

Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan's final version ready in August: Sam

Tony Wong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai said yesterday that the local government is aiming to publish the final version of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan in August and then start implementing it.

Sam said that he will draft his 2027 Policy Address, which he is scheduled to deliver in November, in close alignment with the policy initiatives to be listed by the 3rd Five-Year Plan, while the local government's various public entities will plan their tasks for next year in compliance with those to be laid out by the 3rd Five-Year Plan.

Sam made the remarks during a Q&A session in the legislature's hemicycle yesterday afternoon. During yesterday's plenary session, which lasted four hours including a 30-minute break, Sam first reviewed the local government's administration and governance over the past six months and presented his governance team's key tasks and policy initiatives for the second half of this year, before answering questions from lawmakers.

Sam answered questions from 32 lawmakers in the 33-member Legislative Assembly (AL) chaired by André Cheong Weng Chon. As is customary, the speaker of the legislature refrains from actively taking part in his peers' Q&A sessions, merely overseeing them.

The Macau Special Administrative Region's (MSAR) 3rd Five-Year Plan, officially known as 3rd Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development, covers the period between 2026 and

2030. The Macau government has underlined its commitment to aligning Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030), the full version of which was published by the Central People's Government in March this year.

The local government is running a public consultation on its drafting of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan. The 40-day public consultation, which started on May 20, is slated to end on June 28.

After assessing the opinions and suggestions gathered during the ongoing public consultation, the local government will draw up and publish the final version of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan. Afterwards, the government will start implementing the plan.

During yesterday's plenary session, Sam also pledged that his government will ensure that the various policy initiatives and tasks to be laid out by the 3rd Five-Year Plan will be completed one after another on schedule.

Sam said that the opinions and suggestions gathered so far during the ongoing public consultation indicated that members of Macau's civil society generally paid close attention to issues such as Macau's appropriate economic diversification, the development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, and the integrated development of Macau's education, sci-tech, and talent cultivation.

Continued on p.5



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

Macau to develop stage show at world heritage landmark: O Lam



Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam answers reporters' questions during a Greater Bay Area (GBA) press visit to Macau's UNESCO World Heritage-listed Dom Pedro V Theatre yesterday. - Xinhua

Macau will upgrade its Dom Pedro V Theatre and turn the heritage site into a venue for immersive stage performances, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam said yesterday.

Speaking at a press event held at the theatre, O said the project will use the spot, which is part of the "Historic Centre of Macao" inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, as a stage and showcase the city's more than 400 years of cultural exchange between East and West.

O underscored that Macau's cultural confidence is rooted in the enduring heritage of Chinese civilization. She described the theatre as an example of Macau's multicultural heritage and cultural confidence.

The city has preserved traditional Chinese culture while fostering a multicultural environment, she noted, adding that historic landmarks, traditional festivals, and folk customs all reflect Macau's distinctive blend of Chinese and Western cultural influences.

O also outlined plans to promote the integrated development of education, technology, and talent. She said Macau will leverage its role as an international platform to attract talent from Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries, as well as other parts of the world, while deepening cooperation within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

A key initiative is the development of the Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town. The first phase is scheduled to begin operations in August, with around 1,300 postgraduate students from three public universities studying and living on campus, she noted.

The education town is expected to gradually expand to accommodate about 20,000 students and serve as a platform for integrating education, technological innovation, and talent development, O said.

- Xinhua, MPD

Macau's most popular English-language newspaper - Your trustworthy source of news & views

The Macau Post Daily

Xi holds talks with Myanmar counterpart on boosting cooperation

President Xi Jinping held talks with President of Myanmar Min Aung Hlaing in Beijing yesterday. - Story on p. 7

Hormuz shipping muted despite Iran war accord: trackers

Shipping through the Strait of Hormuz stayed at a trickle yesterday, maritime trackers indicated, two days after the US promised to reopen it under an agreement with Iran to end their war. - Story on p. 10

Middle East fuel crisis keeps Mozambique fishermen ashore

Dozens of low fishing boats lay anchored in flat waters off Mozambique's capital, stranded for days as surging fuel costs kept their owners from heading out to sea. - Story on p. 12

Hou Kong holds student-led English carnival focused on wellbeing

Commentary by teacher Ngan Heng Chan

After International Children's Day on June 1, the English Language Team of Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) hosted a "student-led English carnival" recently.

The event aimed to promote student well-being and actively respond to recent educational issues. Specifically, it aligned with the Education and Youth Development Bureau's (DSEDJ) policy to "care for the growth and development of students' physical and mental health," as well as the nation's "Double Reduction" policy* by the Ministry of Education, which seeks to reduce students' academic burden.

Since 2020, the team has pursued a whole-school approach to hold an annual English-language event. The goal is to provide students with a different learning experience where they can apply English in real-world contexts. The objectives of this year's English Carnival were to strengthen students' confidence in speaking English and to encourage them to explore the world through the language. In the current



Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) students participate in the school's recent English Carnival. – Photos by Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) student Luciano Sio Pak Long

academic year, around 10 game booths were set up for students to enjoy during their lunch breaks.

The highlight of this year's event was that the student helpers and booth hosts were from the school's English Enrichment Programme, which is funded by the DSEDJ Education Fund. It aimed to demonstrate that students with advanced English skills need more than just language proficiency, considering that leadership and communication skills are important in today's world. Therefore,

Grade 3 to 5 teachers from the English Enrichment Programme took this carnival as a practical platform for these students to exercise and implement their leadership and communication skills.

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) emphasises through its Learning Compass 2030 framework that social emotional learning (SEL) is the core for developing students' self-regulated learning and becoming life-long learners.

In response to the framework,



Hou Kong has been working hard since 2015 to assist students in becoming life-long learners. As the bureau has also launched a "Wellbeing Week" this year, the school's English Language Team is planning to collaborate with the school's Moral and Civic Education Team, with the objective of designing English-medium activities that support and promote students' wellbeing. ■

*The "Double Reduction" Policy is a set of education reforms introduced by the Central People's

Government in July 2021. Its full name is *Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and After-School Tutoring for Students in Compulsory Education*. The policy has two main goals, namely (1) to reduce the burden of homework by limiting the amount and difficulty of compulsory education students' homework and (2) to reduce the burden of off-campus tutoring by strictly regulating and limiting for-profit, subject-based after-school tutoring. - DeepSeek

Local man admitted to ICU with severe flu: SSM

Armindo Neves

The Health Bureau (SSM) said in a statement yesterday that a local man was admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) at Kiang Wu Hospital on Monday with severe influenza.

According to the statement, the patient is a 49-year-old male with a history of chronic illness.

On Monday evening, the patient developed fever and breathing difficulties at home and was rushed by ambulance to the private hospital, the statement said, adding that during treatment he lost consciousness and was diagnosed with influenza A complicated by pneumonia.

According to the statement, the patient was on ventilator support and receiving treatment in the intensive care unit yesterday. The bureau described his condition as critical.

The statement noted that during the incubation period, the patient had no history of travel abroad and had not received the seasonal influenza vaccine for this year.

The statement also said that the

patient's household contacts have developed influenza-like symptoms including fever and runny nose, adding that they have been advised to seek medical evaluation promptly for assessment and obtain a prescription for antiviral medication.

In the statement, Health Bureau reminded the public that influenza viruses are active in Macau.

The 2025-2026 seasonal influenza vaccine currently available provides protection against influenza A and B viruses and is the most effective measure to prevent the circulating strains, significantly reducing the risk of severe complications and death.

Residents who have not been vaccinated since September last year – especially high-risk groups such as pregnant women, young children, the elderly, and individuals with chronic conditions, who are more likely to develop severe complications or even die following influenza infection – should get vaccinated as soon as possible. ■

Man falsely imprisons, beats victim to take revenge for blackmailing girlfriend: PJ

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police arrested a man from the Chinese mainland for falsely imprisoning and physically assaulting a fellow mainlander, in order to take revenge for blackmailing his girlfriend, who is also from the Chinese mainland, PJ spokesman Chao Teng Hin said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Chao identified the suspect as a 37-year-old man surnamed Qiu who claimed to be unemployed. The victim and suspect's girlfriend are also middle-aged.

According to Chao, the Judiciary Police received a report from the Public Security Police (PSP) last Wednesday, in which the victim accused Qiu of falsely imprisoning and physically assaulting him.

After receiving the report, PJ officers rushed to a shop in the peninsula's northern district where they arrested Qiu and his girlfriend.

According to Chao, the investigation revealed that the victim had previously learnt that Qiu's girlfriend was suspected of operating an illegal meat smuggling business in Macau, and subsequently extorted a total of 2,500 yuan (2,988 patacas) from her on two separate occasions.

At around 7 p.m. last Wednesday, when the victim tried to extort money once again, Qiu, upon learning of the attempt, attacked the victim with a hammer in a parallel-trading



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Chao Teng Hin looks on during yesterday's regular press conference.

– Photo: Armindo Neves



This undated handout photo provided by the Judiciary Police yesterday shows a hammer seized from a parallel-trading den run by the suspect's girlfriend.

den in the northern district, which was operating under the cover of a shop, Chao said, adding that the attack resulted in multiple bruises to the victim's neck, both arms, and back. The suspect then did not allow the victim to leave the shop, according to Chao.

At around 11 p.m. that day, in order to secure his release, Chao said, the victim pretended to agree to accept 1,000 yuan as compensation for "medical expenses" and not to pursue the matter further. After the suspect paid the money, he allowed the

victim to leave, according to Chao, adding that the victim then immediately reported the incident to the Public Security Police.

Qiu has meanwhile been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing charges of false imprisonment, physical assault and keeping an illegal weapon.

The Judiciary Police have opened a blackmail probe into the victim and referred a separate case involving Qiu's girlfriend – suspected of running a parallel-trading den – to the Macau Customs Service. ■

Published since Aug 2004

- Director & Chief Editor – Harald Brüning
- Office Manager – Sally Chong
- Marketing Manager – Kevin Cheung King Lok
- Managing Editor – Maria Cheung Ut Meng
- Editors – Lesley Wells, Johnny Un
- Senior Reporters – Tony Wong, Rui Pastorin
- Reporters – Khalel Vallo, William Chan, Ida Cheong, Armindo Neves
- Chief Graphic Designer – Simon Wang
- Graphic Designer – Colin Zhong
- Administrative Assistants – Ester Mak, Carl Leong
- Printed by Tipografia Welfare Lda., 82-86 Rua dos Pescadores
- Chatbots: DeepSeek, Gemini, Poe
- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua

Macau Weather

**UNSETTLED.
CLOUDY.
SHOWERS, HEAVY AT TIMES.
OCCASIONAL THUNDERSTORMS.
FORCE 3 TO 5 SOUTH TO
SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS WITH
GUSTS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY
WILL RANGE BETWEEN
80% AND 99%.**



25°C~28°C

Source: SMG

Nobel laureate discusses climate risks, geopolitical uncertainty at UM lecture

Khalel Vallo

A 2003 Nobel laureate in Economic Sciences examined the growing challenges posed by climate change and geopolitical uncertainty in a lecture at the public University of Macau (UM) on Monday, highlighting their impact on global financial markets and the importance of understanding interconnected global risks, according to a UM statement that day.

The lecture, titled “Can We Stop Climate Change?”, was delivered by Robert F. Engle as part of the university’s 45th anniversary celebrations, the statement said.

Organised by the Faculty of Business Administration (FBA), the event attracted industry professionals, community members, faculty and students, the statement noted, adding that UM Vice Rector Michael Hui King Man pointed out in introductory remarks that Engle’s contributions to economics and finance earned him the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 2003.

Engle, 83, is a professor emeritus of Finance at the Leonard N. Stern School of Business of New York University (NYU) and co-director of the NYU Stern Volatility and Risk Institute, according to a UM statement last week.

Hui noted that Engle is internationally recognised for developing the autoregressive conditional heteroskedasticity (ARCH)* model, a framework widely used to analyse financial market volatility and risk, the statement said, adding that FBA Dean Jun Yu (aka Yu Jun) said the lecture offered valuable perspectives on climate risk, financial stability and the interconnected challenges facing the modern world.

Yu added that understanding these issues is increasingly important as climate change and geopolitical developments continue to reshape global economies and markets, according to the statement.

During his presentation, Engle explored the relationship between climate change and geopolitical risk, elaborating on how major events such as wars, public health emergencies and elections can create volatility in global asset markets and investment environments, the statement said, adding that Engle also discussed both the physical and transition risks associated with climate change.

Sponsored by the university’s Development Foundation (UMDF), the lecture formed part of the university’s anniversary celebrations and provided attendees with insights into the financial implications of climate change and geopolitical uncertainty, the statement said, adding that the event was attended by university officials, members of the FBA Advisory Board and representatives from the financial sector. ■

* ARCH (Autoregressive Conditional Heteroskedasticity) and GARCH (Generalised ARCH) are statistical models used to analyse and forecast volatility in time series data. They are foundational tools in finance and econometrics, widely used to predict asset risk, price derivatives, and optimise portfolios. In statistics and econometrics, heteroskedasticity happens when the spread—or volatility—of data points is not constant across a dataset. To break it down simply: it means unequal variance. — Gemini



This handout photo provided by the public University of Macau (UM) on Monday shows 2003 Nobel laureate Robert F. Engle speaking during his “Can We Stop Climate Change?” lecture at the campus in Hengqin that day.



3 regional power industries hold summit focusing on AI & energy development

Ida Cheong

The one-day “13th Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao Power Industry Summit”, kicked off yesterday at Galaxy Macau in Cotai, themed “Artificial Intelligence and High-Quality Energy Development”, with the aim of contributing wisdom and strengthening to the energy transition and intelligent development of the Greater Bay Area (GBA), according to a statement released by local power utility CEM.

