

IAS to launch smart assistive device rental service next month

Ida Cheong

The Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) plans to launch a smart technology assistive device* rental service next month, which will be based at a women's resource centre providing short-term trials, IAS Department Chief U Ka Wai told reporters on the sidelines of an award ceremony yesterday.

U did not elaborate on the location of the women's resource centre.

U made the remarks during yesterday's "Smart Mobility Aid Design Competition" award ceremony at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Zape.

U noted that users who are satisfied with and interested in the devices can purchase them directly, while eligible residents can apply for subsidies to acquire assistive equipment, adding that the bureau will continue to integrate smart technology into both personal and institutional settings.

The local women's resource centre will provide home caregivers with a one-stop service including the selection, application, and usage guidance of assistive gear, as well as needs

assessment, to alleviate their stress, U said, adding that the Social Welfare Bureau will also partner with the Macau Science Centre (MSC) and schools to launch public awareness campaigns, guiding young people to pay attention to the needs of the elderly and people with disabilities, and encouraging them to participate in designing smart products tailored to these groups, U added.

10-Year Rehabilitation Action Plan

U also revealed that the bureau has completed preparatory work for its 10-Year Action Plan for Rehabilitation Services (2026–2035), with only administrative procedures remaining before its official announcement. He added that several initiatives are already being advanced in parallel, noting that the bureau has formulated over 80 specific action items, many of which are underway and progressing steadily.

In addition, the bureau plans to introduce funding schemes to support rehabilitation institutions, helping them adopt smart technologies to enhance

training services, operational management, and overall efficiency, U said.

Smart Mobility Aid Design Competition

Meanwhile, IAS Director Wilson Hon Wa noted in speech that the "Smart Mobility Aid Design Competition" aimed to provide a practical platform for young people, encouraging them to pay attention to the needs of the elderly and disabled communities, and to integrate innovative thinking and technology into their entries to effectively meet the practical needs of these groups.

All entries will be displayed at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) from July 1 to October 11 and at the age-friendly home modification display area in Mong Tak Building (望德樓) from October 23 to January 20 next year. ■

**An assistive device is any item, piece of equipment, software programme, or product system used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities, injuries, or age-related impairments. – Gemini*



Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) Department Chief U Ka Wai listens to a reporter's question on the sidelines of yesterday's "Smart Mobility Aid Design Competition" award ceremony at Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Zape. – Photo: Ida Cheong

Trump says Iran deal in 'a few hours,' blames Israel for delay: Axios

WASHINGTON, DC US President Donald Trump said yesterday that a peace deal with Iran was still on track to be signed within hours, despite an Israeli strike on Beirut that he said had delayed the plan.

"It shook it up. It delayed the signing by a few hours. It was supposed to be now. Now it is scheduled for a few hours from now," Trump said in a phone call to the Axios news outlet.

Trump fumed at Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the attack on Beirut, saying, "it is

so bad – I couldn't believe it. An hour before we are supposed to sign the deal."

Using a string of expletives, Trump told Axios he raged at Netanyahu after Israel struck Beirut's southern suburbs yesterday, killing three people, in response to what it said was Hezbollah fire at northern Israel.

Tehran insists that any agreement to halt the war must include the parallel conflict in Lebanon, where Israel has been pursuing a campaign against the Iran-backed movement Hezbollah. – AFP

Iran's top security body warns response 'imminent' after Israel's Beirut strike

TEHRAN – Iran's highest national security body warned yesterday that a response was "imminent" following an Israeli strike targeting Tehran's ally Hezbollah in Beirut's southern suburbs.

"The response of the fighters of Islam is

imminent," the Supreme National Security Council said in a statement on X. "Lebanon is our life and violation of the red lines of the Islamic Republic will not be tolerated." (More on p.10) – AFP



A robot plays football at an embodied intelligence innovation industrial park in Zhongguancun, Haidian District of Beijing, on Saturday. The embodied intelligence innovation industrial park is home to a number of brilliant players in this arena. Thanks to the "high density" of residing companies here, it is very easy for the players to find partners along the industrial chain – literally by stepping up and down the stairways in the office building. – Xinhua

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FMs of China, Mongolia issue joint press communiqué on ties, cooperation

A joint press communiqué was issued yesterday by the foreign ministers of China and Mongolia, highlighting the synergy of development strategies and the expansion of mutually beneficial cooperation. – Story on p. 7

Thousands protest in Geneva ahead of G7 summit in France

Thousands of protesters thronged the streets of Geneva yesterday ahead of the G7 summit in Evian in neighbouring France, with police omnipresent amid fears of a repeat of the violence seen at a similar summit in 2003. – Story on p. 11

Narco-terrorist' the new 'communist': Guatemalan Nobel laureate Menchu

The term "narco-terrorist" has been weaponised just as the word "communist" was in the past, Guatemalan Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchu told AFP in an interview. – Story on p. 12

Police arrest 2 Vietnamese women for drug trafficking

Armando Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested two women from Vietnam for drug trafficking on Thursday, PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a special press conference on Friday.

Cheong identified the pair

as Nguyen, 33, and Ta, 36. Ta is a non-resident worker (NRW) employed as a masseuse, while Nguyen had previously worked as a masseuse with Ta under the same NRW status, Cheong said, adding that after leaving her job, Nguyen began overstaying her

visa on May 24.

According to Cheong, following intelligence indicating drug trafficking activities, the Judiciary Police identified the duo and intercepted them on Thursday afternoon at their home in the city's centre.

During the operation, Cheong said, PJ officers seized a large quantity of drugs from a suitcase, including 286 packets of methamphetamine (aka meth or ice, weighing a total of 380.8 grammes), 159 packets of ketamine (245.2 grammes), 33 packets of a drug commonly known as "happy powder"* (165 grammes), 10 packets of MDMA (ecstasy) fragments and powder (approximately 702.6 grammes, equivalent to 1,316 pills), as well as 11 glass straws and other drug-taking paraphernalia. Officers also confiscated HK\$2,000 (2,059 patacas) in suspected drug proceeds and one casino chip worth HK\$10,000.

Cheong said that the investigation revealed that the duo had been engaged in drug trafficking activities since May, selling drugs through a network of fellow compatriots. Both refused to disclose the source of the drugs or any information about their upstream suppliers, Cheong said, adding that the urine tests for both came back negative for drugs.

The duo were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on Friday, each facing charges of drug trafficking and possession of drug-taking paraphernalia. ■

*"Happy powder" is an illicit, fruit-flavoured powdered mix containing an unpredictable cocktail of MDMA, methamphetamine, ketamine, and benzodiazepines designed to be dissolved in drinks. - Gemini



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the two hooded drug suspects from Vietnam to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape on Friday. - Photos: Armando Neves



Evidence seized from the duo's home in the city centre is displayed at the PJ headquarters in Zape on Friday.

Macau-Shenzhen airport ferry route relocates to Taipa Ferry Terminal: Turbo Jet

Armando Neves

Hong Kong-based TurboJET announced in a statement yesterday that its Macau-Shenzhen Baoan International Airport ferry services will relocate from Macau Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal to Taipa Ferry Terminal from today.

According to the statement, the Macau-Shenzhen airport route offers six return voyages per day from Monday to Thursday, and seven two-way trips per day from Friday to Sunday as well as on public holidays.

According to a previous Post report, the route was launched in November.

The statement also noted that the relocation is intended to align with passenger travel trends, making it easier for travellers to stay and attend events at Macau's integrated resort hotel complexes in Cotai.

The measure aims to leverage the synergies between transport and tourism, as well as the "unique advantages of the Greater Bay Area's (GBA) diversified integrated transport platforms", the statement said.

The ferry departure schedule from Shenzhen Baoan International Airport to Taipa Ferry Terminal is as follows: 10:00 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 1:00 p.m., 2:30 p.m., 4:30 p.m., 6:30 p.m.

From Taipa Ferry Terminal to Shenzhen Baoan International Airport the departure schedule is as follows: 11:30 a.m., 1:00 p.m., 2:45 p.m., 4:30 p.m., 6:45 p.m., 8:00 p.m.

On Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays, an additional ferry from Shenzhen airport to Taipa departs at 8:30 a.m., and from Taipa Ferry Terminal to Shenzhen airport at 10:00 a.m. ■



This artist's rendition provided by TurboJET yesterday promotes its Macau-Shenzhen airport ferry service, relocated from Macau Out Harbour Ferry Terminal and Pac On Ferry Terminal.

Training aims to help children appreciate charm of spoken word: club chief

Armando Neves

The 17th Chinese Children's Film Dubbing Contest (Macau section) is scheduled to be held on July 25, and a raft of training activities for the contest was officially launched on Saturday.

The contest is organised by the China National Film Museum in conjunction with the China Film Association and China Children's Film Association (CCFA), while the Macau section is undertaken

by the Macau Parent-Child Toastmasters Club.

The club held the training activities at the headquarters of 369 Cooperation Town Entrepreneurial Youth Association on Avenida do Almirante Lacerda.

Shelly Cai (蔡依莹), president of the club, said in her speech that dubbing training is one of the key projects of the year, encompassing a variety of formats including workshops, contests, and summer

activities, which will be rolled out progressively from June to August.

She expressed hope that through professional guidance and stage experience, children will find the courage to speak up and express themselves confidently, and come to appreciate the charm of the art of the spoken word in a fun and educational environment.

According to the club's

statement released yesterday, Saturday's activity's topic was "Language Standards and Emotional Expression" and featured as its speaker Jacky Li Chun Kit, a founding member and executive director of Macau's Theatre Farmers.

Through thematic explanations and live demonstrations, he guided participants in mastering dubbing

techniques and emotional control, the statement said.

Li pointed out that excellent dubbing requires not only clear enunciation and accurate intonation, but also emotional commitment and an understanding of the character. Only by combining linguistic standards with genuine emotion can one make one's voice truly compelling and persuasive, Li said. ■



This handout group photo provided by the Macau Parent-Child Toastmasters Club yesterday shows participants posing during their training activity in the runup to next month's Chinese Children's Film Dubbing Contest held at the headquarters of the 369 Cooperation Town Entrepreneurial Youth Association on Avenida do Almirante Lacerda.

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25°C~29°C

Source: SMG

Macau hosts 1st HK-Macau intercity Beyblade competition

Khalel Vallo

The first-ever Hong Kong-Macau Beyblade* tournament kicked off on Saturday at New Yaohan in Nam Van, where eight local players secured spots on the Macau representative team after competing in the city's inaugural Beyblade competition, with the selected competitors set to face their Hong Kong counterparts in an upcoming interport championship.

Titled "OFFLINE X Beyblade: Hong Kong-Macau Interport Competition", the tournament adopted a standardised competitive format, marking a departure from the informal recreational matches traditionally associated with Beyblade, according to a statement by its organisers on Saturday.

Beyblades are customised, battling spinning tops used in a competitive gear sport. Players launch their Beys into a bowl-like "Beystadium" to clash. A player wins by spinning the longest, knocking the opponent

out of the stadium, or causing it to "burst" apart, according to chatbot Gemini.

Saturday's competition attracted strong public interest, with registration quotas for both the children's and open categories fully subscribed, the statement said, adding that the event was described as one of Macau's most popular youth-orientated competitive activities during the first half of the year.

Contestants competed across multiple elimination rounds in the children's and open divisions before eight top-performing players were selected to form the Macau representative team; the local team will travel to Hong Kong to compete in the Hong Kong-Macau grand championship, where they will challenge leading players from Hong Kong for the overall title.

The statement did not reveal the names of the eight winners.

The opening ceremony was attended by representatives from the retail, gaming, and

animation sectors, including New Yaohan Executive Polly Yeung (楊寶莉), Macau Animation and Toys Association Secretary-General Wan Hin Fai, and OFFLINE Founder David Chu (朱達偉).

The statement said that the tournament was conducted under fair and professional standards, helping identify emerging local talent while promoting the structured development of Beyblade competition in Macau.

The statement concluded that the event not only helped standardise a Beyblade competition culture but also created a platform for youth exchange between Macau and Hong Kong, contributing to the growth of the city's emerging trend sports sector. ■

**The name Beyblade is a linguistic blend (a portmanteau) that combines elements from both English and Japanese, reflecting the toy's mechanics and cultural heritage. The first part of the name comes from "beigoma",*



Contestants compete with their Beyblades during Saturday's "OFFLINE X Beyblade: Hong Kong-Macau Interport Competition" at New Yaohan in Nam Van. – Photo: Khalel Vallo

a traditional Japanese spinning top that dates back centuries. – Gemini

Shell Macau 'miscalculates' fuel subsidy: govt

Staff Reporter

Macau's Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) said on Friday it has detected that the local branch of international fuel supply company Shell incorrectly calculated the value of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and petrol subsidies allocated by the local government.

