

IC to list Pork Chop Bun on Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Armando Neves

Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) President Deland Leong Wai Man told reporters yesterday that her bureau has decided to add 20 items to Macau's Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which will raise its total number to 90.

Leong said that the additional items cover a range of traditions, including Cantonese music, Patuá songs, and the craft of making Pork Chop Buns.

The Pork Chop Bun has been described by foodies, restaurateurs and culinary experts as a perfect example of Macau cuisine – a tasty fusion of Portuguese and Chinese influences that results in something greater than the sum of its parts. According to tour guides, Pork Chop Buns are a “must-try” for any food-loving tourist – as are Macau's ubiquitous Egg Tarts, Almond Biscuits and Beef Offal.

Leong did not say when the complete list of the 20 additional items will be gazetted.

Patuá is the highly endangered Portuguese-Asian Creole language of Macau's community of mixed Portuguese and Asian extraction, and its diaspora.

Leong made the remarks at a press briefing after a regular behind-the-doors meeting of the advisory Cultural Heritage Council at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape.

The inventory currently contains 70 items, and the latest extension will add 20 more, she noted.

The current inventory already includes several other culinary items such as Almond Biscuits, Egg Tarts (officially listed in English as “Custard Tarts”) and Traditional Chinese Wedding Cakes.

Fellow councillor-cum-civil engineer Wu Chou Kit told reporters in a post-meeting press briefing that all the members of the government-appointed council have endorsed the 20 items that will be added to the inventory, as they recognised the new items' diverse range and their continuity with



Cultural Heritage Council Acting President and Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) President Deland Leong Wai Man (right) and fellow councillor Wu Chou Kit look on during a press briefing after the committee's regular closed-door meeting at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape yesterday. – Photo: Armando Neves

the core direction established by the first and second batches of intangible heritage items.

Completion of St. Paul's Ruins statue restoration delayed

Meanwhile, Leong said during the press briefing that completion of the restoration of all the statues of the Ruins of St. Paul's has been postponed to early next year, but that the restoration, i.e., cleaning and maintenance, of second-row, two right-side statues on the façade of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed landmark have already been completed.

However, she pointed out, when relic restorers inspected the two still unrestored left-side statues, they discovered various kinds of damage, such as cracks.

According to Leong, experts from the Macau Palace Museum Cultural Heritage Preservation and Transmission Centre will conduct further research to determine the cause of these flaws – whether they are casting defects or damage that only occurred later – before formulating a restoration plan.

Leong underlined that the restoration work

includes academic research involving technical exchange. She also rejected rumours claiming that the two restored bronze statue had been “displaced” when put back onto the façade, confirming that all restoration processes have strictly adhered to rigorous scientific procedures.

Wu also said that the councillors agreed to reschedule the completion of the restoration work until early next year to allow for further assessment by experts.

In response to reporters' questions about whether the Cultural Heritage Protection Law

would be amended in order to relax certain construction restrictions, Leong replied that the focus of the city's heritage buffer zones was primarily on building height and size, rather than façade renovations.

Leong insisted that if renovations do not impact the cultural heritage, the bureau does not need to provide additional feedback. She emphasised that this approach does not weaken heritage protection but rather makes it more targeted, balancing business needs with public convenience. ■



December 2006 file photo of a Pork Chop Bun served in a local restaurant. – Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

‘The war of tomorrow will begin in space’: Macron



TOULOUSE, France – Modern conflicts are already being fought in space and the next wars will begin there, French President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday as he outlined France's future space strategy.

“The war of today is already being

fought in space, and the war of tomorrow will begin in space,” Macron said in Toulouse, France's space and aviation hub. “Let us be ready: this will be a condition for the success of military operations on land, in the air, and at sea.” – AFP



Peng Liyuan (center, right), wife of President Xi Jinping, and Queen Letizia of Spain (center, left) explore reading activities for children with disabilities at the Beijing Demonstration Center of Services for Persons with Disabilities yesterday. Peng and Letizia, who is accompanying King Felipe VI of Spain on his state visit to China, visited the center yesterday. (More on page 7) – Xinhua

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MGTO chief expects 500,000 visitors for 72nd MGP

MGTO Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes told reporters yesterday that MGTO is expecting to see around 500,000 visitors during the 72nd Macau Grand Prix, which will be taking place from today through Sunday. – Story on p. 5

Starmer insists govt ‘united’ as plot rumours swirl

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer insisted yesterday he runs a “united team” after a senior minister was forced to repeatedly deny that he planned to oust the embattled premier. – Story on p. 11

Indigenous protesters clash with security at COP30 summit in Brazil

Dozens of indigenous protesters clashed with security guards on Tuesday at the COP30* summit in Brazil, causing minor injuries in a rare incident of violence at the UN climate talks. – Story on p. 12

3 locals lose 1.4 million patacas in ‘Taobao’ phone scams: police

Ada Lei

A young man and two elderly women have separately fallen victim to scam calls impersonating customer service representatives from “Taobao”, resulting in a total loss of 1.4 million patacas, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

According to Cheong, the three victims received the fraudulent SMS messages on Tuesday, claiming that their “Taobao funds security insurance” was about to expire and that monthly fees ranging from 720 to 2,000 patacas would be automatically deducted. To cancel the service, the victims contacted the “customer service representatives” via the phone number provided in the message.

Cheong noted that the scammers, who spoke in Mandarin, guided the victims to fake websites where they filled in personal information, bank account details, and identity verification documents. The scammers then instructed the victims to open their mobile banking apps through a website link and carry out a “virtual transfer” for “identity verification.”

Cheong added that the scammers intentionally emphasised that the operation was a “virtual transfer,” claiming it would not lead to an actual transaction and that full refunds would be returned upon successful verification. However, once the victims transferred the funds to the specified accounts as instructed, the money was immediately withdrawn, and the

scammers went offline.

Cheong said that the young man transferred a total of HK\$999,901 in two transactions, while the two elderly women lost HK\$260,000 and HK\$142,454 respectively, the three cases incurring a total loss of 1.4 million patacas. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong looks on during yesterday's regular press conference. – Photo: Ada Lei

Police nab Filipina maid for theft by finding

Ada Lei

The Public Security Police (PSP) apprehended a female domestic helper from the Philippines on Tuesday for stealing a MACAU Pass, PSP spokesman Cheong Heon Fan said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a woman in her forties surnamed Cabillo.

According to Cheong, the Public Security Police (PSP) received a report on Sunday from a local woman who said that she had lost her MACAU Pass, which had 300 patacas inside. Through a mobile app, she discovered 10 unauthorised transactions totalling 261 patacas. Suspecting that someone had stolen and was misusing the card, she immediately reported the case to the police.

Through citywide CCTV surveillance footage, the police identified Cabillo as the suspect and apprehended her in Rua Central (龍嵩正街) on Tuesday. Under questioning, Cabillo admitted to stealing the MACAU Pass and using it to purchase food in several shops. Cabillo later handed over the card to the police.

Cabillo has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a charge of theft by finding. ■



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

Aviation regulator imposes no-fly zone for drones during MGP

Khalel Vallo

The Civil Aviation Authority of Macau (AACM) announced in a statement yesterday that unmanned aircraft flights will be prohibited across the Macau Peninsula from today through Sunday to ensure safety during the 72nd Macau Grand Prix (MGP).

The full-day drone restriction over the peninsula, published in the Official Gazette (BO) No. 46,

Series II, yesterday, is based on Article 66 of the Air Navigation Regulation of Macau. The measure aims to prevent risks or interference during the city's annual motorsport event.

Violators of the flight ban may face fines ranging between 2,000 and 20,000 patacas, the statement said, urging the public to heed the ban in order to maintain safety and order throughout the four motor-racing days. ■



This poster provided by the Civil Aviation Authority of Macau (AACM) yesterday shows its no-fly order for drones during the four-day Macau Grand Prix (MGP) starting this morning.

Gongbei Customs seizes 16.1 kg of rosewood

Armindo Neves

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers at the Qingmao Port (checkpoint) seized 16.1 kilograms of rosewood last month.

According to the statement, on October 17, customs officers at the checkpoint, while conducting routine inspections of outbound passengers' luggage, noticed a large item wrapped in plastic film on a traveller's trolley.

A follow-up inspection unearthed a log weighing 16.1 kilograms. The log had a light yellowish-white appearance with small black lenticels* and reddish-brown inner bark, suspected to be of the endangered rosewood species Dalbergia fusca, the statement said.

Upon appraisal by the Technical Centre of Gongbei Customs, the log was identified as Dalbergia melanoxylon, commonly known as African blackwood or grenadilla. It is an endangered species listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs shows 16.1 kg of Dalbergia melanoxylon seized by its officers at Qingmao Port (checkpoint) on October 17.

In the statement, Gongbei Customs reminded the public that according to CITES and the Chinese mainland's Wildlife Protection Law, as well as the regulations on the import and export of endangered wild animals and plants, it is prohibited to trade, carry, or mail endangered species and their products across border checkpoints without legal import and export certificates. The statement noted that serious

violations may lead to criminal liability. ■

* Lenticels are small, raised, corky pores on the stems and roots of woody plants that allow for the direct exchange of gases between the internal tissues and the atmosphere. Think of them as tiny “breathing pores” for the bark of a tree. You can often see them as rough, horizontal lines or speckles on the bark of trees like birches or cherries. – DeepSeek

Published since Aug 2004

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- Chatbots: Poe, DeepSeek

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MGP Museum launches 'Extreme Speed Heroes' racing simulator



Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes delivers her opening remarks during yesterday's "Extreme Speed Heroes" opening ceremony at the Macau Grand Prix Museum (MGPM) in Zape.



Racers Marcus Cheong Man Hei (right) and Mattia Colnaghi showcase their driving expertise on the museum's new racing simulators on the sidelines of yesterday's opening ceremony. – Photos: Khalel Vallo

Khalel Vallo

The Macau Grand Prix Museum (MGPM), in conjunction with integrated resort operator Melco Resorts & Entertainment, launched the "Extreme Speed Heroes" racing simulator programme yesterday, aiming to promote motorsport culture and inspire the next generation of local racing enthusiasts.

The programme offers simulated motor-racing training divided into two stages – practice sessions on November 22, 23 and 29, followed by a simulated contest on December 7 for graduating participants.

Open to youngsters aged 10 to 16, the sessions will be conducted in Cantonese under the guidance of Macau's Formula 4 driver and seven-time Karting Champion Marcus Cheong Man Hei.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes said the collaboration "combines racing simulation with training into a fun learning experience for locals and visitors."

She noted that the MGPM "is dedicated to promoting and carrying on the motorsport

culture through a wide range of exhibits, colourful activities, and interactive multimedia experiences."

Meanwhile, the opening ceremony was also attended by Cheong and Italian-Argentine racer Mattia Colnaghi, who talked about their road to success in the motorsport world and showcased their driving expertise on the racing simulators.

In addition to the training sessions, the racing simulators will remain open for museumgoers from today until December 29, aiming to allow the public to experience "the speed and passion of the Guia Circuit."

According to MGTO, the initiative is part of the museum's series of MGP-themed events that have been running since September, aiming to reflect Macau's growing emphasis on combining "tourism + sports" to enhance visitor engagement and cultural participation.

The minimum height of applicants is 135 cm, with four trainees per session. The maximum number of participants is 32. Applications can be submitted by contacting 6663 8527 or by email via miguelu38@yahoo.com.hk. ■

72nd Macau Grand Prix begins today, ID reports strong weekend ticket sales

Kristina Vallesteros

The 72nd Macau Grand Prix (MGP) kicks off today and will run through Sunday, with tickets for this weekend almost sold out, Acting President of the Sports Bureau (ID) and Coordinator of the Macau Grand Prix Committee (MGPOC) See Lei Si Leng (李詩靈) told reporters yesterday afternoon at the Macau Grand Prix Media Lounge.

Lei made the remarks during an activity at the Media Lounge above the paddocks opposite the Macau Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal yesterday for drivers racing in the Macau Grand Prix - FIA FR World Cup, Macau GT Cup - FIA GT World Cup, Macau Guia Race - Kumho FIA

TCR World Tour Event of Macau, and the Macau Formula 4 Race - FIA F4 World Cup. Among the various racers Macau's Charles Leong Hon Chio, Italian Swiss Raffaele Marciello and Swiss-Italian-French racer Edoardo Mortara, aka "Mr. Macau", were present.

Lei pointed out that tickets for this weekend's races are almost entirely sold out, with only a very limited number reserved for on-the-spot purchase at the venue, going on to describe this year's ticket sales as "extremely good."

Moreover, Lei confirmed that the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) has completed its inspection of the Guia Circuit

and is "very satisfied" with the facilities. She also said that all safety procedures have been confirmed. The circuit features 162 sets of movable gates, which will be reopened to the public as soon as possible after each day's practice and racing sessions.


She also noted that with the 72nd Macau Grand Prix and the 15th National Games both happening concurrently, November offers an "extremely good sports atmosphere" in Macau, making it a "sports month" with many activity choices for residents and tourists alike. ■



Racers pose for a group photo after yesterday's activity held at the media lounge.




Acting President of the Sports Bureau (ID) and Coordinator of the Macau Grand Prix Committee (MGPOC) See Lei Si Leng speaks with reporters at the Macau Grand Prix Media Lounge yesterday afternoon. – Photos: Rui Pastorin



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Hou Kong Dance Group performs Musical "Xian Xinghai" in June in Shenzhen. – Photos provided by Ken Sou

LOCAL MUSICAL 'XIAN XINGHAI' to tour Chinese mainland, amplifies cultural footprint

Interview by William Chan

The celebrated biographical musical, "Xian Xinghai" (星辰大海·冼星海), produced and first performed locally in 2023, is currently touring the Chinese mainland this and next month. Audiences in Chengdu, Heyuan and Zhuhai, Shunyi District in Beijing and the cities of Jinan and Dezhou in Shandong Province will be able to experience this original production from Macau that has become a cultural talking point in the rest of China.

