at scrum-half instead of the benched Alex Mitchell.

Luke Cowan-Dickie comes in for the injured Jamie George at hooker as part of a new front

row, together with Ellis Genge and Asher Opoku-Fordjour.

Argentina, who came from 21-0 down to beat Scotland 33-24 at Murrayfield last weekend, are due to name their side tomorrow.

The Pumas defeated both New Zealand and Australia in this season's Rugby Championship.

England, who twice won away to Argentina in July, are bidding to extend their winning streak to 11 games.

"Last weekend gave us plenty to build on, and now the challenge is to push our performance further," said Borthwick.

"Argentina play with emotion and physicality, and they've shown they can beat the best in world rugby this year. We know how dangerous they can be, and we are preparing for a fiercely contested Test match."

– AFP

Bollywood battles paid reviews and fake sale claims

Seema Sinha

MUMBAI – India’s US\$60-billion Bollywood industry is facing a deepening credibility crisis, as insiders warn that manipulated film reviews and inflated box office numbers are distorting public perception, ultimately hurting ticket sales.

Streaming platforms have disrupted traditional cinema but industry veterans say Bollywood’s woes are also self-inflicted – including the trend to declare a film a “hit” even before its release.

“If you don’t engage these influencers and critics, they will write bad reviews, even if the film is good,” producer-distributor Suniel Wadhwa told AFP.

“If the film is bad, they will write good things about the film, provided the producer or studio has paid them.”

Trade analyst and veteran distributor Raj Bansal said audiences have grown sceptical of early rave reviews.

“As soon as the media gives four stars, people message me saying, ‘Sir, that means the movie is not good,’” Bansal said.

“And, even if the film is good, they don’t trust it.”

That distrust is now visible at the box office.

“Regular cinema-goers wait to know the correct reports,” Bansal said.

That means ticket sales during the vital opening shows “take a major dip” as film fans wait for word of mouth or “genuine reviews” to come out, he added.

Industry insiders allege that some influencers have “rate cards”, with prices rising for films that generate low pre-release buzz.

Producers, meanwhile, are accused of bulk-buying tickets to inflate opening-week numbers.



Moviegoers queue to purchase tickets for the popular Indian Hindi-language romantic film ‘Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge’ starring Bollywood actors Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol, at the Maratha Mandir cinema in Mumbai on October 18, 2025. – AFP

“Everything is bought and manipulated,” Bansal said, referring to both reviews and social media personalities.

‘Bleak’

Sudhir Kasliwal, owner of Jaipur’s Gem Cinema, recalled seeing hundreds of online bookings for one of superstar Shah Rukh Khan’s releases, but only a fraction of the audience showed up in person.

“Producers, directors and actors themselves buy tickets... the future of Bollywood looks very bleak if this practice continues,” Kasliwal said.

“The wrong messages are conveyed to people and unless good content is produced,

things will never improve.”

Recent controversies include Bollywood A-lister Akshay Kumar’s fighter jet action movie “Skyforce”.

The film’s director denied allegations of so-called “block booking” to boost first-week numbers, but a Mumbai-based trade analyst claimed its gross was inflated from about US\$6 million to over US\$9 million.

“Online booking platforms showed full houses, but many theatres were nearly empty,” the analyst told AFP, requesting anonymity.

Bansal said that critics who refuse to play along also risk being sidelined, while those who comply “flourish”.

“Whenever I [post] that the film has opened with weak collections [ticket sales], I receive a barrage of calls from actors, producers asking me to remove it,” he said.

‘Appetite to buy’

Producer-distributor Wadhwa said that the box office collection of the 2025 romantic comedy horror “Thamma” was also manipulated, claiming true sales were around US\$15 million while the film reported US\$18 million.

Thamma director Aditya Sarpotdar defended the US\$18 million figure, calling it the “most accurate”, having come from distributors and exhibitors.

“When a film is still in theatres, the collection figures between producers and the trade will vary,” Sarpotdar told AFP.

“Producer numbers are always the honest numbers.”

Experts warn that falsifying box office data has lasting consequences, from inflated star salaries to shrinking opportunities for new talent.

“You can’t take the audience for granted. They know the truth,” said Wadhwa, adding that to have both reviews and ticket sales manipulated was “a very sad situation.”

Streaming platforms, now major players in film distribution, have begun demanding audited box office figures before striking deals which has added pressure on producers.

“Streamers have now become sharp and careful about the film they are choosing,” said Wadhwa.

Despite the backlash, few expect the trend to end anytime soon.

“This practice will continue” Wadhwa said, until producers and studios lose their “appetite to buy tickets.” – AFP

P.Priime, Nigeria’s young leading Afrobeats producer

Kadiatou Sakho

LAGOS – Five years ago, at just 17, P.Priime emerged as one of Nigeria’s youngest music producers, quickly grabbing headlines as he worked with Afrobeats heavyweights like Burna Boy and Rema.

Now 23, P.Priime – born Peace Emmanuel Aderogba Oredope – has cemented his place as a leading creative force in Afrobeats, one of the world’s most influential and fast-growing musical genres.