CEM Chairman Fu Jianguo noted in a speech during yesterday’s summit that from initial traditional power cooperation to low-carbon green transformation, and now to the integrated development of artificial intelligence (AI) and energy, the summit has consistently dedicated itself to jointly exploring frontier topics in the power industry, the statement said.

Fu added that this year marks the launch of the nation’s 15th Five-Year Plan, with “energy powerhouse” written into a national five-year plan for the first time, charting a new blueprint for the high-quality development of China’s energy sector, the statement added.

According to an online report by Chinese language *Macao Daily News* yesterday, China Southern Power Grid (CSG) Chairman Qian Zhaoyang noted that the Greater Bay Area, situated at the forefront of global innovation and benefiting from the unique advantages of “One Country, Two Systems,” is the ideal “server” for pioneering AI-powered development. Qian said he hopes that the participants will make full use of the summit platform to jointly advance AI and high-quality energy development.

Qian put forward three proposals,

including strengthening the foundational support of energy for AI development; amplifying the multiplier effect of AI on energy transformation; and revitalising the industrial ecosystem and promoting two-way empowerment between AI and energy development.

China General Nuclear Power Corporation (CGN) General Manager Pang Songtao noted that CGN as a key power enterprise in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau region, should seize the strategic opportunities presented by AI development. He called for deeper opening of energy application scenarios, breakthroughs in core technologies, efficient coordination between computing power and electricity, and active cultivation of a new landscape featuring co-construction of ecosystems, resource sharing and value co-creation. ■

Shanghai Ballet brings Swan Lake to Macao Arts Festival, dancers speak of challenges behind iconic roles

Khalel Vallo

The Shanghai Ballet announced in a press conference yesterday that they will stage the classic ballet *Swan Lake* at the Macao Cultural Centre (CCM) this Friday and Saturday as part of the 36th Macao Arts Festival (MAF).

During the press conference, main dancers and artistic leaders gave insights into the production, discussing character interpretation, technical demands and the challenges of bringing one of ballet’s most celebrated works to the stage.

According to a recent statement by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), the production is choreographed by British dancer and choreographer Derek Deane, featuring music by Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893).

According to the ballet, the adaptation combines elaborate costumes, refined stage design and an expanded *corps de ballet* to create a “visually striking” interpretation of the classic story.

Speaking at the presser, *Swan Lake* Artistic Director Xin Lili and Director Ji Pingping were joined by main dancers Qi Bingxue, Feng Zichun, Xu Jingkun and Tu Hanbin.

Qi, who performs the dual roles of Odette and Odile, said that portraying the White Swan remains particularly challenging due to the character’s graceful and delicate movements. She also said that achieving the softness required in the arm movements, which symbolise the swan’s wings, demands extensive practice and self-adjustment.

By contrast, she found the Black Swan role more natural to perform because of its stronger and more dramatic personality.

Meanwhile, Feng, who also plays both swans, highlighted the stark contrast between the two characters, describing the White Swan as fragile, restrained and emotionally subtle, while the Black Swan is confident, aggressive and immediately commands attention on stage, noting that performing both roles requires both dancers to balance emotional expression with the physical demands of ballet.

Meanwhile, Xu and Tu discussed the complexities of portraying Prince Siegfried. They noted that the role

requires both dancers to maintain a noble, dignified stage presence while conveying the prince’s loneliness, longing for love, despair, and eventual heartbreak. Furthermore, the character experiences rapidly shifting emotions throughout the ballet, making emotional expression one of the role’s greatest challenges alongside its technical requirements.

The Shanghai Ballet’s performances of *Swan Lake* will take place at 8 p.m. this Friday and Saturday at CCM’s Grand Auditorium in Nape.

Yesterday, tickets were still available. Ticket prices range between 150 and 400 patacas. ■



The Shanghai Ballet troupe – (from left to right) Tu Hanbin, Qi Bingxue, Ji Pingping, Xin Lili, Feng Zichun, and Xu Jingkun pose after the *Swan Lake* press conference at the Macao Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape yesterday. — Photo: Khalel Vallo



Quatuor Rodin performs at Liège Philharmonic Hall in 2023. – Photos provided by Lee

Quatuor Rodin members poses with their teacher François Deppe in 2024.



Quatuor Rodin poses with Belgium composer Frederik Neyrinck (centre) in 2023.

‘Quatuor Rodin’ to perform in Macau, featuring local saxophonist Lee Chi Pok

Interview by William Chan

Organised by the Macau Band Directors Association, the Macau Band Fair 2026 features the saxophone quartet Quatuor* Rodin.

Formed at the Conservatoire Royal de Liège**, the ensemble comprises Korean players Han Dahyeon, Yun Yeachan, and Kim Donghwan alongside local saxophonist Lee Chi Pok.

Guided by renowned cellist François Deppe, the group successfully bridges French repertoire with contemporary creations, and had their debut performance in 2022. Deppe personally named the quartet after the iconic French sculptor Auguste Rodin as a tribute to their refined, nuanced interpretations of French music.



Lee Chi Pok poses with his saxophone in this file photo.

The birth of Quatuor Rodin

Lee told the *Post* that the quartet formed organically when three Korean master’s students joined his class at the conservatory. Their initial bond was forged through shared adversity when Deppe assigned them an obscure, handwritten manuscript for a chamber music project. Although the score was nearly illegible and rehearsals were gruelling, Lee noted that overcoming these challenges built their mutual trust.

The turning point came when they began rehearsing Debussy’s String Quartet. Lee fondly remembered the long Belgian May evenings, practising until dusk and walking out under pink-purple skies. For him, the magic of that period was less about the repertoire and more about how those intense hours made them genuinely fall in love with playing together, transforming them into a cohesive quartet.

Lee expressed profound admiration for Deppe’s deep cultural and historical intellect. While Deppe is celebrated for his contemporary music achievements with the Ictus Ensemble, Lee was most inspired by his ability to uncover deep artistic connections within any piece of music, regardless of its genre.

“Deppe consistently challenged the quartet to translate string sensibilities onto the saxophone through meticulous breath control, phrasing, and balance.” Lee credited this rigorous guidance with defining their artistic trajectory, adding that Deppe’s strict yet deeply supportive mentorship provided the vital stage opportunities that allowed the young ensemble to thrive.

A deep thinker in a fast-paced world

Having known Lee for a decade, I have long admired his exceptional skill as a rising star. Yet, Lee humbly dismissed the idea that he possesses superior natural talent, noting that many peers surpass him in technique and speed. Instead, he

acknowledged a trait his mentors often call a “deep” musicality: a habit of relentless, multi-angled reflection.

Lee pointed out that he constantly interrogates musical phrases to uncover their deeper meanings. While he admitted this analytical nature can be a double-edged sword that risks overthinking on stage – where intuition must rule – he views his curiosity as his true gift. Ultimately, he prioritises dedication over talent, drawing inspiration from the incredibly hardworking musicians around him.

Despite his impressive credentials, Lee’s path to music was not linear. He noted that as a teenager, he suppressed his musical ambitions, fearing the career was too unrealistic. The turning point came in his senior year of high school with the movie *La La Land*, which inspired him to pursue his dreams regardless of external judgment.

Though he spent a year studying veterinary medicine in Taiwan, Lee used that time to solidify what he truly wanted out of life. With the immense support and trust of his parents, he ultimately found the courage to pivot back to his true calling.

Heritage vs. innovation

Lee’s fascination with contemporary music began in middle school under his teacher Hugo Loi in Macau. Rather than finding unconventional sounds alienating, Lee was instantly captivated by their novelty. He advises listeners not to force “understanding” onto contemporary music, but to experience it as an immersive sonic space.

For Lee, classical music represents heritage – a responsibility to safeguard and transmit timeless beauty. Contemporary music, by contrast, represents active creation that challenges established aesthetics. He relishes navigating both worlds, arguing that musical vitality relies on this continuous dialogue between tradition and innovation. This dynamic is perfectly mirrored in Belgium, where Lee observed that while classical concerts often draw older crowds, younger generations enthusiastically pack halls for experimental, contemporary performances.

Quatuor Rodin will be performing at the Small Auditorium on July 18 at 7:45 p.m. Tickets are priced at 180 patacas, with various discounts available. To purchase, visit: macauticket.com/TicketWeb2023/programme/P-055952

* “Quatuor” is the French term for a quartet. It primarily refers to a musical ensemble of four singers or instrumentalists, or a composition written for four parts. - Gemini

** The Royal Conservatory of Liège (RCL) (French: Conservatoire royal de Liège) is a historic conservatory in Liège, Belgium. It is one of four conservatories in the French Community of Belgium that offers higher education courses in music and theatre. - Wikipedia

New secretary for economy & finance vows economic diversification

Tony Wong

Newly appointed Secretary for Economy and Finance Ng Wai Han said yesterday that advancing appropriate economic diversification is a “must-answer question” for Macau and the local government’s priority task in her portfolio.

She also said that appropriate economic diversification is a “very important” policy initiative to enhance Macau’s economic resilience.

Ng made the remarks while speaking to reporters on the sidelines of yesterday’s Q&A session in the legislature where Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai answered questions from lawmakers.

Upon the nomination by Sam, the State Council appointed Ng as Macau’s secretary for economy and finance. She assumed office on Monday.

Ng succeeded Anton Tai Kin Ip who resigned two months ago.

Ng joined the civil service in 1999 when she started to work for the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL), where she became a deputy director in June 2017.

Ng was appointed as a deputy director of the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau (SAFP) in June 2020 before being promoted to its director in September 2023. She was appointed as the director of the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) in May last year.

Speaking to reporters yesterday, Ng noted that she is not a newcomer to the government’s Secretariat for Economy and Finance portfolio as she previously worked for a public entity under the portfolio (Labour Affairs Bureau) for a long time. Afterwards, Ng said, during her tenure in the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau under the government’s Secretariat for Administration and Justice portfolio, she oversaw the government’s development of its Macao One Account, and Business & Associations Platform e-government apps, requiring close communication and collaboration with various public entities under the Secretariat for Economy and Finance portfolio.

Ng said that during her tenure in the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau under the Secretariat for Economy and Finance portfolio,

she engaged in close collaboration with various other public entities under the same portfolio, concerning non-gaming projects run by the city’s six gaming operators.

Consequently, Ng said, she is familiar with the government’s work in the Secretariat for Economy and Finance portfolio.

Ng noted that the government is aware of the difficulties and challenges Macau is facing amid its ongoing economic transition, while acknowledging the different business environment across various neighbourhoods in the city.

Ng underlined that the government will remain committed to launching new policy initiatives to create a better business environment for various neighbourhoods. For instance, Ng pointed out, the government has recently launched a new programme, in collaboration with the city’s six gaming operators, to operate free shuttle bus services aiming to divert more visitors to different old quarters to spend there.

Ng acknowledged that Macau’s economy has been affected by a relatively monolithic industrial structure, adding that the current-



Newly appointed Secretary for Economy and Finance Ng Wai Han speaks to reporters at the Legislative Assembly (AL) building yesterday. – Photo: GCS

term government is committed to changing this situation. She said that the government will continue to leverage its various policy initiatives to advance Macau’s appropriate economic diversification, including the upcoming setting-up of a public “guidance fund” aiming to channel different types of private capital towards investments in Macau’s key emerging industries, and the launch of non-gaming projects required by the six gaming operators’ respective gaming concession agreements. ■

Macau’s 3rd Five-Year Plan’s final version ready in August: Sam

Continued from p.1

Sam underlined that the local government will attach great importance to the opinions and suggestions gathered during the public consultation and carefully study every one of them. Afterwards, reasonable opinions and suggestions that command broad public consensus will be incorporated into the final version of the 3rd Five-Year Plan, he said.

During yesterday’s plenary session, Sam also underlined the development achievements that Hengqin has made since early this year. Hengqin’s gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 5.5 percent year-on-year to 14.2 billion yuan in the first quarter of this year, Sam said.

Teaching in Dezhi Plaza set to start

Sam also noted that the first phase of the Macau government’s Macau-Hengqin International Education (University) Town, located in Dezhi Plaza (德智廣場) in Hengqin, will start operating in the upcoming new academic year 2026/27, when three Macau public universities, namely University of Macau (UM), Macao Polytechnic University (MPU), and the Macao University of Tourism (UTM), will start operating their teaching and research facilities there.

Sam said that the three universities will then run postgraduate teaching activities there, with the number of students expected to reach 1,350 in the first year.

Dezhi (“Virtue and Wisdom”) Plaza, a property development project consisting of about a dozen high-rise and low-rise buildings, was initially slated to operate as a “German City” commercial complex, but it is now being converted into the first phase of the Macau government’s Macau-Hengqin International Education (University) Town project.

Sam said that the use of 11 buildings in Dezhi Plaza will be transferred to the three universities at the end of next month.

Meanwhile, Sam also said that the Macau government is aiming to complete the setting-up of an economic and trade office in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, at the end of this month. He said that the office will be run by a public enterprise funded by the Macau government.

Macau Sci-Tech Park on the drawing board

Sam also underlined that the local government is designing the future Macau Science and Technology Research and Development Industrial Park.

According to previous government announcements, the government proposes to set up two industrial parks, located separately from each other, for its planned Macau Science and Technology Research and Development Industrial Park project, namely the plot at the bottom of Big Taipa Hill, near the airport, previously earmarked for a sandwich-class housing project, and a plot on the Zone E1 land reclamation area off Taipa’s Pac On district.

The government is setting up a Macau International Centre for Scientific and Technological Industry which will be operated during the interim period before the future Macau Science and Technology Research and Development Industrial Park starts operating.