In an online interview with the *Post* last week, local producer Ken Sou Io Kuong gave his insights into the upcoming tour and the distinctive Macau perspective at the heart of the production.

"This time, our tour runs from November through December, covering five cities with 14 performances," Sou said. "On December 4, thanks to the invitation of the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), we'll return to Macau and share a very special performance with local audiences at 8 p.m. at the Macau Cultural Centre Grand Auditorium."

The musical, performed by Hou Kong Dance Group, was first staged in Macau in 2023, and after two years of creative refinement, the production returns, more evolved and with a stronger emphasis on Macau's role in the life and legacy of Xian Xinghai.*

The musical now opens at the Xian Xinghai Memorial Museum in Macau, dramatising the touching moment when Xian's daughter donates historic artefacts associated with her father. This provides a unique narrative lens,

highlighting both personal and public history, and sets the foundation for the story of one of China's greatest composers.

"Even for us locals, few realise that Xian Xinghai – a contemporary giant of Chinese music – was born in Macau, and his spirit of perseverance and national pride continues to inspire others," Sou noted, adding that the production aims to give Macau youth and different communities a reason to stand firm in their local roots while looking outward to embrace broader opportunities – within the Greater Bay Area (GBA) and across the globe.

Xian's own life journey embodies this ethos: born in Macau, raised in Guangzhou, hindered by his background from attending school but driven to pursue music in Singapore, reincorporating those lessons in Beijing and Shanghai, and eventually travelling to France and beyond. "It's about seeking self-improvement and embracing a broad vision, and it's a spirit we hope more local people can take to heart as they step out into the world," said Sou.

A particularly meaningful aspect of the musical's evolution is its core creative team, which remains deeply grounded in Macau. "Our main creative team – including directors, producers, and lead actors – are all based in Macau," Sou emphasised. "Traditionally, Macau's performing arts scene has struggled to develop at a large scale, given our local market's limits. But through this project, we've seized the moment, twice winning support from the China National Arts Fund, and truly taking a piece of Macau's culture beyond our borders."

The musical is performed bilingually in Cantonese and Mandarin, mirroring Xian Xinghai's own life – growing up in Guangdong, shaped by Lingnan folk music and culture, later moving through different regions of China as his revolutionary work advanced. "Our original songs anchor the show – it's mainly new works – but, of course, Xian Xinghai's famous music is woven throughout," Sou noted. "Audiences will recognise pieces like the legendary 'Yellow River Cantata', 'On Taihang Mountain', 'Song of the National Salvation Army', and 'February Comes', among other classic compositions."

Sou noted that the "Xian Xinghai" musical has already become a landmark for Macau's creative industries, a showcase for local talent, and a testament to the power of cross-border artistic cooperation. "As the production tours major mainland cities, it continues its mission: celebrating a national icon, encouraging local youth to dream big, and reminding every audience member of the value of perseverance, creativity, and connection between local roots and national aspirations," he said.

The tour will start in Heyuan, a prefecture-level city in northeastern Guangdong, next Friday.

*Xian was born into a Tanka (boat dwelling) family in Macau in 1905, and his father died before he was born. His Cantonese name is Sin Sing Hoi. He moved frequently with his mother, living in Singapore and Guangzhou. In 1938, he relocated to Yan'an, where he became the dean of the Music Department at the Lu Xun Institute of Arts. There, he composed the famous "Yellow River Cantata." – Post



'You have to give it everything': SJM Theodore PREMA Racing team's Charles Leong

Interview by Rui Pastorin

Two-time Macau Grand Prix winner Charles Leong Hon Chio hopes to secure his third win at this week's 72nd Macau Grand Prix, being prepared to give his all, the young racer told the *Post* after yesterday's "A Racing Legacy – SJM Theodore PREMA Racing Press Conference" at Grand Lisboa Palace (GLP) in Cotai.

Leong, 24, won the Macau Grand Prix both in 2020 and 2021. Last year was the first time he did not compete in the race. Achieving a successful racing season with SJM and Theodore Racing, an SJM statement provided yesterday noted that he is the winner of the 2025 Lamborghini Super Trofeo Asia Series.

Leong was born in Zhuhai but represents Macau.

With his return to the Guia Circuit to compete in the FIA FR World Cup under SJM Theodore PREMA Racing team, Leong said that being back in the city felt really special. "Coming back here is an honour, as well with such a legendary team", adding: "I'm just going to give everything for this opportunity".

Leong said that to prepare for the



Local racer Charles Leong Hon Chio signs an autograph after yesterday's "A Racing Legacy – SJM Theodore PREMA Racing Press Conference".

race, the team has done simulators and testing, switching back from GT to regional. Leong said he believes he will be able to adapt "quite nicely" and hopes to bring good results.

Moreover, with the Guia Circuit's challenges, Leong said the hardest part is never knowing what to expect ranging from crashes to suddenly losing what was initially a good lap. "It's just many things when you risk it here". With this in mind, he highlighted the importance



SJM Theodore PREMA Racing team's Charles Leong (right) and teammates Rashid Al Dhaheri (left) and Freddie Slater (2nd from left) pose with Irish racer Alex Denning and SJM's mascot. – Photos: Rui Pastorin

of being calm and patient during the races. "The most important thing is to be calm during the whole week so that you build up the pace and the result will come to you naturally", he pointed out.

Leong also emphasised the importance of dedication and commitment towards a goal or passion: "Give it everything if you really like something. Be ready to sacrifice for what you are chasing. If you really like something, you have

to give it everything".

This is a mindset that extends beyond racing, with Leong highlighting that it is for a person and their character overall. "If you want to be someone special or you have a dream, or you really want to step up into something, or be a part of something. You have to give it everything".

Yesterday's press conference at GLP in Cotai introduced SJM Theodore PREMA Racing team's

lineup comprising Leong, the UK's Freddie Slater and Abu Dhabi's Rashid Al Dhaheri. SJM Theodore Racing's Team President Teddy Yip Jr. also joined them yesterday.

All three drivers are set to race at the 15-lap FIA FR World Cup. During a discussion session, the trio spoke about the upcoming race and their approaches, what they are looking forward to, as well as how they are preparing.

SJM Managing Director Daisy Ho Chiu Fung remarked: "Alongside Theodore Racing, we are now in our eleventh year of partnership, having written many proud chapters in Macau's racing story together", adding that the company will continue to uphold its "multidimensional commitment to motorsport".

The drivers then visited the "A Racing Legacy – Racing Cars Display", which runs until November 30. They were joined by Leong's teammate and co-champion of the 2025 Lamborghini Super Trofeo Asia Championship, Irish driver Alex Denning, all signing autographs in the ensuing meet-the-drivers' session. ■

MGTO chief expects 500,000 visitors for 72nd MGP

Rui Pastorin

Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes told reporters yesterday that MGTO is expecting to see around 500,000 visitors during the four-day 72nd Macau Grand Prix, which will be taking place from today through Sunday.

Senna Fernandes made the remarks after yesterday's opening ceremony for ART OF RACING Helmet Model Artworks and Riders' Collection Exhibition at the Macau Grand Prix Museum in Zape.

The veteran tourism chief remarked that MGTO is looking forward to a "very good month of November as well as December" with the Grand Prix and the 15th National Games, which is taking place over a long stretch of time across multiple venues in the city. Senna Fernandes noted that during the National Games's run, they are expecting, on average, around 100,000 visitors a day entering Macau. "That's quite a big number, but I think it's very

possible as the Games themselves, especially the ones being held in Macau, are very sought after", among which are table tennis, basketball and volleyball, Senna Fernandes said. Moreover, the average hotel occupancy rate has been close to 90 percent.

Moreover, Senna Fernandes said that MGTO expects to reach the 39 million visitor benchmark at the end of the year, with the strong results from October being a very good sign.

October's preliminary figures show that over 3.5 million visitors came to Macau, being "quite a record", said Senna Fernandes. She further highlighted that quite a lot of foreign visitors also entered the city that month. "We are very, very happy with the results", she said, highlighting events like the recently concluded CreatorWeek Macao, which invited many creators that will be making posts on their social media platforms, with MGTO looking forward to extending the effect into the future. ■

MGM, Macau Grand Prix Museum showcase helmet designs, racing memorabilia



Guests, students, artists and riders pose for a group photo at the Macau Grand Prix Museum (MGPM) in Zape yesterday morning. – Photos: Rui Pastorin

Rui Pastorin

A total of 72 model helmet designs showcased along with Motorcycle Grand Prix memorabilia are being presented at the Macau Grand Prix Museum in Zape for the "ART OF RACING" Helmet Model Artworks and Riders' Collection Exhibition, jointly presented by the museum in conjunction with integrated resort operator MGM.

Launched yesterday and located on the second floor of the museum until January 5, the exhibition features three sections, with "Artistic Inclusion and Community Co-Creation" showcasing the 72 helmet artworks created by students and artists with disabilities chosen during a co-launched programme in October; a section featuring items such as leathers and helmets worn by riders of the MGM-sponsored teams over the years; and lion dance-themed helmet installation.

The integrated resort operator has sponsored SK Support riders for the past 15 years, with their

helmets, racing leathers and motorcycles featuring designs by artists with disabilities from Macau and overseas. For this year's 57th Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix, MGM is sponsoring Finnish rider Erno Kostamo, who won the Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix in 2022, and Australia's David Johnson.

Both riders attended yesterday's opening ceremony. Other officiating guests included Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, Macau Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM) President Ho Sut Heng, Macau Women's General Association President Lau Kam Ling, General Union of Neighbourhood Associations of Macau (UGAMM) Vice President Aaron Iu, Fuhong Society of Macau President of General Assembly Maria de Fátima Santos Ferreira, and MGM China Holdings Limited President & Chief Operating Officer Hubert Wang Zhiqi.

Speaking with reporters, Kostamo and Johnson said they



Riders Erno Kostamo (left) and David Johnson speak with reporters

were happy and excited to return to the Guia Circuit. Kostamo said that he hopes to have a good race and win this year, while Johnson said that he was "ready to go" and is happy to be in a good team with good teammates.

The *Post* also asked the riders about the challenges they are anticipating on the Guia Circuit, with Kostamo highlighting all the possible "hard breaks" throughout, while Johnson underlined how physical the race can be, noting that the section from Estrada de S. Francisco to the Melco Hairpin throughout "is very physical to the body", adding: "That's all hard work. It's going to be tough, always is", he told the *Post*.

Moreover, on wearing the racing gear and racing on bikes featuring designs by students and artists with disabilities, both riders highlighted to reporters the work and time that went into them. "It's quite an honour, really. The kids have done a great job with all the artwork", Johnson told the media. ■



Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes smiles while talking to the media after yesterday's opening ceremony at the Macau Grand Prix Museum (MGPM) in Zape. – Photo: Rui Pastorin

Govt proposes licensing 'day hospitals'

Tony Wong

The government announced yesterday that it has finished drafting a bill that proposes the licensing of a new type of private medical institution known as "day hospital" whose service level ranges between a hospital and a clinic.

Day hospitals are a new type of medical institution becoming increasingly popular in more countries and regions, providing certain medical services that previously could only be provided by hospitals. As its name suggests, day hospitals do not run inpatient services.

Currently, Macau's medical institutions in the private sector only comprise hospitals and clinics. The bill announced yesterday proposes that the future day hospitals can provide less intensive, outpatient surgical procedures and other specialty medical services, which currently can only be provided by hospitals.

Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak and Health Bureau (SSM) Director Alvis Lo Iek Long made the announcement during a press conference at Government Headquarters yesterday. Wong is also the spokesman for the government's top advisory Executive Council.

The bill will be submitted to the Legislative Assembly (AL) in due course for debate, review and vote.

The Health Bureau's licensing of privately run medical institutions in Macau is currently regulated by two decree laws promulgated in the 1990s, respectively regulating hospitals and clinics, when Macau was still under temporary



Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak (right) and Health Bureau (SSM) Director Alvis Lo Iek Long address yesterday's Executive Council press conference at Government Headquarters. — Photo: Tony Wong

Portuguese administration.

The bill announced yesterday proposes to establish a new legal system for licensing and regulating medical institutions in the private sector.

During yesterday's press conference, Wong underlined that the government's proposed new system aims to promote the development of Macau's big health sector and its projected "healthcare + tourism" model, expand development opportunities for the city's private healthcare sector, and improve the quality of their services.

Wong said that the government has drafted the bill after assessing the opinions collected from the city's healthcare sector over the past few years as well as those gathered during a one-month public consultation carried out earlier this year.

According to Wong, the bill proposes the licensing of a new type of private medical institution known as day hospitals, which, he said, can

provide certain non-hospitalised specialty medical services, which currently can only be provided by hospitals.

Dr Lo said that according to the bill, the future day hospitals will be defined as private medical institutions without inpatient facilities that provide certain specialty medical services with the expected length of diagnosis and treatment lasting up to 12 hours.

The health chief was quick to add that the 12-hour requirement will be a general requirement, meaning that if the length of diagnosis and treatment of a patient eventually exceeds 12 hours due to special circumstances, the respective day hospital will not be regarded by the bureau as violating the 12-hour rule, provided that it presents reasonable grounds for it. He mentioned an example where a patient can only leave the day hospital some time after the 12-hour period as he or she is still recovering from the anaesthesia after the surgery.