The amount involved is approximately 30,000 patacas, the bureau said.

According to a statement released by the bureau on Friday, since the start of the programme, its officials have carried out more than 130 inspections of petrol stations and LPG retail outlets across Macau.

During inspections conducted between May 26 and the morning of June 4, it was found that the Shell service stations failed to correctly apply the agreed calculation method for most petrol transactions, excluding those made via monthly billing or vouchers. Due to a billing system error, the company failed to first deduct the customers' standard discount from the retail price before subtracting the government subsidy, the bureau said.

According to the official website of Shell Hong Kong, the company operates five service stations in Macau.

The bureau said that the respective

transactions involved a total discrepancy of around 30,000 patacas. The breakdown per transaction is as follows:

- **Motorcycles:** A discrepancy of between 0.4 and 0.7 patacas per transaction.
 - **Cars:** A discrepancy of between 2 and 5 patacas per transaction
- However, diesel transactions were not affected.

Remedial action for consumers

Shell responded to the incident by stating that it has meanwhile corrected the system error and has begun refunding the respective amounts to customers, as requested.

Affected consumers can visit any local Shell service station and present any of the following to reclaim their refund:

- An SMS notification/alert message
- A transaction receipt
- An electronic payment record
- CCTV footage of the transaction

The bureau said that it will continue to monitor the correct implementation of the subsidy programme, noting that it has appointed an independent entity to audit the sales data and records of all local fuel-supply companies.

Shell is a British multinational oil and gas company, headquartered in London. ■

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Fostering entrepreneurship on Rua das Estalagens,
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LISBOETA MACAU LAUNCHES FOOTBALL HISTORY EXHIBITION TO CELEBRATE WORLD CUP

Khalel Vallo

A football-themed exhibition showcasing historic memorabilia, trophies and tributes to some of the sport's greatest figures opened at the Lisboeta Macau integrated resort in Cotai on Wednesday, offering visitors a free immersive experience during the 2026 FIFA World Cup which kicked off on Thursday, ending on July 19.

The "Classic Revival: World Football History Exhibition" opened at the H853 Fun Factory of Lisboeta Macau and will run until July 19 as well. Hosted by MacauSLOT with support from Lisboeta Macau, the exhibition aims to celebrate the history and cultural legacy of world football as excitement builds for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, which is being jointly hosted by Canada, Mexico and the United States.

The exhibition is divided into six themed zones designed to highlight key moments in football history while offering interactive experiences for visitors. Among the highlights is the "World Football History Area", featuring 70 collections of trophies, jerseys and memorabilia spanning from 1930 to the present day.

Meanwhile, a dedicated screening area pays tribute to the late Brazilian football icon Edson Arantes do Nascimento (1940-2022), known internationally as Pelé, while the "Pelé Jersey Corridor" displays 14 autographed jerseys associated with the three-time World Cup winner.

Moreover, visitors can also admire championship trophies in the "World Champion Trophies Display Area" and explore photo spots featuring football-themed installations, including a wall displaying footballs from past tournaments. Guests who share photographs taken at the exhibition on social media will have the opportunity to win prizes including electronics, hotel accommodation and exclusive MacauSLOT collectibles, according to a statement by Lisboeta last week.

MacauSLOT Chief Executive Officer Stephen Ho (何展鵬) said in a speech at the opening ceremony that the exhibition serves not only as a celebration of football history but also as a platform promoting the integration of tourism, culture and sports in Macau.

Speaking to the media after the ceremony, Ho said that preparations for the exhibition were completed in just over a month, with the collection assembled and transported by professional handlers, adding that the exhibition was designed to be more than a display of memorabilia, combining sports, culture and tourism elements to create a broader visitor experience.

He expressed hope that the exhibition would help build excitement during the 2026 FIFA World Cup, despite time-zone differences that may affect local viewing habits. "For a real football fan, it is hard to measure the enthusiasm of a World Cup that is held once every four years", Ho said, adding that the tournament remains one of the most anticipated sporting events globally.

He also highlighted the rarity of some exhibits, noting that two championship trophies on display are being exhibited in Asia for the first time. "It is a rare opportunity for us to have such close contact with these historical objects, stories and feelings", he said, adding that MacauSLOT would continue supporting sports-related initiatives in Macau, including football and basketball events, as part of its long-term commitment to promoting sports development in the community.

Running daily from noon to 9:00 p.m. with free admission, the exhibition seeks to bring football fans closer to the sport's rich heritage while contributing to Macau's development as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure through tourism and sports-related events, the statement noted.



Photos: Khalel Vallo

Xia underlines central authorities' full confidence in Macau's future

Tony Wong

Xia Baolong, who heads both the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office (HKMWO) of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (HKMAO) of the State Council, met with Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak in Beijing on Friday, where Xia said that the central authorities have full confidence in Macau's future development, according to a statement by Wong's office that night.

The statement said that with the aim of thoroughly putting into practice the spirit of President Xi Jinping's various important speeches and instructions made during his inspection visit to Macau and Hengqin in December 2024, advancing the MSAR's public administration reform, improving its legal system, and promoting the Macau-Hengqin integrated development, Wong, who is also the executive deputy director of the management committee of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, led a delegation to Beijing to visit the central authorities' relevant ministries and commissions to exchange views and listen to their guidance and opinions.

The statement did not mention for how many days the visit to the nation's capital by Wong's delegation, authorised by MSAR Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, lasted.

The 106-square-kilometre Hengqin island in Zhuhai City is officially known as Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, following its inauguration in September 2021. The adjacent island is three times the size of the MSAR.

The in-depth cooperation zone's governance consists of a management committee and an executive committee.

The management committee is the zone's top decision-making body run under a dual director system, jointly led by the governor of Guangdong Province and the chief executive of the MSAR. The zone's executive committee, which is run under the management committee, is the body tasked with the zone's daily functioning and execution of tasks.



Xia Baolong (front, centre), director of the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office (HKMWO) of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the State Council's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (HKMAO), HKMWO-HKMAO Deputy Director Nong Rong (front, third from right), and Macau Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak (front, third from left) pose for a group photo with other officials under Wong's portfolio on the sidelines of Friday's meeting in Beijing. — Photo: Wong's office

Currently, the zone's management committee is jointly headed by Guangdong Governor Meng Fanli and Sam.

Wong is the management committee's executive deputy director. The management committee has five deputy directors comprising officials from Guangdong and Macau.

During their working visit to Beijing, Wong and members of his delegation met with Xia on Friday morning, which was also attended by Nong Rong, a HKMWO-HKMAO deputy director, the statement said.

During the meeting, Wong briefed Xia on the progress of the MSAR government's policy initiatives in his portfolio, Hengqin's latest developments, and his visits to the various ministries and commissions.

According to the statement, Xia fully acknowledged the achievements made across various fields in the MSAR's Secretariat for Administration and Justice portfolio and in Hengqin's developments.

Xia said that the central authorities have full confidence in Macau's future development, and will support the MSAR in safeguarding national security, promoting its appropriate economic diversification, deepening its public administration reform, and advancing the Macau-Hengqin integrated development.

According to the statement, Wong expressed his gratitude to Xia for his recognition and guidance. Wong pledged that, capitalising on the start of the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan and the MSAR's 3rd Five-Year Plan, and under Sam's leadership, he will vigorously promote the continuous improvements in the local government's work in his portfolio, accelerate Hengqin's ongoing second-phase development, and help Macau better integrate into and service the nation's overall development.

During their working visit to Beijing, Wong and members of his delegation met separately with officials of the National

Data Administration, the State Commission Office of Public Sectors Reform, the General Administration of Customs, the Ministry of Justice, the State Administration of Civil Service, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, the National Immigration Administration, and the Legislative Affairs Commission and the Macao Basic Law Committee of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), according to the statement.

During the delegation's visit to the General Administration of Customs, the statement said, Wong also witnessed the signing of the "Cooperation Agreement on the Inspection, Quarantine and Supervision of Food and Food Ingredients Transported from Macau to the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin".

Wong is a former prosecutor, ex-director of the Macau Judiciary Police (PJ) and former secretary for security. ■

17th IICF ends with 21 deals worth US\$9.9 billion

Ida Cheong

The 17th International Infrastructure Investment and Construction Forum & Exhibition (IICF), held at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo last week, concluded with the signing of 21 cooperation agreements totalling US\$9.9 billion (79.9 billion patacas), covering sectors such as transport, construction, energy, power, mining, and non-ferrous smelting, according to a statement released by the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) on Friday.

According to the statement, the 21 agreements involve 15 countries and regions, with multiple deals signed between Chinese companies and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries including Angola, Brazil, Chile, and El Salvador.

The three-day forum, held more than 200 business matching sessions and over 250 thematic and supporting activities, and attracted over 3,500 government, business and industry leaders from more than 70 countries and regions, while an exhibition area of about 8,000 square metres showcased

the latest technologies and cooperation opportunities, the statement said.

The statement noted that the forum was focused on green energy with low carbon transformation and infrastructure upgrades driven by digital intelligence technology, aimed to boost the extension of traditional infrastructure to new infrastructure, and provided a practical platform to precisely match market needs and explore international cooperation.

IPIM President Che Weng Keong noted that the strong response to the agreements reached at the forum reflects the opportunities and prospects for infrastructure cooperation between the Chinese mainland, Macau, and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries. He added that Macau will continue to strengthen its role as a platform between China and Lusophone and Hispanic nations, positioning itself as a key bridgehead in the country's high-level opening, the statement added.

Meanwhile, over 95 percent of the custom-built booths at the exhibition generated more than 10 million patacas in

revenue for the local MICE construction industry, Che said, adding that the forum also attracted a large number of high-end business visitors to Macau, fully

demonstrating the diverse economic spillover effects of international professional exhibitions on the city's economy, the statement noted. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) on Friday shows a signing ceremony for the Sadara Cogeneration Project in Saudi Arabia, at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo.

Health Bureau sets up 'Emergency Medicine Training Centre' & 'Stroke Centre'



Health Bureau (SSM) Director Alvis Lo Iek Long (second from right), Zhao Heqing (second from left), deputy head of the Social Development Department of the Central People's Government Liaison Office, Fire Services Bureau (CB) Deputy Commissioner Cheong Chi Wang (right), and Tai Wa Hou, acting director of the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre, pose for a photo after unveiling the inaugural plaque of the new Emergency Medicine Training Centre and the Stroke Centre during Saturday's ceremony at MGM MACAU in Nape.

— Photo: SSM

Tony Wong

The Health Bureau (SSM) has established a "Emergency Medicine Training Centre" and a "Stroke Centre", both of which were inaugurated during a one-day medical forum hosted by the bureau on Saturday, according to an SSM statement that day.

The medical forum was held at MGM MACAU in Nape.

The two centres were inaugurated by SSM Director Alvis Lo Iek Long and other officials during a plaque-unveiling ceremony, which was part of Saturday's medical forum.

With the concept of "First Aid Learning for the Whole Population", the statement said, the Emergency Medicine Training Centre is committed to creating multifaceted, systematic, and practical training courses aimed at healthcare professionals, rescue workers, educators, and residents in general.

The centre's courses are designed in accordance with international first-aid guidelines and clinical evidence, combining simulation teaching and scenario-based exercises to strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration and clinical response

capabilities, thereby improving overall emergency response capacities and service quality.

Regarding community promotion, the Emergency Medicine Training Centre will focus on popularising cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and automated external defibrillators (AEDs) through cooperation with schools, businesses, and community associations, so as to gradually build a "first-aid friendly community".

In the future, the Emergency Medicine Training Centre will coordinate the sensible distribution and accessibility of AEDs in public venues, creating a citywide emergency support network, reducing the golden time for rescue, and increasing the success rate of pre-hospital care.

The statement said that the establishment of the Stroke Centre aims to provide stroke patients with rapid, professional, and standardised treatment services, reducing the time between the onset of symptoms and treatment, and improving the success rate of acute treatment.

The Stroke Centre has been built in strict accordance with national and international standards for stroke

centres, equipped with advanced diagnostic imaging equipment and vascular interventional treatment systems, and features a 24-hour green channel for strokes. This aims to improve the success rate of emergency treatments such as intravenous thrombolysis* and arterial thrombectomy**, and reduce patient disability and mortality rates.

In the future, the seamless connection between pre-hospital emergency care and hospital treatment will be optimised, operating in tandem with the bureau's chest pain centre to enhance Macau's capacity to treat acute and severe cases, the statement said.