Sam revealed yesterday that the Macau International Centre for Scientific and Technological Industry will be inaugurated on June 30.

According to previous government announcements, the centre aims to attract tech firms from outside Macau regarded by the local government as meeting the future industrial park’s development direction. The centre, covering 2,000 square metres, will be housed in an office space in a building in Nape, which was previously used for the Macao Young Entrepreneur Incubation Centre, which has been relocated to an office building in the city centre.

Meanwhile, Sam also pledged that the government will advance its work on drafting amendments to the Administrative Procedures Code and on drafting a new bill regulating the operations of the city’s community associations.

Sam also said that the local government is studying the drafting of a master plan for Macau’s national security education, covering the period between 2027 and 2032. The plan aims to ensure that the city’s national security education will cover all different groups of residents, he said. ■

3rd Deignan Award invites applications

Ida Cheong

The 3rd edition of the “Deignan Award for Responsible Entrepreneurship”, co-organised by Wofoo Social Enterprises, Macau Ricci Institute, and the University of Saint Joseph (USJ), started yesterday to accept applications through November 2, Stephan Rothlin S.J., chairman of the award steering committee announced in the launch ceremony yesterday.

The launch ceremony for the “Deignan Award for Responsible Entrepreneurship” was held at USJ campus in Ilha Verde.

The award recognises small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Hong Kong and Macau with fewer than 100 employees that demonstrate how moral principles serve as a core competitive advantage, achieving outstanding commercial success while fulfilling social responsibilities, according to the statement released by the organisers yesterday.

This year’s judging process will select three outstanding SMEs each from Hong Kong and Macau with substantive business operations for at least one year. Enterprises with GBA supply chains, manufacturing, or client networks are especially welcome to enhance their market reputation and social impact, the statement said.

The statement added that the judging process includes company interviews, site visits, and data verification. Results are

expected to be announced in mid-January next year.

Rothlin underlined that by choosing “The Ethical Edge” as the theme of the award, carrying forward Fr. Alfred Joseph Deignan’s vision in the artificial intelligence (AI) era, the competition aims to help business leaders understand that true leadership stems from inner morality and care for others. He noted that although small -medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have fewer resources, their diverse backgrounds and more direct business models enable them to invest time and expertise in corporate philanthropy and social contribution more effectively.

Fr. Alfred Joseph Deignan, S.J. (1927–2018) was a Irish Jesuit missionary who spent over 65 years dedicated to education, spiritual leadership, and community service in Hong Kong and Macau. Soft-spoken, kind, and widely respected, he left a profound legacy as one of the region’s most influential educators, according to Google AI Mode.

USJ Vice-Rector Prof. Alexandre Lobo noted the critical role that responsible information dissemination plays in today’s complex business environment, adding that the public don’t know if the information being disseminated is right or wrong so that the discussion coming to the ecosystem of small- and medium-sized enterprises becomes important. ■



Stephan Rothlin S.J., chairman of the award steering committee (10th from right), and participants pose for a group photo during the launch ceremony for the “Deignan Award for Responsible Entrepreneurship” on the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) campus in Ilha Verde yesterday. – Photo: Ida Cheong

China to continue efforts with Pakistan for early restoration of peace in Middle East: Wang Yi

BEIJING – China stands ready to work with Pakistan to continuously promote peace and advance dialogue, and keep making efforts for the early restoration of peace, stability and development in the Middle East, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks in a phone conversation with Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar.

Dar briefed on the situation of the first-phase memorandum of understanding (MoU) reached between Iran and the United States, expressing gratitude to China for maintaining close communication with Pakistan over the past few months and

providing valuable support for Pakistan's mediation efforts.

The Pakistani side looks forward to continuing communication and coordination with the Chinese side, maintaining the current momentum of peace talks, and jointly playing a positive role in achieving lasting peace and stability in the region, Dar added.

Wang congratulated Pakistan on facilitating the first-phase MoU between Iran and the United States, and stressed that working for peace is an international responsibility shared by all countries, including China and Pakistan.

As long as there remains hope for peace, every effort is worthwhile, he said.

Since the outbreak of the war, China has engaged with all parties and actively

promoted a ceasefire and peace talks, Wang noted. From the very beginning, China has firmly supported Pakistan and emphasized to all parties that Pakistan is a trustworthy mediator, he said, adding that China has also engaged separately with Iran and the United States in its own way.

Quoting a Chinese saying, "For a journey of a hundred miles, reaching ninety is only half the task," Wang noted that the current consensus is far from the end point but a new starting point, and lasting peace in the Middle East and the Gulf region still requires sustained efforts from all parties.

It is foreseeable that, compared with the first phase of the talks, the second phase will be even more difficult. However, China believes there must be no turning back, still

less any return to the use of force, he said.

The international community should further support the Iran-U.S. talks, and multilateral institutions, including the United Nations Security Council, should also play a greater role, said Wang.

China has consistently advocated that regional countries should take their future and destiny into their own hands, and hopes to explore, through dialogue and consultation, a peace and security architecture that is jointly participated in by all countries in the region, he said.

Once the door to peace has been opened, it should not be closed again, said Wang, adding that the Middle East has been deeply scarred by war and its people deserve peace.

– Xinhua

China's 'sugar pill' vaccine developer remembered on centenary

Analysis

BEIJING – Chinese virologist Gu Fangzhou's heroism in swallowing an untested vaccine and then secretly feeding it to his infant son ultimately gave rise to China's oral polio vaccine, a "sugar pill" that would protect millions of children.

Although the story is decades old and the disease long been wiped out in China, Gu has never been a forgotten icon. His name remains inseparable from the breathtaking gamble.

Yesterday, an exhibition commemorating the 100th anniversary of the late scientist's birth opened in Beijing, and his name has once again appeared in news outlets across the country.

Gu Liedong, the son who took that first dose, still feels proud to have participated in his father's scientific work in such an extraordinary way, over 60 years ago.

"I have no memory of it. It was only later, through media reports and family members, that I learned I was the first child to receive the vaccine," the son recalled in a recent interview. "I feel very honored that I could make a small contribution to his work."

Born on June 16, 1926, Gu devoted his life to fighting poliomyelitis, a highly-contagious disease that paralyzed thousands of children across mid-20th-century China. In 1955, a severe outbreak ravaged many cities, including Shanghai and Qingdao. At the time, no vaccine existed to prevent it. Parents carried their limp sons and daughters to Gu and his colleagues, begging for help.

In 1957, Gu was tasked with developing a polio vaccine. To produce it, Gu and his team went to the remote southwestern province of Yunnan, where they built laboratories inside mountain caves.

After animal trials, they needed to test the experimental vaccine on humans. Gu drank the first vial himself. He did not get sick. But adults often carry natural antibodies, so the real test required children. Later, Gu brought his infant boy to the lab and fed him the vaccine, without telling his wife.

"If my own child won't take it, how can I ask other people's children to take it?" Gu said.

The baby stayed healthy. Moved by Gu's example, his colleagues vaccinated their own children, the nation's first kids to receive the polio shots.

"My father rarely talked about his own achievements at home," said Gu Lienan, Gu's second son. "But if you understood

what he went through: giving up a comfortable life in Beijing and moving the entire family, including his mother, his wife and his children, to a remote mountain valley in Yunnan, then you would realize that his decision to test the vaccine on himself and on his own child was not a sudden heroic act, but a determined choice."

By the end of 1960, the first batch of 5 million doses of the liquid vaccine had been rolled out in 11 cities across China. In those cities, the peak of polio outbreaks gradually began to subside.

As the epidemic receded, however, Gu saw a new challenge. The vaccine's refrigeration requirements made it difficult to reach remote areas, and children did not like injections or taking bitter medicine.

After intensive experiments, Gu's team transformed the liquid vaccine into a white sugar pill, much more palatable for kids. It could also be stored longer than the liquid form.

With the help of the vaccine, in 1990, China began implementing its plan to eradicate polio across the country. In 2000, the World Health Organization declared China polio-free.

Gu's given name "fangzhou" means "ark" in Chinese. Netizens dubbed him "Sugar Pill Grandpa" after his story spreading online. Gu died in January 2019, and months later he was awarded the national honorary title of "People's Scientist."

Despite his monumental achievement, Gu remained humble. "I only did one thing in my life," he once said, "and that was to make a small sugar pill."

The modest Chinese scientist has also received international recognition.

At the end of last year, the 43rd UNESCO General Conference adopted a resolution to commemorate the 100th anniversary of his birth, celebrating his scientific dedication and global public health. China, France and Italy will jointly host centennial celebrations in his honor.

During those arduous years of research, Gu and his wife, also a virologist, were immersed in the lab day and night, leaving their two sons with a childhood that was often lonely.

In the eyes of Gu Lienan, his father never bragged. The image lingered in his mind was a scientist immersed himself in experimental work, data analysis and reading foreign-language literature.

"The outside world calls him a hero," the son said. "But in our family, he was an ordinary person." – Xinhua



A Long March-3B carrier rocket carrying a new satellite, Shijian-31, blasts off from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan Province, yesterday. The rocket blasted off at 5:45 p.m. and placed the new satellite into space successfully.

– Xinhua

China, Pacific island countries to forge closer cooperation via platforms

NANJING – A briefing session on China-Pacific Island Countries (PICs) multilateral cooperation platforms was held in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, yesterday.

Qian Bo, China's special envoy for PICs affairs, said seven multilateral cooperation platforms have delivered on four global initiatives proposed by China, tapped into local resources, aligned with actual needs of PICs, and facilitated pragmatic cooperation with PICs.

They have played a significant role in helping PICs improve climate change response capacity, respond to natural disasters, accelerate agricultural development, advance poverty alleviation, and strengthen police authorities' law enforcement capacity, Qian added.

To support the island countries' development and implement the consensus reached at previous China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers' Meetings, the seven platforms were established, covering fields including emergency material reserve, climate change cooperation, poverty reduction and development, disaster prevention and mitigation, agriculture, and police training.

Over 100 participants attended the event, including diplomatic envoys and representatives from Vanuatu, Samoa, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, the Federated States of Micronesia and Tonga, heads of the seven multilateral cooperation platforms, as well as representatives from relevant universities, think tanks, enterprises and institutions.

At the briefing, directors of the seven platforms comprehensively reviewed the outcomes of China's cooperation with PICs in recent years, and held in-depth exchanges and discussions centered on deepening practical cooperation and aligning with the development strategies of the PICs.

Diplomatic envoys from PICs noted that the platforms have delivered tangible benefits to the development of their countries. They expressed the expectation that, relying on the communication mechanism established through this briefing, the two sides will further deepen project matching, expand cooperation areas, and leverage the strengths of local resources to launch more livelihood cooperation projects that benefit the people at the grassroots level.

– Xinhua

Xi holds talks with Myanmar counterpart on boosting cooperation

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping held talks with President of Myanmar Min Aung Hlaing in Beijing yesterday.

China places ties with Myanmar as a priority in neighborhood diplomacy, and supports the new Myanmar government in coordinating development and security imperatives to find a correct path of development that suits its national conditions and wins popular support, Xi told Min Aung Hlaing, who is on a state visit to China.

Xi said that China adheres to the principle of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs, pursues a friendly policy toward all the people of Myanmar, and firmly supports Myanmar in safeguarding its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Noting that this year marks the beginning of China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030), Xi said China stands ready to share its development experience with Myanmar and jointly build a China-Myanmar community with a shared future, which is underpinned by political amity and mutual trust, win-win

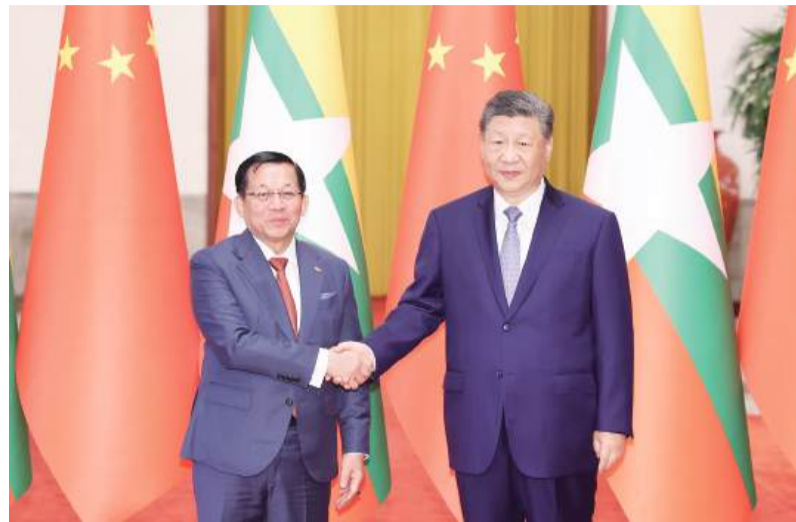
development, security coordination and people-to-people exchanges.

As Myanmar's neighbor with the longest shared border, China is a trustworthy friend and partner, Xi stressed, calling on both sides to strengthen solidarity and collaboration in a changing and turbulent international landscape.

Xi called the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor a flagship project of the Belt and Road cooperation between the two countries, saying both sides should steadily advance the safe construction of key projects to help Myanmar develop its economy and improve people's livelihoods.

Xi said China is willing to increase support for Myanmar's post-earthquake reconstruction, and the two sides should continue to combat criminal activities including online gambling, telecom fraud and drug trafficking.

China supports all parties in Myanmar in advancing peace and reconciliation through talks to achieve lasting stability in northern Myanmar, which serves the fundamental and long-term interests of Myanmar and its people, he said.



President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with President of Myanmar Min Aung Hlaing, who is on a state visit to China, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

Hailing the time-honored "pauk-phaw"* friendship between the two countries, Min Aung Hlaing thanked China for its long-standing and selfless support for Myanmar's development, stability, peace and reconciliation, adding Myanmar will firmly adhere to the one-China principle.