Dr Lo also said that the bill clearly defines the respective statutory functions of the three types of private medical institutions, namely hospitals, day hospitals, and clinics. He underlined that the government's proposed licensing of day hospitals aims to promote the development of Macau's big health sector and its projected "healthcare + tourism" model, enable residents to be provided with more diversified choices of medical services, and improve the city's healthcare sector.

The health chief also mentioned examples for the medical services that can be provided by the future day hospitals, such as low-risk surgeries, endoscopy, and assisted reproductive technology (ART) services.

Wong dismisses rumours about new civil service working hours, pension system

Meanwhile, during yesterday's press conference, Wong dismissed

rumours circulating on social media concerning the government's alleged intention of amending public servants' normal working hours and its pension system for retired public servants.

Wong made the remarks when replying to a reporter's question about the rumour. Wong's remarks came after the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau (SAFP) dismissed the rumour in a statement yesterday morning.

The SAFP statement underlined that the local government does not have any plan to amend public servants' normal working hours and its pension system for retired public servants.

Wong underlined during yesterday afternoon's press conference that if the government planned to amend any systems concerning public servants, it would certainly collect opinions from various segments of civil society including public servants. ■

Groups, govt to launch 30-pct-discount coupons for restaurant patrons

Coupons to run for 3 days for MSAR establishment anniversary



A man uses his smartphone while sitting on the outdoor seating of a restaurant in Taipa early this month. — Photo: Tony Wong

Staff Reporter

The United Association of Food and Beverage Merchants of Macau, in collaboration with the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) and the Macau Industry and Commerce Association, will launch a scheme providing 30-percent-discount coupons for restaurant patrons who use any of the four mobile payment apps covered by the scheme.

The scheme will run for three days between December 20 and 22, in celebration of the 26th anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland.

The Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) was established on December 20, 1999.

The organisers announced the scheme during a press conference yesterday, which was held at the headquarters of the Macau Chamber of Commerce (ACM), colloquially known in Cantonese

as "Chung Chung", in Zape.

According to the press conference, the scheme will cover over 500 restaurants and eateries across the city.

Restaurant patrons who use any of the scheme's four mobile payment apps can benefit from the discounts, namely MPay as well as the payment apps for Bank of China (BOC) Macau Branch, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (Macau), and Tai Fung Bank.

On each of the three days between December 20 and 22, according to yesterday's press conference, smartphone users can obtain three 30-percent-discount coupons from each of the four mobile payment apps. If a smartphone user uses all four apps, according to the press conference, he or she can obtain 12 coupons on each of the three days.

The beneficiaries can only use one coupon for every transaction. ■

'Fung-wong' breaks No. of annual storm signal records: SMG

Armindo Neves

The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) announced in a statement yesterday that Typhoon "Fung-wong" (鳳凰 – "Phoenix") has broken the record for the most tropical cyclone warning signals issued by Macau in a single year since records began in 1968, now standing at 14.

The weather station said that although Fung-won swept through the Philippines as a super typhoon, it was significantly weakened by the terrain of Luzon and further influenced by a northeastern monsoon after entering the South China Sea. It ultimately passed about 560 kilometres east of Macau, the observatory noted.

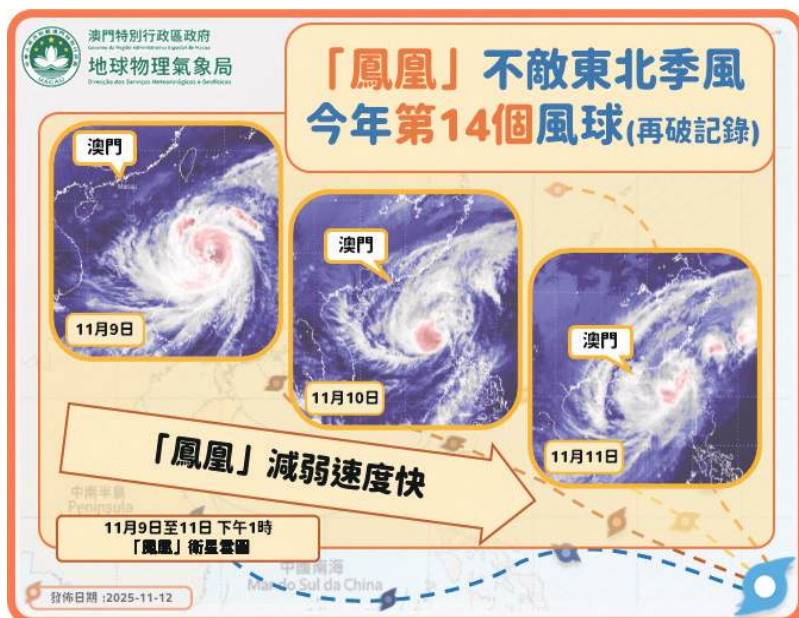
Meanwhile, the weather station forecast that a strong northeastern monsoon will arrive in the coastal areas of southern China early next week, resulting in a significant drop in temperatures.

By the middle of next week, the observatory said, the minimum temperature is expected to fall to between 13 and 15 degrees Celsius.

The bureau said that under the persistent influence of the northeastern monsoon, the weather will become mainly fine and dry over the next couple of days, with relatively cool mornings and evenings.

As the strongest surge of a northeastern monsoon since the start of autumn, the observatory said it expected the monsoon to reach the southern China coast early next week, when Macau will experience a significant strengthening of northerly winds starting from next Monday, accompanied by relatively strong gusts.

The weather station said that the conditions will become very dry next week, with daytime relative humidity potentially dropping to 35 percent or below. ■



This handout image provided by the local observatory (SMG) yesterday shows three satellite images of Typhoon "Fung-wong" between Sunday and Tuesday.

China, Spain look to bolster ties amid evolving global dynamics

BEIJING — China stands ready to work with Spain to forge a comprehensive strategic partnership with greater strategic determination, dynamism and global influence, President Xi Jinping said yesterday.

Xi made the remarks when meeting with King Felipe VI of Spain, who is on a state visit to China, in Beijing. It marks King Felipe VI's first state visit to the country after his enthronement, and the first visit by a Spanish monarch to China in 18 years.

After the meeting, the two heads of state jointly witnessed the signing of 10 cooperation documents in trade and economy, science and technology, and education, among others.

Following Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's three visits to China in three years, King Felipe VI's visit throws the weight of royal diplomacy into Spain's relations with China, said Felix Valdivieso, chairman of IE University's China Observatory.

The European country is shifting toward a more long-term, stable and strategically visionary policy on the world's second-largest economy, which will benefit Spanish businesses and subsequently enhance the competitiveness and innovative vigor of the Spanish economy, Valdivieso said.

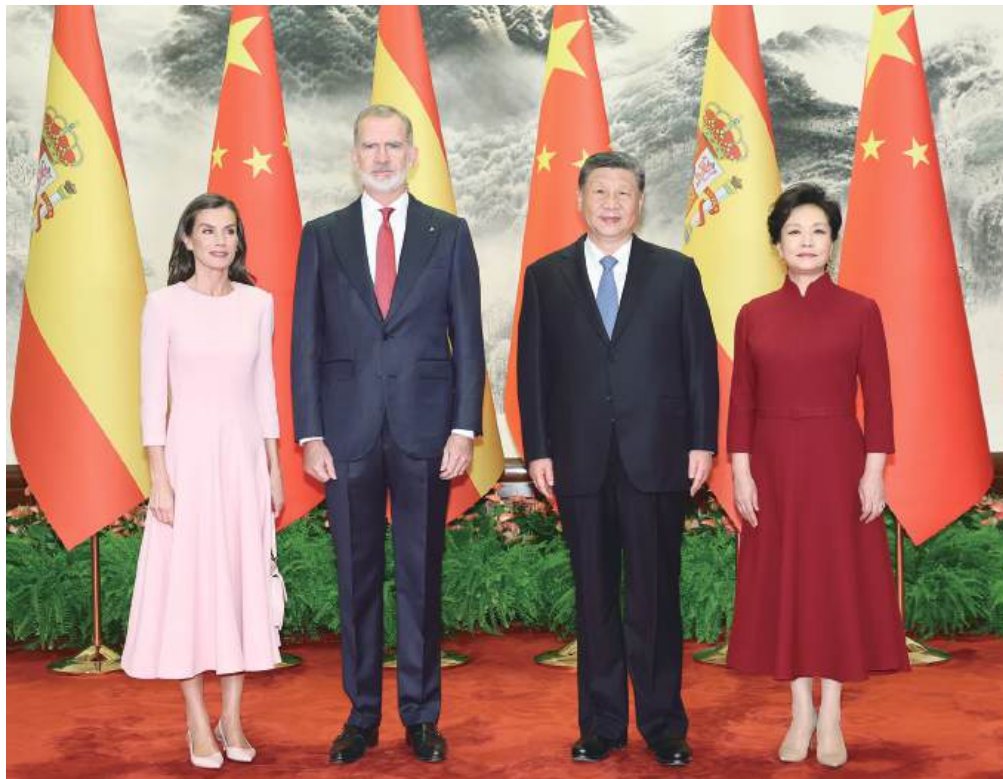
A VISIT OF GREAT SIGNIFICANCE

Welcoming King Felipe VI to China, Xi noted that both China and Spain have profound historical and cultural heritage. Over the past 50-plus years since the establishment of diplomatic ties, the two sides have always viewed and developed bilateral relations from a strategic height and long-term perspective, respected and supported each other, and contributed to each other's success, Xi said.

This has set a model of pursuing amicable ties and common development by countries with different history, culture and social systems, and played an important role in promoting openness and cooperation in the world and upholding international fairness and justice, Xi said.

Hailing the Spanish royal family's remarkable contributions to developing the China-Spain relationship, Xi said as the two countries celebrate the 20th anniversary of the comprehensive strategic partnership, King Felipe VI's state visit is of great significance to the further advancement of the friendship and cooperation between the two countries.

King Felipe VI said that it is a great



President Xi Jinping (second from right) and his wife Peng Liyuan (right) pose for a group photo with King Felipe VI of Spain (second from left) and his wife Queen Letizia in Beijing yesterday. Xi met with King Felipe VI, who is on a state visit to China, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. — Xinhua

pleasure to pay a state visit to China at the 20th anniversary of the Spain-China comprehensive strategic partnership, and that Spain and China enjoy longstanding friendly exchanges. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties, the two countries have consistently trusted and respected each other and worked together for joint development and prosperity, he said.

King Felipe VI said China has accomplished globally recognized and admirable achievements in its development, adding that its successful experiences, especially in poverty alleviation and green and low-carbon development, offer great inspiration.

The Spanish government is firmly committed to the one-China policy, supports China in safeguarding its territorial integrity, and stands ready to work with China to advance the comprehensive strategic partnership to bring more benefits to the two peoples and contribute even more to global peace and stability, the king said.

BOOSTING PRAGMATIC COOPERATION

Underscoring that China values the

traditional friendship with Spain and its unique role in international and regional affairs, Xi said it is important for the two sides to continue supporting each other firmly, maintain the momentum of high-level exchanges, strengthen strategic guidance, and ensure that the bilateral relationship always advances along the right path.

Calling on the two sides to further advance practical cooperation, Xi said China will import more quality products from Spain, and the two sides should explore the potential of cooperation in such emerging areas as new energy, digital economy and AI, expand mutual investment and build more signature projects.

He said the two sides could also tap into complementarity and jointly explore third-party markets such as Latin America.

Xi said the two sides need to strengthen people-to-people connectivity, and enhance exchanges in culture and education, and support each other in the operation of cultural and language institutions in each other's country. He said China will continue to extend the visa-free policy to Spain to facilitate people-to-people exchanges and bring the two peoples closer.

King Felipe VI said investment by Chinese enterprises has strongly boosted Spain's economic growth and green transition. Spain is willing to maintain close exchanges with China, in order to seize the important opportunities presented by China's 15th Five-Year Plan, and deepen cooperation in such areas as economy and trade, industry, science and technology, and green energy.

King Felipe VI appreciated China for extending the visa-free policy, and expressed the readiness to strengthen cultural, linguistic and tourism exchanges in order to enhance the friendship between the two peoples.

CHAMPIONING MULTILATERALISM

Pointing out that this year marks the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, Xi said the world today is now in a new period of turbulence and transformation, and the pursuit of peace and development remains an arduous task.

"I have put forward the building of a community with a shared future for humanity for the hope that countries could rise above differences in social systems and ideologies, build consensus through dialogue and consultation, and work together to turn the aspirations of people around the world for a better life into reality," Xi said.

China stands ready to work with Spain to support the UN in playing a central role in international affairs, safeguard the rules of free trade and the international economic and trade order, and make global governance more just and equitable, for the building of a community with a shared future for humanity, he said.

Noting that history can only move forward, and does not allow for going backward, King Felipe VI said Spain and China share highly similar philosophies on many international affairs, and both support multilateralism and the settlement of disputes through dialogue and consultation.

Spain highly appreciates the four major global initiatives put forward by President Xi, and is going to work with China to respond to uncertainties in the international situation with a view to upholding international trade order and promoting the steady development of the global economy, the king said.

— Xinhua

Premier Li meets King Felipe VI of Spain

BEIJING — China and Spain can strengthen the alignment of their development strategies, give full play to their economic complementarity, and foster new growth drivers in order to pursue shared development and prosperity, Premier Li Qiang said yesterday.

