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Xi hails CPC's 105-year 'epic', urges building modern socialist China

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping yesterday hailed the 105-year history of the Communist Party of China (CPC) as the "most magnificent epic" of the Chinese nation and urged the Party to press ahead to build China into a modern socialist country on schedule.

Addressing a gathering marking the CPC's 105th founding anniversary in Beijing, Xi, also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, called on Party members to remain steadfast in their convictions and work tirelessly to fulfill the Party's missions in the new era and on the new journey.

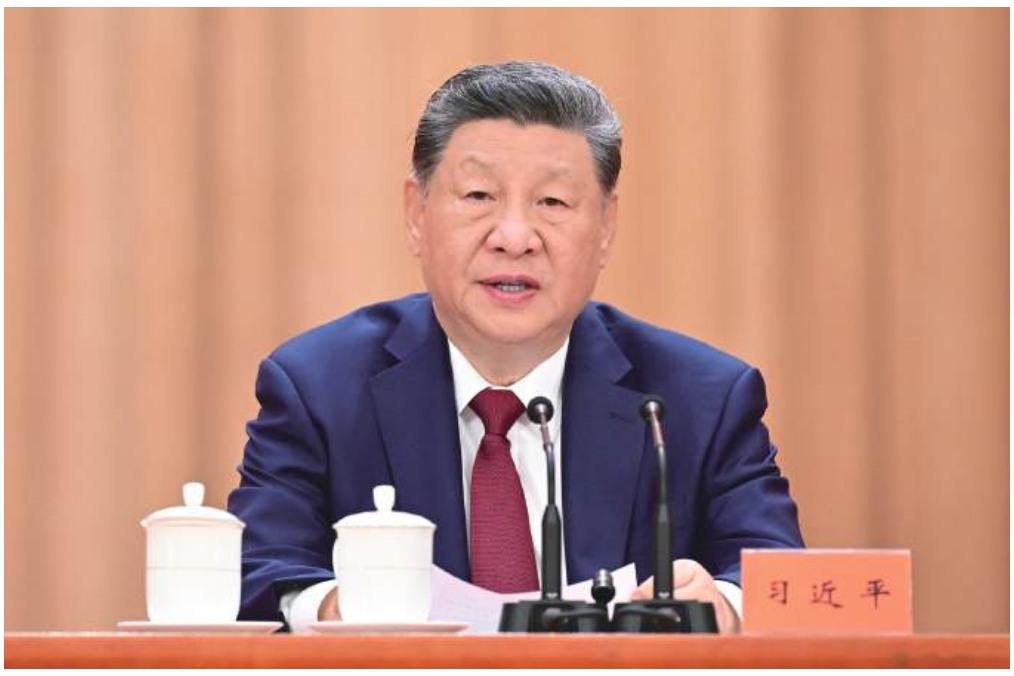
Founded in 1921 against the backdrop of a weak China plagued by foreign humiliation and poverty, the CPC has grown from a small group of just over 50 members into the world's largest governing party with tremendous global influence.

Xi underscored the importance of meeting the goal of fully realizing socialist modernization by the middle of the century.

"Time stops for no one, and neither does history," he said.

CREATE HISTORIC FEATS

The whole Party must adhere to its basic theory, basic line and basic policy to "remain undaunted by passing clouds and stay on course through wind and waves," Xi said.



President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, addresses a gathering marking the CPC's 105th founding anniversary at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

Stressing that the Party must rely closely on the people to create historic feats, Xi urged Party members to "further reinvigorate the enterprising spirit for getting things done."

He also called on the whole Party to actively respond to risks and challenges on the path ahead.

"China's development is now in a period where strategic opportunities coexist with risks and challenges, and where uncertain and unpredictable factors are on the rise. We must always be prepared to withstand major tests of high winds and raging waves, and even violent storms," he warned.

As profound changes unseen in a century accelerate, the world has entered a new period of turbulence and transformation, with humanity once again standing at a crossroads of choice, Xi said.

"We must continuously promote the building of a community with a shared future for humanity," he said.

Xi also stressed advancing full and rigorous Party self-governance with sustained efforts to win "the tough, protracted and all-out battle against corruption."

"It is imperative that all of us in the Party never forget our original aspiration and founding mission, that we always stay modest, prudent, and hard-working, and that we have the courage and ability to carry on our fight," he added.

According to the latest statistics, the CPC now has nearly 101.29 million members and over 5.43 million primary-level Party organizations.

At the gathering, Xi conferred the July 1 Medal, the Party's highest honor. Eight individuals received the honor this year, including a grassroots mediator, a veteran, a village Party official, a rural doctor, a community worker, an agricultural specialist, a mechanical engineering expert, and a petroleum refining engineering expert who was honored posthumously.

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Portugal declares national day of mourning for Venezuela earthquake victims

LISBON – The Portuguese government has declared a national day of mourning to be observed on Sunday for the victims of last Wednesday's twin earthquakes in Venezuela, particularly Portuguese nationals and people of Portuguese descent, reported local media yesterday.

According to the latest update from Portugal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the death toll among Portuguese nationals and people of Portuguese descent has risen to 71, including 11 children, while another 71 people remain missing.

Portugal's Lusa News Agency reported that the Portuguese community in Venezuela is one of the largest in the Portuguese diaspora, ranking second in Latin America after Brazil. Community estimates put its population, including people of Portuguese descent, at around 1.2 million. *(More about Portugal on p.12)* – Xinhua

Children dressed up as Na Tcha (left) and Li Jing (Pagoda-Bearing Heavenly King, right) takes part in the Na Tcha birthday celebration procession and float parade held yesterday in the city centre. (More on page 4) – Photo: Armindo Neves

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Planned 1.7 million satellites 'devastating' for astronomy: study

The 1.7 million satellites that companies are aiming to launch into Earth's orbit in the coming years will have "devastating consequences for astronomy", new research warned yesterday. *– Story on p. 11*

Portugal braces for new heatwave

Parts of Portugal including the Lisbon region will be placed on red alert after being relatively spared from Europe's worst heatwave which set records in several countries. *– Story on p. 12*

Kane rescues England from DR Congo calamity to reach World Cup last 16

– Story on p. 13

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The Licensing Maze: Why Macau Football Still Cannot Return to Asian Competition

A reflection on the real barriers preventing Macau football from returning to AFC competitions

Commentary by Manuel Silvério
Independent Sports Analyst and Regional Development Consultant

(Former public sports administrator with extensive international experience in public policy and sports development)

For the third consecutive year, clubs from Macau's Liga de Elite have been excluded from the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) club competitions. The recent confirmation that Macau clubs once again failed to secure admission to the AFC Challenge League has left players, administrators and supporters understandably disappointed. Public debate has largely focused on the alleged lack of playing quality or financial resources. Yet the real obstacle no longer lies on the pitch; it lies in whether clubs are capable of complying with an increasingly demanding international licensing system.

Modern Asian football no longer evaluates clubs solely on their sporting performance. It also assesses whether they possess sound legal structures, professional management, financial transparency, qualified personnel and administrative systems that meet international standards of football governance.

In recent years, the AFC has fully implemented the Club Licensing Administration System (CLAS). Through this digital platform, every club must demonstrate compliance with licensing requirements covering five major areas: sporting, infrastructure, personnel and administration, legal affairs and finance. The flexibility once informally afforded to smaller member associations has virtually disappeared. Today, every requirement is assessed within a strictly regulated digital process governed by fixed deadlines, leaving very little scope for late submissions or corrective action. Club licensing has therefore evolved from a simple administrative procedure into an international certification of institutional quality.

The AFC licensing framework extends far beyond sporting merit. Clubs are no longer permitted to submit simplified accounts typical of traditional associations. Instead, they must provide independently audited Annual Financial Statements prepared in accordance with recognised accounting standards and complying with the required Reporting Perimeter. Where a principal sponsor or benefactor exercises Significant Influence over the club, consolidated financial statements must also be submitted. Clubs are likewise required to comply with the No Overdue Payables principle, demonstrating that salaries, benefits and all other financial obligations towards players, coaches, employees and other stakeholders have been settled in full.

The professional requirements extend equally to the club's organisational structure. The AFC expects clubs to maintain clearly defined professional positions, including a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), a qualified Chief Financial Officer (CFO), a Club Licensing Officer, a Legal Adviser, a Media Officer, a Security Officer, a Medical Officer and a Youth Development Director. On the sporting side, the head coach must hold an AFC A Licence or Pro Licence, while clubs must operate a structured youth development programme on a continuous basis.

Even stadium facilities are subject to detailed AFC regulations. Compliance requires dedicated VAR operation rooms, mixed zones for media interviews, media centres, television broadcasting facilities, doping control rooms and numerous other technical requirements expected of modern international competitions. None of these standards is unattainable. They simply require organisational capacity, long-term planning and a management culture that differs substantially from the traditional volunteer-based model that has characterised many smaller football associations.

Macau does not lack committed administrators, dedicated volunteers or talented players. The fundamental challenge is that many local clubs continue to rely primarily on voluntary administration and traditional association structures, whereas the AFC licensing framework requires permanent professional management, clearly defined responsibilities and institutional continuity.

Macau's geographical size is not the real issue, as several Asian football associations have already demonstrated. Timor-Leste's Karketu Dili, supported by FIFA development funding, successfully restructured its administrative organisation in accordance with AFC requirements and secured participation in Asian competitions. Likewise, Bhutan, Nepal, Mongolia and Bangladesh have all strengthened their domestic club licensing systems in recent years, progressively assisting their clubs in meeting AFC standards. These countries may not possess greater financial resources than Macau, yet they share one important characteristic: they have embraced institutional reform and placed the modernisation of football governance among their strategic priorities. Perhaps this is the most valuable lesson Macau can draw from their experience.

Solving the problem cannot depend upon any single institution. The Sports Bureau (ID) should continue ensuring that public sports facilities comply with the AFC's latest technical requirements while also exploring mechanisms to support clubs in their professional development, including assistance with independent financial audits and the training of specialised personnel.

The Macau Football Association also has a crucial role to play. Beyond its routine administrative responsibilities, it should establish a permanent Club Licensing Task Force, bringing together legal, financial, accounting and licensing specialists to provide year-round technical support to clubs, identify potential compliance issues well before submission deadlines and strengthen expertise in both the CLAS platform* and AFC regulations.

The clubs themselves must also embrace a new organisational culture. Greater financial transparency, professional record-keeping, qualified personnel and sustained investment in youth development will all be essential if Macau football is to meet the standards expected by the modern Asian game.

It is equally important to dispel a common misconception. Government support for football development does not, in itself, breach the AFC's principle of football autonomy. What the AFC prohibits is political interference in sporting decisions and licensing procedures. Public investment in administrative capacity, infrastructure, professional training and institutional modernisation remains entirely compatible with international football governance.

Macau possesses all the necessary conditions to return to Asian competition. It enjoys institutional stability, high-quality sports infrastructure, adequate public resources and many individuals who remain deeply committed to developing local football. The real challenge is transforming these strengths into a modern and sustainable governance model. Three consecutive years without Asian participation should perhaps be seen not merely as a disappointment, but as an opportunity to reassess the entire system.

The key question today is no longer whether Macau's footballers are capable of competing in Asia. The real question is whether Macau's football administration is prepared to meet the governance standards that modern international football now demands.

Because, in contemporary football, the first match no longer begins with the opening whistle. It begins with the club licensing process. Only by successfully navigating that institutional gateway will Macau football be able to return to Asian competition in a sustainable and lasting manner.

** In football, CLAS stands for the Club Licensing Administration System. It is an online, cloud-based platform developed by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) to manage, automate, and streamline the entire club licensing process for its member associations. Rather than dealing with stacks of paperwork, football clubs use the CLAS platform to submit mandatory legal, financial, administrative, sporting, and infrastructure documents directly to their national associations and the AFC. – Gemini/MPD*

Casino takings drop 12.1 pct to 18.5 billion patacas in June

Staff Reporter

Macau's 20 casinos generated gross gaming revenue (GGR) of 18.5 billion patacas last month, marking a year-on-year decline of 12.1 percent, the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) announced today.

Analysts had predicted a GGR decline of up to 20 percent due to betting on the 2026 FIFA World Cup matches, which started on June 11 and will end on July 19.

Month-on-month, June's GGR dropped by 18.1 percent, from May's 22.6 billion patacas.

June produced the local casino sector's lowest monthly GGR in the first six months of the year and its first year-on-year negative growth rate.

However, in the first half of the year GGR still rose year-on-year by 6.8 percent to 126.9 billion patacas.

Macau's government-concessioned gaming industry is operated by six rival integrated resort (IR) operators: Sands, Galaxy, SJM, Melco, Wynn, and MGM. Under their concession agreements with the government, they are required to enhance their non-gaming attractions and support the promotion of Macau's cultural heritage and old-quarter renewal projects. The operators pay 35 percent of their GGR as a direct gaming tax to the government, along with an additional 5.0 percent in levies to fund a raft of public causes.