The statement did not mention where the two new centres are located. ■

* *Intravenous thrombolysis (IVT) is a time-critical medical treatment used to dissolve dangerous blood clots in blood vessels, restore blood flow, and prevent tissue damage. — Gemini*

** *An arterial thrombectomy is an emergency surgical or interventional procedure to physically remove a blood clot (thrombus) directly from inside an artery. — Gemini*

HK's 5-year plan to focus on economic development, well-being for residents: financial secretary

HONG KONG — Paul Chan Mo-po, financial secretary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government, said yesterday that Hong Kong's first five-year plan will foster economic development and boost employment.

His remarks came as the two-month public consultation period for the blueprint will start today.

Chan wrote in his blog that the plan will help the business community, companies and residents develop a clearer vision for the future. He hopes that the public consultation will generate informed and novel ideas as well as pool resources from all sectors.

Tapping new markets and exploring new drivers of growth are key issues to be discussed in the

public consultation, he said.

Enhancing coordinated development with other regions across the country is among the objectives of the plan. The financial secretary said Hong Kong must further align rules and mechanisms within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to facilitate the flow of various production factors. — Xinhua

Macau Municipal Affairs Bureau exempts dogs & cats from mandatory quarantine

Staff Reporter

Macau's Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said in a statement on Friday that, "in order to further facilitate pet owners bringing their dogs and cats into Macau, improve customs clearance and inspection procedures, and maintain consistent safety standards for epidemic prevention", it has adjusted its inspection policy for imported dogs and cats in accordance with the latest technical recommendations from the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).*

The adjustment took effect on Friday.

From now on, according to the statement, dogs and cats from rabies-affected countries or regions will no longer be required to undergo quarantine, provided that they meet the specified pre-entry inspection requirements and pass an inspection by an IAM veterinary surgeon upon arrival in Macau. "This represents a significant improvement in convenience compared with the previous mandatory 30-day quarantine requirement for dogs and cats upon entry", the bureau said.

The bureau pointed out that rabies is an animal disease that is required to be declared in Macau and is also one of the key diseases that the WOAH prioritises for prevention and control. According to the organisation's latest technical recommendations, inspection policies should be based on risk assessment to prevent imported rabies cases, taking into account the risk rating of the exporting country or region. Effective pre-entry inspection measures, such as microchipping, vaccination, and antibody testing, may replace quarantine for imported dogs and cats.

The bureau underlined that it has reviewed past quarantine measures and referred to relevant technical guidelines, "further optimising inspection arrangements for imported dogs and cats based on the principle of risk-based management".

As of yesterday, dogs and cats from rabies-affected countries or regions are exempt from quarantine upon arrival in Macau, provided that they meet the specific pre-entry inspection requirements, including: having a compliant microchip implanted in the exporting country or region (ISO 11784/11785); completing rabies vaccination; possessing a valid rabies antibody test report and a health certificate issued by an official veterinary surgeon; and passing the inspection by an IAM veterinary surgeon.

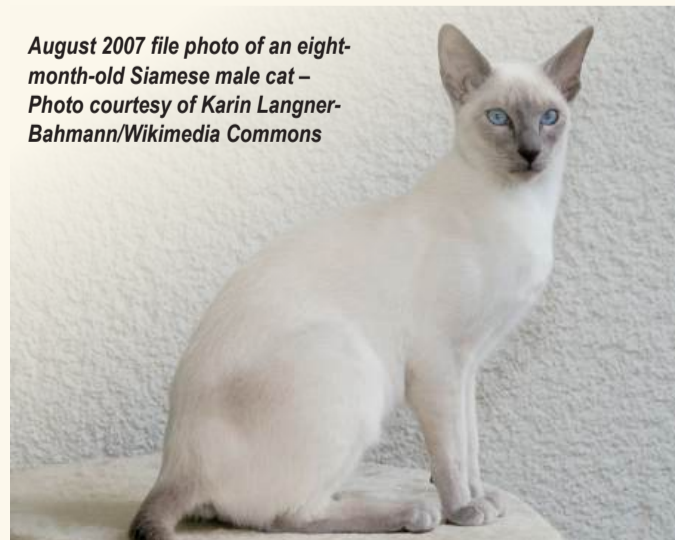
"These optimisation measures enhance customs clearance convenience without lowering standards for epidemic prevention", the bureau said, adding that if dogs or cats arrive in Macau with incomplete documents or fail to meet the relevant import inspection requirements, owners will be responsible for arranging the animals' return to their country of origin at their own expense".

The bureau also said in the statement that it will continue to implement science-based and precise inspection supervision to strictly prevent the introduction of animal diseases.

For specific import inspection requirements and application procedures for dogs and cats, members of the public may visit the Macau Animal Health Control website at www.iam.gov.mo/canil or call the IAM Hotline on 2833 7676 for enquiries. ■

* *The Paris-based World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) is an international intergovernmental organisation that works to improve animal health worldwide. It supports countries in preventing, controlling, and reporting animal diseases, and it develops international standards and guidelines used to guide disease surveillance, diagnosis, and biosecurity, helping reduce the spread of outbreaks and support safe trade in animals and animal products. — Poe*

August 2007 file photo of an eight-month-old Siamese male cat — Photo courtesy of Karin Langner-Bahmann/Wikimedia Commons



Foreign ministers of China, Mongolia issue joint press communique on ties, cooperation

ULAN BATOR – A joint press communiqué was issued yesterday following talks between Mongolian Foreign Minister Batmunkh Battsetseg and visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, highlighting the synergy of development strategies and the expansion of mutually beneficial cooperation.

During the three-day visit that began on Saturday, both sides reaffirmed their mutual respect for each other's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and chosen development paths, as well as their commitment to non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

Both sides reaffirmed that they will not join any military or political alliance directed against the other, will not conclude treaties with any third country that undermine the sovereignty and security of the other, and will not allow any third country to use their territory to harm the sovereignty and security of the other.

Mongolia reiterated its firm adherence to the one-China principle, its opposition to "Taiwan



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (left), also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, and Mongolian Foreign Minister Batmunkh Battsetseg meet the press in Ulan Bator, Mongolia, on Saturday. – Xinhua

independence," and its support for China's peaceful reunification. Mongolia also reaffirmed that matters related to Xizang, Hong Kong, and Xinjiang are China's internal affairs.

The two sides agreed to

strengthen alignment of their development strategies, advance projects under the frameworks of high-quality Belt and Road (B&R) cooperation and Mongolia's Steppe Road Program, expand mutually beneficial cooperation in various

sectors, and further enhance the scale, quality, and level of bilateral economic and trade cooperation.

Both countries agreed to maintain regular communication on international and regional affairs. Mongolia reiterated its support for

building a community with a shared future for humanity, as well as for the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), and the Global Governance Initiative (GGI).

China highly appreciated Mongolia's role in hosting the Ulan Bator Dialogue on Northeast Asian Security.

The two sides agreed to oppose and condemn all forms of fascism and militarism, jointly safeguard world peace and security, and uphold international fairness and justice.

Both sides spoke highly of the achievements of trilateral cooperation among China, Mongolia, and Russia, expressing their firm belief that the implementation of the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor plan plays an important role in promoting regional prosperity and stability.

The two sides also emphasized that the growing political and economic influence of multilateral mechanisms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), APEC, and BRICS has contributed significantly to advancing regional cooperation. – Xinhua

Xi's governance philosophy inspires worldwide pursuit of modernization

Analysis

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping's governance philosophy provides useful references for other countries to pursue modernization, foreign experts have said.

The Russian edition of the first volume of "China's Governance Under Xi Jinping's Leadership" was recently launched in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Sheradil Baktygulov, director of the Kyrgyz Institute of World Politics, said Xi's governance philosophy deeply embodies the fundamental principles of China's development.

The philosophy, in his view, features a people-center development concept, comprehensively deepening reform, advancing law-based governance and strengthening Party self-governance.

"These ideas, principles and policies have led China to historic achievements and transformations, advancing the modernization of the public administration system," Baktygulov said.

China has historically eradicated absolute poverty, significantly increased average life expectancy and expanded its operational high-speed railway network to more than 50,000 km, he said. "And this is just a fraction of the high-quality changes taking place in China."

Former Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Alikbek Dzhekshenkulov said a key feature of Xi's governance philosophy is the integration of strong Party leadership with effective governance, the modernization of China's system and capacity for governance.

"President Xi Jinping has not only strengthened Party discipline but also established long-term development goals," he said, noting that the Chinese leader's ideas

and policies have helped successfully address the tasks of the era, like maintaining social stability, promoting economic development and implementing major civilizational projects.

Dzhekshenkulov said the book highlights Xi's idea that the people's aspiration for a better life is the Party's goal, which is not merely a slogan but a fundamental principle of governance.

Anastasia Savinykh, an analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Research, said the book does not stop at abstract theoretical exposition but contextualizes theories and the modernization of China's system and capacity for governance through tangible real-world practices, such as poverty alleviation, industrial upgrading, advances in science and technology, full and rigorous governance over the Party and more proactive foreign policies.

Igor Maksimtsev, rector of St. Petersburg State University of Economics, said the governance philosophy substantiates that modernization does not entail blindly copying Western or any other external models.

While thoroughly drawing on global practices, China not only proceeds from its national realities and draws strength from its own identity and culture, but also shifts its focus from GDP growth as the sole measure of success to pursuing high-quality development and enhancing people's well-being, he said.

Andrey Deryabin, a China expert at the Far Eastern Federal University of Russia, said that China prioritizes periphery diplomacy in its foreign policy while upholding the principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness, thereby effectively promoting international cooperation. – Xinhua

German business leaders reaffirm commitment to Chinese market

DÜSSELDORF, Germany – German business leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the Chinese market at an "Invest in China" roundtable held in Düsseldorf on Friday, citing China's market potential, innovation capabilities and improving business environment as key drivers for future growth.

Amid growing global economic uncertainty and protectionist pressures, German business leaders at the event stressed that deeper cooperation between China and Germany will create opportunities for both sides and support long-term growth.

Ling Ji, vice minister of commerce and deputy China international trade representative, said China and Germany are important trade and investment partners with deep economic ties and broad shared interests.

During China's 15th Five-Year Plan period, China will continue to advance high-level opening-up and provide new growth opportunities for foreign businesses through its complete industrial system, dynamic innovation ecosystem and skilled workforce, Ling said.

Ling expressed hope that German companies will continue to support the stable development of China-Germany and China-European Union economic relations.

Chinese Consul General in Düsseldorf Yu Yong said an increasing number of German companies have shifted from an "In China, for China" approach to an "In China, for Global" strategy, viewing China as an important base for innovation and industrial development.

"This not only reflects the attractiveness of the Chinese market, but also demonstrates

the strong momentum and resilience of China-Germany economic cooperation," Yu said, adding that decades of cooperation have deeply integrated the industrial and supply chains of the two countries.

Thomas Becker, senior vice president of BMW Group, said China remains one of the company's most important strategic markets and innovation centers.

"BMW will continue to increase investment in China, focusing on electrification, innovation and sustainable development," he said.

Sebastien Gagnon-Messier, senior vice president of Merck Group, said the company remains confident about China's economic prospects.

"China is not only one of the world's most important markets, but also a key partner for innovation cooperation and industrial upgrading," he said, adding that Merck Group plans to further expand its presence in China.

Matthias Berninger, executive vice president of Bayer, said China is Bayer's second-largest market worldwide and a key pillar of its global innovation network and supply chain operations, and China's continued opening-up in the healthcare sector will create additional opportunities for cooperation.

Volker Mansfeld, vice president of Henkel, said China's pursuit of high-quality development and advanced manufacturing aligns closely with the company's long-term strategy.

Henkel has continued to expand investment in China in recent years and will deepen cooperation with local partners to pursue shared growth, he said.

– Xinhua

China's systematic push powers panda protection

Analysis

BEIJING—Once pushed close to extinction by human activities, wild giant pandas in China are making a strong comeback. Today, in Baoxing County, Sichuan Province, where French naturalist Armand David first scientifically discovered the species, villagers and tourists are now treated to regular glimpses of these black-and-white wonders. In the first half of 2026 alone, five or six such sightings have already been recorded.

This change is no accident. Over the decades, China has set up many nature reserves to protect the giant panda. In 2021, the Giant Panda National Park was officially established, spanning the three provinces of Sichuan, Shaanxi and Gansu and covering about 22,000 square km.

China is now taking systematic action to better protect its national treasure. The wild giant panda population in the country has grown from about 1,100 in the 1980s to nearly 1,900, according to the 2025 data from the National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

FLAGSHIP SPECIES

In the 1980s, the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda started with just six pandas rescued from the wild and began exploring captive breeding.

At the center's Shenshuping base in Sichuan, the natural mating season has just wrapped up, and many female pandas have successfully conceived. Cheng Jianbin, a captive breeding expert at the center, said that at the start of each year, the base selects healthy pandas of suitable age, assesses their genetic diversity and population value, and draws up detailed breeding plans. After the cubs are born, keepers stand guard 24 hours a day.