As the world economy is experiencing sluggish recovery and global trade and investment are losing momentum, China is willing to work with Spain to continuously tap into the potential of bilateral trade, steadily expand trade volume and optimize trade structure, Li said when meeting with King Felipe VI of Spain, who is on a state visit to China.

"China supports more competent companies to invest in Spain, expand industrial and supply chain cooperation in fields such as photovoltaic energy, green hydrogen and power batteries, and explore

cooperation in future industries such as artificial intelligence," Li noted.

He expressed the hope that Spain will create a fair and predictable market environment for Chinese enterprises. The two sides can also jointly explore third-party markets, deepen people-to-people and cultural exchanges and cooperation, and boost the tourism industry, he said.

Noting that both China and Spain are supporters and beneficiaries of economic globalization and free trade, Li urged the two sides to strengthen coordination and cooperation to jointly safeguard the global economic and trade order and uphold international fairness and justice.

It is hoped that Spain will continue to play a positive role in facilitating China-EU cooperation, Li added.

He said that since the establishment of diplomatic relations, China and Spain have

always respected each other as equals, with bilateral ties developing in a healthy and steady manner, and fruitful achievements made in cooperation across various fields.

Noting that President Xi Jinping and King Felipe VI conducted in-depth exchanges of views on major strategic issues on Wednesday morning, Li said the two countries should carry forward the traditional friendship, firmly support each other in terms of core interests and major concerns, consolidate political mutual trust, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, and continuously enhance the well-being of the two peoples.

King Felipe VI said the relations between the two countries have maintained a strong momentum of development since President Xi's successful state visit to Spain in 2018, adding that Spain firmly adheres to the one-China policy and is willing to continue to be

a reliable partner of China.

Noting that this year marks the 20th anniversary of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries, King Felipe VI said Spain is willing to maintain close high-level exchanges with China, strengthen the alignment of development strategies, expand mutually beneficial cooperation in fields such as trade, investment, science and technology, and green energy, and promote people-to-people and cultural exchanges in tourism, culture, education, language and other areas.

Spain highly appreciates the four global initiatives proposed by President Xi and is willing to maintain close multilateral coordination with China to support multilateralism and the role of the United Nations, he said, stressing that Spain will play a positive role in promoting the steady development of EU-China relations. — Xinhua

Cambodia says Thai troops kill one in fresh border clashes

Suy SE with Montira Rungjirajit-tranon in Bangkok

PHNOM PENH – Cambodia and Thailand traded accusations of fresh clashes along their border yesterday, with Phnom Penh reporting one civilian shot dead in hostilities flaring after Bangkok paused implementation of a US-backed peace deal.

Five days of combat erupted between Thailand and Cambodia this summer, killing 43 people and displacing around 300,000 before a truce backed by US President Donald Trump took effect.

However, Thailand on Monday paused implementation of a follow-on deal to wind down hostilities, claiming a blast from a newly laid landmine had wounded four of its soldiers.

Just two days later, officials on both sides have reported gunfire across the boundary between Thailand's Sa Kaeo province and Cambodia's Banteay Meanchey province.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet said three civilians were wounded and one killed.

"The action goes against the humanitarian spirit and recent agreements to resolve border issues peacefully," he said in a post on Facebook.

But Bangkok blamed Cambodian troops who "fired shots into Thai territory", Royal Thai Army spokesman Winthai Suvarree said.

Thai troops "took cover and fired warning shots in response", he said, with the incident lasting about 10 minutes with no Thai casualties reported.

Cambodia's information ministry shared images and video which it alleged showed wounded



This handout photo made available by Agence Kampuchea Press (AKP) yesterday shows Cambodian health workers tending to an injured man after Cambodia and Thailand traded accusations of fresh clashes along their border in Banteay Meanchey province. Cambodian information minister Neth Pheaktra told AFP "Thai soldiers opened fire on civilians", wounding at least five in Prey Chan village of Banteay Meanchey Province, citing a toll from local authorities. – AFP

civilians, including one man being treated in an ambulance with a bloodied leg.

AFP was not able to verify the provenance of the images.

'I am so frightened'

Cambodian villager Hul Malis told AFP by phone that gunfire from across the border had wounded at least three people in her area.

"They just shot at us. We did nothing," she said. "I am so frightened, I am running away now."

Her husband, Thong Kimleang, told AFP the Thai military "fired a lot of shots" for around 15 minutes.

The dispute between Thailand and Cambodia centres on a century-old disagreement over borders mapped during France's colonial rule in the region, with both sides claiming a smattering of boundary temples.

Back in July, the region ignited with open combat along the

frontier waged with fighter jets, missile strikes and ground troops.

A truce began on July 29 after intervention by Trump, as well as Chinese diplomats and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who chairs the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) bloc.

They signed a joint declaration last month, agreeing to withdraw heavy weapons and allowing ceasefire monitors access to the border.

While experts said the deal failed to adjudicate the core territorial dispute, Trump flew into Kuala Lumpur to oversee the pact he cited as evidence of his presidential peace-making abilities.

But the apparent fresh landmine blast and renewed clashes have thrown its future into doubt.

Thailand has already delayed the release of 18 captured Cambodian soldiers, a key plank of the joint declaration. – AFP

Alleged Chinese scam kingpin extradited from Thailand: police

BANGKOK – An alleged Chinese racketeer linked to a hugely lucrative scam hub in Myanmar was extradited from Thailand to China yesterday, a police official in Bangkok told AFP.

She Zhijiang had been in Thai custody since 2022 after spending more than a decade on the run from Chinese authorities, accused of ties to the Myanmar gambling and fraud hub Shwe Kokko.

A Thai appeals court upheld China's extradition request this week for the 43-year-old, who also holds Cambodian nationality, after lengthy legal wrangling.

He was flown out of Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport around 4:30 p.m. [local time] the police official said.

The businessman was escorted from the airport's police station with his hands braced behind his back by armed and masked Thai police, an uncommon practice for local officers.

An Interpol red notice published in May 2021 and obtained by AFP said She faced criminal charges in China related to running online gambling and fraud operations.

She and his company Yatai have already been hit with sanctions by Britain and the United States.

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".

The gleaming city is one of the most infamous of the hubs thriving

in Myanmar's border regions, which have devolved into hives of black market activity since a civil war consumed the country in 2021.

The hubs gained international notoriety for housing internet fraud factories where workers – some of them trafficked – rob foreigners with romance and business cons worth billions of dollars annually.

In pleas written from a Bangkok prison and seen by AFP, She denied all allegations of criminality and insisted his company was simply an "urban developer".

His attorney Daniel Arshack has told AFP the allegations against She were "fabricated" and, once in China, "it is expected that he will be deprived of due process, tortured, and ultimately disappeared".

She's Thai lawyer Sunya Eadjongdee declined to comment yesterday, saying the extradition was a confidential matter.

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".

Beijing has led an international pressure campaign to crack down on the scam hubs, irked at its citizens being lured to work in the industry and targeting other Chinese with their cons.

China sentenced five people to death this month for their involvement in a violent criminal gang with fraud operations in Myanmar's Kokang region. – AFP

Death toll from twin typhoons in Philippines rises to 259

MANILA – The death toll from two recent powerful typhoons that swept across the Philippines has climbed to 259, with millions of people displaced, authorities said yesterday.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said yesterday that Fung-wong, which made landfall on Sunday as a super typhoon before weakening considerably as it crossed north-central Luzon, killed at least 27 people, with two others still missing.

It said in a separate report that Typhoon Kalmaegi, which made landfall on November 4, triggered massive flooding and mudslides

in central Philippines, leaving 232 dead, 112 missing, and more than 500 injured.

Most of the fatalities were reported in Cebu province, which was still reeling from a 6.9-magnitude earthquake that hit on September 30, it said.

The two storms displaced millions of residents and caused widespread destruction of homes, farms and key infrastructure, including roads and bridges, according to the agency.

Fung-wong was the 21st tropical cyclone to hit the Philippines this year, surpassing the country's annual average of 20 storms. – Xinhua

Indonesia's free meal scheme major cause of food poisoning: govt

JAKARTA – The Indonesian government's hallmark programme to provide free meals to combat malnutrition in the country has contributed to nearly half of food poisoning cases this year, an official told lawmakers yesterday.

Thousands of people have been sick since the much-hyped billion-dollar scheme of President Prabowo Subianto was launched in January, with critics calling for its suspension over hygiene concerns.

Dadan Hindayana, head of the national BGN agency which oversees the programme, told parliament that more than 11,000 people suffered from food poisoning across Indonesia since the launch, including over 600 who were hospitalised.

Out of 441 recorded incidents of food poisoning, "the free meal programme accounts for 211 incidents, or 48 percent of these cases," he said.

Each incident could involve

numerous people affected, sometimes in the thousands.

Last month more than 660 pupils from two schools in central Java experienced diarrhoea, nausea and dizziness after they ate meals provided by the government.

Dadan said that half of food poisoning cases related to the free meal programme were the result of E. coli contamination.

The government has tightened the supervision of kitchens providing the meals, he added.

Authorities require these kitchens to sterilise food trays and use only filtered water in cooking and washing utensils.

There are currently more than 14,000 kitchens operating across the country under the programme, which according to Dadan fed more than 42 million people until November.

Food insecurity is a persistent issue in Indonesia, where stunting spurred by malnutrition affects more than 20 percent of children.

The government had previously announced a target of 82.9 million people – about one-third of the country's population – receiving nutritious meals by the end of the year.

The programme was funded by widespread budget cuts, which together with anger over deep inequality in the country triggered two waves of nationwide protests earlier this year.

Prabowo has defended the flagship programme as a way to tackle child malnutrition, claiming that cases of food poisoning were low compared to the number of meals served.

Last month, he said that, while not perfect, the programme was an achievement praised by many countries.

Recipients are mostly children and toddlers, as well as pregnant and breastfeeding women.

In 2026, the government plans to expand the programme to include elderly Indonesians and people with disabilities. – AFP



In this photo taken last Thursday, a wild Sumatran elephant calf clings to its mother during the fitting of a GPS collar by the Riau Natural Resources Conservation Centre (BBKSDA Riau) in the Tesso Tenggara conservation area in Pelalawan Regency, Riau. – AFP

Malaysia scrambles to find anyone ‘still alive’ after migrant shipwreck

Isabelle Leong

LANGKAWI – The death toll from a migrant boat sinking off the Thai-Malaysian coast rose past 30 yesterday, but officials said they had not given up hope of finding survivors on the fifth day of the search.

Fourteen people have been rescued alive so far since the boat capsized last week near Thailand’s Tarutao island while trying to reach Malaysia.

Officials said the vessel was carrying some 70 undocumented migrants, mostly from Myanmar’s persecuted Rohingya community.

As the search and rescue operation resumed yesterday amid rough seas and rain, Malaysia’s Home Minister Saifuddin Nasution Ismail said: “Our

main focus now is to find those who are still alive. The priority is to save lives first, every life is precious.”

He said the search would continue for a reasonable period, without giving a precise timeline.

Malaysian authorities had earlier said the operation was expected to last seven days.

Romli Mustafa, director of the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency in the northern states of Kedah and Perlis, told AFP that teams involved in the effort around the island resort of Langkawi “recovered five more bodies in Malaysian waters” yesterday.

This has taken the overall toll to 32 bodies, including seven found by Thai rescuers in recent days.

The 14 survivors, mainly Rohingya and Bangladeshi citizens, have all been found in Malaysian waters since rescue operations started on Saturday.

At least 12 vessels were searching an area of around 250 square nautical miles, roughly the same size as the city-state of Singapore.

Floating ‘debris’ a survivor

Muhd Azham Azmi, a fisherman in Langkawi, told journalists on Tuesday how he had helped rescue a survivor, after initially mistaking her for “red floating debris”.

“When my friends and I got closer, it turned out to be a woman clinging to two planks,” an animated

Azham said, recalling the Saturday rescue.

“She only moved when we steered closer to her. That’s when we realised she was a person! We panicked... we’d never seen anyone floating in the sea like that before.”

The woman was quickly lifted onto the boat and given some water and cake, added the 34-year-old fisherman.

“We couldn’t understand her language. She used hand gestures to ask us to take her ashore.”

The passengers on the capsized boat were likely part of a larger group of some 300 people who had left Myanmar two weeks ago, and were split between at least two vessels, officials say.

Malaysian police reported the

second vessel as missing.

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.

The Rohingya have been persecuted in Myanmar for decades, and thousands risk their lives every year to flee repression and civil war, often aboard makeshift boats.

As authorities continue to scour the waters around Langkawi, Azham said he hopes that “those who are still missing... are still alive.” – *AFP*



Mount Fuji and city's skyline are pictured from Tower Hall Funabori Observation Deck in Edogawa district of Tokyo yesterday. – *AFP*

S Korea’s ex-spy chief arrested over martial law: court

SEOUL – A former South Korean spy chief who led the intelligence agency during last year’s martial law declaration was arrested yesterday for dereliction of duty, a Seoul court told AFP.

The arrest follows a request by special prosecutors for a warrant against Cho Tae-yong, former head of the National Intelligence Service, on charges that he ignored his duties as spy agency chief and posed a risk of destroying evidence, among other allegations.

The Seoul Central District Court reviewed the validity of the warrant Tuesday and granted it.

“The outcome of the review is... the issuance of the warrant on the risk of evidence destruction,” the court said in a statement to AFP.

“The primary charge is dereliction of duty,” it added.

Prosecutors said Cho, a career diplomat who led the spy agency at the time of former president Yoon Suk Yeol’s martial law declaration in December, failed to report the move to parliament despite “understanding its illegality”.

He is also accused of making false statements.