Currently, the six operators own a total of 20 casinos, a 52.4 percent decrease from the peak of 42 casinos in 2021. This decline is primarily due to a government-ordered consolidation of the gaming industry, which included an official ban on so-called "satellite casinos" operated by third-party enterprises, generally known as junkets, in collaboration with gaming concessionaires.

During the gaming industry's three-year consolidation process, which officially ended on December 31, 2025, the gaming tables and slot machines from shuttered satellite casinos, along with their local employees, were transferred to casinos directly run by the six gaming concessionaires.

Currently, SJM and Sands own five casinos each, Galaxy and Melco operate three each, while Wynn and MGM run two each.

According to the latest available DICJ statistics, baccarat accounted for 85.2 percent of local casinos' GGR across their 16 games of chance at the end of this year's first quarter. In comparison, roulette, Europe's classic game of chance, generated a mere 0.49 percent of GGR.

At the end of the first quarter, Macau's casinos operated 6,000 gaming tables and 12,000 gaming machines, according to the inspectorate overseeing the city's "dragon-head" industry.

Macau's officially licensed casino industry got off the ground in 1849.

According to the latest available data from the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC), the number of persons engaged in the gaming sector amounted to 53,272 at the end of last year, accounting for 10.7 percent of Macau's total labour force of 496,600 around that time (December 2025-February 2026).

In December last year, according to DSEC figures, the average earnings (excluding irregular remuneration) of the gaming sector's full-time employees stood at 28,020 patacas. ■

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Macau Weather

VERY HOT.
CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS.
A FEW SHOWERS.
FORCE 3 TO 4 EAST TO SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS, BECOMING FORCE 5 WITH GUSTS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 70% AND 95%.

27°C~32°C

Source: SMG

Sam vows compliance with spirit of Xi's speech on CPC founding anniversary

Macau compatriots 'must uphold Party leadership'

Tony Wong

Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai pledged yesterday that the MSAR government will, together with Macau's civil society, put into practice the spirit of the important speech made by President Xi Jinping during yesterday morning's gathering in celebration of the 105th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC), held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

The chief executive also said that all Macau compatriots must firmly uphold the CPC's leadership.

Sam made the remarks in a statement released through the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) yesterday evening.

During yesterday's gathering, Xi, also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, conferred the July 1 Medal, the Party's highest honour, on eight model CPC members, after which he delivered the important speech, the statement noted.

In the statement, Sam said that Xi's important speech has charted a forward path for all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation, including Macau compatriots, to strengthen their confidence in striving on the new journey.

Sam pledged that the MSAR government will unite and lead all sectors of Macau's civil society to earnestly study, promote, and put into practice the spirit of Xi's important speech, open up new horizons for the high-quality development of the "One Country, Two Systems" cause, and make new contributions to advancing the building of a strong country and the great cause of national rejuvenation through Chinese modernisation.

Sam noted that Xi's important speech has comprehensively reviewed and summarised the glorious history of struggle and the great founding spirit of the CPC over the past 105 years. Xi's speech has profoundly revealed the excellent qualities and key codes that have enabled the CPC to continuously forge brilliance, has put forward five clear requirements for strengthening confidence in striving on the new journey, and has issued a great call to create new historical brilliance, carrying profound political, theoretical, and practical significance.

According to the statement, Sam said that history has eloquently proven that without the CPC, there would be no New China, and there would be no prosperous, stable, and harmonious Macau under "One Country, Two Systems". All Macau compatriots, Sam said, must firmly uphold the CPC's leadership, firmly safeguard the nation's sovereignty, security, and development interests, and firmly safeguard the central authorities' overall jurisdiction over the MSAR.

Students and representatives from various segments of Macau's civil society watch yesterday morning's gathering held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing in celebration of the 105th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC), at the Macao Polytechnic University's (MPU) Multi-Sport Pavilion in Zape. – Photo: DSEDJ

In the statement, Sam quoted Xi as saying in his speech: "Promoting the long-term prosperity and stability of Hong Kong and Macau is an inherent requirement for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. On the new journey, we must comprehensively, accurately, and unswervingly implement the principles of 'One Country, Two Systems', 'Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong', 'Macau people governing Macau', and a high degree of autonomy. We must implement the principles of 'patriots governing Hong Kong' and 'patriots governing Macau', enhance the effectiveness of law-based governance in Hong Kong and Macau, promote the economic and social development of Hong Kong and Macau, and support Hong Kong and Macau in better integrating into and serving the nation's overall development".

Sam said this fully reflects the earnest care and strong support that Xi and the central authorities have shown towards the MSAR, pointing out the direction and providing guidance for Macau to enrich and refine the new practice of "One Country, Two Systems" under the new circumstances, and further strengthening Macau's confidence and determination to plan and develop its various undertakings.

In the statement, Sam expressed strong confidence that with the CPC's strong leadership and the great motherland's strong backing, the practice of "One Country, Two Systems" with Macau characteristics will surely achieve new and even greater success.

Now and in the future, Sam said, the MSAR government will join hands with all sectors of Macau's civil society to fully put into practice Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, deeply study and put into practice the spirit of Xi's important speech delivered during yesterday morning's gathering, carry forward the great founding spirit of the CPC, draw spiritual strength from it, and translate it into concrete actions to build and develop Macau.

In the statement, Sam pledged that Macau will take the initiative to seize the development opportunities brought about by the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, ensure the full and effective implementation of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan, advance the high-quality development of various undertakings in Macau and Hengqin, and accelerate its integration into the nation's overall development.

Sam underlined that the local government is committed to encouraging Macau compatriots, the younger generation in particular, to share the historical responsibility of national rejuvenation and the great glory of a prosperous and strong motherland with the people of the motherland, making unremitting efforts to jointly realise the building of a strong country and the great cause of national rejuvenation.

Meanwhile, Macau's five policy secretaries, as well as Legislative Assembly (AL) President André Cheong Weng Chon and Court of Final Appeal (TUI) President Song Man Lei respectively issued statements yesterday voicing their support for Xi's speech delivered during yesterday morning's gathering in Beijing.

They pledged to effectively perform their duties in their respective areas in compliance with the spirit of Xi's speech.

Meanwhile, the local government held a session at the Macao Polytechnic University's (MPU) Multi-Sport Pavilion in Zape yesterday morning where about 2,000 residents, comprising students and representatives from various segments of Macau's civil society, watched the live broadcast of the gathering held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing in celebration of the 105th anniversary of the founding of the CPC. ■

Observatory hoists Signal No.1 as depression approaches Macau

Khalel Vallo

The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) hoisted Stand-by Signal No.1 at 11:00 p.m. yesterday as a tropical depression developing over the south-central South China Sea was moving within 800 kilometres of Macau.

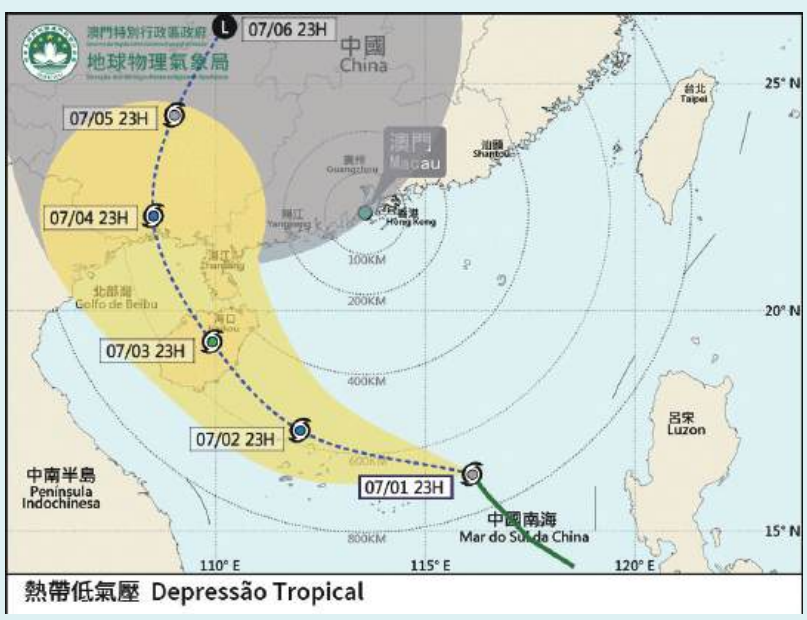
According to an SMG statement, there is a "medium" probability of hoisting Strong Wind Signal No.3 tomorrow morning.

According to the bureau, the tropical depression was forecast to gradually intensify over the next few days while tracking generally towards the nation's southernmost island province of Hainan.

Under the system's influence, winds in Macau are expected to strengthen gradually tomorrow, occasionally reaching Force 6 on the Beaufort scale*, accompanied by frequent showers, the statement said, adding that windy conditions will persist over the weekend, with periods of heavy rain expected at times.

The local observatory advised residents to stay alert to changing weather conditions and monitor its latest forecasts and tropical cyclone warnings as the system develops, adding that it will continue monitoring the tropical depression closely and urged the public to keep up to date with its latest weather information and warning signals. ■

**The Beaufort Scale is a 12-point empirical system that measures wind intensity based on observable physical conditions at sea or on land, ranging from Force 0 (Calm) to Force 12 (Hurricane). Devised by British Admiral Sir Francis Beaufort in 1805, it remains a valuable tool for sailors, meteorologists, and coastal residents to estimate wind speed without instruments. - Gemini*



This infographic provided by the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) yesterday at 11:00 p.m. shows the expected track of the still unnamed tropical depression moving towards Hainan Province from the South China Sea.

Guan Jiang Shou (a traditional ritual performance troupe), who cleared the way and led the procession. Guan Jiang Shou (官將首) translates literally to "The Chiefs of the Divine Officers".

Scorching weather fails to dampen spirits at Na Tcha parade

Armindo Neves

The two-day Na Tcha Procession and Float Parade started yesterday afternoon. Despite the local observatory issuing a yellow hot weather alert, the festive atmosphere was not dampened by the heat.

The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) issued the yellow hot weather alert at 6:50 a.m. yesterday, and the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) also announced yesterday afternoon that its cooling shelter was open to the public.

The procession and parade were organised by the Na Tcha Temple Association. At 2:00 p.m. yesterday the procession set off from Na Tcha Temple near the Ruins of St Paul's, travelling along various streets and squares in the city centre, including Largo do Senado, before returning to the temple, which forms part of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Historic Centre of Macau.

The procession, which continues today, is part of a series of events celebrating the Birthday of Prince Na Tcha and the upcoming 27th Anniversary of the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR). Around 40 art troupes from Macau, China's Taiwan region, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), and from overseas participated in the event.

Ip Tat, president of the association, spoke to reporters on the sidelines of the procession, noting that since the annual "grabbing the flower cannon" (搶花炮)* tradition has been revived in recent years, the Na Tcha festival has taken on a more traditional flavour and has brought great enjoyment to the public.

A tourist couple from Malaysia told the *Post* that although it was their first time watching the Na Tcha parade, they thoroughly enjoyed it and found it to be a wonderful experience. They expressed a willingness to attend it again in the future, though they hoped that the crowds during the event would not be too overwhelming.

An Indian tourist by the name of Arjay, who was also watching the parade for the first time, told the *Post* that the atmosphere was very festive and that he would be happy to attend it again. Although he was unfamiliar with the story of Na Tcha, Arjay said he was deeply interested in this traditional Daoist cultural event.

Na Tcha, known in Putonghua as Nezha (哪吒) and also as Nezha the Crown Prince (哪吒太子), is a protective deity in Taoism, Buddhism, and Chinese folk belief. A towering figure in Chinese mythology, Na Tcha is a divine hero whose origins are rooted in ancient folklore and religious traditions. According to mythological narrative, Na Tcha was born during the Shang Dynasty (商朝, around 1600–1046 BCE), and his famed story is closely tied to the Investiture of the Gods (封神演义), a Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) novel set in that era. Every year, on the 18th day of the fifth lunar month, Macau hosts colourful celebrations to mark Na Tcha's birthday today.

** In the Guangdong region – including the Pearl River Delta, Hong Kong, and Macau – "grabbing the flower cannon" refers to a vibrant, centuries-old folk festival tradition. It is essentially the southern Chinese equivalent a traditional "scramble" game, deeply rooted in community spirit and religious celebrations. The ritual typically takes place during major Daoist deity festivals, most notably the birthday of Tin Hau ("Heavenly Empress"), Na Tcha (Nezha – aka "Divine Marshal of Three Altars") and Tou Tei ("Earth God").* – Gemini/MPD

A child dressed up as Na Tcha takes part in the float parade.

Na Tcha's tablet was placed inside a palanquin and carried through the streets during the procession through the city centre. – Photos: Armindo Neves

Local eatery's roast duck found to contain Listeria

Armindo Neves

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) announced in a statement yesterday that the Listeria bacteria has been detected in roast duck samples.