Every year, the base gives each panda at least one physical checkup and provides timely treatment if any health issues are found. "Whether they are in mating season, pregnant, elderly, sick or disabled, every panda receives meticulous one-on-one attention," said Wang Xi, a giant panda healthcare specialist at the center.

According to Wu Honglin, deputy director of the base, it has bred a total of 199 giant pandas. By the end of 2025, China's captive panda population had reached 808. "What we aim for is not simply an increase in numbers, but a steady, sustainable, high-quality growth of the panda population," Wu said.

Since 2003, the center has led research into wild training and panda release. So far, 11 captive-bred pandas have been released into the wild, nine of which have survived. This growing confidence in returning pandas to nature stems from China's dedicated, systematic efforts to protect and restore panda habitats.

Since the Giant Panda National Park was established, about 72 percent of wild giant pandas have been placed under strict protection. The protected panda habitat area has increased from 1.39 million hectares to 2.58 million hectares. The park has integrated 73 nature reserves across the three provinces, connecting the habitats of 13 local panda



Giant panda cubs are pictured during a group appearance event in celebration of the Spring Festival (Chinese Lunar New Year) at the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, on February 4. — Xinhua

populations. In addition, six ecological corridors have been built to allow pandas to move freely within the region.

On June 11, the 10th cross-regional joint patrol of Sichuan, Shaanxi and Gansu kicked off in Longnan City, Gansu. Since 2023, over 20 agencies from the three provinces, including park authorities, prosecutors and police, have set up a regular joint patrol system. The patrols focus on combating poaching, monitoring giant panda activity, protecting key wildlife and plant species, and identifying environmental and safety risks. Ten patrol routes have been set up, covering a total length of over 200 km.

"Joint patrols have turned protection efforts from fragmented actions into a coordinated network," said Ma Junlin, director of the Shaanxi administration of the Giant Panda National Park.

The giant panda is a flagship species for biodiversity conservation. Its habitat is also home to thousands of other wild animals and plants, including crested ibis, golden snub-nosed monkey, snow leopard, and trees such as dove tree and Chinese yew. As the park's ecological health improves, it provides a wider umbrella of protection, ensuring a safer haven for countless other species.

"In the past, it was hard to spot a bharal. Now we see them foraging in groups in the valley at any time," said Zhou Tinghong, a staff member of the Huanglong National Scenic Area Administration Bureau in Sichuan. He added the recovery of the bharal population has also driven the return of apex predators. "This is direct proof that the local ecological chain is intact and improving."

TECH POWER

At a wildlife rescue and breeding base in Wenxian County, northwest China's Gansu Province, a screen tracks wild giant pandas in real time. Base director Liu Zhi can plan the next patrol route with just a few clicks — a far cry from over two decades ago, when rangers trudged through mountains guided only by luck and experience.

According to Liu, the area managed by the base is one of the regions with the highest density of wild giant pandas in the Giant

Panda National Park. "The new technologies give us a more accurate understanding of population changes," he said.

A "space-air-ground" intelligent monitoring system is now in place, integrating satellite remote sensing, aerial photography, and ground sensor networks. With more than 1,500 infrared cameras and over 20 drones deployed, and linked to a smart forestry and grassland big data platform, the system enables round-the-clock, multidimensional monitoring of hydrology, meteorology, wildlife and plant life.

Today, technology does more than just pinpoint where wild giant pandas roam. It also allows the team to more accurately tell individual animals apart. In the Tangjiahe area of the Giant Panda National Park in Sichuan, technological upgrades now let staff collect fresh wild panda feces and perform DNA testing to identify individuals. This helps them get core data, including sex, age, health status, and activity patterns.

Building on this, the area achieved another technological breakthrough in panda conservation last year. "We have fully rolled out AI-powered 'panda face recognition' technology," said Xiao Mei, an official with the administrative office of Tangjiahe National Nature Reserve.

The Tangjiahe area now operates a dual monitoring system that combines fecal DNA analysis with AI-powered panda face recognition. In 2025, the system detected a total of 44 individual giant pandas. It has clarified the size of the wild panda population, individual traits, and activity ranges in the area, providing scientific data to support wildlife conservation and regional ecosystem restoration.

Eco-environmental research experts from the Chinese Academy of Sciences noted that digital tools are shifting giant panda conservation from an "experience-driven" to a "data-driven" approach. With AI image recognition, the efficiency of monitoring wild panda populations can be increased by more than 40 percent.

SHARED HOME

China's national park law, which took effect on January 1 this year, divides national parks into core protection zones and general control zones. Core protection zones are strictly managed,

while in general control zones, activities such as science education and eco-tourism can be reasonably planned. Luoyigou Village in Qingchuan County, Sichuan, is located in a general control zone of the Tangjiahe area.

Pu Youhai, 72, was once a hunter in his youth in the village. After the national hunting ban, he turned to farming. With the development of the Tangjiahe area, villagers moved from the core protection zone to the general control zone and started an eco-friendly beekeeping industry. Pu became a beekeeper.

The village now keeps more than 3,000 beehives, with an annual output value of about 1.6 million yuan, helping more than 60 households increase their annual income by 20,000 to 30,000 yuan. "We used to live on what the mountain offered, with an unstable income," Pu said. "Now we make money from beekeeping, and our life is getting sweeter by the day."

Villagers have made way for giant pandas, and the pandas are giving back to this land. With nature on the mend, tourists are flocking to the area. Many local young people have returned to their hometowns to start businesses, and rural restaurants and homestays are thriving.

"My husband and I used to work far from home, earning just a few tens of thousands of yuan a year," villager Zhang Aihua said. "Now we run a homestay, and we can make 60,000 yuan in just two peak months." Currently, Luoyigou has 72 homestays, receiving 150,000 visitors a year, with total annual tourism revenue exceeding 30 million yuan.

Zhang and more than 30 other villagers also work part-time as ecological rangers, protecting the national park's gateway community, which covers more than 60 square km. "We will do a good job guarding the gate for the national park," she said.

Yang Yong, a homestay owner in the village, now feels nothing but joy when black bears come to eat crops on his land. Familiar with the habits of local wildlife, he has also partnered with environmental organizations and become a nature education guide. In his spare time, he leads children who come for summer retreats and study tours into this "nature classroom."

Similar efforts are also underway in other areas of the Giant Panda National Park. At a giant panda origin camp in Baoxing County, visitors can see panda feces turned into bookmarks and scented candles at study workshops, and can also make "wotou," a type of steamed cornbread treat for pandas, by hand.

Earlier this month, He Xiaolong, a 63-year-old cycling enthusiast, took an 8-km detour with his companions to visit the camp. "I've seen giant pandas before, but I learned a lot more today. I'll definitely study deeper when I get back," he said.

Chen Yang, a nature education instructor at the camp, said that offering nature education programs in the Giant Panda National Park not only helps spread the concept of biodiversity conservation to the public but also boosts local industries. In 2025, Baoxing County received 4.63 million visitors, with total tourism revenue reaching 4.09 billion yuan. — AFP

Chinese language proficiency competition held in Israel

JERUSALEM — This year's "Chinese Bridge" Language Proficiency Competition for Israeli university students recently concluded in Tel Aviv.

The contest featured themed speeches and talent performances, with four university students and nine beginners taking part. Tomer Ben Shimol from the University of

Haifa took first place after a tight race.

Shimol said learning Chinese enables him to foster cultural exchange and deepen mutual understanding between the two peoples.

Chinese Ambassador to Israel Xiao Junzheng said in his remarks that equal exchanges and mutual learning among

different civilizations can provide valuable inspiration to address today's global challenges and achieving common development.

"The Chinese Bridge competition is not merely a language contest," Xiao said. "It is a bridge of communication, mutual understanding, trust, and cultural exchange."

"Just as the name 'Chinese Bridge' suggests, Chinese is a bridge. Every word learned, every Chinese character written, and every idiom or poem understood adds a new connection to that bridge," said Asaf Goldschmidt, the Israeli director of the Confucius Institute at Tel Aviv University.

— Xinhua

Deadly Philippine quake raised seabed by up to 2 metres

MANILA – A powerful earthquake that killed at least 61 people in the Philippines this week raised the seabed by as much as two metres, exposing coral and harming marine life, the environment department said yesterday.

The 7.8-magnitude tremor in southern Mindanao island last Monday has also left at least 40 people missing, according to updated tolls from the disaster agency.

Local residents first reported the geological phenomenon known as “coastal uplift” two days after the quake, which extended the shoreline by as much as 200 metres in some places, the environment department said.

A shifting of the Cotabato Trench “pushed upward part of the coastlines of Sarangani and Davao Occidental (provinces)... exposing the bottom of the sea that was originally submerged”, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said in a statement.

“Approximately 2m (metres) was the mapped uplift.”

The Cotabato Trench, which lies as close as 50 kilometres off the coast of southern Mindanao, is the site of frequent seismic activity, including a “swarm” of thousands of mostly small earthquakes recorded in January.

A team dispatched to the area “found that long stretches of shoreline, coral reef and seagrass

beds have been exposed”, the environment department said.

An official who spoke to AFP yesterday said they could not yet say precisely how wide an area had been affected given the size of the area they needed to survey.

Images released by the department’s regional office showed a large swathe of exposed coral with dead fish and other aquatic life lying on top.

Residents initially reported the changes to the seabed out of concern that they might be poisoned by the fumes from decaying sea life.

“These exposed corals and seagrass beds had begun dying off alongside their resident organisms such as reef fish, eels, clams, and shells,” the environment department said.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said the earthquake affected over 173,000 households, or 724,000 people. Some 54,000 houses sustained damage, among which nearly 10,000 were labelled as “totally damaged.” A total of 725 infrastructure facilities were damaged, resulting in losses of 1 billion pesos (approximately US\$16.2 million), according to the council. Meanwhile, assistance worth 67.6 million pesos has been provided to affected families, and 13 municipalities and cities in the affected regions are under a state of calamity.

– AFP/Xinhua



Balinese people take part in a parade during the Bali Art Festival in Denpasar, Indonesia resort island of Bali island on Saturday.

– AFP

Bangladesh’s ex-police boss wanted by Interpol arrested in Dubai

DHAKA – Bangladesh’s former police chief Benazir Ahmed was arrested in Dubai, the interior minister said yesterday, years after he fled his home country where he is facing multiple charges including corruption.

Benazir, once a close ally of former autocratic leader Sheikh Hasina, left the country in May 2024 amid public outrage over allegations that he had stashed an illegal multi-million dollar fortune.

The United States imposed sanctions against the official in 2021 for his alleged role in hundreds of disappearances and extrajudicial killings when he led the feared Rapid

Action Battalion paramilitary force.

“Benazir Ahmed was arrested on June 12 and he will be extradited soon,” Bangladesh’s Interior Minister Salahuddin Ahmed told parliament.

“An Interpol Red Notice was issued against Benazir,” he added.

“This is a historic achievement. Through these efforts, we will be able to break the culture of impunity,” Salahuddin Ahmed said.

“We want to assure the nation that no perpetrator, however powerful, is above the law.”

A student-led revolt toppled prime minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024, forcing her into exile. – AFP

Thousands gather in Thai capital to mourn late princess

Montira Rungjirajitranon

BANGKOK – The body of the Thai king’s eldest daughter was taken to the royal palace in Bangkok on Saturday, as thousands of black-clad mourners lined the procession route.

Princess Bajrakitiyabha, known as Princess Bha, died aged 47 on Thursday following an abdominal infection.

She had already spent more than three years in a coma due to a cardiac condition.

“When it comes to saying goodbye, it’s not easy for us,” mourner Donnapha Kladbupha, a 54-year-old English teacher and self-described royalist, told AFP.

The monarchy represented “unity” for Thai people during times of distress, she said.

Others queued nearby for their turn to perform a Buddhist ritual of pouring holy water into a ceremonial bowl placed before a portrait of the princess.

“I’m sad that she passed away, especially when I saw her pictures as a child,” another mourner, Nitikan Tephakham, 79, from the northeastern province of Roi Et, told AFP.

“When she was sick, I prayed for sacred beings to protect her and hoped for a miracle,” she said.

Strict protocol

Thousands of mostly older mourners sat in sweltering temperatures along the 10-kilometre route to the Grand Palace from Chulalongkorn Hospital, where the princess had been treated.

Her body arrived at the palace at around 5:00 p.m. local time in a solemn and orderly procession.

Police closed roads and traffic ground to a halt in parts of Bangkok’s commercial centre as the royal motorcade passed, led by King Maha Vajiralongkorn and Queen Suthida.

Thailand’s public broadcaster Thai PBS reported that the princess’s



Mourners hold portraits of late Thai Princess Bajrakitiyabha Mahidol outside the Grand Palace in Bangkok on Saturday.