“The possibility that he was involved in the insurrection has increased,” prosecutor Park Ji-young

told reporters last week.

Cho’s arrest comes after prosecutors added another indictment against Yoon on charges of aiding the enemy, alleging he ordered drone flights over North Korea to bolster his martial law plan.

North Korea said last year it had “proved” the South flew drones to drop propaganda leaflets over Pyongyang, an act Seoul’s military has not confirmed.

Park said Monday her team had “filed charges of benefiting the enemy in general and of abuse of power” against the former president.

Yoon plunged South Korea into political crisis when he sought to subvert civilian rule in December, sending armed soldiers to parliament in a bid to stop lawmakers voting down his martial law declaration.

The effort failed, and Yoon was detained in a dawn raid in January, becoming South Korea’s first sitting president to be taken into custody.

Yoon remains on trial for insurrection and other offences linked to his martial law declaration.

His wife, Kim Keon Hee, is also in custody and standing trial on corruption charges, including stock manipulation – marking the first time a former first couple has been detained. – *AFP*

Vietnam jails 2 former officials in US\$100 million gambling trial

HANOI – A court in Vietnam handed jail sentences yesterday to two former local officials who wagered millions of dollars under false foreign names, in a closely-watched gambling trial, state media reported.

The pair were part of an illegal gambling ring run by South Koreans out of a swanky Hanoi hotel and comprising more than 140 people, prosecutors had alleged.

The outfit was said to include former government and communist party officials, entertainers and businesspeople who placed bets totalling more than US\$106 million.

The slot, roulette and baccarat machines at the gilded King Club in the capital’s five-star Pullman

Hotel were licensed to serve foreigners but not Vietnamese citizens, who are largely barred from gambling by law.

However, prosecutors alleged that Vietnamese gamblers entering the club were issued membership cards with fake foreign names allowing them to play.

Ho Dai Dung, former vice-chairman of the Phu Tho Provincial People’s Committee who wagered more than US\$7 million over 95 sessions, was sentenced to three and a half years in jail, the Dan Tri news site said.

Ngo Ngoc Duc, a former party secretary for Hoa Binh City who bet US\$4.2 million, received a three-year sentence, it reported.

Vietnamese police were still

seeking the arrest the alleged mastermind, South Korean national Kim In Sung whose company leased the casino, according to state media reports.

He is accused of fleeing back to South Korea with more than US\$9 million of the luckless gamblers’ funds. Vietnam’s public security ministry has issued a wanted notice for him.

The court sentenced four of his accomplices – three of them South Korean – to between two and four years yesterday, while another received a suspended sentence.

More than 100 others accused in the case have yet to be sentenced.

The gamblers won back just 0.22 percent of the total wagered, according to state media. – *AFP*

Cambodia’s Prince Group denies link to scams after asset seizures

PHNOM PENH – A Cambodian conglomerate whose founder has had more than US\$15 billion of allegedly ill-gotten assets seized said it “categorically rejects” claims he amassed his fortune running an internet scam empire.

A frenzy of asset confiscations in Europe, the United States and Asia have targeted Cambodia’s Prince Holding Group – with authorities alleging its founder Chen Zhi was running a transnational criminal organisation.

The US Justice Department in October unsealed an indictment against the tycoon, accusing him of presiding over forced labour camps in Cambodia where trafficked workers conduct online scams.

US investigators seized around US\$15 billion worth of Bitcoin they allege are criminal proceeds – the largest forfeiture action in the Justice Department’s history.

Britain also froze business and property assets worth more than US\$130 million while Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong each

swooped with national seizures as high as US\$350 million.

“The Prince Group categorically rejects the notion that it or its Chairman, Chen Zhi, has engaged in any unlawful activity,” said the company on Tuesday.

“The recent allegations are baseless and appear aimed at justifying the unlawful seizure of assets worth billions of dollars,” added the statement – the first by the company since the crackdown began.

“We are confident that when the facts come out, the Prince Group and its Chairman will be fully exonerated.”

One of Cambodia’s largest conglomerates, Prince Holding Group has operated across more than 30 countries with interests in real estate, financial services and consumer businesses since 2015.

The business empire is ubiquitous in the Southeast Asian country, boasting US\$2 billion in real estate investments, including a large shopping mall, Prince International Plaza, in the capital Phnom Penh.

The company said allegations against it “have caused undue harm to thousands of innocent employees, partners and communities who the Group serves”.

But prosecutors accuse the company of being a corrosive influence – running elaborate online networks that target people with romance or business cons and launder the proceeds through cryptocurrency.

Cyber-scam operations have mushroomed across Southeast Asia – often operating from unassuming office blocks or warehouses, where con artists target marks living on the other side of the world.

Some workers go willingly to the scam hubs, while others are trafficked and held in prison-like conditions.

The US Justice Department last month called Prince Group “one of Asia’s largest transnational criminal organisations” and said Chen – a joint British-Cambodian national – remains “at large”.

– *AFP*

Trump writes to Herzog asking him to pardon Netanyahu: Israeli presidency

JERUSALEM — Israeli President Isaac Herzog said he received a letter from US President Donald Trump yesterday asking him to pardon Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is on trial in three separate corruption cases.

Netanyahu has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing in the ongoing court cases, with no ruling yet delivered, and his supporters have dismissed the trials as politically motivated.

In a speech to the Israeli parliament in October, Trump suggested to Herzog that he pardon Netanyahu.

“This morning, President Isaac Herzog received the attached letter from US President Donald Trump, calling on him to consider granting a pardon to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu,” Herzog’s office said in yesterday’s statement.

In the letter, Trump says he is writing to Herzog at a “historic time, as we have, together, just secured peace that has been sought for at least 3,000 years.”

“I hereby call on you to fully pardon Benjamin Netanyahu, who has been a formidable and decisive War Time Prime Minister,” it adds.

“While I absolutely respect the independence of the Israeli Justice System... I believe that this ‘case’ against Bibi... is political, unjustified prosecution,” the letter says.

Netanyahu and his wife Sara are accused in one case of accepting more than US\$260,000 worth of luxury goods such as cigars, jewellery and champagne from billionaires in exchange for political favours.

He is also accused of attempting to negotiate more favourable coverage from two Israeli media outlets in two other cases.

The statement from Herzog’s office said the Israeli president holds Trump “in the highest regard and continues to express his deep appreciations for President Trump’s unwavering support for Israel”.

“Alongside and not withstanding this... anyone seeking a Presidential pardon must submit a formal request in accordance with the established procedures,” it added.

During his current term, which started in late 2022, Netanyahu proposed far-reaching judicial reforms that critics say sought to weaken the courts.

Those prompted massive protests that were only curtailed after the onset of the Gaza war in October 2023.

Trump himself has long accused his political opponents of using the Justice Department to target him during his time out of office. — AFP



Palestinians, some holding the image of their late leader Yasser Arafat, shout slogans as they gather to mark the 21st anniversary of his death, in the Israeli occupied West Bank city of Ramallah on Tuesday.

— AFP

Israel says key crossing to north Gaza opens for humanitarian aid

JERUSALEM — Israel said it had opened a key crossing into northern Gaza yesterday to allow the entry of humanitarian aid supplied by the United Nations and other international organisations.

“Today, the Zikim crossing has been opened for the entry of humanitarian aid trucks into the Gaza Strip,” COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body that oversees civilian affairs in the Palestinian territories, said on X yesterday.

When contacted by AFP, a COGAT spokesman said the crossing would now remain open “permanently”, like the Kerem Shalom crossing into southern

Gaza, through which the bulk of aid has been transferred since the war began in October 2023.

COGAT said that humanitarian aid entering Gaza through Zikim, the main access point to Gaza’s hard-hit north, would be subject to the usual Israeli security checks prior to entering, before being dispatched via the UN.

The UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) said in late October that it had not been able to collect cargo in north Gaza since the crossing was closed on September 12.

Getting humanitarian aid into Gaza is complicated by lengthy Israeli security checks and restrictions on the entry of a large

number of items, humanitarian workers have said.

Once inside Gaza, getting aid to its final intended destination is complicated due to the destruction of much of the infrastructure or the risk of looting.

“The opening of direct crossings to the north is vital to ensure that sufficient aid reaches people as soon as possible,” the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (OCHA) said in a recent situation report.

The UN-backed Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Initiative (IPC) had confirmed famine conditions in north Gaza in August, which COGAT contested. — AFP

Israeli police say settlers arrested after West Bank clashes

BEITLID, Palestinian Territories — Israel’s police and military said on Tuesday that security forces arrested several Israeli settlers after violent clashes near the occupied West Bank city of Tulkarem, during which Palestinians were injured and property was destroyed.

The military said it dispatched troops after “masked Israeli civilians... attacked Palestinians and set fire to property in the area.”

“Security forces operated to disperse the confrontation using riot dispersal means and apprehended several Israeli civilians”, it said, adding that four injured Palestinians were evacuated for medical treatment.

In a separate statement, Israel’s police said that four suspects were arrested “following the violent incident that occurred earlier today in the villages of Beit Lid and Deir Sharaf,” in the north of the West Bank.

Hussein Hammadi, mayor of Beit Lid, told AFP that around 200 Israeli settlers came down from the hills towards his village, before

splitting into two groups.

“One attacked the Bedouin community located on a slope along the road, while the other climbed the nearby hill where the Juneidi Dairy factory is located,” Hammadi said, referring to one of the main Palestinian dairy brands.

“The group that attacked the Bedouin community burned Bedouin vehicles, animal pens, and homes, and tried to steal sheep before moving to another Bedouin encampment,” while those at the dairy factory burned five company trucks and ransacked the facility, Hammadi said.

Hammadi added that 10 Palestinians were injured during the attack.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967, and more than 500,000 Israelis live in settlements in the Palestinian territory.

A minority of these Israelis engage in violence against Palestinians, who complain that Israeli forces usually do not arrest settlers.

All settlements in the West Bank are illegal under international law.

Hammadi said he did not believe the police arrested settlers on Tuesday.

“They would never have dared to do all this if they weren’t protected by the army,” he said.

The UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said that October 2025 was the worst month for settler violence since it began recording in 2006, with 264 attacks that caused casualties or property damage.

Almost none of the perpetrators have been held to account by the Israeli authorities.

Violence has surged across the West Bank since the war in Gaza broke out in October 2023.

At least 1,002 Palestinians, including militants, have been killed in the West Bank by Israeli forces or settlers since the war started, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

During the same period, 43 Israelis, including soldiers, have been killed in Palestinian attacks in the West Bank, according to official Israeli figures. — AFP

Israel negotiator Dermer resigns

JERUSALEM — Israel’s strategic affairs minister Ron Dermer, who also led negotiations for the Gaza ceasefire, has announced his resignation from his ministerial post following the return of hostages held in the Palestinian territory.

Dermer, a close aide to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, spearheaded months of intense negotiations that resulted in the Gaza ceasefire and hostage exchange deal that took effect on October 10.

“This government will be defined both by the attack on October 7th and by the prosecution of the two-year... war that followed,” Dermer wrote in his resignation letter posted on X on Tuesday.

“Two years later, we have dealt a devastating blow to Iran’s terror axis and are now powerfully positioned to usher in an age of security, prosperity and peace,” he said, describing October 7, 2023 as the “darkest day” for the Jewish people since Israel was created in 1948.

“What the future holds for me, I do not know. But I do know this: No matter what I do, I will continue to do my part to help secure the Jewish future.”

Dermer did not indicate in the letter whether he would remain as lead negotiator in the ongoing talks towards a second phase of the Gaza ceasefire deal.

In a statement on X, Netanyahu thanked Dermer for his “tremendous help to me and the state of Israel”.

“I am sure you have much more to contribute in the future,” Netanyahu wrote.

In his resignation letter, Dermer praised Netanyahu for his “experience and strong leadership” during the war.

“When the truth comes out and the facts are known, I am confident that appreciation for your leadership will be even greater,” he added.

A large number of Israelis across the political spectrum support the establishment of an inquiry to determine who is responsible for the authorities’ failure to prevent the Hamas attack on October 7, the deadliest in the country’s history.

But Netanyahu’s government has so far refused to set one up, arguing it cannot be established before the end of the war in Gaza.

Dermer, a 54-year-old Miami Beach native, has held the post of strategic affairs minister since 2022. He was appointed by Netanyahu in February to lead the truce talks, despite being little known among Israelis.

His appointment as negotiator drew immediate criticism over his lack of military experience, his rare appearances on Hebrew-language media and what some describe as his limited understanding of the country’s language and culture.

Since the ceasefire took effect in Gaza, Hamas freed all 20 living hostages and returned the remains of 24 other deceased captives, with four other bodies yet to be returned. — AFP



A Palestinian boy sits on an unexploded missile in the Al-Rimal neighbourhood of Gaza City yesterday.

— AFP

Starmer insists govt 'united' as plot rumours swirl

Peter Hutchison

LONDON – UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer insisted yesterday he runs a “united team” after a senior minister was forced to repeatedly deny that he planned to oust the embattled premier.

Starmer’s comments came after Downing Street sources said Britain’s leader would fight off any leadership challenge, as the anonymous briefing exposed tensions at the heart of the beleaguered government.

Rumours are swirling in the UK parliament that some ministers are plotting to challenge Starmer following a budget due later this month, in which Labour is expected to break manifesto promises.

“This is a united team,” Starmer told parliament, adding that he was focused on “rebuilding the country”.

Earlier, health minister Wes Streeting told Sky News that he was “not going” to demand Starmer’s resignation, adding: “I support the prime minister. I have done since he was elected leader of the Labour Party.”