The statement said that through a routine food sampling, a roast duck sample taken from a Cantonese restaurant identified as "Lan Heong Kuok" on Rua da Madeira (新埗頭街), was found to contain Listeria monocytogenes at a level classified as "unsatisfactory."

The bureau has ordered the eatery to cease selling the problematic duck, rectify its production and handling procedures, and thoroughly clean and disinfect all equipment and utensils, the statement said, adding that the sale of the product may only be resumed after passing a follow-up inspection and re-testing.

The statement also said that the person in charge has also been required to arrange for the restaurant's employees to attend the bureau's "Food Hygiene Supervision Course" to strengthen their awareness of hygiene practices.

According to Hong Kong's Centre for Health Protection (CHP), listeriosis is caused by the bacteria Listeria monocytogenes which is commonly found in the natural environment. The bacteria may be found in contaminated raw foods, such as vegetables and uncooked meats as well as unpasteurised milk.

A person with listeriosis usually comes down with fever, headache, and sometimes gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. Some patients may develop severe complications such as meningoencephalitis or septicaemia (blood poisoning). Pregnant women, newborns/infants, the elderly and persons with chronic diseases or weakened immunity are at higher risk of being infected. Although pregnant women with listeriosis are mostly asymptomatic or only develop mild symptoms, they may transmit the infection to their foetuses or newborns, resulting in miscarriage, stillbirth, preterm birth and septicaemia or meningitis in newborns. ■

This undated handout provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows a roast duck sample found to contain Listeria.

Macao 2026 Specialized World Stamp Exhibition draws over 10,000 visitors

Rui Pastorin

The Macao 2026 Specialized World Stamp Exhibition, aka "MACAO 2026", concluded its run at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo yesterday, attracting over 10,000 visitors across six days.

The data comes from a statement yesterday from the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT), which co-organised the event in conjunction with the Macau Philatelic Association.

The final day saw activities including the celebration of the "FIP [Fédération Internationale de Philatélie] Centenary Day, the "Exhibition Badge Workshop", and a seminar by local veteran artist and stamp designer Guilherme Ung Vai Meng, who tackled stories behind cultural heritage stamps.

Moreover, the six-day event showcased around 1,500 frames of rare stamp collections from over 40 countries and regions, with the statement adding that during the event's Palmarès Nuit (French for "Nighttime Awards") on Tuesday, the jury chose the winners among the competitive exhibits.

According to the statement, Singapore's Yau Khai Weng won the Grand Prix International for "Queensland Classics", while the Chinese mainland's Ding Jinsong garnered the Grand Prix National for "Postal History of Mongolia (1854-1921).

This photo provided by the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) yesterday shows a family taking part in a workshop hosted at the Macao 2026 Specialized World Stamp Exhibition.

Awards were also presented across 10 major "Competitive Exhibits Classes", while there was a total of 22 Large Gold medals, 77 Gold medals, 87 Large Vermeil medals, 60 Vermeil medals, 27 Large Silver medals, 20 Silver medals, 24 Silver Bronze medals, 1 Bronze medal and 38 certificates for Promotional Class, the statement noted.

MACAO 2026 Organising Committee Chairman and CTT Acting Director Lao Lan Wa said, as summarised in the statement, he hopes that "stamp exhibitions would continue to serve as a bridge to advance philatelic culture, while encouraging more young people to join the ranks of collectors so that the legacy of philately burns bright across generations". ■

LRT installs toilets at Union Hospital & Seac Pai Van stations

Tony Wong

The operator of the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) has launched a project to install public toilets at Union Hospital Station and Seac Pai Van Station, the only two stations on the LRT system currently without toilets for passengers to use.

The project was announced in a joint statement by the LRT operator, Macau Light Rapid Transit Corporation Limited (MLM), and the Transport Bureau (DSAT) yesterday.

The project, which started yesterday, is scheduled to last 105 working days, the statement said.

Macau's LRT system currently comprises Taipa Line, Seac Pai Van Line, and Hengqin Line in operation. The Taipa Line serves Taipa and Cotai with its extended section connecting to the peninsula's Barra through the lower enclosed deck of the Macau-Taipa Sai Van Bridge.

The Seac Pai Van Line connects the Taipa Line's Cotai section with Coloane's sprawling Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood, while the Hengqin Line connects the Taipa Line's Cotai section with the Macau-side zone of the Hengqin joint checkpoint.

Union Hospital Station and Seac Pai Van Station are the Seac Pai Van Line's two stations, which are respectively located next to the Macao Union Hospital complex in south Cotai, and near the Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood.

Union Hospital Station is the interchange station between the Taipa Line and the Seac Pai Van Line.

The Taipa Line opened in December 2019, while its extended section connecting to the peninsula's Barra came into service in December 2023.

The Seac Pai Van Line came into service in November 2024, while the Hengqin Line opened the following month.

The LRT system currently has a total of 15 stations, two of which are not equipped with public toilets for passengers, namely Union Hospital Station and Seac Pai Van Station. ■

UTM hosts symposium highlighting sports events in communities

This photo provided by the Macao University of Tourism (UTM) on Tuesday shows participants in the recent "3rd Research Symposium on Event Studies" posing for a group photo at the university's Mong-Ha Campus.

Rui Pastorin

The "3rd Research Symposium on Event Studies" was held at the Macao University of Tourism's (UTM) Mong-Há Campus on Tuesday, with this edition focusing on the role of sporting events in communities.

The one-day symposium was organised by the university in conjunction with the School of Tourism Management at the Sun Yat-sen University (SYSU) and was supported by the *Event Management* journal. Joining it were professors and doctoral students from both universities, along with industry speakers and scholars, according to a UTM statement that day.

The event featured three keynote speeches from representatives of both universities on sport topics, while four panel discussions on sport and communities, as well as community engagement through sporting events, were also held, the statement said, highlighting research and using examples from sporting events.

The statement quoted UTM Rector Fanny Vong Chuk Kwan as saying in her remarks: "We recognise the important contribution of sporting events to our life, and especially its instrumental role in building Macau into a World Centre for Tourism and Leisure", while also highlighting the sports event sector as "an ecosystem that plays an important role in the community".

The statement also quoted Chair Ubaldino Couto, who is also UTM's Academic Coordinator for Tourism Event Management Programme, as saying: "The continued success and support on the symposium give us confidence to innovate and tap into other topics related to events".

Academic Coordinator for Hotel Management Programme and Co-Chair Jenny Guan was also quoted as saying: "In the future, this symposium can explore along the nexus of events and luxury hospitality, as well as big health, finance and technology". ■

‘Erth’s Dinosaur Zoo’ to open Macau Int’l Children’s Arts Festival

Khalel Vallo

The interactive puppet show “Erth’s Dinosaur Zoo” will kick off the 3rd Macau International Children’s Arts Festival this week, combining large-scale dinosaur puppets, scientific storytelling and interactive theatre for audiences of all ages.

Organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), the festival will officially open tomorrow at 8:00 p.m. at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape.

Erth’s Dinosaur Zoo, presented by Australia’s Erth Visual & Physical Inc., will be staged tomorrow and Saturday at the CCM’s Grand Auditorium. At a media session yesterday afternoon, Erth Artistic Director Scott Wright and members of the puppetry team introduced the production’s creative concept and performance highlights.

The show features life-sized dinosaur puppets, including the “Australovenator” and energetic baby dinosaurs, guiding audiences through a prehistoric adventure that blends scientific exploration with imaginative storytelling. Wright said that children’s fascination with dinosaurs comes from both their connection to nature and the creatures’ ability to spark imagination. “Children get to see the creatures that they love, that they see on television or in a museum, but they get to see them alive on stage”, Wright said.

“We work with palaeontologists and museums so that we can be as authentic as possible, while also bringing the dinosaurs to life through puppetry and storytelling”, he noted, adding that that the creative team studies not only reptiles but also birds when designing dinosaur behaviour.

“Birds are dinosaurs”, Wright pointed out, noting that the Australian cassowary is one of the animals that inspired the movement and behaviour of some of the puppets.

As part of the festival’s community outreach programme, the dinosaur puppets are also making appearances around Macau through a series of pop-up events under the “More Culture, More Happiness” initiative, according to a statement by the bureau yesterday. The first pop-up was held yesterday in the Lok Yeung Fa Yuen (“Green Poplar Garden”) area, the statement said, adding that additional appearances are scheduled for Luís de Camões Garden tomorrow at 11:00 a.m., and Anim’Arte NAM VAN on Saturday at 11:00 a.m. and Sunday at 6:30 p.m.

Tickets for various Macau International Children’s Arts Festival programmes are available through the Enjoy Macao Ticketing platform at ticketing.enjoymacao.mo, with special family package discounts offered for group purchases. More information is available on the festival’s official website at www.icm.gov.mo/micaf. ■

Erth Visual & Physical Inc Artistic Director Scott Wright (top second from right) and his team pose with their puppet dinosaurs during yesterday’s “Erth’s Dinosaur Zoo” media session at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape. – Photo: Khalel Vallo

Why has the CPC remained vibrant after 105 years?

Analysis

BEIJING – Since its founding 105 years ago, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has kept standing at the forefront of China’s transformation, leading the country through construction to become one of the world’s foremost economic powers.

Now with more than 101 million members, the CPC is steering the country on a new journey toward modernization by building on decades of development.

What has enabled the CPC to remain vibrant and resilient for more than a century? How has it mobilized the wisdom and strength of the Chinese people to achieve such remarkable progress? And what does its governance experience reveal about effective leadership in a rapidly changing world?

PEOPLE-CENTERED PHILOSOPHY

The CPC, since its founding, has made seeking happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation its mission. This commitment has remained at the heart of its governance philosophy.

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chinese president, has said, “The aspirations of the people to live a better life must always be the focus of our efforts.” He also urged all party members to bear in mind that “the country is the people and the people are the country.”

Poverty alleviation has long been a priority for the Party. The hard-won achievements in this endeavor have brought real changes to numerous people struggling with poverty.

Perched at an altitude of 1,600 meters in the mountains of southwest China’s Sichuan Province, the clifftop village of Atulie’er gained nationwide attention for its rugged location. Until a decade ago, villagers had to climb zigzag rattan ladders clinging to steep cliffs to reach classrooms, markets and medical facilities.

As a nationwide targeted poverty alleviation campaign progressed, a steel ladder with handrails replaced the rattan ladders in 2016, significantly improving villagers’ daily lives. Many families were later relocated to apartment complexes in a nearby county. Since then, the village has developed tourism and cultivated agricultural specialties as new sources of income.

The transformation of Atulie’er is emblematic of China’s drive to shake off extreme poverty. After an eight-year relentless campaign, the country lifted all of its 98.99 million impoverished rural residents out of poverty by the end of 2020, eradicating absolute poverty that had long plagued the nation.

While poverty alleviation stands as a major achievement, it is part of a wider effort to improve people’s livelihoods. Over the years, China has built the largest education, social security, and healthcare systems in the world. It has also made historic progress in ecological conservation and environmental protection.

“While all countries advocate helping their people, in China, one can trace the people-centered philosophy directly to specific policy initiatives,” said Robert Lawrence Kuhn, chairman of the Kuhn Foundation.

Dennis Munene Mwaniki, executive director of the China-Africa Center at Kenya’s Africa Policy Institute, said that China’s governance focuses on designing and implementing policies that are people-centric in nature to ensure everyone can benefit from development.

Mwaniki said China’s governance practices – including its whole-process people’s democracy – offer an alternative to the Western development model, which he described as “capital-centered rather than people-centered.”

KEEPING PACE WITH THE TIMES

Reform has been a defining feature of the CPC in its striving to bring better lives to the Chinese people. The Party has addressed development challenges through comprehensively deepening reform, while pursuing self-reform to enhance its governing capacity.

Since the reform and opening-up in 1978, China has undergone profound transformations. Having achieved tremendous success from humble beginnings, reform efforts have now entered a “deep-water zone.” Xi once compared the remaining difficult reforms as “tough bones that are hard to chew.”

Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, the drive to comprehensively deepen reform has expanded across the economy, innovation, people’s livelihoods, opening-up and governance.

Take the economy as an example. To remove barriers to a unified market and stimulate market innovation, the country has implemented the negative list approach for market access. Through successive revisions over several years, the number of items on the list has been reduced from 151 in the 2018 version to 106 at present, a decrease of about 30 percent.

In 2024, the third plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee adopted overarching plans to comprehensively deepen reforms and announced more than 300 major reform tasks to be completed by 2029.

As reforms have advanced into more complex stages, the CPC views full and rigorous governance of the Party as an essential guarantee. Under the banner of self-reform, the CPC has made persistent efforts to improve Party conduct, build a clean government and fight corruption.

Between December 2012 and May 2021, the CPC discipline inspection and supervisory authorities investigated 392 officials at or above the provincial and ministerial level and about 22,000 department and bureau level officials. Punishments for more than 626,500 violations of Party conduct rules were also handed down during the period.