Noting that China's implementation of the 15th Five-Year

Plan brings important opportunities for its Asian neighbors including Myanmar, Min Aung Hlaing said Myanmar hopes to deepen all-round cooperation with China, jointly build the Myanmar-China Economic Corridor and elevate bilateral trade and investment cooperation.

Min Aung Hlaing said Myanmar attaches great importance to the

safety of Chinese enterprises and personnel in Myanmar and will make every effort to ensure their security. Myanmar is willing to work closely with China to resolutely crack down on online gambling and telecom fraud and safeguard border security and stability, he added.

Myanmar fully supports the four major global initiatives put forward by President Xi and stands ready to deepen multilateral communication and coordination with China, he said.

After the talks, the two heads of state jointly witnessed the signing of cooperation documents in areas including transportation and people's livelihoods.

Prior to the talks, Xi held a welcome ceremony for Min Aung Hlaing. A welcome banquet was also held for him around noon. – Xinhua

* "Pauk-phaw" is a Burmese term meaning "kinsfolk," "fraternal," or literally "siblings from the same mother." In modern geopolitics and international journalism, the term is used to describe the special, centuries-old relationship between Myanmar and China. – Gemini

Chinese premier meets Myanmar's president

BEIJING – Premier Li Qiang met with President of Myanmar Min Aung Hlaing in Beijing yesterday.

Noting that China and Myanmar are good neighbors and friends, Li said China will support Myanmar in following a development path that suits its national conditions, and firmly support the governance of the new Myanmar government.

Li said that China stands ready to work with Myanmar to follow the strategic guidance of the two heads of state, carry forward traditional friendship, consolidate political mutual trust, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, and promote the steady progress of bilateral relations to better serve the modernization drive of the two countries and jointly promote regional stability and prosperity.

He pointed out that China is willing to deepen high-quality cooperation with Myanmar on jointly developing the Belt and Road Initiative, expand cooperation in areas such as renewable energy, artificial intelligence and digital economy, and continue to move forward hand in hand on the path of common development.

The two sides should further enhance cooperation in law enforcement and security, jointly eradicate cross-border crimes such as online gambling and telecom fraud, and effectively safeguard the safety of Chinese personnel, institutions and projects in Myanmar, Li said. He added that China is also willing to deepen

exchanges and cooperation with Myanmar in the fields of education, culture, tourism, youth and health.

Noting that the current international situation is complex, Li called on the two sides to coordinate and cooperate closely within multilateral frameworks to safeguard the common interests of developing countries and promote the building of a more just and reasonable global governance system.

Min Aung Hlaing said that the Myanmar side firmly adheres to the one-China principle, and firmly opposes "Taiwan independence."

He expressed gratitude to China for providing valuable assistance to Myanmar's economic and social development, adding that Myanmar is willing to enhance strategic alignment with China, promote cooperation on the Myanmar-China Economic Corridor, deepen cooperation in trade, investment and other fields, strengthen people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and push the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership between Myanmar and China to a higher level.

Myanmar is willing to work closely with China to resolutely crack down on cross-border crimes, Min Aung Hlaing said.

The Myanmar side fully supports the four major global initiatives proposed by China, and is willing to enhance communication and collaboration with China to promote regional peace, stability, development and prosperity, he added. – Xinhua

Building stronger Party for stronger China with powerful theoretical guidance

Commentary

BEIJING – As the Communist Party of China (CPC) marks its 105th founding anniversary, a key meeting convened on Monday mapped out plans for studying and implementing Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building, underscoring the central role of Party building in China's governance and modernization drive.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, has put forward a series of new ideas, new thinking, and new strategies for governing and strengthening the Party in response to the major questions of the times – what kind of Marxist party exercising long-term governance could be built, and how such a party could be built.

Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building articulates several core principles: that the CPC's leadership is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics; that the centralized, unified leadership of the Party Central Committee must be upheld; and that full and rigorous Party self-governance must be advanced unwaveringly, among others.

As an integral component of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, this Thought stands as a milestone in the CPC's history of Party building. It has made major original contributions to the development of Marxist theory on Party building and carries great practical and far-reaching guiding significance for strengthening both the Party and the nation.

Its significance is all the more evident against the backdrop of the CPC's own transformation. From just

over 50 founding members in 1921, the Party has grown into the world's largest governing party, with more than 100 million members, over 5 million primary-level organizations, and the historic responsibility of leading a nation of more than 1.4 billion people.

Yet a larger Party also confronts greater tests. As its scale has expanded, the challenges in Party building have become more complex. How can such a large party preserve its vitality, maintain its advanced nature and purity, and continuously elevate its governance capacity? This is a question no long-governing party can afford to evade.

In the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, theoretical innovation in Party governance has never slowed. The Party has forged an increasingly systematic approach to self-governance – from advancing full and rigorous Party self-governance, to defining the general requirements for Party building in the new era, and further to refining a comprehensive system for full and rigorous Party self-governance. This evolution has fortified the Party politically, ideologically, organizationally, in conduct and discipline, with institutional building woven into every facet and the fight against corruption sustained.

From a longer-term perspective, China's transformation since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 powerfully demonstrates the importance of effective leadership and strong institutions. Its rise from poverty and underdevelopment to the world's second-largest economy has reinforced a fundamental truth: China's achievements are inseparable

from the CPC's leadership and its capacity for self-reform. For the CPC, this truth is both historically grounded and forward-looking.

At a time when global transformations unseen in a century are accelerating amid intertwined changes and turbulence, China also faces major domestic tasks in reform and development to advance socialist modernization. For instance, unbalanced and inadequate development remains a pressing issue, the transition from old to new growth drivers is far from complete, and risks persist in certain key areas. The Party remains clear-minded that the tests and dangers it faces will exist for a long time to come. All these circumstances place new and higher demands on the Party's self-improvement and governance capabilities.

Challenges demand stronger governance; stronger governance requires a stronger Party; and a stronger Party depends on sound theory, effective institutions and unceasing self-reform.

A political party guided by sound theory and armed with a profound grasp of the laws governing its own development possesses the clarity, resolve and momentum needed to navigate the complexities of the times. For the CPC, Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building serves as the fundamental guide in this endeavor.

Guided by this Thought, the CPC will continue to strengthen itself through ideological unity, firm resolve, coordinated action and enhanced effectiveness. In so doing, it will provide firm leadership for building China into a great modern socialist country and advancing national rejuvenation. – Xinhua

Stolen felines reunited with owners after Vietnam cat-meat bust



This handout picture taken on Monday and released yesterday by Humane World for Animals Vietnam shows people looking at cats seized by police at a facility in Ho Chi Minh City. — AFP

HANOI — More than 40 abducted cats have been reunited with owners after Vietnam police busted a feline theft ring and rescued 400 pets destined to be slaughtered for food, an animal rights group said yesterday.

Nine people were arrested last week in connection with the “criminal group specialising in stealing and collecting cats”, according to the official newspaper of the Ho Chi Minh City police.

Authorities clawed back more than 400 live cats and 80 dead ones preserved on ice, the newspaper said. They seized another 21 cats from a separate facility.

Consumption of dogs and cats is legal in Vietnam, where many restaurants openly advertise the meat — however vendors are required to obtain certificates showing the origin of the animals.

Police said they swooped on the gang after responding to rampant pet thefts in Ho Chi Minh City, and the suspects confessed to luring and trapping the cats over three years across southern Vietnam.

At least 40 of the pinched pets have been reunited with their owners, Humane World for Animals said in a statement yesterday, praising police for “decisive action that has saved the lives of so many animals”.

However, it said around 100 of the rescued cats “later perished due to what they have endured”.

“While efforts are continuing to reunite stolen cats with their families, our main concern is for the cats who remain at the police station as evidence during the prosecution,” Humane World for Animal’s Karanvir Kukreja said, according to the statement.

He said the organisation had donated food and was arranging the delivery of fans to keep the pets from overheating.

Ho Chi Minh City police did not immediately respond to AFP’s request for comment. — AFP

N Korea’s push for dry-field rice reflects drought concerns: experts

SEOUL — North Korea is stepping up cultivation of dry-field rice, which relies on irrigation or rain rather than flooded paddies, state media reported, in what experts said was a sign of worsening drought.

The nuclear-armed country is under multiple sets of sanctions over its weapons programmes and has long struggled with a moribund state-managed economy and chronic food shortages.

Elizabeth Salmon, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in North Korea, said in February that food shortages remain a key humanitarian concern in the country.

“The work for cultivating dry-field rice is being hastened in different parts of the DPRK,” Pyongyang’s official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said yesterday.

The report came after KCNA’s April warning that the country was experiencing an “unusual” and “severe” drought and was taking steps to protect crops.

North Korea’s state television last month reported severe drought conditions in various parts of South Hwanghae Province in western North Korea, according to South Korea’s Yonhap News Agency.

Experts said the latest report suggested drought conditions remain severe in the hermetic, impoverished country.

Kim Yong-hyun, a professor at Dongguk University, said dry-field rice is used as an alternative crop when water supplies are low.

“If North Korea is expanding the cultivation of dry-field rice, it may indicate concerns about food production later this year,” he told AFP.

Park Won-gon, a professor of North Korean studies at Ewha Womans University, agreed the report suggested drought conditions “have not improved” in North Korea.

“North Korea annually faces a food shortfall of roughly 500,000 to one million tonnes,” he added.

— AFP

Scientists in Australia discover new walking shark species

SYDNEY — Scientists in Australia have identified a previously unknown species of walking shark during fieldwork in Papua New Guinea (PNG), marking a rare addition to the group.

Researchers discovered the meter-long Dudgeon’s walking shark, named after Australia’s University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) senior research fellow Christine Dudgeon, in shallow waters off Milne Bay, southeastern PNG, according to a UniSC statement released yesterday.

It is the first new species described in the genus since 2013, according to a study published in the *Journal of the Ocean*

Science Foundation. The research confirmed that the nocturnal shark is found only in a small area off southeastern PNG.

“The sharks, which eat invertebrates off the sea floor and are not dangerous to humans, are famous for using all four fins as limbs to amble across reef flats at low tide,” the statement said.

The shark was first spotted by researchers studying endangered epaulette sharks. Lead author Jess Blakeway, a UniSC PhD student, said its distinctive white dashes along its brown body differed from “the leopard-like spots” of related species. Genetic analysis later confirmed it as a new species.

The species’ local name,

kadedekedewa, roughly means dog shark or lazy shark, referring to its slow, four-limbed gait.

The newly identified species appears to have a highly restricted range, raising concerns about vulnerability to habitat degradation, fishing pressure and climate change. Researchers plan further surveys to support an International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) assessment.

The discovery brings the number of known walking shark species in the region to 10. Five are already listed as threatened with extinction by the IUCN, tied to their restricted range, a criterion that applies to just 3 percent of all sharks, Blakeway said. — Xinhua

68 killed after strong quake hit S Philippines

MANILA — At least 68 people were killed and 33 are missing after a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck off the southern coast of Mindanao, the Philippines, on June 8, said the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) yesterday.

In its latest report, the NDRRMC said the earthquake

affected over 337,000 households, or some 1.38 million people. Nearly 68,000 houses sustained damage, among which over 12,380 were labeled as “totally damaged.”

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said the tectonic earthquake occurred at 7:37 a.m. local time on June 8 at a depth of 33 km, with the

epicenter 32 km southwest of the coast of Maasim town in Sarangani province on Mindanao Island.

The Philippines experiences frequent seismic activity due to its location along the Pacific “Ring of Fire,” a zone of major tectonic plate boundaries known for earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

— Xinhua



This photo taken on June 5 shows environmental activists and people from affected communities walking to highlight the toxic contamination of rivers affected by gold mining, near the northern Thai city of Chiang Rai.

Thailand’s pollution control department said in April it had found arsenic concentrations of up to 296 milligrams per kilogram of sediment near Chiang Saen — more than nine times the level considered dangerous for aquatic life. — AFP

Magnitude 6.7 earthquake strikes central Indonesia

PALU, Indonesia — A shallow 6.7 magnitude earthquake struck central Indonesia yesterday, the US Geological Survey said, with no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

The tremor hit east southeast of Palu, Central Sulawesi province, at 10:27 a.m. [local time].

The earthquake was felt quite strongly in Palu and Sigi, but did not pose a tsunami threat, according to Indonesia’s Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysics Agency.

Palu resident Nurhaidar, who, like many Indonesians, has only one name, was cooking in her kitchen when she felt the quake.

“Suddenly, it was like there was a jolt, and then the whole house

seemed to shake. The entire roof was making noise, like it was about to collapse,” the 42-year-old told AFP.

“I hurried to evacuate with all the kids, and even though we were disorientated and confused for a moment, we managed to get out.”

Indonesia, a vast archipelago in Southeast Asia, experiences frequent earthquakes due to its position on the Pacific “Ring of Fire”.

The arc of intense seismic activity, where tectonic plates collide, stretches from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin.

In 2018, a magnitude-7.5 quake and subsequent tsunami in Palu, killed more than 2,200 people. — AFP

India braces for El Niño-linked dry conditions

NEW DELHI – India will prepare contingency plans to help farmers weather potential low rainfall linked to the El Niño weather system, agriculture officials said yesterday.

El Niño is a naturally occurring climate phenomenon that brings worldwide changes in winds, air pressure and rainfall patterns. In India and Southeast Asia, it typically causes drier conditions.

The last El Niño helped make

2023 and 2024 the two hottest years on record.

“Full preparations should be made in advance in those districts where there is a possibility of low rainfall or uneven rainfall,” Agriculture Minister Shivraj Chouhan said, according to an official statement.