Streeting, 42, is considered one of Labour’s better performers and has long been touted as a potential replacement for Starmer, among others including interior minister Shabana Mahmood.

The health minister’s denial, repeated to other broadcasters, followed anonymous briefings by Starmer allies who told journalists he would fight any bid to replace him, in what appeared to be an attempt to warn them off.

A person close to Mahmood told AFP that suggestions she was involved in a leadership plot were “nonsense”.

Starmer told parliament that attacks on any of his cabinet members were “completely unacceptable” and said Streeting was doing a “great job”.

“The government has descended into civil war,” said opposition Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch.

Difficult budget looms

Starmer led Labour to a landslide victory over the Conservatives in



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer speaks during the weekly session of Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) in the lower house in London yesterday. – AFP

July last year, returning the centre-left party to power for the first time in 14 years.

But his government’s poll ratings and his personal standing among the British public have nosedived due to struggles on key issues such as economic growth and irregular immigration.

Brexit figurehead Nigel Farage’s rightwing Reform UK party has

been leading by double-digit margins in many national polls for much of this year.

The next general election is not expected until 2029 but the government faces an important test at local elections in May 2026.

First, Starmer must navigate a difficult budget on November 26, when finance minister Rachel Reeves is expected to raise taxes

for workers despite a pre-election pledge not to do so.

Any challenge for the Labour Party leadership would require the support of 20 percent of its MPs, which would currently require 80 nominations.

Some Labour MPs fear a contest would plunge the party into similar chaos experienced by the Conservative party, which cycled through five leaders between 2016 and 2022 as it fought amongst itself.

A backbench Labour MP told AFP that the party should focus on governing and trying to claw back support from Reform.

“We have a commanding majority, a clear timeline until the next election and a compelling narrative of fixing the country after 14 years of damage and decay, including through Farage and the Tories’ Brexit mess,” they said.

But another, speaking on condition of anonymity, said there was widespread belief amongst MPs that Starmer, 63, would not lead the party into the next election.

– AFP

Ramaphosa says US skipping G20 'their loss'

Hillary Orinde

JOHANNESBURG – President Cyril Ramaphosa said yesterday the United States boycott of the G20 summit in South Africa later this month would not prevent the meeting of the world’s leading economies from going ahead.

Pretoria and Washington have clashed over a range of policy issues, including South Africa’s summit agenda, culminating in President Donald Trump announcing at the weekend that no US official will attend the Johannesburg gathering.

“We will take fundamental decisions and their absence is their loss,” Ramaphosa told reporters in the coastal city of Cape Town.

“In many ways, the United States is also giving up the very important role that they should be playing as the biggest economy in the world,” he added.

Following in the footsteps of his staunch ally and financial backer Trump, Argentinian President Javier Milei will also skip the summit, his spokesperson told AFP Wednesday.

Set for November 22-23, the summit marks the first time the G20 will convene on African soil.

South Africa – current G20 chair – wants to use its presidency to champion Global South priorities, including boosting climate resilience and tackling debt in developing countries, before handing the baton to the United States next year.

The US has labelled South Africa’s theme of “Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability” as “anti-American”.

“They’ve chosen to boycott, and boycotting never achieves anything of great impact, because decisions will be taken that will move the various issues ahead,” Ramaphosa,

alluding to a decision on the cost of debt, a hot-button issue for developing nations.

Buenos Aires did not specify the reasons for Milei’s absence, but the right-wing leader has repeatedly expressed his diplomatic alignment with the United States and Trump.

Milei will send Foreign Minister Pablo Quirno in his place.

Tensions

Trump has singled out South Africa for harsh treatment on a number of issues since he returned to the White House in January, notably making widely debunked claims of white Afrikaners being systematically “killed and slaughtered” in the country.

He ambushed Ramaphosa in the Oval office earlier this year, playing a video in which he alleged a campaign against white farmers by the post-apartheid government.

South Africa’s government denies any such policy.

In May, Trump offered refugee status to Afrikaners, descendants of the first European settlers, a first group of around 50 were flown to the United States on a chartered plane.

Pretoria has also come under fire from the Trump administration over its case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and laws meant to empower black South Africans as part of efforts to redress inequalities inherited from apartheid.

Founded in 1999, the Group of 20 (G20) leading economies comprises 19 countries and two regional bodies – the European Union and the African Union (AU).

The bloc represents 85 percent of the world’s GDP and about two-thirds of its population. – AFP

Stampede at Ghana army recruitment event kills 6, wounds 22

ACCRA – At least six people were crushed to death yesterday after a crowd of job seekers surged through stadium gates during a military recruitment event in the Ghanaian capital Accra, the army said.

“The unfortunate incident led to the death of six potential recruits,” it said in a statement.

Twenty-two others were wounded in the stampede at the El-Wak Sports Stadium, with at least five in critical condition, Ghana military hospital official Evelyn Abraham-Kwabiah told AFP.

Five people were also injured in similar stampede in Kumasi, in the southern region of the country.

The army said in a separate statement yesterday afternoon (local time) that it has suspended the recruitment exercise and set up

a committee to probe the cause of the “unfortunate incident”.

At the 37 Military Hospital in Accra, scenes of grief and confusion unfolded as families crowded the emergency ward, desperate for news of their loved ones.

Relatives wept openly, clutching phones and identity cards, while medical teams hurried stretchers through the packed corridors.

Security officers struggled to control the swelling crowd outside the casualty unit, where dozens of people pressed against barricades for information.

President John Mahama arrived at the hospital under tight security to visit the injured, his convoy drawing even more of a crowd.

The Ghana Armed Forces said the stampede took place around 6:20 am (local time) when an

unexpected surge of applicants “breached security protocols and rushed” through the stadium gates ahead of the scheduled screening.

“We witnessed a sad event today, we encountered a disaster,” Mahama said.

“The violence ensued when the gates were opened for people to enter, but the youth rushed in, and sadly, some fell and were stomped on.”

In addition to normal military activities, soldiers in Ghana are also tasked with targeting illegal mining operations in the gold-rich west African country.

Mahama said his government had mandated that the recruitment drive be done openly so that young people all over the country can have equal access to joining the military. – AFP

White House says Democrats leaked Epstein emails to 'smear' Trump

WASHINGTON – The White House accused Democrats yesterday of pushing a “fake narrative” after they released emails in which Jeffrey Epstein suggested that President Donald Trump was aware of the financier’s sexual abuse.

“The Democrats selectively leaked emails to the liberal media to create a fake narrative to smear President Trump,” Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement.

She added that the release of the mails was “hoax” designed to take the shine off an upcoming vote to end the longest-ever US government shutdown, which Trump has claimed

as a victory for Republicans.

“These stories are nothing more than bad-faith efforts to distract from President Trump’s historic accomplishments,” Leavitt said.

“Any American with common sense sees right through this hoax and clear distraction from the government opening back up again.”

Trump has denied any involvement in or knowledge of the sex-trafficking activities of his former friend, who died by suicide in federal prison in 2019 as he was awaiting trial.

But in one of the mails released by Democrats on the House Oversight Committee – and initially reported on by *The New York Times*

and CNN – Epstein said that Trump “knew about the girls”.

Epstein also asserts in another mail that Trump “spent hours at my house” with an unnamed victim.

Leavitt said that victim was Epstein’s main accuser Virginia Giuffre, who died by suicide in April.

Giuffre “repeatedly said President Trump was not involved in any wrongdoing whatsoever and ‘couldn’t have been friendlier’ to her in their limited interactions,” Trump’s spokeswoman added.

“The fact remains that President Trump kicked Jeffrey Epstein out of his club decades ago for being a creep to his female employees, including Giuffre.” – AFP

Indigenous protesters clash with security at COP30 summit in Brazil

Madeleine Pradel

BELÉM – Dozens of indigenous protesters clashed with security guards on Tuesday at the COP30* summit in Brazil, causing minor injuries in a rare incident of violence at the UN climate talks.

In the evening, indigenous demonstrators and their supporters breached security barriers at the main entrance to the conference hall in Belém and scuffled with security officers there.

The incident caused “minor injuries to two security staff, and minor damage to the venue,” a spokesperson for United Nations Climate Change told AFP.

“Brazilian and UN security personnel took protective actions to secure the venue, following all established security protocols,” the spokesperson said.

Calm was quickly restored and security staff used tables and chairs to barricade the entrance to the high-level “blue zone” at the heart of the conference venue.

An AFP journalist saw a police officer being evacuated in a wheelchair.

Security inside the COP30 venue falls under the responsibility of the UN, while local authorities take charge of the surrounding area.

UN police officers were asking those still inside the COP30 venue to evacuate the vast site of giant air-conditioned tents.

“The indigenous movement wanted to present its demands inside the blue zone but were not allowed



Security personnel clash with indigenous protesters and activists as they storm the venue during the COP30 UN Climate Change Conference in Belém, Pará State, northern Brazil, on Tuesday. – AFP

in,” said João Santiago, a professor at the Federal University of Pará.

‘Voices ignored’

Maria Clara, a protester with the Rede Sustentabilidade (“Sustainability Network”) Bahia association, told AFP she wanted to draw attention to the plight of Indigenous peoples.

“These voices are ignored,” she said.

“They entered the COP30 venue to protest the fact that the COP will end but the destruction continues.”

The March for Health and Climate, the organisers behind the protest, sought to distance themselves from the incident.

“The march, which concluded before the COP30 venue, was a

legitimate, peaceful, and organized expression of popular mobilisation, built through dialogue, responsibility, and collective commitment,” the group said in a statement.

The UN spokesperson said “the venue is fully secured, and COP negotiations continue.” Brazilian and UN authorities were investigating the incident, the spokesperson added.

Last week, Brazil’s Minister for Indigenous Peoples, Sonia Guajajara, said the UN summit would be “the best COP in terms of indigenous participation.” – AFP

*COP 30 stands for the 30th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). – DeepSeek

Police ground drone drug flights from Morocco to Spain

MADRID – Spanish police said yesterday they had arrested nine people and dismantled a criminal network that used homemade drones “with exceptional range” to transport hashish from Morocco to Spain.

The drones would depart from southern Spain to pick up the drugs in Morocco and return, releasing the cargo over Vejer de la Frontera and Tarifa in Cádiz province, Spain’s Guardia Civil gendarmerie said in a statement.

Packages were equipped with fluorescent markers and radio-linked geolocation devices to aid night-time recovery, it added.

Police said the group manufactured the drones, which were capable of flying over 200 kilometres using components brought from Asian suppliers at a workshop in Alcalá de los Gazules.

“The group developed homemade drones with exceptional range, accuracy, and carrying capacity, well beyond that of standard commercial models,” the statement said.

The network operated nearly every night, launching up to 10 drones simultaneously and moving roughly 200 kilograms of hashish in a single night.

The operation, dubbed “Ruche” which means “beehive” in French, was carried out in cooperation with the Royal Moroccan Gendarmerie after authorities detected multiple unidentified drone flights between the two countries.

Police seized eight drones, and another 10 which were being built, in five raids carried out on Monday in southern Spain, along with over 150 kilograms of hashish and 320,000 euros (US\$370,000) in cash.

Nine people have been arrested so far.

Northern Morocco is just 14 kilometres from Spain’s southern Andalusia region at the Strait of Gibraltar’s narrowest point.

Spain is a major entry point for hashish into Europe because of its proximity to Morocco, a key producer of the drug.

Last year, Spanish police busted a criminal network that used Ukrainian-made drones to fly hashish from Morocco to Spain.

The devices used by that group were capable of transporting up to just 10 kilograms of drugs per trip and had an autonomy of more than 50 kilometres. – AFP

Panamá seizes 12 tonnes of US-bound cocaine, arrests 10

PANAMÁ CITY – Panamanian authorities on Tuesday announced a large seizure of US-bound cocaine on a ferry in the Pacific, at a time Washington is upping an anti-drug military deployment in Latin America.

Prosecutor Julio Villareal told reporters approximately 12 tonnes of drugs, “in this case cocaine,” were seized in an operation on Monday, and 10 people arrested.

It was one the biggest such hauls in Panamanian waters to date, he said.

Panamá is a transit point for cocaine from South America, mainly Colombia, destined for the United States – the world’s largest consumer.

Villareal said Venezuelans, Ecuadorans and Nicaraguans were among those detained on the ferry, which had set out from Colombia.

Panamá in 2023 seized a total of 119 metric tons of drugs.

Latin American countries have been keen to show off anti-narcotics efforts as US strikes on alleged drug-ferrying boats have claimed at least 76 lives so far in the Caribbean and Pacific.

Washington said its military deployment in the region is part of an anti-drug campaign, but Venezuela in particular fears it is all a ploy to get rid of its president, Nicolás Maduro. – AFP



Performers dance while carrying shields adorned with Angolan flags during a parade celebrating Angola’s 50th Independence Anniversary at the António Agostinho Neto Memorial in Luanda on Tuesday. – AFP

Sánchez hits opposition over cancer screening row

MADRID – Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez yesterday criticised the conservative opposition’s “immoral” healthcare conduct in the regions where they govern, after a cancer screening scandal provoked outrage.

His comments follow last month’s revelation that hundreds of women in Spain’s most populous region, Andalusia, did not receive their breast cancer screening results.

The regional government run by the conservative People’s Party (PP) said the scandal affected at least 2,300 women who had mammograms in public hospitals

in recent years.

Sánchez said regional powers had misused central funds to benefit elites with tax cuts and other measures, while ordinary citizens suffered – referring to the breast screening scandal.

“This may be legal, but it is undoubtedly immoral and destructive for the middle and working classes,” the Socialist premier said during a parliamentary debate.