Chayanant Tiyatrakarnchai, a Thai senator, said the CPC has not become complacent after decades in power, but has continued to strengthen itself in response to the changing times and the evolving expectations of the people.

Juvenal Quicassa, an international relations expert at the University of Belas of Angola, highlighted the CPC’s ongoing efforts to build the systems and measures to ensure that officials do not dare to be, are not able to be, and do not want to be corrupt.

“In my assessment, one of the reasons why the CPC continues to demonstrate vitality after more than a century of existence lies precisely in its capacity for adaptation, self-correction and maintenance of high levels of organizational discipline,” said Quicassa.

EXCHANGES FOR BETTER GOVERNANCE

Roughly two weeks ago, British Ambassador to China Peter Wilson visited Yan’an, an old revolutionary heartland of the CPC in northwest China’s Shaanxi Province. He described the journey as “important” for gaining a better understanding of China and the CPC.

At the Yan’an Revolutionary Memorial Hall, he lingered over the old photographs and exhibits showing the life and struggle of revolutionaries of the older generation.

Wilson also visited Liangjiahe, a village where Xi lived and worked as an educated youth for seven years. He heard villagers recount what life was like in the old days and how their lives have changed, and photographed a cave dwelling that bears Chinese characters meaning “hard work” and “self-reliance” on its exterior wall.

Starting from a small party with just over 50 members, the CPC was little understood by the outside world for quite a long time. As the world has witnessed its remarkable transformation in recent decades, more and more people worldwide have shown a growing interest in China’s governance model.

Amid a wave of visits to China by foreign leaders this year, many have traveled beyond Beijing to explore the country’s development experience firsthand – in areas ranging from modernization and poverty reduction to ecological protection. Their itineraries covered robotics companies, rural communities, and Xiong’an New Area, which is dubbed China’s “city of the future.”

“China develops its own development and governance path that fits its own conditions,” differing from traditional Western-led models and offering inspiration for Global South countries to chart their own distinctive governance path, said Mwaniki, the Kenyan scholar.

Rather than advocating a one-size-fits-all model, China has emphasized exchanges and mutual learning through platforms such as the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-level Meeting and the publication of “Xi Jinping: The Governance of China” in many languages.

China’s poverty alleviation experience is also gaining traction in Africa. In Ethiopia’s Oromia Region, a three-year agricultural cooperation project launched in 2024 has delivered modern farming techniques and training to the village of Godino Jitu, where residents report a marked rise in crop yields.

“By vigorously promoting dialogue and cooperation among political parties worldwide, the CPC is playing a constructive and forward-looking role in enriching global governance practices and contributing valuable public goods to the international community,” said Adhere Cavince, a Kenya-based international relations scholar.

“In an era of global uncertainty, the CPC’s actions serve as a vital bridge, fostering trust, reducing misunderstandings, and amplifying the voice of developing countries in global affairs,” he added. *– Xinhua*

Xi hails CPC's 105-year 'epic', urges building modern socialist China

Continued from p.1

Outstanding Party members, Party workers, and primary-level Party organizations from across the country were also honored at the 3,000-strong gathering.

The event was attended by Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, and Li Xi – all members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee – as well as Vice President Han Zheng.

FINE QUALITIES

In his address, Xi said the CPC boasts fine qualities with no parallel among other political parties and political forces.

He said the Party's endeavors over the past 105 years have fundamentally transformed the future of the Chinese people, blazed the right path toward the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, demonstrated the strong vitality of Marxism, had a profound influence on the course of world history, and made the CPC a powerful Communist Party.

Under the CPC's leadership, China has become the world's second-largest economy, emerged as one of the world's fastest-rising innovators, raised the average life expectancy of its people to more than 79 years, and established the world's largest education, social security and healthcare systems.

The Party remains committed to seeking truth and always adheres to the right direction, Xi said, adding that it is deeply rooted in the people and always boasts a solid foundation.

He said the CPC courageously rises to its historic missions and always maintains the strategic initiative. It follows the trend of development and always remains at the forefront of the times.

Xi also praised the Party's courage and ability to fight, its unwavering confidence in victory, and its commitment to continuous self-improvement.

Having led the country to eradicate absolute poverty, the CPC has mapped out a blueprint to basically realize modernization by 2035 and build China into a great modern socialist country in all respects by the middle of the century.

Stressing the need to uphold the Party's absolute leadership over the armed forces, Xi urged efforts to achieve the goals for the centenary of the People's Liberation Army in 2027 and elevate the people's armed forces to world-class status at a faster pace.

He also called on the military to resolutely defend China's sovereignty, security and development interests, and make greater contributions to safeguarding world peace and development.

Promoting the long-term prosperity and stability of Hong Kong and Macao is essential to realizing national rejuvenation, Xi said.

Resolving the Taiwan question and realizing China's complete reunification are a historic mission and an unshakable commitment of the CPC, he said.

He pledged resolute actions to fight secessionists seeking "Taiwan independence," oppose external interference, and advance national reunification.

– Xinhua

Leaders of political parties, governments worldwide extend congratulations on CPC's 105th founding anniversary

BEIJING – Leaders of political parties and governments from countries worldwide have recently sent messages and letters to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and General Secretary Xi Jinping of the committee, extending warm congratulations on the 105th anniversary of the founding of the CPC.

Kim Jong Un, general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and president of the State Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, said that the CPC has led the Chinese people in overcoming various difficulties and obstacles, and has vigorously advanced the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Kim said that he firmly believes that under the leadership of the CPC with General Secretary Xi at its core, the Chinese people will continue to achieve brilliant accomplishments in their endeavor to build China into a great modern socialist country in all respects and to realize the Second Centenary Goal.

Prabowo Subianto, general chairman of Indonesia's Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra) and president of Indonesia, said that the CPC's achievements in successfully leading China in poverty alleviation and improving the well-being of its people have consistently served as a model for Gerindra.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, chairman of Türkiye's Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and Türkiye's president, said that he highly commends General Secretary Xi's initiatives and vision aimed at safeguarding global stability and prosperity. The AK Party hopes to strengthen inter-party exchanges with the CPC and promote further deepening of cooperation between the two countries, he said.

Mahmoud Abbas, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization Executive Committee and president of the State of Palestine, said the Palestinian side firmly adheres to the one-China policy, supports China in safeguarding its national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and wishes the Chinese people and the CPC continued progress.

Kenyan President and United Democratic Alliance Leader William Ruto said that the achievements of the CPC have inspired constructive reflections among the Global South on development and governance, and further strengthened Kenya's determination to pursue a path of transformative growth.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said that the indomitable spirit demonstrated by the CPC and the Chinese people has brought hope to all peoples committed to peace, development and multilateralism.

Serbia is ready to work with China to jointly implement the four major global initiatives proposed by Xi, and to effectively address current global challenges, he said.

Leaders worldwide who also extended congratulations included the leader of the Maldives' People's National Congress and Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, Nauruan President David Adeang, President of Malaysia's People's Justice Party and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, Secretary-General of Singapore's People's Action Party and Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, President of the Leaders Party of Vanuatu and Vanuatu Prime Minister Jotham Napat, and Leader of Samoa's FAST Party and Samoan Prime Minister Laaulialemalietoa Leuatea Polataivao Fosi Schmidt – among others. *– Xinhua*

Xi hails CPC's 105-year 'epic' urges building modern socialist China

President Xi Jinping (center), also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, poses for photos after conferring the July 1 Medal, the Party's highest honor, on model CPC members in Beijing yesterday. A solemn gathering marking the CPC's 105th founding anniversary was held at the Great Hall of the People yesterday. *– Xinhua*

Analysis

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping yesterday hailed the 105-year history of the Communist Party of China (CPC) as the "most magnificent epic" of the Chinese nation and urged the Party to press ahead to build China into a modern socialist country on schedule.

Addressing a gathering marking the CPC's 105th founding anniversary, Xi, also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, called on Party members to remain steadfast in their convictions and work tirelessly to fulfill the Party's missions in the new era and on the new journey.

Founded in 1921 against the backdrop of a weak China plagued by foreign humiliation and poverty, the CPC has grown from a small group of just over 50 members into the world's largest governing party with tremendous global influence.

Xi underscored the importance of meeting the goal of fully realizing socialist modernization by the middle of the century.

"Time stops for no one, and neither does history," he said.

The whole Party must adhere to its basic theory, basic line and basic policy to "remain undaunted by passing clouds and stay on course through wind and waves," Xi said.

Stressing that the Party must rely closely on the people to create new historical feats, Xi urged Party members to "further reinvigorate the enterprising spirit for getting things done."

He also called on the whole Party to actively respond to risks and challenges on the path ahead.

"China's development is now in a period where strategic opportunities coexist with risks and challenges, and where uncertain and unpredictable factors are on the rise. We must always be prepared to withstand major tests of high winds and raging waves, and even violent storms," he warned.

As profound changes unseen in a century accelerate, the world has entered a new period of turbulence and transformation, with humanity once again standing at a crossroads of choice, Xi said.

"We must continuously promote the building of a community with a shared future for humanity," he said.

Xi also stressed advancing full and rigorous Party self-governance with sustained efforts to win "the tough, protracted and all-out battle against corruption."

"It is imperative that all of us in the Party never forget our original aspiration and founding mission, that we always stay modest, prudent, and hard-working, and that we have the courage and ability to carry on our fight," he added.

According to the latest census, the CPC now has nearly 101.29 million members and over 5.43 million primary-level Party organizations.

At the gathering, Xi conferred the July 1 Medal, the Party's highest honor, on model CPC members.

– Xinhua

'My dream is broken': Japan visa rules push out foreign residents

Kyoko Hasegawa

TOKYO – In a tiny Tokyo restaurant filled with the smell of Nepalese dumplings, Budhathoki Samjhana surveys the business she built from scratch but may now have to give up as Japan tightens visa rules.

Even though Japan has a rapidly ageing population and is suffering labour shortages in many sectors, opposition to immigration is growing and the new rules for business manager visas were introduced by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in late 2025.

Nepalese national Budhathoki, who spent a decade away from her young daughter to create a new life for them in Tokyo, faces expulsion from the country because she may not be able to meet the specifications.

"I always wanted to become a bridge between Japan and Nepal... but my dream is broken," the 38-year-old told AFP from the capital's Okubo district, where her restaurant is nestled alongside Vietnamese cafes, Indian curry houses and Korean barbecue joints.

The stricter rules come as some residents complain of overtourism and soaring land prices in part due to foreign investment, prompting a push by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi for tighter regulations on foreign nationals.

Her government announced last month a sharp increase in visa fees for some tourists for the first time in nearly 50 years, hiking the cost for single and multiple entry permits five-fold.

Japan is also tripling a departure tax to 3,000 yen (US$18) for all travellers – including Japanese citizens – from yesterday, with the extra funds used to tackle issues caused by an increasing number of foreign tourists.

And while business manager visa holders have a three-year grace period to meet the new conditions, some thriving businesses – including many popular eateries in Okubo – fear they won't manage.

"The biggest problem is the increase in capital requirement to 30 million yen (US$185,000) from 5 million (US$30,000)," said Budhathoki, leafing through receipts as the scent of freshly cooked Nepalese momos wafts in from the kitchen.

"It's impossible".

Budhathoki came to Japan as a student in 2016 and saved for years to open her first restaurant in 2023.

After opening her third eatery in January, she finally brought her 14-year-old daughter from Nepal following a decade of separation and she is now enrolled in a Japanese school.

"Now, I'm very worried not about myself but about my daughter... What did I do to her?" she said.

"My heart pounds when I think about the next visa renewal."

'Zero illegal' residents

Indian restaurant owner Manish Kumar, who has lived in Japan for three decades, has already been told his business manager visa won't be renewed, in spite of the grace period.

A delivery man passes people eating at a Nepali restaurant in the Okubo district in Tokyo on June 12, a neighbourhood known for its large immigrant communities, including Korean, Southeast Asian and South Asian residents. – AFP

He doesn't know exactly why but visa experts say immigration officials have become more rigorous, demanding more documentation including tax receipts and social insurance premiums.

"My children only speak Japanese... and we're told to go back to India," Kumar tearfully explained at a gathering about the visa issue last month.

More than 67,800 people have signed a petition calling for the suspension of the new rules.

"What happened to him was shocking," petition organiser Taro Tsurugashima said of Kumar, who ran a restaurant in Saitama, near Tokyo, for 18 years.

"He is one of my friends, and he is a trusted member of a business community," Tsurugashima told AFP.

The tightening of regulations comes after the justice ministry in May last year announced a "zero illegal foreign residents" plan to address public concern.

Super-ageing Japan has one of the world's lowest birth rates, and increasing immigration could help reverse its falling population.

But foreigners were a major issue in last year's upper house election which saw the sharp rise of the "Japanese-first" Sanseito party, which describes immigration as a "silent invasion".

Since taking office in October, Takaichi has pledged stricter screening.