“Such districts should be clearly identified and crop-wise contingency plans should be prepared... so that farmers can be provided immediate alternatives,

advice and support.”

In regions where the impact of El Niño is expected to be particularly severe, Chouhan called for awareness campaigns “so that every farmer knows what precautions and which crop options are safer for his area”.

Forecasters have predicted below-average monsoon rainfall in India this year, estimating precipitation at about 90 percent of the long-term average.

The Indian Meteorological

Department has warned of a 60-percent probability of a deficient monsoon, raising alarm among policymakers and farmers.

The agricultural sector helps sustain over 45 percent of people in India, the world’s most populous nation with more than 1.4 billion people.

The US weather agency said on Thursday that El Niño had arrived, with scientists expect the pattern synonymous with droughts, floods and soaring temperatures will

intensify into the end of the year, potentially to historic strength.

Scientists fear it will exacerbate the heat of a planet already warming from burning fossil fuels, while amping up weather extremes.

Every El Niño is different, but major events often follow familiar patterns. This includes drought across parts of the Amazon, Indonesia and Australia, disrupted monsoons in India, and shifting rainfall throughout the tropics. – AFP



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (left) shakes hands with Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer during a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the G7 summit, in Evian, eastern France, yesterday.

A G7 summit is set to take place from Monday to today in the French town of Evian-les-Bains near Switzerland and it will be attended by country leaders as well as the EU's foreign policy chief and ministers from Brazil, Canada, the United Arab Emirates and Türkiye. – AFP

Thailand builds climate database to brace for prolonged El Niño

BANGKOK – Thailand is developing high-resolution climate data and risk-mapping tools to prepare for the El Niño weather pattern that global agencies expect to persist through early 2027, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment said yesterday.

Citing data from international climate organizations, the ministry stated that the world is almost certain to enter El Niño conditions in June-July, with intensity peaking between November 2026 and January 2027.

Phirun Saiyasitpanich, director-general of the Department of Climate Change and Environment, said rainfall across many parts of Thailand would be below normal from June 2026 to January 2027 and that the wet season could see less rain if the phenomenon strengthens.

The southern region is expected to face reduced rainfall in December and January, while average temperatures nationwide would run

slightly above normal, likely making the coming winter milder than usual, Phirun said in a statement.

In response, the department said it has developed climate projections through the year 2100, covering rainfall, temperatures and humidity, with the Climate Change Information Center sharing the data with agencies for long-term flood and drought planning.

The department is also working on a high-resolution river flood-risk dataset and a subdistrict-level climate risk map covering floods, droughts, landslides, sea-level rise and rising temperatures, the official noted.

He added that the risk map will help pinpoint vulnerable communities and farmland, guide budget and manpower allocation, support farmers in adjusting planting calendars and crop choices, and inform urban planning to avoid building critical infrastructure in hazard-prone areas. – Xinhua



Sikh pilgrims take part in religious rituals to commemorate the martyrdom of Sikh Guru Arjan Dev, at the Gurdwara Dera Sahib in Lahore, Pakistan yesterday. – AFP

India blocks Telegram before retest exam to curb cheating

Bhuvan Bagga

NEW DELHI – India blocked access to Telegram messenger yesterday ahead of a retest of a nationwide medical college entrance examination, after a scandal last month over a question paper leak.

The failure of the hugely competitive exam, along with a separate marking fiasco in high school tests, sparked outrage and fuelled youth protests demanding the education minister’s resignation.

The electronics ministry issued the order restricting access to Telegram until Monday, the day of the retest. Message-editing features, which allow users to alter existing posts, will remain restricted until June 30.

“Both measures have been taken in the interest of public order, in response to the organised use of the platform by cheating rackets to defraud candidates,” India’s National Testing Agency (NTA) said in a statement.

The National Eligibility Entrance Test (NEET) is one of the country’s most competitive exams, attracting more than two million aspiring doctors.

The NEET exam was scrapped in May following allegations that the question paper was leaked in advance, including reports that it had been circulated through Telegram channels.

Responding to the electronics ministry’s decision, Telegram

founder and CEO Pavel Durov said the week-long ban “hasn’t stopped anything” but “punishes” 150 million ordinary users of the messaging app in India and “not the insiders who leaked the exam materials”.

“The leaks just moved to other apps,” Durov said in a post on X.

The Internet Freedom Foundation, a digital rights group, said the ban “is a disproportionate answer to exam fraud”.

The intense pressure to succeed in the national exams has fuelled a lucrative industry, with tens of thousands of coaching centres across the country.

Fierce competition means that success often comes at a significant personal and financial cost – creating opportunities for criminal networks seeking to sell leaked examination papers to the highest bidder.

Test pilots

India’s Central Bureau of Investigation has arrested the “kingpin” alleged to be behind the leak, naming him as a chemistry lecturer involved in the examination process for the NTA.

The education ministry launched on Monday a website where the public can report “suspicious claims, unauthorised content, or fraudulent activities” related to the NEET exam.

Indian air force helicopters yesterday were seen readying for the delivery of the test papers, to

“prevent any possibility of leak”, the Press Trust of India news agency reported, broadcasting images of preparations in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

Despite rapid economic growth, millions of people in the world’s most populous nation still struggle to find stable and well-paying jobs, fuelling discontent.

Students spend years preparing for exams in the hope of securing a professional career, with the pressure intensified by limited opportunities and intense competition.

Indian media reported suicides of teenagers following the fiasco over the NEET exam.

The NEET scandal came on top of another controversy, related to the online marking system used for tests taken by nearly two million high school students.

Many students said the system had assigned incorrect grades or issued results to the wrong candidates.

Anger at the exam mishandling has been channelled by the satirical “Cockroach People’s Party”, which has won millions of followers on social media since its launch in May.

The movement emerged after India’s Chief Justice Surya Kant reportedly likened young people who criticised the government to “cockroaches” and “parasites” during a court hearing, sparking outrage among the youth. Kant later said his comments were taken out of context. – AFP

Sri Lanka’s ex-leader asks court to stop possible arrest over 2019 attacks

COLOMBO – Sri Lanka’s former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa asked a court yesterday to prevent his potential arrest over the Easter Sunday bombings in 2019 that killed 279 people.

A Colombo court imposed a foreign travel ban on Rajapaksa this month, along with two military intelligence officers, pending investigations after he was identified as a “person of interest” in the case.

Rajapaksa’s former intelligence chief, Suresh Sallay, has been detained since February after being accused of orchestrating the 2019 attacks on three hotels and three churches.

A lawyer for Rajapaksa said a petition was lodged with the Court of Appeal over fears that the travel ban, issued by the Colombo Fort Magistrate on June 3, was a precursor to the former leader’s arrest.

A hearing date has yet to be fixed.

Forty-five foreigners were among the 279 people killed and more than 500 were wounded in the 2019 attacks that were blamed on a homegrown jihadist group.

Sallay, a retired major general and former head of military intelligence, was appointed chief of the State Intelligence Service in 2019 immediately after Rajapaksa became president.

British broadcaster Channel 4 reported in 2023 that Sallay was linked to the Islamist bombers and had met them before the attacks.

A whistleblower told the network Sallay had allowed the attack to proceed with the intention of influencing that year’s presidential election in favour of Rajapaksa.

Rajapaksa declared his candidacy two days after the bombings and went on to win the November election in a landslide after promising to stamp out Islamist extremism.

However, he was forced to resign in July 2022 after months of street protests over acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines. – AFP

Hormuz shipping muted despite Iran war accord: trackers

Paris – Shipping through the Strait of Hormuz stayed at a trickle yesterday, maritime trackers indicated, two days after the US promised to reopen it under an agreement with Iran to end their war.

As of 15:00 GMT yesterday, tracking platform Kpler had detected just four crossings of the strategic waterway that day by vessels carrying raw materials.

Five were detected on Monday – a similar rate to traffic during the week before the US-Iran agreement to end the Middle East war, announced late Sunday.

“The Strait of Hormuz continues to

operate below normal commercial levels, despite signals of diplomatic progress,” Kpler said on X.

The Iranian government said yesterday that the US military’s counter-blockade of Iranian ports, imposed on April 13, had been lifted ahead of the formal signing of the agreement.

US President Donald Trump said on Monday that ships were starting to come out of the strait. He said it would “completely” reopen as soon as the accord is signed on Friday.

Shipping groups have warned however that uncertainty remains about the steps

towards reopening and how long it could for the strait to be cleared of mines.

“Key operational questions remain unresolved, including transit security, navigation fees and safe passage arrangements,” Kpler said.

The vessels counted since the deal all transited with their transponders switched on but others may have passed without transmitting signals, making detection more difficult.

An Iranian tanker, the *Diona*, switched its transponder back on yesterday for the first time in nearly two months.

Tanker owners’ association Intertanko

said in an advisory published on June 5 that the US Navy had been liaising with ships to help them safely pass by night, with their lights and transponders off, through the strait on its southern side near Oman’s coast.

It said 15 ships a day had been using that route.

Before the conflict erupted on February 28, about 120 transits a day were recorded, according to maritime news outlet Lloyd’s List.

In peacetime the strait saw around a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas exports pass through, along with other key commodities. –AFP

Hezbollah thanks Iran negotiator for help stopping Israel’s Lebanon war



A flag bearing the image of Hezbollah slain leader Hassan Nasrallah, who was killed by an Israeli airstrike on Beirut’s southern suburbs in 2024, is placed amidst rubble in the village of Deir Qanoun al-Nahr in southern Lebanon yesterday. –AFP

BEIRUT – Hezbollah’s chief yesterday thanked Iran’s top negotiator for helping stop the “Israeli-American aggression” on Lebanon, after the announcement of a US-Iran deal on ending the Middle East war that includes Lebanon.

In a message to Iranian parliament speaker and top negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Hezbollah’s Naim Qassem expressed “profound gratitude” for Iran’s efforts “to compel the Israeli entity to an immediate and permanent cessation of military operations on all fronts including in Lebanon”.

“You have transformed the only effective glimmer of hope in ending the Israeli-American aggression on Lebanon into a reality that has proved to the world that Iran is the champion of

truth and the resistance,” he said, according to the message published by Hezbollah.

“We have always said that Iran has given Hezbollah, the resistance and the Lebanese people everything, and has taken nothing in return. It has supported us in our choices and strengthened us to liberate our land,” he added.

Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2 with rocket fire at Israel to avenge the killing of Iran’s supreme leader in US-Israeli strikes.

Israel responded with a massive campaign of airstrikes and a ground invasion that Lebanese authorities say has killed more than 3,800 people.

Qassem is due to make a televised address today. –Xinhua

EU chief says ‘time for change’ on children’s social media access

BRUSSELS – EU chief Ursula von der Leyen warned yesterday it was “time for change” on children’s access to social media as a new survey showed their exposure to violence, hate speech and other harmful content online.

After Australia became the first country in the world to ban social media for children under 16, a move emulated this week by Britain, the 27-nation European Union is exploring a similar step.

Von der Leyen tasked an expert panel to study what action the EU should take to protect minors online after member states including France pushed for a ban.

The panel, including medical professionals and parents’ representatives, met for the last time yesterday and will deliver its recommendations on July 13.

“Young people are confronted with problematic content online – from hate speech, to body

pressure, to unexpected violence – it is a clear signal that it is time for change,” von der Leyen said in a statement.

The European Commission chief has previously indicated her personal support for limiting children’s access to social media, and said there could be a legal proposal in the summer.

The commission, which acts as the EU’s digital watchdog, published a survey yesterday revealing what it termed “excessive” screen and social media use by teenagers aged 13 to 18.

Nearly one in three teenagers explicitly reported feeling stressed, sad or socially excluded because of social media, the survey found.

It also showed a quarter of adolescents are confronted by hate speech, and almost as many see content that puts pressure to look a certain way or follow certain body standards, described as examples of “harmful or distressing content”. –AFP

Son of late shah warns against deal with Tehran

LONDON – The son of the ousted shah of Iran spoke out yesterday against any deal with Iran that leaves the Islamic government in place, as Washington prepared to sign an agreement with Tehran.

Speaking after meeting MPs during a visit to London, 65-year-old Reza Pahlavi said the international community should back opposition protesters rather than making peace with Iran.

“Dealing with this regime will fail and we will all face the consequences,” he declared in a social media post.

“The regime’s 47-year war against the Iranian people continues. Just as it has never made peace with its own citizens, it will never truly make peace with the world,” he said.

Pahlavi’s father, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, was the last shah of Iran, who fled into exile in 1979 ahead of an Islamic revolution that overthrew he monarchy and died in exile soon afterwards.

For some – but far from all – opponents of the Islamic republic, the

exiled crown prince is an inspirational figure, and he has called for a nationwide referendum to establish a new system of government.

He also remains controversial – criticised for his support of Israel and for not distancing himself from his father’s autocratic rule.

On February 28, US and Israeli planes and missiles struck Iran, killing the supreme leader Ali Khamenei, plunging the Middle East into conflict and for a while giving hope to the opposition that the government could fall.

Now, on Friday, Washington and Tehran are due to sign a deal meant to end the conflict and clear the way for settlement talks that are expected to leave the government in place and lift some economic sanctions.

“Any agreement that preserves this regime or its remnants will fail. The Iranian people will not accept it,” Pahlavi warned.

“With or without international support, the people of Iran will overthrow this regime. Freedom will come to Iran.” –AFP

Israeli activists launch Arab-Jewish party ahead of elections

NAZARETH – Israeli peace activists yesterday announced the establishment of a new political party based on Jewish-Arab partnership, ahead of national elections scheduled for later this year.