Hundreds of black-clad Thai mourners gathered at the royal palace in Bangkok on Saturday, awaiting the arrival of the body of the king’s eldest daughter a day after her death was announced.

– AFP

body was carried in the same vehicle that had transported the body of her grandfather, King Bhumibol, who died in October 2016.

“I feel sad, very sad, because Her Royal Highness was so beloved by the Thai people, well-known for what she had done and contributed,” Pongsanguan Paranan, 63, told AFP.

Buddhist rites were chanted behind closed doors in the palace after the procession.

Live footage broadcast by a public television station showed monks chanting before the king and queen, who were seated on gilded chairs with a portrait of the princess behind them.

The Thai government has yet to announce details of the funeral, but it has instructed state officials to wear black and ordered that flags be flown at half-mast for 15 days.

The proceedings were carried out under tight security and strict protocol, with attendants wearing formal attire, media access restricted and dozens of police officers standing guard.

Tourists at the palace grounds, one of Bangkok’s most

popular attractions, had to find workarounds.

“It’s something quite unique that someone can be this much loved,” Maria Marcais, a 22-year-old visitor from Canada, told AFP.

“It’s profound,” she said.

Second death in months

It is the second bereavement for the royal family in months, after Queen Sirikit, the king’s mother, died in October at the age of 93.

Bajrakitiyabha was the only child of Vajiralongkorn’s marriage to Princess Soamsawali.

A trained prosecutor and diplomat, she was educated in Britain, Thailand and the United States, and served for a time as ambassador to Austria.

The 73-year-old king, who has seven children from four marriages, has not announced his chosen heir, although succession rules favour men.

Strict rules govern what can and cannot be said about the Thai royal family, who are protected from criticism by lese-majeste laws that carry prison sentences of up to 15 years per charge. – AFP

N Korea says nuclear status ‘irreversible’: KCNA

SEOUL – North Korea said yesterday its status as a nuclear weapons state was “irreversible” and key to ensuring regional stability, rejecting calls by the United States and its allies for denuclearisation.

Pyongyang has repeatedly insisted it will not abandon its nuclear arsenal, portraying it as essential to deterrence, with Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of leader Kim Jong Un calling the policy a “line of no retreat” earlier this month.

The North’s statement came after a trilateral meeting between South Korea, Japan and the United States in Tokyo on Friday, at which the allies reaffirmed their commitment to the “complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula”, according to Seoul’s foreign ministry.

“The US and its vassal forces’ meaningless rhetoric against the DPRK... can never affect the irreversible position of the DPRK as a nuclear weapons state,” the unnamed spokesperson said in a statement published by the official Korean Central News Agency yesterday, using the acronym for the North’s official name.

“The ‘denuclearisation’ is an irreversibly finalised matter,” the official added.

The spokesperson also cited Washington’s sales of weapons systems to Seoul and Tokyo as justification for Pyongyang’s pursuit of its nuclear programme, describing it as “a strong security guarantee for regional stability and peace”.

“No matter how hard the US, Japan and the ROK may quibble, they will never change the present

position of the DPRK as a nuclear weapons state,” the official said, referring to the South by the acronym of its official name.

North Korea has accelerated its nuclear weapons programme since talks with Washington broke down in 2019, when a summit between Kim and US President Donald Trump in Hanoi ended without agreement.

In a possible reference to the failed negotiations, the spokesperson said “no one can recover the ‘denuclearisation’ permanently missed in the trend of the times”.

Kim recently hosted China’s President Xi Jinping in Pyongyang, after the Chinese leader held back-to-back summits in Beijing with Trump and Putin.

Neither side made any mention of denuclearisation, according to their official media reports. – AFP

3 dead as Israel says strikes Hezbollah in Beirut's southern suburbs

BEIRUT – Israel struck Beirut's southern suburbs yesterday, killing three people, in response to what it said was Hezbollah fire at northern Israel, while its military also carried out broader strikes on southern Lebanon.

The latest escalation came amid expectations that a deal between the United States and Iran to end the Middle East war could be imminent, but Iranian chief negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said there was "no point" in continuing peace talks with Washington after the strike.

Tehran insists a ceasefire in Lebanon must be part of any deal.

Israel and Hezbollah have been at war since March 2 when the Iran-backed group fired rockets at Israel to avenge the killing of Iran's supreme leader in US-Israeli strikes days earlier.

Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) said a strike hit an apartment in the Ghobeiry neighbourhood of Beirut's southern suburbs, a Hezbollah stronghold known as Dahiyeh.

An AFP correspondent saw smoke and dust rising near a heavily damaged apartment as debris covered the street and people searched for survivors, with panic in the area after the strike along a busy road filled with shops.

Lebanon's civil defence agency reported three dead and six wounded.

Israeli officials including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have warned that Israel would strike south Beirut if the Iran-backed Hezbollah group targets northern Israeli communities, a position they say has the backing of Washington.

The Israeli military earlier yesterday said three suspected Hezbollah drones struck northern Israel in separate incidents, causing no casualties.

Hezbollah yesterday claimed several attacks on Israeli troops who have invaded south Lebanon, but none on north Israel.

'Test'

Israel's military had struck Beirut's southern suburbs last week after saying it had intercepted rockets launched by Hezbollah into Israeli territory.



Lebanese army soldiers stand guard as residents clear the rubble at the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted a building in Beirut's southern suburbs yesterday. – AFP

Iran launched missiles towards Israel in response to that attack, triggering Israeli retaliatory strikes before both sides halted fire.

Iran had repeatedly warned it would strike Israel if the Lebanese capital was targeted.

Netanyahu's office said yesterday that the military "carried out strikes in the Dahiyeh district of Beirut against terrorist targets belonging to the Hezbollah terrorist organisation, in response to Hezbollah's firing toward Israeli territory".

Israel's military said it "conducted a precise strike on a Hezbollah command centre" in the area.

Two far-right Israeli ministers earlier yesterday had called for strikes.

"The shooting at northern communities is a test of the Dahiyeh Doctrine that the prime minister declared. I call on him to implement it decisively and firmly, and to bring down buildings in Dahiyeh," Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said on X.

"For every drone – a missile; for every violation – fire; for every UAV [unmanned aerial vehicle] – Dahiyeh must tremble," wrote National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir on X.

A senior Iranian military official meanwhile warned that Israel's strike on Beirut's southern suburbs would not go "unanswered" by Tehran.

"Without a doubt, these crimes will not go unanswered," Brigadier General Mohammad Jafar Asadi, deputy commander of Iran's highest military command, told Defa Press news agency.

Lebanon's NNA also reported Israeli strikes on more than 20 locations in the country's south, including the city of Nabatieh.

The strikes came both before and after the Israeli army issued evacuation warnings for almost 30 south Lebanon locations ahead of raids there.

Israel's military activity in recent days has been focused on the region around Nabatieh.

Direct talks

A military source told AFP on Sunday that a small Lebanese army force which had been present in Kfar Tibnit, near Nabatieh, evacuated its position there a day earlier after an Israeli incursion into the village.

Requesting anonymity, the source emphasised that the Lebanese army was however still present at the Nabatieh barracks.

An AFP correspondent saw around a dozen vehicles, including some military trucks and heavy machinery as well as civilian vehicles, heading out of Nabatieh yesterday.

In April, Israel and Lebanon began landmark direct talks in Washington seeking to halt the hostilities, with a fifth round scheduled later this month.

Hezbollah rejects the direct talks and has dismissed a conditional ceasefire announced this month that would require it to cease attacks but makes no mention of Israel doing so or withdrawing troops from Lebanon.

Lebanon says Israel's campaign of airstrikes and ground invasion since March 2 have killed more than 3,700 people. – AFP

Trump vows Mideast deal is on, calls for no more attacks

WASHINGTON, DC – US President Donald Trump yesterday said Israeli strikes on Beirut "should not have happened" as he vowed a regional peace deal was at hand, though he did not confirm his earlier claim it would be signed during the day.

"We are very close to a Deal that will bring peace to the region, including to Lebanon, and all sides should stand down," Trump said on social media.

"This could be the beginning of a long and beautiful peace – Let's not blow it!"

Israel struck Beirut's southern suburbs on Sunday, killing three people, in response to what it said was Hezbollah fire at northern Israel, an exchange that Trump

said "should not disrupt" progress towards a pact.

"This morning's attack on Beirut should not have happened, particularly on a special day," Trump wrote yesterday, possibly a reference to his hopes of a signing on June 14, his 80th birthday.

"There should be no more attacks by Israel anywhere in Lebanon, but there should also be no more attacks by any other party, including Hezbollah, against Israel."

Trump – who has repeatedly declared a deal with Iran was all but concluded – had said on Saturday that the framework accord was scheduled to be signed the next day.

– AFP

Somaliland president makes 'historic' visit to Israel

JERUSALEM – Somaliland's President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi met his Israeli counterpart yesterday in Jerusalem in his first-ever state visit, which comes months after Israel officially recognised the breakaway African state.

In December, Israel became the first country to recognise the independence of Somaliland since it declared its autonomy from Somalia in 1991 following a civil war.

"The visit carries special significance," said Abdullahi, according to a statement issued by the office of Israeli President Isaac Herzog.

"It is the first state visit by a president of the Republic of Somaliland to another country, and we are deeply appreciative that the State of Israel has chosen to receive us with such an honour on this historic occasion," Abdullahi said.

"Somaliland has been talking, has been reaching out to the world leaders for the last 35 years. They were asking only one question: to see us. Only one country desired to see us and recognise Somaliland, and that's the government of Israel and its people." – AFP

Somaliland enjoys a strategic position on the Gulf of Aden and has its own currency, passport and army, but has struggled to win international recognition amid concerns in many capitals that this would provoke Somalia and encourage other separatist movements in Africa.

Herzog said that Abdullahi's visit "symbolises the great potential of this wonderful new partnership", according to the statement, adding that he hoped for increased bilateral "cooperation in a range of fields".

"We both face the threat of radical extremism. We both seek security and stability in the region and in the Horn of Africa. We both see the importance of protecting maritime freedom," Herzog said.

The visit comes just weeks after Israel appointed its first ambassador to Somaliland, a reciprocal move after Somaliland named its own envoy to Israel.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar had travelled to Somaliland in January – a trip that drew sharp condemnation from Somalia, which described it as an "unauthorised incursion".

– AFP

Obama says Trump Iran deal will not improve on his pact

WASHINGTON, DC – Barack Obama said it was unrealistic to expect that any deal between US President Donald Trump and Tehran would mark a "significant improvement" over his own nuclear pact 11 years ago.

In interview excerpts released yesterday on ABC News talk show "This Week," the former president also suggested it was better to negotiate a deal that falls short of all of Washington's requirements in order to avoid an outright war.

"It is doubtful that any

agreement that arises is going to be significantly different or a significant improvement from the deal that we had in the first place," Obama said, referring to 2015's landmark pact that Trump abandoned.

Obama said his own deal "had worked for a long stretch of time before... the United States pulled out of it."

US and Israeli forces sparked the Middle East war in late February when they launched strikes against Iran. For months Trump has bandied about a potential peace deal with the Islamic republic, but that country's

leaders have yet to sign on.

Trump has stressed the deal would forever block Iran's ability to produce a nuclear weapon and would lead to the immediate opening of the blockaded Strait of Hormuz.

Obama said the troubled progress of a new US-Iran deal is a reminder that Washington can not "just bully our way or bomb our way to solutions" instead of engaging in comprehensive diplomacy.

"You'd think we would have learned that lesson by now," he said.

– AFP



Flags of Somaliland and Israel fly alongside on a street in western Jerusalem yesterday. – AFP

Swiss reject anti-immigration proposal: projections

Charlene Personnaz and Nina Larson

BERN – The Swiss appeared yesterday to have voted down a divisive anti-immigration proposal to cap the country's population, early projections showed.

Shortly after polls closed at noon (local time), initial projections from the gfs.bern institute indicated around 55 percent opposition to the initiative, which had sparked warnings of "chaos" and devastating impacts for the Swiss economy and European Union relations.

"We are very relieved and happy. This is an important result for our country and for our relations with the EU," Monika Ruhl, director of the employers' organisation economiesuisse, told public broadcaster RTS.

Opinion polls had suggested that the vote, held under Switzerland's direct democracy system, would be tight.

Tensions have been running particularly high over the "No to a Switzerland with 10 million!" initiative, put forward by the rightwing Swiss People's Party (SVP).

That proposal wanted measures to stop the wealthy Alpine nation's population – currently 9.1 million – going above 10 million before 2050.

In a country where foreigners make up more than a quarter of the population, the proposal, if accepted, would slam the brakes on immigration.