The business manager visa, meant to attract entrepreneurs, had become an easy route for would-be immigrants without real business plans, said Kazuki Yuda, an administrative affairs advisor.

The visa's popularity surged, with around 46,000 holders by mid-2025 – up 70 percent from 2020. About half were Chinese nationals, according to government data.

"We also started to see unscrupulous real estate agents telling people that they could secure a visa simply by purchasing property in Japan," he said.

Daisuke Komori, another advisor on administrative affairs, told AFP that he had declined potential clients, "many of whom were Chinese", seeking to move chiefly for their children's education or to leave China.

However, Yuda and Komori both warned that the tougher measures were impacting "small restaurant owners" and "young entrepreneurs", as well as the system's abusers.

At an April parliament session, Justice Minister Hiroshi Hiraguchi said he had no plan to review the rules, but his ministry intends "to respond based on individual circumstances".

Among other new requirements, a business manager visa holder must employ a Japanese national or long-term resident.

But with the shrinking population, "there's not enough Japanese workers", a 30-year-old Bangladeshi man who runs a trading business in Tokyo told AFP.

Under these circumstances, "who will apply for a job at a company whose manager's status is unstable with a visa that has to be renewed every year?" *– AFP*

Australia may need to retire farmland to avoid ecological collapse: study

CANBERRA – Australia may need to overhaul its rural landscape, including retiring farmland and restoring vegetation, to avoid ecological collapse, a new study suggests.

The study argues that restoring at least 30 percent of landscapes to functioning natural systems is the bare minimum needed to stabilize biodiversity, according to a release of Australia's Adelaide University yesterday.

Researchers found that parts of the state of South Australia (SA) fall well short of an internationally agreed goal to return 30 percent of land to nature, a benchmark endorsed globally in 2022 and considered critical to preventing ecosystem collapse.

Native vegetation has been reduced to minimal levels in some areas, with SA's Copper Coast retaining only 3.6 percent, the study found, meaning large areas, including some productive farmland, would need to be returned to native ecosystems to reach the target.

Peter Martin, a recent Adelaide University environmental science graduate, said achieving this would require "major land use change at a district scale," shifting from traditional "wheat-sheep" farming systems to more diverse landscapes incorporating native ecosystems.

"The region might generate slightly less agricultural produce, but social and health science suggests that a more natural and diverse landscape can significantly improve human health and mental wellbeing," said Martin, who conducted the study in 2025.

Martin identified community acceptance as the main barrier, noting changes would need to occur over decades with "sustained government and community support."

Climate change is expected to intensify the challenge, with rising temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns likely to render some current farming areas unviable, strengthening the case for alternative land uses. *– Xinhua*

Philippines' Alexandra Eala returns to Mexico's Renata Zarazua during their singles match at the 2026 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, on Tuesday. Eala won the game 6-1, 6-2. (More tennis on p.14) – AFP

Singapore police seize luxury bungalow in AI chip probe

SINGAPORE – Singapore police said yesterday they had seized a luxury bungalow worth more than US$40 million as part of fraud investigations linked to the alleged transfer of AI chips in breach of US export controls.

The probe centres on two Singaporeans, Aaron Woon and Alan Wei, and a Chinese national, Li Ming, who were charged last year with fraud for allegedly concealing the actual end-user of servers supplied by US firms Dell and Super Micro.

Investigators filed additional fraud charges yesterday against Woon and Li as well as Jenny Lim, the chief financial officer of a firm embroiled in the case.

Police expect to file further charges next week against Wei, including money laundering.

As part of the probe, police have issued a prohibition of disposal order on the luxury property owned by Wei and valued at S$55 million (US$42.4 million), the force said in a statement, adding that they had also seized funds from bank accounts under scrutiny.

Four companies are also facing fraud-related charges in the case.

Last year, authorities said the servers in question may have contained advanced Nvidia artificial intelligence chips.

They were shipped from Singapore to Malaysia, though their ultimate destination remained unclear, Interior Minister K. Shanmugam has said.

Some media reports have suggested the equipment may have been intended for China.

US restrictions aimed at maintaining a technological edge limit the export of advanced semiconductors to China.

Bloomberg News reported last year that US officials were probing whether Chinese firm DeepSeek had obtained advanced Nvidia chips via intermediaries in Singapore to circumvent these curbs.

Last week, Malaysian authorities said they had foiled an attempt to smuggle advanced AI chips through the country's main airport, seizing 72 servers worth nearly US$13 million. *– AFP*

Indonesia aims for 12.3-million-hectare land degradation neutrality by 2030

JAKARTA – The Indonesian Ministry of Forestry yesterday said it has set a target to achieve land degradation neutrality across 12.3 million hectares by 2030, trying to balance soil depletion with restoration efforts.

"Indonesia is committed to achieving land degradation neutrality, meaning there is a balance between degraded land and restored land. Our target is to reach around 12.3 million hectares by 2030," Dyah Murtiningsih, the ministry's director general of watershed management and forest rehabilitation, said in Jakarta yesterday.

Achieving that goal requires scaling up extensive forest and land rehabilitation programs, driven by widespread reforestation both within and beyond forest zones, Murtiningsih said.

Also yesterday, Indonesian Deputy Minister of Forestry Rohmat Marzuki called for fast-tracking the peatland ecosystem restoration initiative, citing it as a tangible move to restore the ecological functions of degraded lands.

Official data showed that Indonesia had restored more than 2 million hectares of degraded land by 2025. *– Xinhua*

World Cup frenzy fuels Islamic flag fury in Bangladesh

DHAKA – Supporters of a hardline Bangladeshi preacher have heeded his call to counter fan frenzy around the World Cup by raising Islamic flags across the constitutionally secular country, putting police on alert, the force said yesterday.

Football is extremely popular in Muslim-majority Bangladesh, with hundreds of thousands of fans supporting mainly Brazil and Argentina.

Mufti Harun Izhar, a Muslim religious leader, has urged supporters in a recent speech to take down the flags of Argentina and Brazil and raise white flags bearing the Kalima – profession of faith – wherever they could.

Such Islamic flags were raised in more than a dozen districts, leading police to say they would "act if these flags create a law and order situation".

"We are on alert," police spokesman Shahadat Hossain told AFP.

Since Izhar's speech has circulated online, supporters have also held motorcycle rallies carrying the flags while playing religious songs.

The preacher told AFP that "there should be restraint in displaying support for Argentina, Brazil or any other country."

Izhar stressed that the white flags raised by his supporters should not be confused with those used by Afghanistan's Taliban authorities or the black banners of the Islamic State group.

"Secularists have certain attitudes towards these flags, and readily label them Taliban flags or ISIS flags – that is not correct," he said, using an acronym for the Islamic State group.

Zahed Ur Rahman, an adviser to the prime minister, said the government was closely following the issue.

"This could send the wrong message globally," he told reporters on Tuesday.

Some fans have also pushed back.

"Football helps people forget their hardships and challenges for a while," said Mohammad Moniruzzaman Chisty, a passionate Brazil fan.

"For us, football is the ultimate form of entertainment." – *AFP*

Indian forecasters warn of below normal July rains

NEW DELHI – India is likely to see below normal rainfall in July after recording its fifth-driest June since 1901, forecasters said on Tuesday, raising concerns over agricultural output.

Hundreds of millions of people in India rely on the annual monsoon winds to bring vital rains that sustain agriculture and industry.

However, climate change is making the country hotter and shifting weather patterns, and the presence of the El Niño weather phenomenon this year has brought warnings of lower rainfall.

The rainfall for July is expected to be below 94 percent for the long period average, India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Tuesday.

Low rainfall may pose challenges for "agriculture, water resources", the IMD said, adding that such conditions may spike risk of heat stress.

"To reduce potential impacts, timely planning and preparedness measures, including water conservation, efficient management of available water resources, and suitable agricultural contingency measures, may be considered by the concerned agencies and stakeholders," the IMD said in a statement.

Monsoon rains sweep the north over several weeks, providing rain for farmers to plant their crops - a crucial lifeline for a sector that supports 45 percent of people in the world's most populous country.

IMD's director general said on Tuesday the country had recorded its fifth driest June since 1901.

The strength of El Niño phenomenon, which was the reason for low rainfall in June, would increase in the coming months, said IMD director-general Mrutyunjay Mohapatra.

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

Police personnel walk past razed buildings during a demolition drive to widen roads leading to the Kashi Vishwanath temple, at Dalmandi market in Varanas, India yesterday. – *AFP*

Pakistan community holds funerals for 14 children killed in roof collapse

LAHORE – Pakistani mourners shouldered bedframes in a procession through the narrow streets of Lahore's Kahna area yesterday as they carried the bodies of 14 children killed when the roof of their tutoring centre collapsed the night before.

Residents and families gathered by freshly dug graves at a nearby cemetery before returning to a neighbourhood where frantic rescue efforts had given way to mourning.

Grief engulfed the community in Pakistan's second-largest city, with some wiping away tears and embracing while others called for urgent action by authorities to prevent further disasters.

"For our community, this is nothing less than a catastrophe," said 48-year-old resident Aas Muhammad, adding that some families had lost multiple children when the roof gave way during their lessons.

Residents of the disadvantaged neighbourhood to the south of Lahore said they had suspicions that the building housing the tutoring centre was rundown.

However, there was a dearth of nearby options to give their children a chance at improving their education and forging a better future.

"Everyone knew that the condition of the building was very poor," said Muhammad Farooq, 30, whose daughter was killed. "But we had no choice."

Hundreds of mourners took part in funeral prayers at the local mosque yesterday before the dead children, mostly aged between four and 12, were carried to the graveyard for burial.

Relatives and local residents carry the bodies of deceased children for their funeral in Lahore, Pakistan yesterday, after the roof of a tutoring centre collapsed the previous day. – *AFP*

'Wake-up call'

The roof collapse has fuelled anger alongside grief, with the community questioning how an apparently unsafe building had been allowed to house a private tutoring centre.

"I would like to appeal to all relevant government authorities to fulfil their responsibilities by carrying out thorough structural inspections of schools and other educational institutions," resident Aas Muhammad said, adding that the disaster should serve as a "wake-up call".

Roof and building collapses are common across Pakistan, mainly because of poor safety standards and shoddy construction in the South Asian country of more than 240 million people.

Authorities have promised an investigation and police said two people were taken into custody on Tuesday night.

"No child should ever be placed at risk simply for seeking education," Muhammad said.

Broken bricks, twisted steel beams and shattered concrete lay strewn across the ground at the collapse site as local residents looked on in disbelief.

Remnants of children's belongings were still partially buried beneath the rubble.

"This is a tragedy of unimaginable proportions," resident Muhammad Anwer, 53, told AFP.

"It is not only the families who have lost their children who have been devastated; the entire community has been left in mourning." – *AFP*

Pakistan military intercepts 4 drones from Afghanistan: statement

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan's military said yesterday it had intercepted four drones sent from Afghanistan the previous day, the latest incident in months of conflict between the two neighbours.

The Taliban government had vowed a response to deadly Pakistani airstrikes on eastern Afghanistan this week and the Afghan defence ministry said in a statement overnight it had carried out aerial operations targeting militants in Pakistani border provinces.

Pakistan's military said Afghan Taliban forces on Tuesday had "launched four rudimentary drones across the border in Balochistan... the hostile aerial platforms were immediately picked up by Pakistan's robust air defence network".

"If the Afghan Taliban continue to provoke Pakistan, they would receive a befitting response which would cost them heavily," it added.

The Afghan defence ministry posted on X that it had carried out "airstrikes" in Balochistan and northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, that it said caused casualties among Islamic State (IS) group members.

The Taliban military forces lack a fully functional air force but have used small drones, targeting areas primarily in the border regions of Pakistan, experts say.

Pakistan, which denies its territory is used by IS, did not mention any casualties and accused the Afghan government of "misleading" its people, saying the drone attacks were "effectively thwarted".

The regional IS branch, Islamic State-Khorasan, has claimed responsibility for attacks in Afghanistan in recent years that have killed civilians.

The incident is the latest flare-up of conflict between the neighbours whose relationship has been fraught since 2021, when the Taliban government took power in Kabul, and follow a war that erupted in February.

After a deadly weekend attack in Karachi, Pakistani airstrikes killed dozens of people in eastern Afghanistan, with Islamabad saying on Monday it targeted militants but the Afghan government reporting civilian casualties.

The United Nations confirmed the strikes killed 28 civilians and wounded dozens more. Pakistan has not commented on civilian casualties and said 29 militants were killed in the strikes and ground operations.

The months of conflict that has killed hundreds has centred around Islamabad's accusations that the Taliban government shelters militants behind a surge in attacks, particularly the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) which has waged a violent campaign against Pakistan for years.

Afghan officials deny those assertions and counter that Pakistan harbours hostile groups and does not respect its sovereignty. – *AFP*

US Fed chair says committed to combatting 'too high' prices

Asad Hashim

WASHINGTON, DC – US Federal Reserve Chair Kevin Warsh said yesterday the central bank was committed to fighting "too high" prices, as inflation fuelled by the US war on Iran surges through the world's largest economy.