The party, called “A Place for Us All”, was launched in Israel’s largest Arab city of Nazareth and “aims to offer a new political home for Jews and Arabs who work toward peace, equality, social justice, and the fight against violence and crime,” a statement said.

It will be led by Rula Daood and Alon-Lee Green, the co-directors of Israeli-Palestinian grassroots movement Standing Together.

Daood is the only woman currently heading a national political party in Israel and the first Palestinian woman to do so, the party said.

Most of Israel’s Arab minority identify as Palestinians who remained in what is now Israel after its creation in 1948. They represent about 21 percent of the country’s population.

“This is the last moment to save our society,” Daood said.

“We are being abandoned,

murdered, our future is being burned – and I know that to fix this, it is not enough to only say what we are against. We also need to say what we are for,” she added.

In a statement, the party said it would focus on the “lack of security amid an ongoing war, the high cost of living, the housing crisis, planning and construction challenges, the lack of educational solutions, and the urgent issue that has been pushed to the margins – advancing an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement.”

Green called for cooperation among opposition forces seeking to replace the ruling coalition of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The launch event came a day after the veteran Israeli leader reiterated his intention to seek a new mandate in the planned polls, due to be held by the end of October.

Netanyahu, Israel’s longest-serving prime minister, has led his country through three years of war on multiple interconnected fronts and is facing mounting domestic criticism over his wartime leadership. –AFP

Surging SpaceX overtakes Amazon, buys Cursor for US\$60 billion

SAN FRANCISCO – SpaceX said yesterday it will acquire artificial intelligence (AI) coding startup Cursor for US\$60 billion as shares of Elon Musk's rocket company soared for a third straight session after a record-breaking IPO.

Near 11:30 a.m. (local time), shares of SpaceX, formally Space Exploration Technologies Corp., stood at US\$214.29, up 11.2 percent, and lifting its market value above Amazon to become the fifth largest enterprise in terms of market valuation.

Cursor, founded in 2022 and based in San Francisco, specialises in AI for creating software code, particularly for business uses.

An acquisition had looked possible after the two companies had announced a partnership in April that included a clause for Cursor to be potentially bought by SpaceX for US\$60 billion.

In a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, SpaceX said the all-stock deal was expected to close in the third quarter of this year and that Cursor would become a wholly owned subsidiary.

Combining Cursor's software



SpaceX founder and CEO Elon Musk speaks via video at the Nasdaq Marketsite in Times Square during the launch of the SpaceX initial public offering (IPO) on the Nasdaq last Friday in New York City.

– AFP

and product expertise with SpaceX's "Colossus" AI training supercomputer will enable the company "to build the world's most useful models," the companies said in April when announcing their partnership.

Cursor had initially emerged as a platform where developers could interface with other IA models, such as Anthropic's Claude or Google's Gemini program.

In late October, Cursor's parent

company Anywhere launched its own model, Composer, which has since been updated at a competitively priced level.

Cursor's emergence has coincided with the growth of "vibe coding," whereby online users ditch written codes and build applications by commands executed by AI.

The company has also been boosted by the growing capacity of AI "agents," which are able

to undertake tasks of increasing sophistication well beyond responding to research queries.

Cursor described the latest version, Composer 2.5, as a "substantial improvement" over Composer 2.

"It is better at sustained work on long-running tasks, follows complex instructions more reliably, and is more pleasant to collaborate with," according to a May 18 blog post.

Growth at Cursor has been accelerated by increased business with the private sector, where there is a greater volume of work and profit margins are more robust compared with individual clients.

At its last funding round in November, Cursor was valued at US\$29 billion.

The company's acquisition by SpaceX further cements Musk's company as a dominant force in the emerging AI business.

SpaceX at AI nexus

Musk announced in February that SpaceX would acquire xAI, a step in his plan to launch solar-powered, satellite-based data centres to run future AI models.

In May, SpaceX announced plans to invest US\$55 billion to build a "Terafab" semiconductor factory in Texas, producing chips for AI as well as robotics.

In early May, AI startup Anthropic announced a partnership with SpaceX under which it would pay for use of the compute capacity at SpaceX's Colossus 1 data centre in Memphis, Tennessee.

These ventures have cemented investor belief that SpaceX resides at the nexus of key AI developments. Investor consensus also continues to propel Musk, already the world's wealthiest person, whose role as Tesla CEO also brings exposure to new developments in autonomous driving and robotics.

Shares of SpaceX have soared about 40 percent in three sessions since last week's IPO, which raised a record-breaking US\$85.7 billion.

With a market value of US\$2.76 trillion, SpaceX overtook Amazon in fifth place among companies and was within striking range of Microsoft, which is currently worth US\$2.92 trillion, according to Yahoo Finance.

– AFP

Microsoft launches AI agent with pay-as-you-go pricing

SAN FRANCISCO – Microsoft is changing how it charges for its software for the first time in two decades, moving to bill customers with a pay-as-you-go model each time they use its new AI agent.

The change, prompted by the soaring cost of AI, came yesterday as the company launched Copilot Cowork – an AI "agent" that can independently carry out office tasks like drafting documents, building spreadsheets and sending emails.

The tool still requires a paid Microsoft 365 Copilot subscription, but now every task it runs is billed separately, based on how much computing power it consumes.

Copilot Cowork is Microsoft's take on so-called "agentic" AI, a wave that has gripped Silicon Valley and turned the simple chatbot into an assistant capable of acting on a user's behalf.

Like rival tools on Google's and Amazon's enterprise platforms, it can be handed an assignment and run with it on its own, sometimes for several hours.

Microsoft says one customer used it to compare nearly 4,000 documents in a matter of hours, and that the assistant can prepare complex meetings by synthesising emails, internal documentation and calendars.

The reason for the new pricing comes down to cost: running these AI systems demands vastly more computing power than a search engine or a chatbot, and usage can vary widely from one user to the next.

The new plan will be "like you're filling up your gas tank at the pump," Charles Lamanna, Microsoft's executive vice president

for Copilot and agents, told AFP.

Under the old system "there's not one overarching user license that makes sense," he said, given that different users consume widely varying levels of computing power.

The turn is a notable one for Microsoft, whose office software has relied for some two decades on fixed, predictable subscription fees.

"This is a big evolution for us ... which has been a user subscription-based business for so long, for really like two decades," Lamanna acknowledged, calling the new approach "the only way to make the model work."

To guard against runaway bills, the service is disabled by default, and companies can cap spending per employee, per team or per department.

Microsoft is not alone in taking this route. Its programming subsidiary GitHub moved to usage-based billing in early June, sparking anger among developers, some of whom saw their bills shoot up.

Anthropic, one of the United States' AI flagships, announced in early June that its newest cutting-edge models would soon be billed by usage rather than included in subscriptions, even premium ones.

Another way to ease the bill: users will be able to choose which model is used, more or less powerful and therefore more or less expensive.

At general availability, Copilot Cowork runs on Anthropic models, including Opus 4.8 and Sonnet 4.6, while customers on the "Frontier" tier can use the state-of-the-art GPT 5.5.

A "significantly cheaper" model, named Cowork 1, is coming soon for everyday tasks.

– AFP

California governor probes not launched by Washington: source

WASHINGTON, DC – Federal investigations into California's Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom stem from whistleblower complaints and were not launched by the Justice Department in Washington, a source familiar with the matter said yesterday.

Newsom, a likely Democratic White House contender in 2028, accused Republican President Donald Trump on Monday of launching a criminal investigation into him and his wife, Jennifer Siebel Newsom, as a "personal vendetta."

The source familiar with the investigations told AFP that the probes were not initiated by "main Justice" but were begun about a year ago by the Sacramento-based US attorney for the Eastern District of California and were triggered by information from whistleblowers.

The source, who requested anonymity, said the investigations were focused on "tax activity" involving Newsom's wife, a documentary filmmaker, and activities related to his former chief of staff and possibly current aides.

Dana Williamson, a former Newsom chief of staff, pleaded guilty in May to bank and wire fraud and other felony charges stemming from a position she held prior to working for the governor.

The source was not in a position to confirm whether Williamson's case had any links with the current investigations into the California governor.

Newsom, in a video on Monday, said federal agents had questioned friends and associates of him and his wife and have been sifting through "years and years of random documents."

"Donald Trump isn't just coming after me because of my mean tweets," Newsom said. "He's coming after me because I am considering running for president."

"To get me, he's coming after my wife," he said. The California governor noted that Trump has called for investigations into a number of his perceived political opponents since returning to the White House in January of last year.

"One by one, anyone who has challenged Donald Trump has ended up on his hit list," Newsom said.

Former FBI director James Comey, an outspoken critic of Trump, was indicted in April for allegedly



Governor of California Gavin Newsom attends a press conference during the COP30 UN Climate Change Conference in Belém, Pará State, northern Brazil, on November 11, 2025.

– AFP

threatening the Republican president in an Instagram post.

Comey was also charged in September with making false statements to Congress and obstructing a congressional proceeding.

A federal judge threw out the case on the grounds that the US attorney handpicked by Trump who brought the charges was unlawfully appointed.

The judge tossed a separate case at the same time that was brought against another Trump foe, New York Attorney General Letitia James.

California Senator Alex Padilla condemned the investigations into his fellow Democrat.

"The Trump Administration's decision to investigate Governor Newsom fits a pattern: speak out against this President, hold him accountable for his own corruption and failures, and you become a target," Padilla said in a post on X.

"Every American should be alarmed when the nation's top law enforcement agency is reduced to a tool of political retribution rather than an independent institution charged with enforcing the law fairly."

– AFP

Middle East fuel crisis keeps Mozambique fishermen ashore

Emídio Jozine

MAPUTO – Dozens of low fishing boats lay anchored in flat waters off Mozambique’s capital, stranded for days as surging fuel costs kept their owners from heading out to sea.

Since the government hiked prices in early May because of the impact of the Middle East conflict on supply, many fishermen in Maputo’s quiet Pescadores (“Fishermen”) quarter have not had the cash to fuel a fishing trip.

“The impact is dramatic for us,” said Carlos Nguenha, vice president of the local community fisheries council, as wooden boats bobbed idly behind him, some piled with nets.

“These conflicts don’t only impact those countries, they affect the whole world,” Nguenha said. “We appeal to them to sit down and talk so that we can overcome this.”

Nguenha’s council covers 1,800 fishermen and nearly 290 boats on the Costa do Sol (“Sun Coast”) just north of the city. Members are young and old and mostly family breadwinners, with no other work, he said.

Mozambique’s energy authority in early May increased the cost of petrol by 12 percent to 83.6 meticaís (US\$1.3) a litre. Diesel rose by nearly 46 percent to a record US\$1.8 a litre.

While fuel costs are slightly higher in other countries in the region, the sharp increase, coupled with erratic supply, has hit hard in



This undated and unlocated photo shows fishermen along Mozambique’s extensive coastline pulling in their day’s catch. – Photo courtesy of World Bank

Mozambique, which was listed as the world’s second-poorest country in a World Bank economic update published in March 2026.

There have been massive queues at filling stations and some people have reportedly given up using their own vehicles in favour of public transport.

Its poverty headcount, defined as people living on less than US\$3 per day, is 81 percent and most employment is informal and low-paying, the World Bank report said.

Small quantities

Exhausted and dishevelled, Eduardo Alexandre and his crew had just landed their boat on the Pescadores beach with no catch after more than 24 hours at sea.

“We would still be out there but

we had to come back because of a lack of fuel,” the 49-year-old said.

It can take six to seven hours to reach the open sea where the fishing is best, he said. “We needed another 10 litres.”

With the scarcity prompting some people to buy smaller quantities of fuel in water and soft drink bottles, the government has also cracked down on the use of unapproved containers to fetch and carry the precious liquid.

Its recommended sturdy metal or hard-plastic containers are intended to prevent leakages and fires, and also curb informal fuel trading, it announced. However, they cost around US\$40-45 each.

“Where are we going to find the money to buy the recommended containers?” Nguenha asked.

“Since our childhood, we’ve been using our own.”

Feeling the squeeze

“My children go to school and I support them with the fish that comes from here,” said Martinha Djive, a 42-year-old fish seller sitting on the sandy beach.

“So without fuel, the crisis affects everyone – us who depend on this, our children, and the whole population,” she said.

Many stands at the nearby market were empty but a few fish were being scaled and gutted for sale at prices higher than before the increase.

“We’re selling very little because customers are also feeling squeezed by the rising price of fish,” said Carlota Mabasso, wearing a colourful traditional capulana* around her waist.

Despite its poverty, Mozambique – home to around 30 million people – is rich in natural resources, including planet-warming hydrocarbons.

A giant gas project by French fossil fuel behemoth TotalEnergies is under construction in the insurgency-hit north, reportedly the largest private investment in Africa’s energy infrastructure.

The World Bank said the project, coupled with the country’s removal in October from a global money-laundering watchdog grey list, could grow foreign investment.

However, the country’s “fiscal space to respond to shocks is severely limited, whether from climate-related disasters, external economic shocks such as the conflict in the Middle East, or rising insecurity in the north”.

Economist and researcher Teresa Boene said the rise in costs risked pushing Mozambique’s most vulnerable further into precarity.

“It is the government’s role to protect its citizens,” said Boene, from the Centre for Public Integrity think tank. “Fuel is the engine of the economy.”

– AFP
*A capulana is the iconic, vibrant cotton fabric central to the cultural identity, history, and daily life of Mozambique. Typically measuring about 2.0 metres by 1.0 metre, it is much more than just a piece of textile – it is a non-verbal language, an archive of memories, and a powerful symbol of Mozambican womanhood. – Gemini

Brazil’s Amazon waters recover after 2 years of drought: report

RIO DE JANEIRO – Water levels in the Brazilian Amazon recovered in 2025 following two consecutive years of severe drought, but long-term prospects remain “concerning,” a monitoring network said in a report published yesterday.