The Grammy Awards once again recognised Afrobeats this year by nominating several Nigerian superstars including Davido, Wizkid, Ayra Starr and Omah Lay for its 68th ceremony slated for next February in Los Angeles.

Afrobeats which blends

traditional African rhythms with contemporary pop sounds, has its roots in 1970s Nigeria, influenced by Nigerian megastar Fela Kuti. The genre is smashing through into the international mainstream and music awards circuits.

Afrobeats legends Burna Boy and Tems have won Grammy Awards.

For P.Priime, the global success of the genre lies in the “groove” of its songs, which exude a spontaneous energy that makes people want to dance.

“Afrobeats makes you want to be happy and move your body,” he said, guitar in hand, sitting on large sofa while waiting in the dressing room of a filming studio in the Lekki district of Lagos, Nigeria’s economic and cultural hub.

“I’ve just started learning to play the guitar, so I take it with me everywhere,” he told AFP.

P.Priime has worked with big names including artist Rema in 2024 on tracks such as “March Am”, “Azaman” and “Villain”.

He has also worked with Burna Boy on the song “Alone” from the 2022 Black Panther: Wakanda Forever soundtrack, as well as with CKay and PinkPantheress on “Anya Mmiri” that same year.

“I connect more easily with artists that freestyle or write songs that pop up the top of their head. That’s how I make music. It pops up the top of my head,” said the slender producer.

‘Loved music since little’

Born and raised in Lagos, has been immersed in music since childhood, playing drums and the piano at church and singing in the choir.

“I’ve always loved music since I was little,” recalls P.Priime, paying tribute to the support of his father, an accountant and school owner, and his mother, a grocery store manager and a brother who built him a studio.

His talent was discovered early. At 17, he gained recognition for the production of “Gelato” a track by DJ Cuppy featuring singer and rapper Zlatan Ibile.

Quickly, his work captivated the general public, the Nigerian industry, and international critics. He has won awards at the Headies

and the All Africa Music Awards.

He also co-produced Wizkid’s “Made in Lagos” album, nominated for the Grammy Awards in 2022.

His journey was refined through the Sarz Academy, an incubator project launched by producer Sarz to train young Nigerian talents in modern production.

“Sarz noticed my highly developed ear and how fast I work,” said P.Priime.

At the Lekki studio, P.Priime prepared for the recording of an episode of Next Afrobeats Star, a new Nigerian reality TV show dedicated to discovering new talents. He will co-judge artists alongside Sarz, Andre Vibe, and Puffy Tee, all Nigerian producers and key music industry players.

“Thousands of candidates”

applied for this programme and only 48 made it to the auditioning stage. Just one will win a US\$100,000 music contract offered by the ONErpm distribution agency at the end of the year.

P.Priime believes the programme is a real springboard for the industry.

“You can never tell who is watching on stage and at home. Don Jazzy might be watching from his house,” he said, referring to founder of Marvin Records.

His piece of advice: To succeed, artists must have confidence in themselves, in their team, and above all, convey their authenticity through their music.

“The biggest mistake would be to simply imitate those who have already found their place in a booming industry,” he said. – AFP



Nigerian producer Peace Emmanuel Aderogba Oredope, known as P.Priime, 23, poses for a photo in Lagos, on November 7, 2025. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -1°C~12°C	Manila 24°C~32°C	New York 6°C~10°C	Lisbon 8°C~15°C
Shanghai 3°C~15°C	Bangkok 21°C~27°C	London 0°C~5°C	Rio de Janeiro 17°C~24°C
Hong Kong 14°C~18°C	Tokyo 3°C~14°C	Frankfurt -2°C~5°C	Luanda 23°C~28°C
Taipei 17°C~21°C	Singapore 24°C~31°C	Vancouver 7°C~11°C	Maputo 19°C~26°C
Guangzhou 11°C~18°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~29°C	Paris -1°C~5°C	Dili 22°C~33°C
Nanjing 1°C~15°C	Jakarta 23°C~32°C	Moscow -2°C~1°C	São Tomé 25°C~29°C
Guilin 8°C~17°C	Seoul -1°C~14°C	Las Vegas 8°C~15°C	Praia 22°C~31°C
Xi'an -2°C~13°C	Sydney 17°C~24°C	Monte Carlo 5°C~13°C	Bissau 23°C~34°C



Liu Yinglan (centre) of Sichuan falls during the women's 200m final at the 15th National Games in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, yesterday. – Xinhua



Wang Ruimiao of Hubei performs during the breaking B-Boys final battle at the 15th National Games in Guangzhou, south China's Guangdong Province, yesterday. Wang won the gold medal. – Xinhua



Zheng Ninali of Shanxi competes during the women's heptathlon long jump at the 15th National Games in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, yesterday. – Xinhua



Team Guangdong celebrate after winning the U18 men's basketball final against Shandong at the 15th National Games in Macao, on Tuesday. – Xinhua



Xu Jiahuan of Zhejiang reacts during the women's heptathlon javelin at the 15th National Games in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, yesterday. – Xinhua

Players of Jiangsu celebrate after winning the women's volleyball final against Shandong at the 15th National Games in Macao, yesterday. – Xinhua