"We've all looked around and we've seen that prices are too high, and I don't think I'm the only one on this stage that's recommitted to deliver price stability," Warsh said at a forum in Portugal, sitting alongside fellow major central bank heads.

"We're going to deliver price stability in the US. That's what this committee has signed up to do," he said, referring to the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) that sets interest rates.

Chairing his first FOMC meeting last month, Warsh had delivered a similar message, with his fellow policymakers suggesting a rate hike may come later this year to combat inflation.

The Fed has a dual mandate of keeping inflation to a long-term two-percent target while also ensuring maximum employment.

Price increases, however, have been far above that level since the pandemic, peaking at nine percent in 2021.

Inflation trended down after that peak, but the US central bank paused its rate-cutting cycle in January as price volatility fuelled by US President Donald Trump's tariffs and unpredictable economic policy rippled through the economy.

Since late February, when the United States and Israel launched the war on Iran, it has surged once more, driven by skyrocketing fuel prices.

The Fed's preferred inflation gauge came in at a three-year high of 4.1 percent in May.

Yesterday, Fed Chair Warsh recommitted to the central bank's two-percent target for inflation.

"If there were people in households or the business sector, in the financial markets, who thought that this central bank was going to be comfortable with an inflation objective above two percent, well, I guess they'd be disappointed," he said.

AI's potential

In a wide-ranging panel discussion alongside the heads of the European Central Bank, Bank of England and Bank of Canada, Warsh refused to be drawn on offering forward guidance on rates, a practice he has criticized in the past.

Much of the conversation centred on the impact of artificial intelligence (AI), which has fuelled a boom in capital expenditure and on the US stock market.

"This is as exciting a time, and also as consequential a time to be a central banker that I can think of at any point, maybe outside of a crisis, in my adult lifetime," he said of AI's potential to spur massive economic growth.

He said the United States was likely to be a "big winner" in the early running, in part because it "is not afraid of productivity-led economic growth."

He predicted that "jobs will be greater, prosperity will be stronger" due to AI, echoing his previous comments that many have taken as suggesting his view is that the impact will not be inflationary.

Fed independence

This week, the US Supreme Court blocked Trump from firing Fed Governor Lisa Cook, part of his unprecedented campaign to pressure the central bank to lower interest rates.

Trump, who named Warsh as Fed chair, also initiated a criminal probe against his predecessor Jerome Powell – one that has now been dropped.

Warsh has insisted he will not be a puppet for Trump, and yesterday he reaffirmed the importance of the Fed's independence.

"So before the Supreme Court [decision], the Fed acted independently and followed its remit. After the Supreme Court ruling, the Fed will continue to do so," he said.

"We are calling balls and strikes as best we can." *– AFP*

Traditionalist Catholic society defies Vatican by consecrating new bishops

The new traditionalist Catholic bishops Marc Hanappier of France (from left to right), Michel Poinsinet de Sivry of France, Michael Goldade of the US and Pascal Schreiber of Switzerland stand during the schismatic consecration of bishops by the traditionalist Catholic Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX) in Écône, western Switzerland, yesterday. *– AFP*

Agnès Pedrero

ÉCÔNE, Switzerland – An ultra-traditionalist breakaway Catholic group consecrated four new bishops yesterday in defiance of Pope Leo XIV, who pleaded with them to turn back from what he called a "schismatic act" with Rome.

At a ceremony in Écône in southwest Switzerland, attended by thousands of worshippers from around the world and witnessed by AFP, the last two remaining bishops of the Society of Saint Pius X consecrated four new ones: two French, one American and one Swiss.

The society's Superior General Davide Pagliarani called it a "historic" day, during his homily.

"Are we breaking with the Church in order to keep the faith? That is a false dilemma. We belong to the Church first through faith, through the integral profession of the Church's faith," he said.

By going ahead without the pontiff's approval, all six bishops are de facto excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church.

But at the start of the ceremony, the society's secretary general Foucault Leroux said they considered "that all penalties and censures (...) are null and void".

Mass in Latin

The Society of Saint Pius X, which has around 600,000 followers, comprises fundamentalist Catholics who strongly oppose the liberal reforms imposed by the Vatican II Council in the 1960s.

Founded in 1970 by the controversial French bishop Marcel Lefebvre, the group triggered a rift with the Vatican by consecrating four bishops in 1988.

Yesterday's new consecrations took place in the very same spot, in the meadows near the society's seminary in Écône, a village in the Rhone valley, with the Alps towering above.

The consecrations took place during a Mass in Latin which lasted around four hours.

The four priests lay face down on the ground while the Litany of the Saints was sung, before receiving the laying on of hands from the bishop – the key moment, followed by the anointing.

The service took place on a large covered stage before several hundred priests and nuns, while the crowds outside watched on giant screens.

During the final rites, the village was lashed by a torrential downpour accompanied by thunder, forcing some of the faithful to huddle under their umbrellas and raincoats.

'Sin of extreme gravity'

For the Holy See, consecrating bishops without the approval of the pope is a direct act of insubordination, leading to the automatic excommunication of the bishops involved.

"I plead with you and ask you with all my heart: please turn back!" Pope Leo wrote in a letter to the society on Monday, calling it a "schismatic act".

"To tear the seamless garment of Christ is a sin of extreme gravity," the pontiff said.

The society says it is present in more than 75 countries across six continents, with more than 750 priests.

"There is absolutely nothing schismatic or anti-Church in our actions," Father Michel Rion, a theology professor at the Écône seminary – one of the society's five worldwide – told AFP.

"We hope that one day the pope will see that. For us, being schismatic is the worst thing that could happen, we would rather die than be schismatic."

'Historic moment'

Adhering to a strict interpretation of Roman Catholic tradition, the society holds masses in Latin celebrated by priests with their backs turned to the congregation.

André, a 46-year-old Gabonese worshipper from Versailles in France, told AFP at Wednesday's ceremony: "In a few years, we will almost certainly be told that the choice we made was the right one."

In 1988, Pope John Paul II issued a similar appeal but failed to stop the society from ordaining bishops. They were immediately excommunicated, but the sanction was lifted in 2009 by Pope Benedict XVI.

His successor Pope Francis had from 2015 recognised the validity of confessions and marriages celebrated by the society's priests.

The society saw consecrating new bishops as a necessity, arguing it had only two bishops left.

Although influential in certain conservative circles, it remains a tiny group within the Catholic Church and its roughly 1.3 billion faithful. *– AFP*

UK's Princess Anne marks 110 years since bloodiest WWI battle

THIEPVAL, France – Britain's Princess Anne said the 110th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme recalled "the responsibility to remember", as she marked one of the deadliest battles of the First World War which saw particularly heavy British losses.

"As time passes, and the Great War slips further into history, the responsibility to remember falls more clearly upon us," said the sister of King Charles III during a ceremony at the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme in northern France.

"Our duty is not only to honour sacrifice but to ensure that its lessons are neither forgotten nor taken for granted," added the princess, who is the president of The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC).

The 141-day Battle of the Somme was the bloodiest of the First World War, starting on July 1, 1916, as Allied forces – mainly British – aimed to relieve pressure on the French by attacking the Germans around the Somme river.

The battle is the deadliest in Britain's history, with 20,000 dead or missing in just the first hours, and 40,000 wounded.

When it was over in November that year, the Allies had advanced only a few kilometres.

Britain's Princess Anne (centre), the French Prefect of the Somme, Rollon Mouchel-Blaisot (left) and Britain's Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester leave after laying a wreath at the Thiepval Memorial during the commemoration of the 110th anniversary of the First World War Battle of the Somme, in Thiepval, northern France yesterday. *– AFP*

John Ruddick, 77, and his sister Winifred, 79, from Carlisle in northern England, attended Tuesday's ceremony in memory of their uncle Edward Ruddick, who was killed on the first day of the battle at the age of 21.

"His body sadly was never found," they said, speaking together.

The siblings have travelled to Thiepval every year for the past decade to honour their uncle, whose name is on the memorial.

"We still have family members... coming to see these places, not just here in France, but around the world, where their family forebears died for their country," CWGC vice president Peter Hudson told AFP.

The Battle of the Somme was a tragedy not only for British, French and German troops, but also for soldiers from across what was then the British Empire, including from South Africa, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, and India.

Built in 1932, the imposing brick arch at Thiepval commemorates 72,337 missing British and South African servicemen who died between 1915 and 1918 in the Somme region and who have no known grave.

Renovated between 2014 and 2022, the site welcomes several hundred thousand visitors every year, including many school groups from across the Channel. *– AFP*

Planned 1.7 million satellites 'devastating' for astronomy: study

Bénédicte Salvetat Rey

PARIS – The 1.7 million satellites that companies are aiming to launch into Earth's orbit in the coming years will have "devastating consequences for astronomy", new research warned yesterday.

The plans to swarm Earth with huge, extremely bright satellites represent an "existential threat" to telescopes viewing the universe, according to the European Southern Observatory (ESO) which conducted the research.

To retain humanity's ability to properly explore the night sky, the team of researchers called for a maximum limit of 100,000 satellites orbiting Earth.

The study is the first to calculate how much the constellations of big and particularly bright satellites being planned would impact astronomical observations by making the night sky brighter.

The number of satellites orbiting Earth has now reached 14,000 after surging in recent years, many of them part of Elon Musk's Starlink internet constellation.

But that is just the start.

Musk's SpaceX company has announced plans to launch more than one million satellites by 2028 to serve as data centres powering the AI boom.

Other projects such as the "Cinnamon" plans of start-up E-Space and Chinese constellations CTC-1 and CTC-2 would add hundreds of thousands more satellites spinning around our planet.

And US startup Reflect Orbital hopes to launch 50,000 huge satellites that use giant mirrors to point sunlight back down to Earth, with the aim of providing light during the night.

In total, more than 1.7 million satellites could soon be lighting up the night sky, obscuring or blotting out the view of ground-based telescopes.

Night sky four times brighter

"When a satellite crosses what we observe, it makes a bright streak on our image, zapping whatever is behind it," said ESO astronomer Olivier Hainaut, who led the study published in *Astronomy & Astrophysics*.

"For the past few years, this has been happening – but it is still manageable," Hainaut told AFP.

"But if we go from 14,000 to 1.7 million, we are really going to have problems."

The Reflect Orbital satellites pose a particularly significant threat to dark skies.

Even when their mirrors are not pointed at the observer, the light they scatter will make each one as bright as Venus – which is known as the "morning star", Hainaut said.

The researchers determined that almost all images captured by the largest camera ever built – part of the new Vera C. Rubin Observatory in Chile – would be rendered unusable.

Whether you were in France, the Sahara Desert or Chile, the sky "would no longer be clear, resembling instead the sky seen in the suburbs of a city," he warned.

And in light-polluted cities, the satellites "would be the only 'stars' visible in the night sky," according to the ESO.

All 50,000 Reflect Orbital satellites would also make the whole night sky up to four times brighter, it added.

A Reflect Orbital spokesperson told AFP it was commissioning independent research on the impact of its technology and was "committed to ongoing dialogue with astronomers".

The satellites' default position will be "off" and "we will systematically avoid redirecting light near observatories," the spokesperson added.

'Ball in FCC's court'

Hainaut called for the number of orbiting satellites to be limited to 100,000 – and that they be made dim enough to be invisible to the naked eye.

Reflect Orbital and SpaceX are awaiting a decision from the US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) about whether they can launch their constellations.

The new study served as the basis for the ESO's response to their applications, in collaboration with the UK's Royal Astronomical Society and the International Astronomical Union.

"The ball is now in the FCC's court," the ESO's institutional affairs officer Betty Kioko said in a statement.

"For optical astronomy, this is an existential threat, and we hope that the regulators will share that view."

The light pollution created by constellations of very bright satellites is not just a problem for astronomers.

The loss of dark sky has been found to disrupt the biological clocks of humans and animals – and interfere with ecosystems.

There is also the energy and environmental impact of launching nearly two million satellites into space.

And there are concerns that huge amounts of space debris from satellites could increasingly crash into each other in a dangerous chain reaction known as "Kessler syndrome".

– AFP

Police hunt for Monaco bomber after Ukraine-born tycoon wounded

Fanny Carrier

MONACO – Police yesterday were searching for the suspect behind a parcel bomb that seriously wounded a sanctioned multi-millionaire of Ukrainian origin and two others in Monaco, after the unprecedented attack rocked the super-safe principality.

Officers in Monaco and neighbouring France were hunting for a man in a black fisherman's hat who appeared in surveillance footage after leaving a package in a residential building near the border, authorities said.

The device exploded at around 9:00 p.m. (local time) on Monday, leaving a man and a woman seriously wounded and a 13-year-old with lighter injuries, according to the Monegasque authorities.

Monaco public prosecutor Stephane Thibault said as of Tuesday the man had been stabilised, but the woman's condition remained "life-threatening".