Brazil holds about 12 percent of the planet’s freshwater, nearly two-thirds of which is found in the Amazon region.

The Amazon recorded water levels 2.6 percent above its historical average in 2025 due to increased rainfall compared to the previous year, according to MapBiomias, a network of organisations that tracks changes in land cover and use.

Despite the rebound, the network warned the situation “remains concerning” as severe weather events become increasingly common.

“Extreme weather events are becoming increasingly frequent, and there are signs of instability in the hydrological regime, driven by both climate change and changes in land use,” said Bruno Ferreira of the MapBiomias Amazon team.

Brazil’s vast territory includes several different biomes, including forests, wetlands and grasslands.

The report noted Brazil’s Pantanal – the wetland region south of the Amazon Basin – ended 2025 with water levels 56 percent below its historical average

Although conditions improved compared to 2024 – a year that saw the region’s most severe drought in decades – the wetlands region remained the country’s most stressed ecosystem.

The arrival of El Niño, a natural climate occurrence that warms surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, typically causes droughts in parts of the Amazon and threatens to worsen the situation.

The climate phenomenon began last week and could become one of the most intense on record by the end of the year, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. – AFP

Mozambique seizes 3.7 tonnes of synthetic drugs in major airport bust

MAPUTO – Mozambican investigation authorities have seized 3.7 tonnes of synthetic drugs disguised as supplements at Maputo International Airport, local daily *Notícias* reported on Monday.

According to the report, it is one of the largest drug seizures carried out by the country’s law enforcement agencies, following the interception of 1.5 tonnes of cocaine disguised as candy in 2024.

Two suspects, a Mozambican

and a Nigerian, were arrested in connection with the case. Both denied involvement, saying they had been asked to transport the cargo and had been told it contained supplements.

Investigators said laboratory tests confirmed the cargo contained synthetic drugs composed of fentanyl.

“Investigators had initially received information suggesting the shipment came from Brazil, but further inquiries showed it

was dispatched from India to Maputo via Doha and arrived in the Mozambican capital on June 7,” Hilário Lole, spokesperson for the investigation authorities, was quoted as saying.

Authorities described the seizure as a major step in the fight against drug trafficking, particularly against fentanyl, which they said is more potent and harmful than drugs such as cocaine, heroin and morphine. – Xinhua



French President Emmanuel Macron (left) welcomes Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva for the official greeting during the G7 summit, in Évian, eastern France, yesterday. The three-day G7 summit, scheduled to end today, in the French town of Evian-les-Bains near Switzerland is being attended by the leaders of the G7 members, as well as those from nine countries invited by France. – AFP

Portuguese police officer jailed for 2024 murder of Cape Verdean

LISBON – A Portuguese court yesterday sentenced a police officer to three and a half years in prison for murdering a Cape Verdean in 2024 in a crime that set off three nights of riots in Lisbon’s suburbs.

The killing occurred in a district subject to frequent police raids to curb drug dealing, and whose population – mostly immigrants – often accuses law enforcement of racism.

In October 2024, the officer –

then aged 27 – fatally shot Odair Moniz, a 43-year-old cook, after a police car chase started when Moniz committed a traffic violation.

The prosecutor in the case said Moniz had resisted arrest, but police testimony that he had pulled a knife and threatened officers with it was not backed by evidence.

The court in Sintra sided with the prosecutor on that point, but also took into account mitigating circumstances for the defendant. – AFP

Iran says footballer's US visa expires after World Cup opener

Iran 'most oppressed team in whole World Cup' – coach

TEHRAN - An Iranian national football team player's United States visa has expired, state media reported yesterday, leaving his future at the World Cup shrouded in doubt with Tehran engulfed in a bitter diplomatic row with Washington.

Winger Mehdi Torabi was only issued a single-entry visa instead of the multiple-entry visa given to other Iranian national team players to take part in the global spectacle, where Team Melli earned a 2-2 draw with New Zealand in their opening match on Monday.

"Following the national team's trip to Los Angeles for the match against New Zealand and the conclusion of that game, Torabi's visa has now expired," state news agency IRNA reported.

The Iranian Football Federation "has taken steps to obtain a new visa for Torabi, so that he can accompany the national team in its upcoming matches", it added.

The agency did not disclose if Torabi successfully departed the US but said "all members of the national team are on board the aircraft" that was leaving the United States for Mexico after the match.

The United States and tournament organisers did not immediately comment.

The report comes after a series of visa-related issues affecting Iran's delegation during the Middle East war between the US and Iran.

The two nations have agreed a framework to end the conflict, but Iran had already moved its base to Mexico over security concerns and is having to travel in and out of the US for the team's group-stage games.

Iranian officials previously said around 15 members of the delegation were denied US visas.

IRNA also said in a separate report that Iranian captain Mehdi

Taremi and a staff member faced difficulties at Los Angeles airport after the team's draw with New Zealand upon their departure.

Iran play Belgium in their second Group G match on Sunday in Los Angeles before facing Egypt on June 26 in Seattle.

Unfair treatment

Meanwhile, in Los Angeles coach Amir Ghalenoei said Iran is the "most oppressed team in the World Cup" after his players were suddenly informed they must travel back to Mexico immediately after their opening game ended in Los Angeles late Monday.

It is the latest logistical nightmare for an Iran squad that arrived at the tournament under the shadow of a bitter diplomatic row between Tehran and Washington.

The US - refused to issue visas for some team support

staff, and provided travel documents to players only at the last minute.

The team was originally intending to base its training camp in Tucson, Arizona but moved it at the 11th hour to Tijuana in Mexico due to the visa and logistical issues.

"They delayed our arrivals, (now) they are forcing us to go back early without time for recovery," Ghalenoei told journalists following a 2-2 draw with New Zealand.

"They are making the situation more and more difficult, facing us with more hurdles, but we're not going to let that stop us from doing our best."

According to Ghalenoei, his team had previously been told they would be able to remain in the United States until yesterday lunchtime "to recover."

"But again they haven't permitted us," he said.

"To be honest, I have no idea why they haven't told us." - AFP



Iran's defender Ramin Rezaeian (right) celebrates with teammates after scoring his team's first goal during the 2026 World Cup Group G match against New Zealand at Los Angeles Stadium in Inglewood on Monday. -AFP

Group J

Argentina

V

Algeria

Today 9:00 a.m. Macau time

Group J

Austria

V

Jordan

Tomorrow 12:00 a.m. Macau time

Group K

Portugal

V

DR Congo

Tomorrow 1:00 a.m. Macau time

Group L

England

V

Croatia

Tomorrow 4:00 a.m. Macau time

Group L

Ghana

V

Panama

Tomorrow 7:00 a.m. Macau time

Brazil can't expect easy win over Haiti, says Douglas Santos

BASKING RIDGE, New Jersey - Brazil defender Douglas Santos said the five-time World Cup winners cannot afford to take Haiti lightly after a disappointing 1-1 draw with Morocco in their opener.

Carlo Ancelotti's side toiled against Morocco in New Jersey and must beat Group C minnows Haiti in Philadelphia on Friday to ease the pressure.

"We can't allow ourselves that kind of talk that it's Haiti and we're going to beat them by a big margin," Douglas Santos told a news conference yesterday in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, where the team is based.

"We have to keep our feet on the ground, be humble and know that the

three points are the most important thing right now."

Haiti, playing in their first World Cup since 1974, lost 1-0 to Scotland in a tightly contested match in Boston on Saturday.

"They are a physically strong team, with an intensity that, from what I saw against Scotland, shows they are very competitive. It will be a very difficult match, and the first thing we have to think about is winning," said Douglas Santos.

The 32-year-old, who started against Morocco, said Brazil will need to "play much better" and improve defensively, having conceded at least one goal in each of their last six matches.

He expressed confidence that the Seleção would improve now the pressure and anxiety of their World Cup opener had passed, with Brazil seeking their first title since 2002.

"There are a lot of hard-fought games, a lot of draws... So we have to be prepared emotionally and physically to be able to give our very best," said the Zenit Saint Petersburg left-back.

He also said there is hope within the camp that Neymar will recover soon from a calf injury that has sidelined him for the past month.

"We're praying for him to get back to 100 percent, because when he's at 100 percent he'll be someone who can help us a lot." - AFP

Infantino celebrates '1 million fans' so far at World Cup matches

LOS ANGELES - FIFA president Gianni Infantino said yesterday that one million fans have so far attended matches at the World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

"Wow! 1 million fans in stadiums!" Infantino wrote on Instagram.

"A huge thank you to all our passionate supporters who continue to fill the stadiums - you

have brought the most inclusive FIFA World Cup to life."

The expanded 48-team World Cup kicked off last Thursday and 16 of the scheduled 104 matches have been played.

The run-up to the tournament had been marked by fierce criticism of the price of tickets for matches, as well as visa restrictions impacting fans from certain countries entering the US. - AFP

Ruben Amorim takes charge of ailing AC Milan

MILAN - Ruben Amorim will lead AC Milan's bid to return to the Champions League after taking charge of the ailing seven-time European champions on Monday.

Italian media report that Amorim will be paid a net annual salary of 3.5 million euros (US\$4.06 million) over his two-year deal as he bids to improve the fortunes of one of Europe's most storied clubs.

"There are ambitions that stay with you throughout your career, and coaching AC Milan has always been one of mine," Amorim said.

"I know exactly what this club means: history, prestige and an extraor-

dinary fanbase around the world."

Portuguese Amorim returns to coaching six months after being sacked by Manchester United with a year-and-a-half left on his contract, a move which cost the Premier League giants £16.7 million (US\$22.4 million).

He had attracted attention as a bright young coach at Sporting Lisbon but he failed to make an impact at Old Trafford and it was left to his replacement Michael Carrick to drag United into next season's Champions League.

The 41-year-old will be tasked with a top-four finish in Serie A next season after Milan missed out on Europe's top club competition on the

final day of this past campaign.

Milan slumped to a shock 2-1 home defeat by lowly Cagliari and ended up fifth behind both Roma and wealthy upstarts Como who took the final two Champions League spots.

That result, which was preceded and followed by loud supporter protests against American owners RedBird, led to the sacking of coach Massimiliano Allegri, CEO Giorgio Furlani and the club's sporting directors Igli Tare and Geoffrey Moncada.

Allegri is widely reported to be taking over at Napoli in the coming days following the departure of Antonio Conte. - AFP

Serena Williams to play doubles with sister Venus at Wimbledon

Tennis

Williams defeated in Berlin

LONDON - Serena Williams will play at Wimbledon for the first time since 2022 after the American legend was given a wildcard to play the doubles event with her sister Venus yesterday.

Williams made a sensational return to tennis last week when she won her first-round doubles match at Queen's Club with partner Victoria Mboko.

The 44-year-old had not played professional tennis for four years after saying she was "evolving away" from the sport following the 2022 US Open.

But the 23-time Grand Slam singles champion was keen to play in front of her two young daughters and made the shock announcement of her return just prior to the Wimbledon warm-up event at Queen's.

Williams was unable to play more than one match at Queen's after Mboko pulled out with an injury, but she is due to continue her remarkable comeback in the Berlin Open doubles alongside Karolina Muchova this week.

The Williams sisters are six-time doubles champions at Wimbledon, winning their last title on their most recent appearance together a decade ago.

Following speculation that Serena would be tempted to play in the singles at Wimbledon, which starts on June 29, the American was absent from the list of wildcard entries into that part of the tournament.



USA's Serena Williams (right) reacts with Czech Republic's Karolina Muchova as they play against New Zealand's Erin Routliffe and Mexico's Giuliana Olmos during the women's doubles at the WTA500 Berlin Tennis Open tournament in Berlin yesterday. — AFP

After so long away, she had no ranking to secure automatic entry into tournaments, leaving her to rely on wildcards.

Williams is a seven-time Wimbledon singles champion, but she hasn't won a Grand Slam crown since beating Venus to win the 2017 Australian Open.

Her most recent Wimbledon singles title

came in 2016, with her last four Grand Slam finals ending in defeat.

There is still one singles wildcard place for Wimbledon to be announced.

Williams' return at Queen's for her first match in 1,375 days captured the imagination of the sporting world.

Her decision to pick up a racquet in a

competitive setting for the first time since losing to Ajla Tomljanovic at the 2022 US Open had sparked questions about the wisdom of the move.

But it was like she had never been away as Williams produced her trademark thunderous serve and fearsome ground-strokes to the delight of a capacity crowd.

Five-time Wimbledon singles champion Venus has been beaten in all seven of her singles matches this year.

The 45-year-old, who plays only occasionally in the twilight of her career, won a doubles match with Katie Boulter in Madrid in April.

Elsewhere in the Wimbledon wildcard list, three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka, who will retire at the end of the season, and Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov were given entry into the men's singles.

Maja Chwalinska, who reached the French Open final earlier in June, was handed a wildcard for the women's singles.

Meanwhile, Williams suffered a straight sets defeat in the Berlin Open doubles yesterday.

Williams and Czech doubles partner Karolina Muchova fell to Mexico's Giuliana Olmos and Erin Routliffe, of New Zealand, 6-4, 6-4.

The duo lost the opening set after Williams was broken in her second service game.

They were broken on Muchova's serve midway through the second set and failed to find a way back into the contest.

The match was the 44-year-old Williams' second after her shock comeback announcement earlier in June. — AFP

Tour of Switzerland set to showcase Pogacar's pre-Tour de France form

Cycling

LOCARNO, Switzerland – World champion Tadej Pogacar will test his legs one last time ahead of his bid for a record-equalling fifth Tour de France title when he makes his Tour of Switzerland debut this week.