Andalusia’s regional authorities have so far not offered clear explanations for the failure.

But they said they planned to boost staffing in mammography

units, a move many patients and activists have deemed insufficient.

Several health administrators have resigned, and protests over the scandal have erupted in the southern region.

Some patients have already announced plans to file complaints against the Andalusian government.

Regional leader Juan Manuel Moreno Bonilla, who is facing elections next year, has apologised.

Spain has a decentralised political system in which regions are responsible for public healthcare.

– AFP



Visitors take pictures with their smartphones during a performance of the Unitree robot at the Web Summit at the Parque das Nações in Lisbon, on Tuesday. The five-day Web summit, the annual gathering of the digital economy and new technologies, ends on Friday. – AFP



Tuchel warns Bellingham must fight for England berth at World Cup

Steven Griffiths

LONDON — Thomas Tuchel has warned Jude Bellingham that the Real Madrid midfielder faces a fight to earn a place in England's starting line-up at the World Cup.

Bellingham is back in Tuchel's squad for their final World Cup qualifiers against Serbia and Albania this week after being left out of the last international gathering in October.

The 22-year-old had just returned from shoulder surgery when Tuchel opted against selecting him for the Wales and Latvia matches last month, allowing Aston Villa's Morgan Rogers to shine in the number 10 role for England.

Rogers' impressive performances have presented Tuchel with an intriguing dilemma as he looks ahead to next year's World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

"Rather than finding a position for the best players to have them on the field, it is maybe better to put everyone in their best position and have a competition," Tuchel told reporters yesterday when asked if he would try to fit both players into his team.

"At the moment the competition is between the two of them. They are friends so it is a friendly competition.

"They don't have to be enemies and hate each other. They are respectful and they fight for the same position.

"Can they play together? Yes, but in a different structure and now is not the moment to change the structure."

Bellingham's return comes after Tuchel was forced to apologise earlier this season for claiming his mother found some of the playmaker's on-pitch antics "repulsive".

'The standards are clear'

Tuchel, who also recalled Phil Foden after he was left out of the previous three England squads, insisted Bellingham and the Manchester City forward both seem happy to be back in the fold.

But he made it clear that England's strong performances without Bellingham and Foden showed they are not guaranteed to waltz back into his side.

"It has been good to have him [Bellingham] back. There has been a good atmosphere in the last two days and everyone is happy to be in camp," Tuchel said.

"It is always nice to have Phil around, he is a nice guy and like Jude, he is part of this squad and happy to be together.

"I expect what they show. Be straightaway part of the group and why should it be awkward for them? We were driving the levels and standards without them.

"We are obliged to drive our own standards and build what we can build. Now they are back and it is their responsibility to contribute

to this and it is what they are doing. The standards are clear."

Group K winners England secured their World Cup berth with a 5-0 rout of Latvia in October.

Tuchel has won seven of his eight matches, including six World Cup qualifiers without conceding a single goal.

After hosting Serbia today and travelling to Albania on Sunday, Tuchel has only two friendlies remaining in March before he has to name his World Cup squad.

Regardless of who makes it into his group for the tournament, the former Chelsea and Bayern Munich boss is pleased with the unity he has managed to create in less than a year in charge.

"What we are trying is to build a strong bond, to build an energy, a team, a brotherhood that everybody wants to join and to also build a competition that everybody knows that if they pull out in the wrong moment, the door can be closed because someone else will take their place," he said.

"It is not as a threat but the other way around. We are absolutely on the way. Everybody wanted to be part of the camp. Everybody was desperate to come.

"It is an energy that feeds itself and this at the moment is the place where we are."

The game will be played at 3:45 a.m. tomorrow Macau time.

— AFP/MPD

Wolves appoint Edwards as manager in bid to avoid relegation



Luton Town's Welsh manager Rob Edwards gestures on the touchline during the English Premier League match against Wolverhampton Wanderers at the Molineux stadium in Wolverhampton, central England on April 27, 2024.

— AFP



LONDON — Premier League strugglers Wolves confirmed the appointment of Rob Edwards as their new head coach on a three-and-a-half year contract yesterday.

Edwards has left Championship club Middlesbrough and replaces Vitor Pereira, who was sacked by Wolves earlier this month.

The 42-year-old, who managed Luton in the Premier League, faces a huge task to extend Wolves' eight-year stay in the top flight.

Wolves have taken just two points from their opening 11 league games, losing nine times to sink to the bottom of the table.

Edwards will be in his fourth spell at Wolves after making 111 appearances as a player, as well as enjoying time at the Midlands club as a coach and interim boss.

"I know Rob very well and I have seen his growth in different jobs," said Wolves chairman Jeff Shi.

"He's a very good person, he knows the club very well, he knows the city, the fans and he is very talented.

"When he was a youth coach here, he showed his tactical awareness, but after he took first-team jobs he started to grow his own identity, character and leadership."

Edwards lifted Middlesbrough to second place in the Championship table, five points behind leaders Coventry, prior to his departure.

Wolves are already eight points

from safety and Shi added: "We need to refresh the whole club with a new coach's philosophy, bringing his own identity and ideas, and we can build on that.

"We are at a new chapter for the club and Rob will be a key piece of that."

Middlesbrough had initially rejected an approach for Edwards, who only joined the club in June.

Edwards, however, expressed his desire for a move to Molineux and was stood down for Middlesbrough's Championship win against Birmingham on Saturday after the clubs agreed a reported £3 million (US\$3.9 million) compensation package.

He will be joined by assistant head coach Harry Watling after the pair worked together at Middlesbrough.

Edwards' first game in charge of Wolves will come after the international break on November 22, at home to Crystal Palace.

He arrives at Molineux tasking with lifting a gloomy atmosphere after frustrated fans turned on Pereira and called for owners Fosun to sell the club.

Pereira had saved Wolves from relegation last season but the Portuguese coach was unable to recreate that magic this term.

Confidence has been at rock bottom for much of the season, with successive 3-0 defeats at Fulham and Chelsea in their last two matches providing the impetus for Shi to take the managerial change.

— AFP



Mbappe says France football team 'to remember' Paris terror victims

PARIS — France captain Kylian Mbappe said the national football team wished to remember all the victims of the 2015 Paris terror attacks as they prepare to play on the 10th anniversary of the atrocity.

On Friday, November 13, 2015, a series of attacks in Paris and around the Stade de France during a friendly match between Les Bleus and Germany left a total of 130 people dead.

"Everyone knows how special tomorrow is," Mbappe said on the eve of France's World Cup qualifier against Ukraine.

"Not in a good way. So we wanted to remember all those who have lost loved ones, who have been affected, hurt, whether mentally or physically.

"We will try tomorrow (today) to pay tribute to all these people,

whether during the day, during the match, by trying to put smiles on the faces of those who come to the stadium, even though we know it's not a joyful day."

Most of those who were killed lost their lives at the Bataclan concert hall in the city, where the US band Eagles of Death Metal was playing.

But one person died near the Stade de France in the northern Paris suburb of Saint-Denis, where multiple explosions took place as suicide bombers attempted to enter the ground.

The stadium was packed with France's then-president, Francois Hollande, among the close to 80,000 spectators in attendance for the game against Germany - the match was played to a conclusion despite the unfolding events, with

France winning 2-0.

"It would have been better if we could have avoided playing on November 13," coach Didier Deschamps, who was on the touchline 10 years ago, admitted as he spoke to reporters last week to announce his squad.

A minute's silence will be held ahead of kick-off to remember the victims of the attacks, and Deschamps added: "There is an obligation to remember what happened, but there is a football match to be played too."

France, winners of the World Cup in 2018 and runners-up in Qatar in 2022, will qualify for next year's tournament with a game to spare if they beat Ukraine.

The game will be played at 3:45 a.m. tomorrow Macau time.

— AFP/MPD



Messi return 'unrealistic', says Barca president Laporta

BARCELONA — Barcelona all-time great Lionel Messi returning to the Catalan giants is "unrealistic", the club's president Joan Laporta said yesterday.

The 38-year-old Argentine superstar made a surprise appearance at Barca's Camp Nou stadium on Sunday night and said he hoped "one day I can return, and not just to say goodbye as a player,

as I never got to do".

Eight-time Ballon d'Or winner Messi, Barca's record goalscorer and appearance maker, left for Paris Saint-Germain in 2021 after two decades there because their precarious financial position meant they could not afford to keep him.

"Out of the utmost respect for Messi, the professionals at the club, Barca, and the Barca club members,

I believe that now, for me to make speculation that is unrealistic, nor do I think is fair, well, I believe that is not appropriate," Laporta told Catalunya Radio.

The president, who was in charge at the time of Messi's departure, said he did not regret what happened because "Barca is above everything".

Laporta confirmed he would

love to hold a match in homage to Messi's career at the rebuilt Camp Nou, once it is fully open.

"Things didn't end the way we would have liked... if, in some way, this tribute can make up for what wasn't done, I think it would be a good thing," explained Laporta.

"It would be right that he has the best tribute [match] in the world, and it would be wonderful to have

it here, in front of 105,000 fans," he continued.

The president said Inter Miami forward Messi's surprise visit to the stadium on Sunday was a "spontaneous" display of his love of the club.

Messi is currently in Spain with the Argentina national team, where they are training before a friendly against Angola.

— AFP

Why even Olympic gold is not enough at China's National Games



He Leijing

GUANGZHOU – In China, there's a sight that astonishes even the most seasoned sports fans: a cluster of world champions straining every sinew and gasping for every point – simply to win a national title.

That's no exaggeration. In China, for some athletes, winning a world championship can actually be easier than claiming a national one.

Welcome to China's 15th National Games, the country's premier multi-sport event. For the first time, the quadrennial Games is jointly hosted by Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, running until November 21 and drawing over 14,000 elite athletes from across the country.

It's a stage so fierce and so dazzling that domestic duels often look like world finals.

Take table tennis for example, which is China's national obsession and its most dominant sport globally. When titans like Ma Long, Fan Zhendong, Sun Yingsha, Chen Meng and Wang Chuqin meet under the same roof, you might understand why the nation's grip on the world title seems unshakable.

One bad match can see an Olympic champion knocked out. The table tennis arena at the National Games has no easy rounds and no secrets, as everyone knows each other. These domestic rivals have traded blows in training halls for years.

It's like a neighborhood duel where nobody wants to lose to the person next door, yet there are no secrets between them. Spin tricks, serve habits and stamina are all laid bare. Add a few hungry young challengers into the mix, and even legends can feel the heat.

Victory here takes more than skill. It demands luck, mental toughness and constant reinvention. Olympic champion Chen Meng, despite her Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024 golds, still hasn't won a National Games' women's singles title. Legends like Liu Guoliang, Kong Linghui and Zhang Jike – all world champions – also fell short of the national singles gold.

So never underestimate the Games. The unique competitive ecosystem where being the world's best still isn't enough often forges world-beating athletes and record-shattering performances.

On the shooting range, Paris 2024 Olympic champion Liu Yukun fired a stunning 470.1 points in the men's 50m rifle three positions, smashing his own world record of 468.9 set last year. Meanwhile, Olympic pistol medalists Li Yuehong and Wang Xinjie didn't even make the National Games final.

"This is what top-tier competition looks like!" one Chinese sports fan exclaimed on social media.

The same intensity unfolds across diving, swimming, volleyball and weightlifting. Fans thrill to see stars like Pan Zhanle, Zhang Yufei

and Qin Haiyang in the pool, or diving prodigies Quan Hongchan, Chen Yuxi, Chen Yiwen and Zhang Jiaqi competing across 14 titles.

"It's insane. You break a world record just to win the National Games," Olympic weightlifting champion Hou Zhihui said after her victory at the last tournament, where she bested the world-leading mark in order to win by just one kilogram.

"That is probably the secret to China's strength in weightlifting," she added.

Indeed, the relentless intensity keeps Chinese sports shining globally. From 2021 to 2024, Chinese athletes captured 519 world titles and set 68 world records. Beijing 2022 saw their best-ever performance at a Winter Olympics, and the Paris 2024 Games delivered their best overseas results.

The National Games' crucible is also about the future. In table tennis, for example, the top eight finishers in the senior singles categories can automatically qualify for the national team, turning the competition into both a battle for glory and a trial for survival.

Such reforms ensure that even established champions dare not relax, while young players see a pathway to the top.

That mix of tension, opportunity and sheer excellence makes the National Games not just a feast for the audience, but a celebration of the extraordinary power of Chinese sport.

– Xinhua

Auger-Aliassime beats Shelton to get off mark at ATP Finals

Tennis

TURIN – Felix Auger-Aliassime got his ATP Finals bid up and running yesterday by beating Ben Shelton 4-6, 7-6 (9/7), 7-5 ahead of Jannik Sinner's clash with Alexander Zverev.

Canada's Auger-Aliassime won just his second ever match at the season-ending tournament with a battling display in Turin, coming back from a poor start to boost his hopes of reaching the semi-finals.

His win means that current world number one Sinner will qualify from the Bjorn Borg Group if he beats Zverev later in front of a partisan home crowd.

"There was a lot of firepower... obviously we know how good he can serve but I felt that if I was able to engage in the rallies, neutralise his serve maybe I would get a chance at some point," said Auger-Aliassime to Sky Sport.

"I think I played great, very aggressive, hitting very good balls on backhand and forehand, so I

went for it and in the end it paid off."

Auger-Aliassime's imposing service game, which included nine aces, eventually broke down Shelton whose erratic play cost him a debut win at the Finals.

The 25-year-old showed no signs of having the calf problem which affected his opening loss to Sinner, and he will face Zverev on Friday with a chance of making the knockout stage.