He said the blast was being investigated as "attempted murder" but was not being considered as a "terrorist" act.

He declined to say who was the presumed target of the blast, but several sources have said it was Ukrainian-born businessman Vadym Yermolaiev, who is a permanent resident of Monaco and has acquired Cypriot nationality.

Yermolaiev is a sanctioned multi-millionaire with a reportedly long list of enemies in his homeland.

Kyiv alleges the 58-year-old maintained an alcohol business in Russian-ruled Crimea – paying taxes to Moscow even after Russia launched its military operation in Ukraine in 2022.

'Heinous crime'

Monaco's Minister of State Christophe Mirmand said he was not aware of any specific threats against Yermolaiev.

Members of a bomb disposal team work yesterday, the day after an attack involving an explosive device in the lobby of a residential building in Monaco on Tuesday. – AFP

"The family's behaviour before entering their block of flats did not appear to show any signs of concern on their part," he told broadcaster BFMTV.

"They were dressed for summer, relaxed and did not appear to be taking any particular precautions," he added.

He earlier said the teenager was "very likely related" to the couple.

The wounded had been taken to hospital in the southern French city of Nice. A source close to the case had said the man had suffered severe burns and the woman was in critical condition.

John Bulanadi, a 19-year-old student living near the site of the incident, told AFPTV he had heard a loud explosion.

"I quickly went out onto my terrace to see what was happening. There was screaming, crying and two people on the ground," he said.

Monaco's Prince Albert II described the incident as a "heinous crime" and "a shock to the entire Monegasque community".

He and his wife Princess Charlene visited police and civil defence in the afternoon, the palace said.

Bolts, buckshot

Thibault said a suspect had left a bag or package in the building's lobby before leaving.

The Monaco government said the "strong explosion" was caused by a "parcel bomb".

"A suspect was seen on video surveillance fleeing towards the municipality of Beausoleil in France," it wrote on X.

Mirmand earlier said witnesses had provided information to identify the suspect.

The explosive device apparently contained bolts and buckshot, he added.

Emergency services treated four other people for shock and cuts from windows shattered in the blast, he said.

"This is the first time in history, to my knowledge, that such an act has taken place in the principality," he added.

Mirmand told a news conference on Monday that intelligences services were working to understand the victims' background and "determine if others might be facing specific threats".

– AFP

German prosecutors charge Nord Stream suspect

BERLIN – German prosecutors said yesterday they had brought charges against a suspect in the 2022 sabotage of the Nord Stream gas pipeline linking Russia with Europe.

Federal prosecutors confirmed to AFP that a man had been charged over the explosion, with German media reporting that he was a Ukrainian national said to be the head of the team that carried out the operation.

They said he was the same suspect who was arrested in summer 2025 in Italy and extradited to Germany the following November, who was named at the time as Serhii Kuznietsov.

The law firm representing him confirmed to AFP that their client was being charged with "attacks on civilian energy infrastructure, causing an explosives detonation, and demolition of built structures".

Kuznietsov is thought by investigators to have been in command on the yacht used to carry out the operation, according to media reports.

He is now reportedly in detention in Hamburg, where he will face trial.

The evidence gathered against him is described as "overwhelming", as he allegedly incriminated himself during phone calls he made to relatives and acquaintances when he was in custody in Italy.

At the time of his arrest, German prosecutors said Kuznietsov had used forged identity documents to charter a yacht, which departed from the German city of Rostock to carry out the attacks.

The ARD broadcaster said that investigators had found traces of military explosives on the yacht and that a total of seven suspects had been identified in the case, one of whom had since died fighting Russia.

Last year a Polish court refused a German extradition request for another Ukrainian suspect in the Nord Stream case.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has said his government knew nothing about any plan to blow up the pipelines. *– AFP*

Portugal braces for new heatwave

LISBON – Parts of Portugal including the Lisbon region will be placed on red alert after being relatively spared from Europe's worst heatwave which set records in several countries.

The country's IPMA weather agency said the Lisbon and Setubal regions on the coast will be on red alert for high temperatures starting today.

That will be extended tomorrow to the Leiria and Coimbra areas further north, where temperatures could hit 44C in places.

An orange alert was imposed yesterday for four inland regions, including Évora, where 41C could be reached, the Portuguese Institute for the Sea and Atmosphere (IPMA) said.

"Usually, we get temperatures like this in August; this year they're happening earlier," said José Bonifacio, a 31-year-old busker in a square in downtown Évora.

The cobbled alleyways of this historic city emptied in the afternoon heat, while tourists took refuge in cafés or on shaded terraces, sometimes cooled by fans.

"The afternoon is very tough, but those who work have to hold out," said Carlos Guedes, a 53-year-old construction worker from the north of the country who said he is "not used to such intense heat".

The second-highest warning will be extended to all regions not on red alert, IRMA said.

A woman uses an umbrella to shade herself during Europe's current heatwave in Évora where temperatures reached nearly 40 degrees Celsius yesterday. – AFP

"During this period of very hot weather, the most notable element is its duration, which should be for at least a week," it said in a statement on Tuesday.

Coastal regions will be hotter due to a lack of sea breeze, while nighttime temperatures may not fall below 24-28C for several nights, it added.

The Portuguese government has called on the population to follow the recommendations of the health authorities and asked municipalities to identify premises that can shelter vulnerable people identified by health services.

These could be public buildings or churches as well as private premises such as shopping centres and hotels, Secretary of State for Health Ana Povo told a press conference yesterday.

The recent heatwave was the most severe recorded in Europe, and would have been "virtually impossible" in June without climate change, the World Weather Attribution group of scientists said.

All-time temperature records have been broken in Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, as well as for the month of June in the UK and in Switzerland.

France faced record-breaking average temperatures, with the country experiencing its highest-ever nighttime temperatures.

– AFP

Angola opens graft case into would-be ruling party leader

LUANDA – Angola has launched an investigation into alleged embezzlement and money laundering by a former general seeking to succeed President João Lourenço as leader of the ruling People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) party, the attorney general's office said last week.

The leader of the party that has held power since independence from Portugal in 1975 is traditionally its presidential candidate at elections. The next vote is due in August 2027.

Lourenço, 71, is nearing the end of his constitutionally limited second term but has announced he would seek to stay on as party leader at its December congress.

This had led to speculation that he may seek a third term, which would require a constitutional amendment.

Retired General Higino Carneiro, who has held several senior government positions in the oil-rich country, is one of the few public figures to have also announced a bid for the MPLA leadership.

The Chief Public Prosecutor's Office announced last week he was under investigation for alleged embezzlement and money laundering while governor of the southeastern Cuando-Cubango province between 2012 and 2016.

The former general, 70, said in a statement last week that he was ready to cooperate with the investigation and defend "his integrity".

Carneiro has previously served as public works minister, deputy speaker of the National Assembly and governor of Luanda province, the capital.

The MPLA won the last general elections in 2022 with just over 51 percent, its lowest score.

The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) party – a former rebel movement which fought a bitter 27-year civil war against the MPLA government – notched up nearly 44 percent, up from 27 percent in 2017. *– AFP*

IMF board approves US$242 million tranche for Honduras

WASHINGTON, DC – The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) board on Monday approved two reviews under Honduras's programme with the multilateral lender, making US$242 million immediately available to the Central American country.

Honduras agreed to a three-year US$847 million programme with the IMF in September 2023.

In a statement, the IMF said the programme's performance had been "favourable," with one criteria – related to domestic arrears to the public electricity utility – not being met.

"The Honduran economy has been resilient, despite elevated external uncertainty," said Kenji Okamura, deputy managing director at the IMF.

"The continued implementation of prudent fiscal policies, an appropriate monetary and exchange policy mix, and the recent acceleration of structural reform implementation demonstrate the authorities' strong commitment to the Fund-supported program."

Honduras has transactions with the IMF dating back to 1984, with US$67 million in previous debts coming due this year.

Honduras is one of several Latin American nations to swing towards the political right in recent years, a list that includes Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia and Peru. *– AFP*

Spain records more than 1,000 heat-related June deaths

MADRID – More than 1,000 deaths in Spain were attributed to the recent heatwave that roasted Europe, as the country posted the hottest first six months ever recorded, officials said yesterday.

At least 1,028 people died of heat-related issues during the heatwave, the public Carlos III Health Institute said.

The figure was more than double the 407 deaths that were attributed to heat in June 2025, Spain's hottest June since records started being kept, according to the national weather agency AEMET.

The first six months of 2026 were the hottest in Spain since the start of records, with temperatures 1.6C above normal levels on average, the agency said in a post on X yesterday.

"The seven warmest first semesters... have occurred over the past 10 years", the agency said in the post on X.

June 2026 came in as the second-hottest June, "with temperatures on average 3.2C above the norm," the agency said.

The heatwave that has scorched Europe since late June was the most severe ever recorded in Europe, and would have been "virtually impossible" in June without climate change, the World Weather Attribution group of scientists said.

All-time temperature records were been broken in Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, as well as for the month of June in the UK and in Switzerland.

France faced record-breaking average temperatures, with the country experiencing its highest-ever nighttime temperatures. *– AFP*

Cuban FM says 'no progress' in negotiations with US

HAVANA – Cuba's government said on Tuesday that months of negotiations with the United States, which is applying maximum pressure to the island to try to bring about a change in governance, had shown "no progress."

"The discussions between the Cuban and US governments are showing no progress," Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla told a press conference, adding that "despite all that" Havana "will remain open to dialogue."

Washington has cranked up pressure on the communist island in recent months, imposing an energy blockade and several rounds of sanctions that have deepened an already dire economic crisis.

US President Donald Trump has made clear he would like to see a change of leadership, pointing to Washington's overthrow of Venezuela's socialist president Nicolás Maduro and installation of a Washington-friendly successor as a possible blueprint for what he would like to achieve in Cuba.

Cuba's government earlier this month pushed through a batch of major free-market reforms but has repeatedly said its political model is not up for discussion and vowed to resist any invasion militarily.

Rodríguez said he had "no illusions" about Washington's aims and had requested a United Nations General Assembly debate on July 7 to discuss Washington's sanctions.

"It's urgent because the multi-faceted aggression of the US government against Cuba is already ongoing and intensifying," he warned.

As part of its pressure tactics, the United States recently indicted former president Raúl Castro, brother of revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, over the downing of two civilian planes three decades ago.

But the standoff is hurting ordinary Cubans most, with the fuel shortages exacerbating recurring power cuts of up to 40 hours at a stretch and bringing transport across the island to a near standstill.

Food, drinking water and medicine are also in short supply. *– AFP*

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla speaks during a press conference in Havana on Tuesday. – AFP

Kane rescues England from DR Congo calamity to reach World Cup last 16

Kieran Canning

ATLANTA – Harry Kane rescued England from a seismic World Cup shock with two late goals to beat the Democratic Republic of Congo 2-1 in Atlanta and secure a place in the last 16.

Aiming to end a 60-year wait to win a major tournament, Thomas Tuchel's men escaped humiliation and one of England's worst ever World Cup exits thanks to their talismanic captain after Brian Cipenga's early goal gave Congo an early lead.

But the Three Lions will need to improve for the daunting task of facing co-hosts Mexico at the Estadio Azteca in the last 16 on Sunday.

Already England's all-time top goalscorer in the competition, Kane now has 13 World Cup goals and moves onto five for the tournament to remain in the star-studded battle for the Golden Boot.

"What a crazy game, obviously," said Kane. "I think you have to stay patient in these games.

"Their keeper definitely made some unbelievable saves in that first half. And it was just about pounding the rock, keep pounding the rock, and our moments will come."

Defeat ended Congo's fairytale run on their return to the World Cup for the first time in 52 years.

The Leopards had never even won a point or scored a goal at the World Cup until a few weeks ago, but had one of the tournament favourites teetering on the brink of elimination.

Tuchel made two changes from victory over Panama as Declan Rice return in midfield, while Djed Spence came in at right-back with Reece James and Jarell Quansah both ruled out through injury.

The German coach's decision not to select more specialist right-back cover in a 26-man squad will face more scrutiny after Congo took the lead down that flank.

England's forward Harry Kane (right) shoots and scores his team's second goal during the 2026 World Cup Round of 32 match against the Democratic Republic of Congo at the Atlanta Stadium in Atlanta yesterday. – AFP

Spence was caught under Chancel Mbemba's cross as the ball fell for Cipenga. The Almeria winger's shot was low and hard but Jordan Pickford should still have kept it out at his near post.

The vast majority of the nearly 70,000 crowd decked out in England red and white were silenced, while Tuchel's players were visibly rattled.

Jude Bellingham was shown a yellow card for a lunge and was then involved in a heated exchange with his coach during the mid-half hydration break.

The stoppage in play at least allowed Tuchel the chance to restore order.

Bellingham's powerful header from Declan Rice's cross finally forced DR Congo 'keeper Lionel Mpasi into action.