The Slovenian is such an overwhelming favourite for victory in the five-day race that the question on



Slovenia's rider Tadej Pogacar of team UAE Emirates - XRG eats local speciality "Pizzoccheri della Valtellina" (a hearty, traditional Italian pasta dish originating from the Alpine Valtellina valley in Lombardy, northern Italy), during the team presentation on the eve of the first stage of the Tour of Switzerland (Tour de Suisse) cycling race, in Sondrio, Italy, yesterday. — AFP

everyone's lips is not who will win, but rather what shape will he be in.

"Training has gone very well, both individually and as a team," he said ominously.

"And I'm arriving at the Tour of Switzerland feeling strong and motivated," he added, ahead of the opening stage today.

Pogacar has opted for an unusually light workload in the build-up to the Tour de France and has had only 11 race days so far this year, with five more to come this week.

By contrast, his main Tour challenger, Jonas Vingegaard, has had 36 already, having won the Giro d'Italia, Paris-Nice and the Tour of Catalonia.

The light workload has not seemed to have affected Pogacar's brilliance - he has picked up nine victories in his 11 race days, compared to just seven over 36 for Vingegaard.

And Pogacar will surely end the week in Switzerland with at least a couple more.

But what also remains to be seen is his weight.

The 27-year-old put on a few kilograms ahead of the Spring Classics season to prepare for the punishing cobbles in the Tour of Flanders and Paris-Roubaix - where he won the first before Wout van Aert pipped him in a sprint at the second.

He will have to shed those kilos by the time the Tour begins in two-and-a-half weeks' time.

Unbeaten since 2021

The UAE Team Emirates XRG rider has not raced since early May, when the Tour de Romandie finished, and it was clear he was not at his best.

He still won four stages and the overall title, but what was noticeable

was that Pogacar did not manage to blow away his rivals as he is accustomed to.

His winning margin over German Florian Lipowitz, who was third in last year's Grande Boucle, was just 42 seconds, and more than half of that came from time bonuses.

When they went man-to-man on the road, there was only one stage where Pogacar managed to distance Lipowitz on a climb, and even then he snared just 14 seconds.

By contrast, Lipowitz was 1min 30sec off Vingegaard in finishing third in Catalonia, and 2min30sec behind teenage French sensation Paul Seixas in a second-placed finish at the Tour of the Basque Country.

Pogacar has had about six weeks of rest and preparation since Romandie.

"We've had a good block of training done at altitude over the past few weeks," he said.

He has not been beaten in a week-long stage race since the 2021 Tour of the Basque Country, where he was third behind five-time Grand Tour-winner Primoz Roglic and Vingegaard.

Slovenian Roglic, 36, is one of the few potential rivals for Pogacar in Switzerland, although he has not won a race in over a year since the 2025 Tour of Catalonia and looks well past his best.

Roglic will likely be battling for second place alongside former Giro d'Italia champion Richard Carapaz and Bahrain Victorious pair Antonio Tiberi and Lenny Martinez.

Briton Tom Pidcock had been among the contenders but was ruled out 24 hours before the start with a viral infection having recovered from a crash into a ravine in Catalonia in March. — AFP

NZ pick Nicholls to replace Williamson in 2nd Test

Cricket

LONDON – New Zealand have picked Henry Nicholls to replace retired star Kane Williamson in the second Test against England today.

Williamson brought the curtain down on his illustrious international career after New Zealand's first Test defeat at Lord's earlier in June.

Black Caps captain Tom Latham confirmed Nicholls has been chosen ahead of Will Young for the daunting task of filling the void left by Williamson, who is New Zealand's all-time leading run scorer across all formats.

Nicholls, 34, made the last of his 58 Test appearances against Zimbabwe 11 months ago.

"It's a really exciting opportunity for him to come back into the side in a role, at three, that he's been doing for Canterbury at home," Latham told reporters yesterday.

"I think the good thing with Henry is he's always been able to adapt to situations. He's pretty much batted from the top to the middle throughout his international career, and he'll do whatever is required for the team."

Williamson's decision to step away in the middle of the series is a huge blow to New Zealand after their 115-run thrashing at Lord's.

But Latham insisted there was no ill-will among the squad towards the 35-year-old.

"For him to acknowledge that he's not quite right, or that he can't necessarily give 100 per cent, is testament to the player that he is, but also the person that he is as well," Latham said.

"We're obviously gutted not to have him, but we also acknowledge what he's done for this group over a long period of time.

"We're certainly behind him and we'll wish him all the best for what the next chapter holds."

Latham confirmed that opener Devon Conway was "good to go" after jetting home between Tests to attend the birth of his second child.

Matt Henry, who was reduced to a peripheral role at Lord's due to back spasms, joined his team-mates at yesterday's net session in a bid to prove his fitness. — AFP

World-renowned S African jazz pianist Abdullah Ibrahim dies at 91

Bronwen Roberts

JOHANNESBURG – Pianist and composer Abdullah Ibrahim, who died on Monday aged 91, escaped apartheid-era South Africa to be discovered by jazz great Duke Ellington, becoming highly influential with a distinct musical style and touring the world into his nineties.

Ibrahim spent many years away from South Africa – first fleeing in 1962, the year anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela was jailed – but always maintained a strong connection with his homeland, especially through his music.

“Ibrahim passed away peacefully surrounded by family in Germany following a short illness,” his family said in a statement.

His final public performance in South Africa was at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival in March.

“Abdullah passed away peacefully with South Africa and its people in his heart. His love for his country never wavered, no matter where in the world he found himself,” his partner Marina Umari said.

Named Adolph Johannes Brand when he was born in 1934 into Cape Town’s cultural melting pot, he began piano lessons at the age of seven, influenced by his mother and grandmother.

“His early musical memories were of traditional African Khoisan songs and the Christian hymns, gospel tunes and spirituals that he

heard from his grandmother, who was pianist for the local African Methodist Episcopal church, and his mother, who led the choir,” the biography on his website said.

He made his professional debut aged 15, playing with big swing groups and forming his first band, the Dollar Brand Trio, in 1958 when he was 24 years old.

The following year, he joined The Jazz Epistles septet that included another music legend, the late trumpeter Hugh Masekela, and recorded the first album by a black South African band.

Ellington, a mentor

By the 1960s, jazz had come to symbolise resistance against apartheid because of its mixed-race bands and audiences – and the hardline segregationist government was cracking down.

Ibrahim and his future wife, jazz singer Sathima Bea Benjamin, decided to leave, taking up a contract to play at a club in the Swiss city of Zurich.

There he was discovered in 1963 by US jazz pianist Ellington, who was so impressed that he took the South African to a recording session in Paris.

Invitations to perform followed.

In 1965, Ibrahim and his wife moved to New York, where he fronted the Duke Ellington Orchestra on several occasions, studied at the Juilliard School of Music and mixed with other jazz artists.



South African pianist and composer Abdullah Ibrahim performs on stage at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival in Cape Town, on March 27, 2026. World-renowned South African jazz pianist and composer Abdullah Ibrahim died on Monday at the age of 91 in Germany, his family has announced in a statement. – AFP

Three years later, the couple returned to Cape Town and he converted to Islam, taking the name Abdullah Ibrahim.

In 1974, he recorded the iconic “Mannenberg – ‘Is Where It’s Happening’” which became an anthem against apartheid.

After the 1976 Soweto student uprising claimed dozens of young lives, the couple again left South Africa, taking their two young children back to New York.

They returned when Mandela was released from 27 years in jail in 1990.

Ibrahim performed at Mandela’s inauguration as South Africa’s first black president in 1994 and set up

a jazz school but continued to live and work internationally, in his later years settling in Germany.

Zen, karate

With a crop of grey hair and an introspective and gentle demeanour, Ibrahim had a black belt in karate and was a decades-long student of Japanese martial arts.

Among the more than 70 albums to his name, the peaceful and minimalist “3” was recorded when he was aged 89.

He celebrated his 90th birthday in 2024 with a world tour that included a performance in Cape Town, the first time he had been

back in five years.

Reflecting on his 75-year career in an interview in his home city, he admitted that becoming famous was never his intention.

“We don’t do this because we want to attain fame,” he told Eyewitness News.

His compositions were about what he knew best, as a schoolteacher once advised, he said.

And “what I know best is my family, friends, people around me, where I grew up, the narrative of the history of Cape Town.”

His music was intended to be “so sincere, that it communicates, but there is no past, no future, there’s only now. If we can convey that moment, the listener is drawn into whatever they might experience,” Ibrahim told the Jazzwise magazine in 2021.

“His legacy is a bit like Duke Ellington’s in that he was hugely influential both as a pianist and a composer,” said music researcher Christine Lucia.

“I don’t think any South African jazz musician has escaped that influence, and I can imagine that he had considerable influence on the jazz scenes in the places he has lived in, New York especially.”

The US National Endowment for the Arts in 2019 awarded him its highest honour, the Jazz Masters award, one of many acknowledgements over a lifetime of music. – AFP

Bonnie Tyler out of coma

LONDON – British singer Bonnie Tyler, known for mega-hits “Total Eclipse of the Heart” and “Holding Out for a Hero,” has come out of a coma following emergency surgery last month, her family said.

The 75-year-old Welsh star, who shot to fame with her hits in the 1980s, was put into a coma at a hospital in Faro, southern Portugal, in May to aid her recovery.

A message from her team and family posted on her website on Monday said she is “no longer in a coma but remains very unwell and in intensive care” in Portugal.

“Her doctors remain confident that she will make a good recovery but it is going to take time,” they added.

All her planned concerts until the end of August are set to be cancelled or postponed as a result, they said.

Tyler had been due to perform this year in Germany and Austria and at a festival in Britain.

The family thanked fans for their “huge outpouring of love”, saying Tyler was aware of this.

Tyler shot to fame in the 1970s with hits including “Lost in France” and “It’s a Heartache”.

“Total Eclipse of the Heart” later topped the charts in both Britain and the United States.

“Holding Out For A Hero” came out in 1984 and featured on the soundtrack to the huge US box office hit “Footloose”. – AFP



A woman wearing a Minnie Mouse hat poses for in front of the Disney castle at Shanghai Disney Resort in Shanghai yesterday. Shanghai Disneyland officially opened on June 16, 2016. The grand opening featured a multi-day celebration in the Pudong New District, which marked Disney’s first destination resort in mainland China and its sixth resort worldwide. – AFP

Fox to acquire US streaming giant Roku

NEW YORK – Fox Corporation on Monday announced it would acquire Roku in a cash and stock deal that values the streaming giant at US\$22 billion.

“The transaction combines FOX’s leading sports, news and entertainment content and the Tubi service, with Roku’s leading connected TV platform, The Roku Channel, first-party data and direct relationship with more than 100 million global streaming households,” the companies said in a joint statement.

Roku shareholders would

receive cash and Fox stock under the deal valued at US\$160 per share, the statement said, with the transaction expected to close in the first half of next year.

California-based Roku rose to prominence in the early days of streaming with its plug-in devices and is now a major player in smart TV operating systems, earning the vast majority of its revenue from advertising and other platform-related services.

It also has its own advertising-supported streaming channel, a

competitor to Fox’s Tubi.

“FOX and Roku are committed to continuing to operate Roku as an open, partner-friendly platform and to the continued ubiquitous distribution of FOX content,” the companies said.

Roku generated US\$4.7 billion in revenue in 2025, with approximately US\$88 million in profit.

Shares in the company soared over 20 percent on Friday after Bloomberg reported that it was holding discussions about a potential sale. – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 20°C~31°C	Manila 25°C~35°C	New York 19°C~25°C	Lisbon 16°C~31°C
Shanghai 23°C~32°C	Bangkok 26°C~35°C	London 14°C~24°C	Rio de Janeiro 16°C~23°C
Hong Kong 25°C~28°C	Tokyo 19°C~28°C	Frankfurt 16°C~29°C	Luanda 19°C~25°C
Taipei 24°C~31°C	Singapore 25°C~31°C	Vancouver 12°C~21°C	Maputo 16°C~26°C
Guangzhou 24°C~28°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~32°C	Paris 17°C~31°C	Dili 21°C~31°C
Nanjing 22°C~33°C	Jakarta 23°C~33°C	Moscow 10°C~17°C	São Tomé 24°C~32°C
Guilin 23°C~32°C	Seoul 21°C~33°C	Las Vegas 27°C~42°C	Praia 21°C~30°C
Xi’an 21°C~32°C	Sydney 13°C~21°C	Monte Carlo 19°C~27°C	Bissau 24°C~34°C



Official mascots Maple the Moose (Canada) (from left to right), Zayu the Jaguar (Mexico), and Clutch the Bald Eagle (US), pose for a picture ahead of the 2026 World Cup Group F match between Sweden and Tunisia at the Monterrey Stadium in Guadalupe, Mexico on Sunday. – AFP

A Bangladesh fan carries a cat dressed in Argentina's jersey during a rally supporting Argentina in the ongoing 2026 FIFA World Cup in Dhaka yesterday. – AFP



An Ecuadorian fan wears an Aya Huma mask ahead of the 2026 World Cup Group E match against Ivory Coast at the Philadelphia Stadium in Philadelphia on Sunday. – AFP



A fan of New Zealand shows their support by performing the haka before the FIFA World Cup 2026 Group G match against IR Iran at Los Angeles Stadium on Monday in Los Angeles, California. – AFP



Fans arrive before the FIFA World Cup 2026 Group G match between Belgium and Egypt at Seattle Stadium on Monday in Seattle, Washington. – AFP



A fan of Colombia gestures while attending the screening of the 2026 World Cup Group G match between Belgium and Egypt at the FIFA Fan Festival at Zocalo square in Mexico City on Monday. – AFP