"There has to be a limit," retiree Gilles Hirt told AFP at a polling station in Bern yesterday morning, comparing the situation in Switzerland to a ship.

"If it is designed for 150 people and you put 250 onboard, it becomes too small. If you put 350 onboard, it will sink," he said.

Swiss 'Brexit'

The SVP, Switzerland's largest party, insisted drastic measures were needed, blaming "mass immigration" for a host of problems, from housing shortages and rising rents to overcrowded trains and traffic jams.

SVP parliamentarian Céline Amaudruz told RTS she was "disappointed" by the projected results of yesterday's vote, insisting that Switzerland was facing "colossal challenges" from immigration.

Before the vote, SVP parliamentarian Yvan Pahud highlighted to AFP that "Switzerland is a small country that cannot be expanded".

We "do not want to welcome all of Europe".

"The stakes are very high," Swiss Justice Minister Beat Jans told the *Tribune de Geneve* newspaper before the vote, warning that the vote could provoke the equivalent of a Swiss "Brexit".

The initiative faces broad opposition from the government, parliament and multiple sectors of the economy.

"In a globalised world, it's just stupid to try and close borders and put a number on the people that can be in here," teacher Josefina Luque told AFP in Bern as she cast her vote against the initiative.

Conscientious objection

The Swiss also voted Sunday on a bill passed by parliament to make civilian service less attractive and less accessible, at a time when the war in Ukraine and other geopolitical tensions are pushing European countries to bolster army numbers.

It was the political left in the militarily neutral country that called the referendum. They argue the bill is dangerous and could ultimately lead to the alternative to military service being scrapped altogether.

Initial projections indicated that the referendum would pass with 53 percent in favour, although the gfs.bern institute highlighted that the margin of error was three percent, meaning the final outcome remained uncertain.

Switzerland has compulsory military service for men. They serve in a unique militia system in which army conscripts do at least four months' service before being called up repeatedly over a decade for weeks-long refresher sessions.

People who conscientiously oppose military service have since 1996 been permitted to perform civilian service instead.

Since access to civilian service was simplified in 2009, the numbers choosing that option have steadily climbed – a trend the government warns has become "problematic". – AFP

Zelensky holds 'substantive' birthday call with Trump: Kyiv

KYIV – Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky discussed war, peace and diplomacy with US counterpart Donald Trump on Sunday, the Ukrainian presidency said, in what it called a "substantive" conversation on Trump's 80th birthday.

The call comes as US-led talks to end the conflict in Ukraine – grinding through its fifth year – have been sidelined by the Iran war and as Russian advances on the battlefield were showing signs of losing steam.

"It was a quite substantive conversation about everything – from birthday wishes to diplomacy and war/peace," Zelensky's adviser Dmytro Lytvyn told journalists, adding that the call had lasted "30-35 minutes".

Trump has pushed both sides to end the conflict after boasting he could end the war within a day of taking office.

He also repeatedly leaned on Ukraine to make compromises to Russia, which launched its military operation in Ukraine in February 2022.

Trump will take part in a G7 working session with Zelensky in France tomorrow, but no bilateral meeting between the two is scheduled, according to a senior administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Trump has faced criticism for berating Zelensky in their tense White House meeting last year while inviting Russian President Vladimir Putin to a summit in Alaska in August 2025.

– AFP, MPD

Thousands protest in Geneva ahead of G7 summit in France



A firefighter direct a hose at a Tesla car set alight during a protest rally of a "No-G7" coalition of over 60 associations, unions and left-wing groups "against fascism and imperialism", a day ahead of the summit's start, in Geneva, Switzerland, yesterday. The 2026 edition of the G7 summit is set to take place between Monday and Wednesday in the French town of Evian-les-Bains near Switzerland. – AFP

Robin Millard

GENEVA – Thousands of protesters thronged the streets of Geneva yesterday ahead of the G7 summit in Evian in neighbouring France, with police omnipresent amid fears of a repeat of the violence seen at a similar summit in 2003.

Waving banners with messages like "No to the G7 and all imperialist alliances!" and "Abort the G7", the protesters gathered in a park on the shores of Lake Geneva. They then made their way through a barricaded city that seemed to be bracing for an invasion, as helicopters hovered above.

Under a burning sun, they set off shortly after 3:30 p.m. (local time), chanting slogans with a range of messages, supporting Palestinians, climate action, feminism, and anti-capitalist activism.

Police put the number of protesters at up to 7,000 at the start of the procession, but by 4:30 pm, AFP journalists estimated the number was closer to 15,000.

"I'm here because I'm not happy that this group of heads of state is meeting here to make decisions that affect all of us," Michel, a 69-year-old Swiss retiree waving a Palestinian flag, told AFP.

The coalition, made up of around 200 associations, organisations and unions, called for an "internationalist response" to the policies promoted by the Group of Seven leaders, who kick off their three-day annual gathering today.

Explosive issues

The G7 summit will be one of the first major international gatherings since the United

States and Israel launched a war against Iran in late February, upending the Middle East and widening transatlantic tensions.

The G7 brings together the leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States, along with invited leaders from several other countries, including Brazil and India.

The group will have a packed agenda of potentially explosive issues, including efforts to end the war in Iran, with Trump's claims of an imminent deal shrouded in uncertainty.

Most of the leaders will be arriving at Geneva Airport, before making the journey to Evian.

Geneva – about 40 kilometres southwest of the French spa town – is on edge.

The authorities are anxious to avoid any repeat of the mayhem of 2003, when anti-G7 rioters caused millions of US dollars worth of damage in the Swiss city.

The violence, looting and clashes live long in the memory and small shops, supermarkets and university buildings, some of them far from the protest route, were taking no chances, having boarded up their façades.

The main hospital set up large tents in case of an influx of casualties.

Geneva police said yesterday afternoon they had confiscated a number of objects from protesters "likely to be used as weapons", including knives, axes, gas canisters, and powerful pyrotechnical devices.

Laure, a 38-year-old member of the "No to the G7" collective, said many people were staying away from the demonstration due to "the fear created by authorities".

But she insisted the "amplified messages of anxiety and angst" did not correspond with reality. "We have a truck that will make bubbles for the children, we have drums," she added.

Bringing up the rear of the procession was a car carrying a giant effigy of Donald Trump, with red paint portraying blood oozing from his eyes and mouth, and a black cocktail glass in his hand with "Cuba" scrawled across it.

Tight security

While most of the large crowd did appear cheerful, AFP journalists saw several groups of black-clad protesters sporting masks, including one group that broke through a barrier protecting an up-scale apartment building.

AFP journalists also saw a Tesla set alight, and tagged with the words: "Eat the Rich".

The Swiss authorities have permitted the march around a lengthy loop on the north side of the city – well away from the city centre and its luxury boutiques.

Due to conditions imposed by the French authorities, the No-G7 coalition abandoned plans for a counter-summit and demonstration yesterday in the French border town of Annemasse.

"Message to Emmanuel Macron: It is scandalous that the freedom of people is so repressed in your country," said Laure of the "No to the G7" collective.

Switzerland is mobilising up to 4,000 troops to support police forces, while France has announced the deployment of nearly 16,000 police, gendarmes, troops, firefighters and border guards around Evian. – AFP

Narco-terrorist' the new 'communist': Guatemalan Nobel laureate Menchu

Edgar Calderón

GUATEMALA CITY – The term “narco-terrorist” has been weaponised just as the word “communist” was in the past, Guatemalan Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchu told AFP in an interview.

The 67-year-old indigenous activist, who survived the massacre of her family during Guatemala’s civil war, has not given up on the United Nations’ ability to resolve conflict in a world where artificial intelligence (AI) has exacerbated the fallout of war.

Mexico-based Menchu said terrorist accusations thrown around in Latin America acted as a “smokescreen” to crush left-wing opposition.

“How many people did they kill because they said they were communists, how many rules did they crush because they said they were communists?” the law professor said.

In the 1970s and 1980s, six Latin American dictatorships (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Brazil) joined forces to eliminate left-wing opponents under “Operation Condor,” with tacit US support.

The current narco-terrorist discourse “is the same old spiel that replaced what used to be called communism,” she said.

The 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner, visiting her home country for the launch of the Guatemala Book Fair, said that she still believes in the UN’s capacity to broker peace.

“I don’t see any other body that could replace the UN,” she said, acknowledging the organization’s flaws but insisting that “it’s the only thing we’ve got.”

Menchu slammed the US-Israeli offensive on Iran, which has ravaged the Middle East since its launch in February.



Guatemalan Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchu poses after an interview with AFP at the offices of her foundation in Guatemala City on Thursday. The term “narco-terrorist” has been weaponised just as the word “communist” was in the past, Guatemalan Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchu told AFP in the interview. – AFP

“What they’re doing in Iran is opening such an incredible door that we don’t know how many victims it will claim around the entire world,” she said, alluding to rapidly advancing technology that is supersizing the damage wrought by war.

She also praised Cuban steadfastness in the face of US President Donald Trump’s desire to turn the island into his “estate.”

“I don’t have a formula, but I know that the Cuban people have already spent almost 70 years resisting an invasion, and they’re still standing strong,” she said, referring to decades-long US pressure on the Caribbean island. – AFP

Cuba opens more sectors to private business

HAVANA – Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel on Friday announced greater freedoms for small businesses across the country, as the communist government takes steps to liberalise the island’s economy in the face of a crippling US blockade.

In a speech broadcast on national television, Díaz-Canel said Cuba would open more sectors to private businesses and streamline the approval process for new ventures.

“For non-state forms of management, the list of prohibited activities will be limited so that their scope of operations is as broad as possible,” the president said. “A process is underway... to approve all pending applications in the shortest time possible.”

Under pressure from the oil blockade imposed by Washington in January, the Cuban government has unveiled a series of reforms aimed at opening up the economy.

Private businesses – which can employ up to 100 people – were authorised in 2021 and have become an increasingly important part of Cuba’s economy. Since February, they have been permitted to import fuel, a sector previously controlled exclusively by the state.

As part of the new measures, the government will enable private businesses to invest in the economy on equal terms with foreign investors, after some of

them recently left the country amid concerns over US sanctions.

Díaz-Canel said the government was also considering scrapping state intermediaries in import and export operations.

The president reiterated his commitment to decentralising the economy and granting greater autonomy to state-owned enterprises, which account for roughly 80 percent of economic activity.

He also announced an overhaul of the state bureaucracy that would reduce the number of ministries and trim the state workforce, a plan that requires parliamentary approval in July.

Díaz-Canel assured that the new reforms “will soon be discussed and approved very swiftly.”

He also sought to project confidence despite the country’s mounting economic difficulties.

“The country is not paralysed; the country is facing this situation intelligently,” the president said, denouncing what he described as a “maximum pressure” policy from Washington.

In addition to the oil blockade, the United States has imposed a range of sanctions on Cuba.

The measures have further aggravated the economic, social and energy crises that have gripped the island for years despite its decades-long struggle against a US embargo dating back to 1962. – AFP

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FIFA WORLD CUP 2026

Group F



Sweden

V



Tunisia

Today 10:00 a.m. Macau time

Group H



Spain

V



Cabo Verde

Tomorrow 12:00 a.m. Macau time

Group G



Belgium

V



Egypt

Tomorrow 3:00 a.m. Macau time

Group H



Saudi Arabia

V



Uruguay

Tomorrow 6:00 a.m. Macau time

Group G



Iran

V



New Zealand

Tomorrow 9:00 a.m. Macau time

'Limitless' Pedri emerges as Spain's natural heir to Xavi, Iniesta

Kieran Canning

ATLANTA - Pedri watched his heroes Xavi Hernandez and Andres Iniesta conquer the world from his family's bar as a boy, now Spain's latest midfield maestro is chasing the same dream.

The 23-year-old has already proven to be a fitting heir to Xavi and Iniesta at club level with Barcelona, winning three La Liga titles.

He was also part of the Spanish side that became European champions in Germany two years ago, although an injury in the quarter-final win over the hosts saw him miss the final stages.

Fitness problems had been a persistent problem after he burst onto the scene as a teenager.

After a superb breakthrough season in 2020/21, Pedri's starring role as Spain reached the semi-finals of Euro 2020 meant he played 73 matches for club and country, a toll which was too much for his developing body.

Barcelona turned to a specialist myopathy laboratory in the USA for solutions and a study of Pedri's genetics helped create an individual plan that has brought him back to among the world's best midfielders.

Alongside Lamine Yamal, Gavi, Fermin Lopez and Pau Cubarsi he is part of another hugely talented generation of Barca youngsters that have helped the club overcome financial difficulties to remain La Liga's dominant force.

"It's like a movie"

Unlike the others, Pedri was not a product of Barca's fabled La Masia academy.

He made his breakthrough at Las Palmas as a 16-year-old and quickly broke into the first team after joining Barca in 2020.