Shelton looked to be in control when he won the first set at the first opportunity, breaking Auger-Aliassime's serve for the second time just after having his initial break cancelled out.

Auger-Aliassime won a tight second set which went with serve until the tie-break, when Shelton had to save three sets points before eventually conceding the match lead with a double-fault.

He won the match at the third time of asking at the end of another bruising set, breaking Shelton and getting a win on the board.

– AFP



Zheng Qinwen, flag bearer of Hubei delegation, parades during the opening ceremony of the 15th National Games in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, on Sunday. Reigning Olympic tennis champion Zheng Qinwen has withdrawn from the 15th National Games, the Hubei sports delegation announced yesterday.

– Xinhua

Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games schedule revealed



LOS ANGELES – The 2028 Los Angeles Olympics competition schedule was unveiled yesterday by organisers, including a showcase spot for the women's 100 metres and a Super Saturday session.

LA28 revealed a detailed schedule earlier than usual. It starts with the opening ceremony on July 14 and ends with the closing ceremony on July 30.

The biggest-ever Games will feature 11,200 athletes in 51 sports across 49 venues.

Every team sport will feature an equal or greater number of women's teams compared to men's teams for the first time with 50.5 percent of total athletes being women.

On day one, July 15, the most women's finals ever held on one day will be contested, starting with women's triathlon with a spotlight on the women's 100 metres.

"We want to come out in these Games with a bang. We want to start day one with a showcase of the fastest females in the world," LA28 chief of sport Shana Ferguson said.

Doing so will mean women must run three 100m heats in one day.

"We did speak at length with athletes. It was a largely positive

conversation," Janet Evans, LA28 chief athlete officer, said.

"We're kicking off the athletic competition with one of the marquee events for women athletes.

"When we presented it to the athletes that way, there was excitement. They said let me know early and I'll train to run three 100s in one day."

Athletics will for the first time in history span the entire Games, with World Athletics president Sebastian Coe describing the schedule as "both innovative but also honours tradition".

World and Olympic medallist Sha'Carri Richardson remarked: "Track and field is having its moment, and the road to LA28 is about to be something special, especially for the women's sprints."

The American, who won women's 4x100 relay gold and silver in the 100m in Paris last year, added: "The talent, energy, and competition – it's all going to shine. Just look at day one of the LA Games."

Organisers flipped swimming and athletics from the traditional schedule so the opening ceremony venue, SoFi Stadium, could also host swimming in the second week.

Track and field events will be held in the first week of the Games, with swimming in the second week.

Super Saturday

"You move to the second week. You have 38,000 people in the stands," Evans said. "Having 38,000 fans watch my favourite sport is exciting as well."

Swimmers also have a better chance to attend the opening ceremony without next-morning races to consider.

A "Super Saturday" schedule on July 29 includes 26 finals sessions in 23 sports, including 15 gold and bronze medal team matches and finals in 15 individual sports.

Among Olympic champions to be crowned on that day are those in athletics, basketball, beach volleyball, boxing, cricket, golf, football, swimming and tennis.

The last Olympic champions will be crowned in swimming just before the closing ceremony.

Organisers scheduled the marathons on the final weekend, the women's race on July 29 and the men's marathon on July 30.

No dynamic pricing

About 14 million tickets will be available for Olympic events, with pricing details to be announced later, but dynamic pricing is not being considered, Ferguson said.

Olympic and sport federation

officials have helped create the LA28 schedule.

"We don't do any of this schedule without them," Ferguson said.

Weather considerations went into the plan, with some sessions moved into the evening to have cooler conditions, including for horses at Santa Anita for equestrian events.

Baseball and softball will return to the Olympic lineup. Baseball will be played at Dodger Stadium, home of the reigning Major League Baseball champion Los Angeles Dodgers, with medal games July 19.

Baseball will begin on July 13, a day ahead of the opening ceremony, with a new competition window to allow MLB players to compete in

the Olympics.

Cricket rejoins the Olympic lineup after more than a century with the women's final on July 20 and the men's final on July 29.

Lacrosse, on the 1908 London Olympic calendar and later a demonstration sport, will return with the men's and women's finals on July 29.

Los Angeles will also introduce American flag football and squash on July 15 for Olympic debuts.

Details for the Olympic football tournament, to be staged across the United States, and the Los Angeles Paralympics will be announced later.

Ticket registration for the LA Olympics will begin in January.

– AFP

Pope Leo reels off four favourite films

VATICAN CITY – Pope Leo XIV has revealed his four favourite films ahead of a special audience with Hollywood celebrities and Oscar-winning directors at the Vatican.

Leo, the first pope from the United States, picked tearjerkers including Frank Capra's classic 1946 film "It's a Wonderful Life" with James Stewart, in which an angel is sent from heaven to help a desperate family man.

The Chicago-born pontiff said in a video released by the Vatican yesterday that his other picks include Robert Wise's musical "The Sound of Music" (1965) and Robert Redford's family drama "Ordinary People" (1980).

He finished with Roberto Benigni's "Life Is Beautiful" (1997), about a father trying to shield his son from the horrors of a WWII concentration camp.

The Vatican said Leo had

picked "the films that are most significant to him".

Leo, who was elected in May, will hold a special audience on Saturday at the Vatican's Apostolic Palace with stars including Cate Blanchett, Chris Pine, Viggo Mortensen, Dave Franco, and Monica Bellucci.

Directors including Spike Lee, Judd Apatow, George Miller and Giuseppe Tornatore of "Cinema Paradiso" fame are also expected to attend.

The 70-year-old pontiff hopes "to deepen dialogue with the World of Cinema... exploring the possibilities that artistic creativity offers to the mission of the Church and the promotion of human values," the Vatican said in a statement.

The event is being organised by the Vatican as part of the Catholic Church's Holy Year celebrations.

– AFP

Humans can no longer tell AI music from the real thing: survey

PARIS – It has become nearly impossible for people to tell the difference between music generated by artificial intelligence and that created by humans, according to a survey released yesterday.

The polling firm Ipsos asked 9,000 people to listen to two clips of AI-generated music and one of human-made music in a survey conducted for France-based streaming platform Deezer.

"Ninety-seven percent could not distinguish between music entirely generated by AI and human-created music," said Deezer.

The survey came out as a country music song featuring a male singer's voice generated by AI reached the top of the US charts for the first time this week.

"Walk My Walk" by Breaking Rust – an artist widely reported by US media to be powered by generative AI technology – made it to the top spot on Billboard

magazine's chart ranking digital sales of country songs, according to data published on Monday.

Deezer said more than half of the respondents to its survey felt uncomfortable at not being able to tell the difference.

Pollsters also asked broader questions about the impact of AI, with 51 percent saying the technology would lead to more low-quality music on streaming platforms and almost two-thirds believing it will lead to a loss of creativity.

"The survey results clearly show that people care about music and want to know if they're listening to AI or human made tracks or not," Deezer CEO Alexis Lanternier said.

One in three streamed tracks AI

Deezer said there has not only been a surge in AI-generated content being uploaded to its platform, but it is finding listeners.

In January, one in 10 of the tracks streamed each day were completely AI-generated. Ten months later, that

percentage has climbed to over one in three, or nearly 40,000 per day.

Eighty percent of survey respondents wanted fully AI-generated music clearly labelled for listeners.

Deezer is the only major music-streaming platform that systematically labels completely AI-generated content for users.

The issue gained prominence in June when a band called The Velvet Sundown suddenly went viral on Spotify, and only confirmed the following month that it was in fact AI-generated content.

The AI group's most popular song has been streamed more than three million times.

In response, Spotify said it would encourage artists and publishers to sign up to a voluntary industry code to disclose AI use in music production.

The Deezer survey was conducted between October 6 and 10 in eight countries: Brazil, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands and the United States.

– AFP



British actors Ian McKellen (centre) and Adjoa Andoh (fifth from left) pose with students before taking part in a special "Shakespearean Breakfast" by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and the Foyle Foundation at Middle Temple Hall in London yesterday, aiming to launch a new curriculum for teaching Shakespeare in schools.

– AFP

'Demon Slayer' helps Sony hike profit forecasts

Simon Sturdee and Katie Forster

TOKYO – Shares in Japanese giant Sony jumped more than five percent on Tuesday after it hiked full-year profit forecasts thanks to the latest "Demon Slayer" anime blockbuster.

The company also put the improved forecasts down to higher expected sales of its PlayStation games console and a smaller-than-expected impact from US tariffs.

For the 2025-26 financial year, Sony forecast net profit of 1.05 trillion yen (US\$6.8 billion), up eight percent from its last forecast, little changed from last year's record profit.

It also increased its operating profit projection by eight percent and its sales forecast by three percent.

The new guidance was the second hike this year, with Sony in August having raised its net profit projection to 970 billion yen.

In the first half of the current financial year, net profit rose 13.7

percent year-on-year to 570 billion yen, Sony said.

"Demon Slayer: Kimetsu No Yaiba – Infinity Castle: Part 1," the first title in a new trilogy based on the popular manga series, has been a huge hit.

The animated movie has become the second-highest grossing film of all time in Japan, second only to the previous "Demon Slayer" movie, a COVID-19 pandemic hit.

The dark fantasy about sword-swishing Tanjiro Kamado's final showdown to slay demons also topped the box office when it opened in US and Canadian cinemas in September.

Sony lowered its forecast for the impact of US tariffs to around 50 billion yen, a reduction of 20 billion yen from the previous estimate in August.

Trade officials in July reached a deal that saw the United States lower tariffs on Japanese goods to 15 percent from a threatened 25 percent.

Japanese auto giant Toyota last week also hiked its operating income and net profit forecasts for the current fiscal year.

Sony in August bumped up the price of PlayStation 5 video game consoles by US\$50 in the United States citing a "challenging economic environment".

The PlayStation 5, which launched in 2020, is "in the down-cycle of its lifespan", analyst David Cole of DFC Intelligence told AFP.

The hotly anticipated upcoming release of the "Grand Theft Auto VI" game is also important for Sony.

Its creators Rockstar Games last week again delayed the launch, this time until November 2026.

"Overall, this is one of the biggest concerns for PlayStation sales as GTA6 is expected to be a major driver for Sony," said Cole.

"However, the PlayStation business model is such that it is not dependent on one or two big hits," he said.

– AFP

UK music industry warns growth threatened by AI, Brexit

LONDON – Britain's music industry contributed £8 billion (US\$10.5 billion) to the UK economy in 2024, but the effects of Brexit and AI have clouded the sector's outlook, an industry report showed yesterday.

UK tours by Taylor Swift and Take That helped lift the industry's contribution to the UK economy last year, according to the annual report from UK Music, an umbrella organisation for the industry.

Music exports were also boosted by the international success of artists such as Charli XCX and Lola Young.

However, annual growth was slower than the double-digit increases recorded in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the report said.

UK Music's chief executive Tom Kiehl warned that the industry faced a number of challenges, pointing to the "need for urgent action".

He said that the UK government would be judged on the "progress

it makes in regulating artificial intelligence and unlocking EU touring".

The impact of Brexit, such as through increased touring costs, red tape and fewer EU clients making recording studio bookings, is "still bad and is getting worse", the report said.

Elsewhere, two-thirds of music creators surveyed by UK Music said that AI poses a threat to their career.

Ninety percent of British music creators said protections should be in place to stop their work being used without permission or payment.

The UK government plans to make it easier for AI companies to access data by introducing a copyright exception for commercial AI training with its Data (Use and Access) Bill.

Under the proposed law, companies developing AI models would not need permission from creatives to access certain content – a plan that has provoked a fierce backlash from the cultural sector.

– AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 0°C~14°C	Manila 23°C~32°C	New York 5°C~13°C	Lisbon 15°C~19°C
Shanghai 9°C~20°C	Bangkok 24°C~31°C	London 12°C~16°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~28°C
Hong Kong 18°C~23°C	Tokyo 8°C~16°C	Frankfurt 8°C~15°C	Luanda 23°C~27°C
Taipei 19°C~24°C	Singapore 24°C~32°C	Vancouver 6°C~12°C	Maputo 20°C~30°C
Guangzhou 17°C~23°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~32°C	Paris 12°C~18°C	Dili 24°C~31°C
Nanjing 6°C~19°C	Jakarta 23°C~33°C	Moscow 4°C~7°C	São Tomé 25°C~30°C
Guilin 12°C~22°C	Seoul 2°C~17°C	Las Vegas 13°C~26°C	Praia 23°C~30°C
Xi'an 5°C~15°C	Sydney 19°C~27°C	Monte Carlo 12°C~19°C	Bissau 22°C~33°C



Tang Qi of Jiangsu competes on the horizontal bar during the artistic gymnastics men's team final at the 15th National Games in Zhaoqing, Guangdong Province, yesterday. — Xinhua



Cao Ligu (left) of Guangxi competes against Tan Haodong of Wuhan Sports University during the men's Greco Roman 60kg wrestling final at the 15th National Games in Qingyuan, Guangdong Province, yesterday. — Xinhua



Yu Lisai (left) of Beijing Sport University competes against Li Shu of Henan during the women's 66 kg boxing final at the 15th National Games in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, yesterday. — Xinhua



Fans cheer for Zhu Ting of Henan during women's volleyball group A match against Beijing at the 15th National Games in Macao, yesterday. — Xinhua



Gu Bing of Guangdong competes during the equestrian dressage individual final at the 15th National Games in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, yesterday. — Xinhua



Athletes compete during the women's 20km race walking event at the 15th National Games in Zhuhai, Guangdong Province, yesterday. — Xinhua