Yet, his ability to keep possession and vision to cut defences open is reminiscent of Xavi and Iniesta in their prime.

"With Xavi or Iniesta I realised that they are prepared before they receive the ball," Pedri said in a recent documentary on his rise to stardom.

"I learnt that from a very young age and it was natural to me. What makes a good move is knowing what you are going to before you get the ball."

He will be central to Spain's attempt to match the feats of the golden generation that won the 2010 World Cup, in between two triumphs at Euro 2008 and 2012.

Back then Pedri watched on admiringly from a bar, founded by his grandad and run by his parents, in Tenerife that was also the first Barcelona supporters' club on the Canary Island.

"Thanks to God I am living the dream that he had," Pedri added of his Barcelona fanatic grandfather, who never got to see him play at the Camp Nou. "It's like something from a movie."

The next step on the Hollywood script would be for Pedri to

Brazil's frailties laid bare in shaky World Cup opener



Brazil's forward Raphinha (from left to right), Morocco's midfielder Ayyoub Bouaddi, and Brazil's midfielder Lucas Paqueta fight for the ball during the 2026 World Cup Group C match between Brazil and Morocco at the New York/New Jersey Stadium in East Rutherford on Saturday. - AFP

EAST RUTHERFORD – Brazil's defensive frailties, lack of creativity and problems at full-back were exposed in a 1-1 draw with Morocco in their World Cup opener, raising doubts over their chances of lifting a sixth title.

Both Ancelotti and star forward Vinicius Junior, who scored the equaliser on Saturday, acknowledged the need for significant improvement if the Seleção are to lift the trophy for the first time since 2002.

Brazil teams of the past have arrived at previous tournaments not considered favourites and yet gone on to win the trophy, but the nature of their opening display gave little reason to suggest they will return to New Jersey for the final on July 19.

Despite the disappointing start against the 2022 semi-finalists, Ancelotti urged calm, pointing to the next match against minnows Haiti on June 19 as an opportunity to respond.

"We can't expect the team to be perfect from the get-go. You don't win a World Cup based on your first match," the Italian said.

However, the performance highlighted the shortcomings Brazil must address to go deep in the tournament.

Ancelotti had already admitted in March that Brazil no longer boast the attacking full-backs - such as Carlos Alberto, Roberto Carlos or Cafu - that once defined their play.

Roma right-back Wesley fits that profile but was ruled out with injury just before the tournament. That left Brazil with only two natural full-

backs, Douglas Santos and Alex Sandro, both on the left.

On the right, Ancelotti has had to rely on Danilo, who plays at centre-back for Flamengo, as well as Bremer and Roger Ibanez, who offer a more defensive approach.

Ibanez started against Morocco but was replaced by Danilo at half-time.

"We have to adapt to the players available," said Vinicius.

Midfield overrun and lacking spark

Since Ancelotti took over a year ago, Brazil have conceded 12 goals in 13 matches, letting in at least one goal in each of their last six games.

Against Morocco, Brahim Diaz capitalised on Lucas Paqueta losing possession and a disorganised midfield to slice open Brazil's defence and set up Ismael Saibari for the opener.

The difficulties in midfield were more surprising, given one of Ancelotti's first moves as coach was to recall Casemiro last year after an 18-month absence.

Casemiro has enjoyed a solid farewell season at Manchester United, while Bruno Guimaraes has been key for Newcastle, but the pair could not match the intensity and energy of Morocco's midfield - run by 18-year-old Ayyoub Bouaddi on his World Cup debut.

So dominant were Bouaddi and Neil El Aynaoui in the centre of the pitch that Ancelotti replaced five-time Champions League winner

Casemiro at half-time.

"We could have controlled the game better," Casemiro said. "We lost the ball too often in midfield."

Brazil improved after the break with the introduction of ex-Liverpool midfielder Fabinho, though the shift was also in part due to Morocco fading as the physical toll of their aggressive pressing began to show.

A shortage of creative options in midfield, the absence of someone who can dictate play, is another grave concern for a nation that has produced some of the game's greatest playmakers.

Since the 2022 World Cup qualifying campaign, Brazil have relied heavily on Neymar, who is currently sidelined with injury and has struggled for form in recent years.

In his absence, playmaking duties have fallen to Paqueta, a responsibility that appears to weigh heavily on the former West Ham midfielder.

Vinicius stepped up at times on Saturday, but his primary role remains finishing, where he can best exploit his pace and dribbling.

"We should have created more," midfielder Fabinho said. "In the second half, with more intensity, we managed to create more chances and space."

Brazil will surely prove too strong for a Haiti side appearing at their first World Cup since 1974, but the five-time champions did anything but dispel the doubts about this current group of players against Morocco.

- AFP

make his mark on the World Cup and propel himself into the conversation to win the Ballon d'Or - the prize for the best player on the planet.

Spain boss Luis de la Fuente certainly has no doubt that Pedri deserves to be recognised among the world's best.

"We don't know what his best version is because he's so good," said De la Fuente, whose side are unbeaten in 31 competitive games heading into the World Cup. "He is limitless."

Spain begin their World Cup campaign against debutants Cape Verde in Atlanta today.

They will also face Saudi Arabia and two-time winners Uruguay in Group H.

The game will be played at 12:00 a.m. tomorrow Macau time. - AFP/MPD



Iran fans wait for the team to leave for US at the Marriott Hotel in Tijuana, Mexico, yesterday, on the eve of their 2026 World Cup Group G match against New Zealand. - AFP

Hamilton claims his 1st Ferrari win at Barcelona Grand Prix

F1

MONTMELÓ – Lewis Hamilton claimed his first victory for Ferrari yesterday at the Barcelona-Catalunya Formula One Grand Prix, ending championship leader Kimi Antonelli's five-race winning streak.

The seven-time world champion finished ahead of George Russell and Lando Norris, while Antonelli was forced to abandon in the final stages because of a technical problem.

Hamilton, 41, cut down Antonelli's title lead to 41 points by triumphing nearly two years after he last won a race.

"It's not over, that's for sure," said Hamilton of the championship race.

Mercedes polesitter Russell came in 19 seconds behind Hamilton, with Norris completing an all-British podium, the first since the 1968 United States Grand Prix.

"You have helped me so much to achieve this dream, I cannot thank you enough," said Hamilton over team radio.

"To the fans, thank you for reminding me who I am. I couldn't have done this without you."

Russell, pre-season favourite for the championship, arrived in Barcelona bemoaning bad luck for his recent struggles but after team-mate Antonelli edged in front of him late on he had some good fortune to cut the gap on the teenager to 53 points after the Italian abandoned.

"Good to be back on the podium and have a clean race, but Ferrari were mighty today so we need to keep pushing," said Russell.

"The last stints were difficult, but it's good to be back here. The pace today was insane from Lewis, they are coming I think."

With track temperatures up at 51 degrees Celsius, Hamilton opted for a three pit-stop strategy and it worked to perfection, with the third of those fortuitously coming while the virtual safety car was deployed.

Ferrari's heavily upgraded car may well have been fast enough for Hamilton to triumph anyway, as he recorded the 106th victory of his career.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen came in fourth, ahead of McLaren's Oscar Piastri and Isack Hadjar in the other Red Bull.

Russell got off to the perfect start from pole, holding off Hamilton on softs, with the Ferrari driver cutting off Antonelli.

Hadjar, who started in position six, was slow off the line and overtaken by eight cars.

Charles Leclerc, in the second Ferrari, admitted he was "ashamed" by his crash in qualifying which left him starting in 10th but expertly weaved his way up to sixth, although he was later forced to retire.

Early stop

Hamilton took an early pit stop on lap 12 to swap his softs for hards, with Mercedes responding on the following lap with hards for Russell.

Russell was worried his stop "exposed" him to Antonelli but retook the lead from Hamilton with his teenage team-mate back in third after his own stop to bolt on the hards.

With Hamilton 2.3 seconds behind Russell, he said "we are on Plan C" over team radio.

The seven-time champion pitted for the second time in the 28th lap, indicating a three-stop strategy, with Mercedes deciding not to

follow suit because of the threat of 2025 champion Lando Norris, who was on a two-stop plan.

Antonelli moved right behind Russell, who was forced to fend off his team-mate.

Russell was called in for fresh hards before Antonelli followed suit, allowing Hamilton into the lead, with Ferrari telling the Briton this was the "critical time" for his race.

Home favourite Alonso, in what he said was probably his final appearance in Barcelona, was forced to retire because of a suspected battery issue. It brought out a yellow flag with the virtual safety car deployed, offering Hamilton an ideal chance for a cheap stop.

That worked brilliantly for Hamilton who emerged from his third stop with fresh rubber 2.6s ahead of Russell with 24 laps remaining.

With clean air Hamilton was able to stretch his lead comfortably to triumph in style.

The victory was sweetened further by late drama as Antonelli retired from second place in the 62nd lap to blow open the championship.

– AFP



Winner Ferrari's British driver Lewis Hamilton celebrates on the podium after the Catalonia Formula One Grand Prix at the Circuit de Catalunya in Montmeló, on the outskirts of Barcelona, yesterday.

– AFP

Chinese duos complete clean sweep of doubles titles at Australian Badminton Open

Badminton

SYDNEY – The Chinese pairs of Feng Yanzhe and Huang Dongping, Jia Yifan and Zhang Shuxian, and Chen Boyang and Liu Yi won their respective finals in Sydney yesterday to claim the mixed, women's and men's doubles titles respectively at the Australian Badminton Open.

Feng and Huang, the world No.1 duo, defeated compatriots and second seeds Guo Xinwa and Chen Fanghui 21-17, 21-19 in 52 minutes to win their second title of 2026 following success at the

Malaysia Open in January.

Tied at 9-9 in the first game, Feng and Huang won nine of the next 13 points to take control of the game.

In a tightly contested second game, scores were level at 18-18 before Feng and Huang won two consecutive critical points to set up championship points, the second of which was converted.

Jia and Zhang rallied back from trailing 6-12 in the first game to beat Indonesia's Febriana Dwipuji Kusuma and Meilysa Trias Puspita Sari 24-22, 21-13 in 59 minutes.

The Chinese pair again fell behind 0-4 in the second game, but

raced away after drawing level at 7-7 to win the title.

In the final match of the tournament at Sydney's State Sports Center, men's doubles fourth seeds Chen and Liu triumphed 21-15, 21-19 over Indonesian third seeds Sabar Karyaman Gutama and Moh Reza Pahlevi Isfahani.

Rising Chinese star Dong Tianyao was beaten by Indonesian third seed Alwi Farhan to finish runner-up in the men's singles, while Japan's world No. 3 Akane Yamaguchi won the women's singles title by beating Thailand's Pornpawee Chochwong 22-21, 2-18.

– Xinhua/MPD

Vekic beats Raducanu in Queen's Club final to end title drought

Steven Griffiths



LONDON – Donna Vekic won her first title in three years as the Croatian beat former US Open champion Emma Raducanu 6-0, 7-6 (8/6) in the Queen's Club final yesterday.

Vekic took the first set in dominant fashion before holding her nerve in a tense second set tie-break.

The fifth title of Vekic's career was a long-awaited triumph for the world number 76, who got her hands on a trophy for the first time since the 2023 Monterrey Open.

The 29-year-old was only able to compete in the grass-court event in west London as a 'lucky loser' after Marta Kostyuk pulled out injured on the eve of the tournament.

Struggling with illness, Vekic had lost to Anna Blinkova in Queen's qualifying but Kostyuk's exit allowed her to make the most of an unexpected second chance.

The 29-year-old has pedigree on grass after reaching the 2024 Wimbledon semi-finals and winning the Nottingham Open in 2017.

Playing in her first final since the Paris Olympics two years ago, when she lost the gold medal match to Zheng Qinwen, Vekic had to dig deep to subdue British number one Raducanu in a roller-coaster second set.

The Croatian trailed 5-2 and wasted four match-points before finally delivering the knockout blow.

"This is really my favourite time of the year, my favourite surface. I love the grass. I've really enjoyed myself this week," Vekic said.

"Winning 6-0 is sometimes a curse in tennis. Emma rally stepped up and played some amazing tennis. I just tried to stay with her, make her play it out, stay with every single ball.

"Her last service game and the tie-break is a bit of a blur right now, but I'm really happy I managed to win."

Praising David Felgate – Vekic's coach for the grass-court campaign this year – the Croatian added: "We have worked together since I have been 12 years old. You raised me, without you I wouldn't even know what grass is.

"When I called you two weeks ago to ask you to help me you said yes. Thank you so much, without you I wouldn't be here with this trophy."

Raducanu wilts on home turf

It was another final disappointment for Raducanu in 2026 after she lost to Sorana Cirstea in the Transylvania Open showpiece in February.

Raducanu was hoping to win her first title since her stunning US Open victory as a teenage qualifier in 2021.

The 23-year-old's bid for the second trophy of her career fell at the final hurdle.

But Raducanu has been revitalised since rehiring Andrew Richardson, who coached her to that historic title in New York five years ago.

The world number 42 had been hampered by fitness issues for several years and arrived at Queen's with only one win in her previous seven matches after battling a viral illness.

Raducanu will head to Wimbledon, which starts on June 29, with renewed belief.

"It's been an incredible week for me, making the final here, playing in my home city, in my home tournament," Raducanu said.

"Today was a really tough match. Donna played extremely well from the start to the finish."

– AFP

Poland's Majchrzak stuns De Minaur for 1st ATP title

Tennis

Richard Carter

THE HAGUE – Polish outsider Kamil Majchrzak clinched his first ever ATP tennis tour title yesterday, stunning world number six Alex de Minaur 6-3, 2-6, 7-6 (7/5) in a nail-biting final on the 's-Hertogenbosch grass.

The win capped a fairytale run for the world number 76, who had already overcome two top-10 players in consecutive rounds in Felix Auger-Aliassime (world rank four) and Daniil Medvedev (world rank eight).

Both players battled blustery conditions but Majchrzak was the more aggressive player, taking more risks and eventually grinding down the obdurate De Minaur in a match lasting two hours 25 minutes.

"This is a very emotional moment for me, I've been waiting for this moment all my career," said the 30-year-old as he collected his trophy.

"I played some of the best players in the world, so this one feels really good, it feels really special. To beat three players from the top 10 is an unbelievable run for me."

The Pole got off to a flying 3-0 start in the first set, breaking De Minaur's first service game as the Australian appeared to struggle with the swirling wind on serve.

That early break proved to be enough, as Majchrzak wrapped up the first set 6-3 with a high backhand volley at the net.

Losing his first set of the tournament appeared to galvanise the Australian, who broke Majchrzak's first service game of the second set with a crosscourt forehand pass.

But this time the Pole responded immediately, getting the set back on serve with a break of his own as De Minaur pushed a ground stroke long.

A series of unforced errors from Majchrzak at 3-2 however gifted De Minaur another break of serve and the Australian sealed the set

6-2 with another break as the Pole drifted a forehand drive wide.

The deciding set went on serve until the crucial seventh game, when Majchrzak seized the initiative, breaking the Australian's serve courtesy of a double fault.

But the stubborn de Minaur broke back immediately and won his next service game with a brilliant backhand pass up the line, one of the shots of the match.

A final-set tie-break seemed a fitting way to decide such a tight match.

De Minaur kicked off the breaker with a double-fault and Majchrzak gratefully accepted the gift to race into a 3-0 lead.

With a first title in his sight, the Pole tightened up somewhat, allowing the Australian to scrape back to 5-5, but a brave serve and volley gave him championship point.

In the end, De Minaur handed him the title with a double fault, Majchrzak sinking to his knees in triumph after the biggest win of his life. – AFP

David Beckham gets Hollywood star as World Cup begins in US

Paula Ramon

LOS ANGELES – Football idol David Beckham joined the ranks of entertainment royalty on Friday when he was honoured with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, hours before the United States hosts its first game of the 2026 World Cup.

Film legend Tom Cruise was on hand to pay tribute to Beckham, who he said had changed the face of football in the United States.

Former Manchester United and England captain Beckham, 51, told a throng of fans on the sun-kissed boulevard it was a “truly incredible moment.”

“I’ve always been a dreamer, but I could never have imagined that an honor like this would come to a working-class English soccer player like me,” he said.

“How fitting then that I am here today as we prepare to celebrate the opening here in the US of the 2026 World Cup.

“It’s a powerful moment to recognize how the sport I love so

much has grown in this country over the past three decades.”

Beckham, who spent six seasons with LA Galaxy from 2007, said he was deeply honoured to be feted by a Hollywood film megastar.

“To stand here in front of my friend Tom Cruise, the greatest movie star of our time, is quite frankly mind-blowing,” he said.

“You welcomed us to LA 20 years ago, and you have been a loyal friend and an inspiration to me ever since,” he told the actor.

The “Mission: Impossible” star said Beckham’s tenure in Los Angeles had been a huge part of the growth of football on this side of the Atlantic.

Beckham’s arrival “changed this sport in this country. People who had never watched football or soccer suddenly had a reason to.

“When David arrived, Major League Soccer had 13 teams. Today, it has 30. That’s the impact we’re celebrating today: not just an extraordinary career, but a legacy that changed the trajectory of a sport.”

Beckham’s wife, Victoria, a former member of the Spice Girls and now a fashion designer and businesswoman, said football was booming in the United States.

“Soccer in America is entering one of the most exciting chapters in its history, which makes this incredible honour feel all the more timely,” she said.

The United States, which hosted the World Cup for the first time in 1994, is co-hosting this year’s tournament alongside Mexico and Canada.

Beckham retired in 2013 after two decades with some of the world’s most famous football outfits, including Real Madrid, AC Milan and Paris Saint-Germain.

He later invested in Inter Miami CF, which signed Argentine superstar Lionel Messi in 2023 and won the Major League Soccer (MLS) title last season for the first time in its history.

Beckham also ventured into the entertainment industry, founding the content production company Studio 99 in 2019.



David Beckham poses at his newly unveiled Hollywood Walk of Fame star in Hollywood, California, on Friday. – AFP

Bruce Springsteen music centre set to open in New Jersey

Raphaël Hermano

LONG BRANCH – Rock legend Bruce Springsteen is one of New Jersey’s most famous native sons, and the Garden State is honouring The Boss with a new museum that celebrates his legacy and the history of American music.

The venue is located in Long Branch, where the 20-time Grammy winner was born. It’s just a stone’s throw from Asbury Park, the once blue-collar coastal town that was the icon’s stomping ground and shaped his musical identity.

Spread over two levels, the Bruce Springsteen Centre for American Music, which opened on Saturday, has a floor dedicated to US genres including blues, country, hip-hop and jazz.

There is also a heavy emphasis on celebrated voices of protest in music including Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, Nina Simone, Public Enemy, Kendrick Lamar and Springsteen himself.

“I’m the one of a long line of messengers,” Springsteen – a leading voice of opposition to President Donald Trump – says in a 25-minute film shown to visitors on arrival.

‘Born in the USA’

“The stories that Bruce tells in his book ‘Born to Run,’ and of course in his lyrics, really became the inspiration for a lot of design choices here,” said Jared Gilbert, an associate at the CookFox architectural firm, which led the project.

Exhibits include a gold jacket that belonged to Elvis Presley, a saxophone used by John Coltrane, an Eddie Van Halen guitar, and a Chuck D cap.

The items were loaned to the centre by the artists or their estates, said executive director Bob Santelli, a close friend of Springsteen.



A woman walks past a display during a press preview of the “Bruce Springsteen Centre for American Music” on the campus of Monmouth University in West Long Branch, New Jersey last Tuesday. Springsteen, a winner of 20 Grammys and leading voice of opposition to US President Donald Trump, is the focus of their newly opened museum of US music in his native New Jersey. – AFP

“It was relatively easy for me to go and make a phone call and say we’d like to borrow this or like to borrow that,” Santelli told AFP, adding: “Bruce’s name goes a long way.”

The museum, which cost US\$53 million and will host Springsteen’s archives, was largely financed through donations from “Springsteen fans with means,” Santelli added.

Listening stations and touch-screens allow visitors to navigate the full range of styles and eras, although there are notable omissions such as disco, funk, house and techno.

“Unfortunately, we were running out of space,” said collections director Melissa Kozlowski.

Upstairs, the story of Springsteen’s first concerts on the campus of Monmouth University is told.

The formation of his E Street Band follows, as does his breakout in the mid-1970s, and the triumph of his 1984 album “Born in the USA.”

‘Chimes of Freedom’

A large section is devoted to the

album’s title track, still mistakenly regarded as a patriotic anthem by some, even though it was written to condemn US treatment of Vietnam War veterans.

A virtual library brings together some of the key books for the singer, who was a college dropout and recounts in a video that reading only became a passion when he was 28.

In a replica studio, visitors mix their own tracks using a mixing desk.

Springsteen completed a 20-date US tour in May, using each appearance to rail against Trump, but the president’s name does not appear in the exhibits.

“We strive to tell an apolitical, non-political story,” said Santelli.

“Bruce’s personal political ideas are his, it’s not necessarily ours.

“This is a very important subject in this country, which is why we have a new exhibit, a temporary exhibit, that will open with the building that will be there for about six months.”

It will be called “Chimes of Freedom: Politics, Protest and the Power of Song.” – AFP

US clears Paramount’s US\$111 billion Warner Bros. takeover

LOS ANGELES – The US Justice Department on Friday cleared Paramount Skydance’s US\$111 billion takeover of Warner Bros. Discovery, handing a major win to a media empire financed by one of President Donald Trump’s closest billionaire allies.

The Antitrust Division approved the blockbuster deal without demanding a single change, capping an eight-month review and clearing the way for one of the largest media mergers in years.

It said the tie-up was “not likely to result in harm to competition or American consumers” – and could even increase competition.

The approval is a coup for Paramount chief executive David Ellison, whose father, Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison, largely financed the takeover.

The elder Ellison, one of the world’s richest men, is a close ally of Trump.

A group of Democratic senators led by Elizabeth Warren had warned that a Warner Bros. deal risked being “tainted by political favouritism and corruption,” urging the Justice Department to review it on the law and facts.

Larry Ellison’s financial guarantee was what finally won over the Warner Bros. board, sealing Paramount’s victory in a bruising bidding war with Netflix.

The combined company will control a sprawling roster of assets, including CNN, Warner Bros. Pictures and the HBO Max streaming service.

But the federal sign-off does not end the deal’s legal peril.

A coalition of about 10 states led by California is preparing an antitrust lawsuit that could land this month, Bloomberg has reported.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta’s office said last week the acquisition “remains an active investigation.” The European Commission is reviewing the merger as well.

Hollywood is uneasy about the deal.

Hundreds of actors and directors have signed a letter opposing the merger, warning it will choke production in an industry already battered by years of consolidation and cost-cutting.

The Justice Department pushed back on those fears directly, arguing the evidence did not show the merger would shrink output.

The saga began last year, when streaming giant Netflix and Paramount went to war over Warner Bros. and its prized back catalogue.

A wary Tinseltown reluctantly lined up behind Netflix as the lesser of two evils, only to watch Paramount keep raising its bid until the streamer walked away. – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 21°C~30°C	Manila 24°C~33°C	New York 15°C~27°C	Lisbon 15°C~27°C
Shanghai 22°C~27°C	Bangkok 26°C~35°C	London 14°C~23°C	Rio de Janeiro 20°C~23°C
Hong Kong 25°C~28°C	Tokyo 15°C~23°C	Frankfurt 11°C~23°C	Luanda 20°C~25°C
Taipei 23°C~29°C	Singapore 24°C~31°C	Vancouver 15°C~27°C	Maputo 17°C~29°C
Guangzhou 23°C~27°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~33°C	Paris 17°C~28°C	Dili 22°C~31°C
Nanjing 21°C~29°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 11°C~22°C	São Tomé 24°C~32°C
Guilin 22°C~31°C	Seoul 20°C~32°C	Las Vegas 27°C~41°C	Praia 21°C~29°C
Xi’an 23°C~36°C	Sydney 12°C~19°C	Monte Carlo 18°C~25°C	Bissau 24°C~31°C



A child climbs on a LEGO figure of Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo, made of over 30,000 bricks, displayed during the FIFA World Cup 2026 Experience for fans at LEGOLAND California in Carlsbad, California on Saturday. - AFP



A guest kicks a football towards a LEGO minifigure goalie at The Kickoff during the FIFA World Cup 2026 Experience for fans at LEGOLAND California in Carlsbad, California on Saturday. - AFP



A FIFA World Cup trophy made of LEGO bricks is displayed during the FIFA World Cup 2026 Experience for fans at LEGOLAND California in Carlsbad, California on Saturday. - AFP



A LEGO figure of France's forward Kylian Mbappe, made of over 17,000 bricks, is displayed during the FIFA World Cup 2026 Experience for fans at LEGOLAND California in Carlsbad, California on Saturday. - AFP



LEGO Editions set of Argentina's forward Lionel Messi is displayed in a store during the FIFA World Cup 2026 Experience for fans at LEGOLAND California in Carlsbad, California on Saturday. - AFP



A LEGO figure of Brazil's forward Vinicius Junior, made of over 18,000 bricks, is displayed during the FIFA World Cup 2026 Experience for fans at LEGOLAND California in Carlsbad, California on Saturday. - AFP