Nervy first half

Moments later Marcus Rashford's powerful effort was blocked on the line by London-born Aaron Wan Bissaka after Noni Madueke's jinking run opened up the Congo defence.

Yet it could have been even worse for England at the break.

Yoane Wissa's three goals in the group stage fired his country to the knockout stages of the World Cup for the first time and the Newcastle striker had a golden chance to double the DR Congo lead but hit the outside of the post from point-blank range.

At the other end, Kane was furious when he went down as he tried to round Mpasi but the referee refused to point to the spot.

Le Harve stopper Mpasi's inspired afternoon continued as he flew to his right to parry another bullet header from Bellingham and then denied Kane from a corner with the last action of the first half.

After a bright start to the second period, England were beginning to run out of ideas until Tuchel unloaded his offensive weapons off the bench.

Bukayo Saka, Anthony Gordon and Eberechi Eze were sent on by Tuchel in search of an equaliser.

And it was new Barcelona signing Gordon who provided the cross as Kane finally found a way past Mpasi with a downward header 15 minutes from time.

Gordon also got the assist for the 86th minute winner, but Kane did the hard work as he rifled a powerful drive into the roof of the net for his 84th international goal. – *AFP*

Ronaldo and Modric struggle to defy Father Time at World Cup

Kieran Canning

ATLANTA - Cristiano Ronaldo and Luka Modric will make history when two outfield players aged over 40 face off for the first time in a World Cup as Portugal take on Croatia in tomorrow's last-32 clash.

But both men are facing questions over whether their status as national heroes is now more of a burden than a boost to their countries' hopes of progressing far in the competition.

Prior to this tournament, only Cameroon's Roger Milla had played in a World Cup as an outfield player after turning 40.

Ronaldo and Modric, who won four Champions Leagues in six seasons together at Real Madrid, have long defied Father Time but have shown their age in what will almost certainly be their final flourish on the global stage.

At 41, Ronaldo defiantly screamed "I'm back" after netting twice against Uzbekistan as he became the first player to ever score at six World Cups.

Yet either side of a 5-0 romp over a team ranked 60th in the world, Portugal failed to beat the Democratic Republic of Congo and Colombia and fell into a tougher section of the draw as a result.

"It's already 23 years I've been a professional and whenever things don't go well it's 'Cristiano, he's finished, he's old'," Ronaldo said earlier in the tournament.

The forward played every minute of the group stages and outgoing Portugal boss Roberto Martinez shows no sign of taking the bold call to sit the five-time Ballon d'Or winner on the bench.

"There is not an issue physically or mentally for Cristiano in today's game to play the 90 minutes," Martinez said after Ronaldo managed just two touches in the Colombia box.

Protecting Ronaldo's ego

After a slow start to the World Cup four years ago, Ronaldo was eventually dropped by Fernando Santos in favour of Goncalo Ramos.

The AC Milan striker immediately scored a hat-trick in a 6-1 demolition of Switzerland, but a 1-0 defeat to Morocco in the quarter-finals meant Ronaldo's time out of the side was short-lived and Santos was removed as coach.

The impression that Martinez is wasting a richly talented generation just to protect Ronaldo's ego grows with every pedestrian performance.

Portugal's depth of midfield talent meant Paris Saint-Germain's Joao Neves and Bernardo Silva, now of Real Madrid, started on the bench against Colombia.

Yet even with one of the World Cup's strongest midfields behind him, Ronaldo's strikes against Uzbekistan are his only non-penalty goals in his past 14 games at major tournaments.

Modric, 40, similarly showed his age in Croatia's tournament opener, which ended in a 4-2 defeat to England in Dallas.

Caught on his heels, Modric conceded a penalty when chopping down Noni Madueke for England's opening goal and was sacrificed by Zlatko Dalic before the hour mark.

Croatia bounced back to celebrate Modric's 200th cap, edging past Panama 1-0.

In doing so, Modric became the fourth man to reach a double century of international appearances, joining Ronaldo.

The AC Milan midfielder then provided the assist for Nikola Vlasic's winner as Croatia beat Ghana 2-1.

Finalists in 2018, Croatia also reached the semi-finals four years ago.

Modric was the driving force behind those incredible runs for a country of less than four million people.

A likely last-16 meeting with Spain and one final shot at glory awaits the winners in Toronto.

But for one of football's all-time greats, the World Cup curtain will come down in Canada. – *AFP*

Match Times shown in Macau time.

Thursday

USA 08:00 Bosnia and Herzegovina

Round of 32 · San Francisco Bay Area Stadium (San Francisco Bay Area)

Thursday

Spain 03:00 Austria

Round of 32 · Los Angeles Stadium (Los Angeles)

Portugal 07:00 Croatia

Round of 32 · Toronto Stadium (Toronto)

Switzerland 11:00 Algeria

Round of 32 · BC Place Vancouver (Vancouver)

World number ones Sinner, Sabalenka into Wimbledon 3rd round

Steven Griffiths

LONDON – Defending champion Jannik Sinner produced another gritty victory to reach the Wimbledon third round, while women's world number one Aryna Sabalenka battled through as Novak Djokovic prepared for action on Centre Court.

Sinner wasn't at his best again but the world number one did just enough to beat Portugal's Nuno Borges 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 in yesterday's second-round clash at the All England Club.

The 24-year-old Italian had narrowly avoided an embarrassing first-round exit when he fought back from two sets to one down to beat Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic on Monday.

Sinner was left bloodied against Kecmanovic by an awkward fall that injured his right foot.

The four-time Grand Slam champion did not appear impeded by that blow on his return to action in the second round, but he struggled to impose himself against the spirited world number 48.

"The second set was very tough. First couple of sets we were serving very well. These matches, where you don't have a lot of control, I'm happy to win," Sinner said.

"I didn't do a lot of practice because the first match was very long.

"There's a couple of things I need to improve. I felt some moments where I still need to get back to this rhythm."

Sinner ended Carlos Alcaraz's two-year reign as Wimbledon champion with a brilliant final victory over the Spaniard last year.

He is still some way from those lofty heights heading into his third-round tie against American world number 81 Jenson Brooksby.

Sabalenka survived a tough second set to dispatch American McCartney Kessler on Court One.

Thailand's Mananchaya Sawangkaew returns to US player Alycia Parks during their singles match at the 2026 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, yesterday. Sawangkaew won the match 7-5, 6-0. – AFP

The four-time Grand Slam champion, who has reached 14 successive major quarter-finals, won 6-1, 7-6 (11/9), securing a last-32 meeting with former French Open winner Jelena Ostapenko.

"That was a true battle and I'm super happy that I was able to stay in that second set to get into that tie-break," said Sabalenka. "She really tested me and I'm super happy to pass the test."

Sabalenka has never won Wimbledon, losing in the semi-finals on each of her past three visits.

'Just wanted to be here for longer'

Djokovic's latest attempt to make history by winning a record 25th Grand Slam singles title got off to a rocky start as he laboured against unheralded Wu Yibing in the first round on Monday.

The Serb faced Stefanos Tsitsipas in the last match on Centre Court yesterday.

Bidding to become the oldest man to win a major title in the Open era, Djokovic - who won the most recent of his seven Wimbledon crowns in 2022 - has increasingly looked his age over the last two Grand Slams.

The 39-year-old crashed out in the French Open third round, blowing a two-set lead against Joao Fonseca.

But Djokovic can take heart from winning his last 11 matches against world number 87 Tsitsipas.

Serena Williams' Wimbledon comeback is in jeopardy after the American legend suffered a knee injury in her singles defeat to Maya Joint on Tuesday.

Williams, a 23-time Grand Slam singles champion, is due to play in the doubles with sister Venus later this week on her comeback after four years in retirement.

The 44-year-old's agent said Serena "is doing everything she can to be ready for her doubles match".

Elsewhere yesterday, Japan's Naomi Osaka had a special motivation for her 6-3, 6-2 win over Russian Anastasia Gasanova.

"Tomorrow [today] is my daughter's birthday and I just wanted to be here for longer," said the 14th seed said, who arrived on court in another striking outfit.

"I didn't want to make her get on a plane on her birthday so I was really happy with today."

The four-time Grand Slam champion will meet Australia's Daria Kasatkina as she bids to reach the Wimbledon last 16 for the first time.

Italian ninth seed Flavio Cobolli beat Argentina's Mariano Navone in four sets as he looks to emulate his run to last month's French Open final.

Later yesterday, French Open champion Mirra Andreeva faced former Wimbledon winner Barbora Krejcikova and lost 4-6, 7-5, 6-4. *– AFP*

Thomas targets yellow in Tour team time-trial

Barnaby Chesterman

BARCELONA – Former Tour de France winner Geraint Thomas said yesterday that his Netcompany Ineos team would be targeting the first yellow jersey of the Grand Boucle in Saturday's opening team time-trial.

Now the British team's sporting director, Thomas is no stranger to time-trial success at the Tour.

In 2017, he won the opening individual time-trial ahead of his team leader Chris Froome and wore the yellow jersey for four days.

The following year, he went on to win the Tour.

Netcompany Ineos have included several strong time-trialists in their eight-man team for the Tour, which begins in Barcelona.

Italian Filippo Ganna is a twice former time-trial world champion having succeeded Norwegian Tobias Foss, while Briton Josh Tarling is a former European champion in the discipline.

Asked at a press conference if he was aiming to win the opening 19.6km team time-trial, Thomas said: "I'd be lying if I said it wasn't."

With their overall contender Oscar Onley, who was fourth last year, forced to miss the Tour through injury, the team will be hunting stage victories more than anything else.

And none more so than the opening one.

He said that the team had been practising throughout the year with the Tour TTT in mind.

"It's like anything, you're not going to win the mountain jersey without going up a hill," he said.

"But it's just a great opportunity for us, why not just give it a good shot? The boys are motivated for it.

"We've got some world-class time trialists... we've got two of the best individually and in the team discipline.

"It's just an exciting goal. Let's get out there, start with a bang and give it the best we can."

New format

At the Tour Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes a month ago, the team finished just nine seconds behind Visma-Lease a Bike in a 28.4km team time-trial in which they lost significant time when Onley's chain dropped and the others had to slow down and wait for him to fix it before continuing their charge.

They will come into this weekend's race as one of the big favourites to take the first yellow jersey.

The new team time-trial format, which ends with a punchy climb, requires classic time-trialists to deliver a more explosive climber to finish off their effort.

In many teams case that will be their overall contender.

Each team's time is taken when their first rider crosses the line.

"Obviously there's been a lot of thought and a lot of discussion about the best strategy," said Thomas.

"You need a finisher that's able to go up that last climb quickly after the last 20 odd minutes.

"I don't think now is the time to discuss our strategy, but it's something we've put a lot of effort into."

The final climb is less than a kilometre long and not massively steep, but tough enough that larger, heavier specialist sprinters or time-trialists would be unable to keep pace with a lighter punchy climber. *– AFP*

Duffy returns for NZ against West Indies

Cricket

WELLINGTON – Seamer Jacob Duffy was named yesterday to play the upcoming five-match ODI series against the West Indies after sitting out New Zealand's 2-1 Test series win against England for the birth of his first child.

Duffy is New Zealand's reigning player of the year and holder of the Sir Richard Hadlee Medal.

He will line up for the Black Caps for the first time since the T20 World Cup final in March.

Joining Duffy in the pace attack is uncapped 26-year-old speedster Matt Fisher, who has played one Test and one T20I for New Zealand.

"It's great to have Jacob and Matt joining the group and I know they'll bring a lot of energy and excitement," New Zealand coach Rob Walter said.

"Jacob has been a stand-out for us in all formats for the past couple of years. His skills and experience will be a great addition to our squad and I know he's looking forward to representing New Zealand again."

New Zealand's under-strength pace attack was rampant during the just completed three-match Test series against England, leading the team to a series victory.

Nathan Smith took 16 wickets at an average of 23 in the three matches and will return for the West Indies series, as will Ben Sears who was only called in for the third England Test.

Kyle Jamieson, Matt Henry, and Will O'Rourke will all sit out the series to rest.

Blair Tickner is also missing, set to have ankle surgery.

Devon Conway is also being rested to spend time with his family after the birth of his second child, and Rachin Ravindra has been allowed to play in Major League Cricket. *– AFP*

2nd seed Wang stunned in women's 2nd round at WTT US Smash

Table tennis

LOS ANGELES – Women's singles second seed Wang Manyu has suffered one of the biggest upsets so far at the World Table Tennis United States Smash on Tuesday, losing in straight games to Japan's Hitomi Sato in the second round.

The second-ranked Chinese fell 12-10, 11-4, 15-13 to the wildcard player in 36 minutes.

Kuai Man, the other Chinese female paddler contesting the singles draw on Tuesday, beat Canada's Zhang Mo 11-6, 2-11, 11-7, 11-4.

Wang and Kuai won their women's doubles round-of-16 duel in straight games, 14-12, 11-6, 11-9 against Liu Yangzi of Australia and Germany's Nina Mittelham. Their teammates Wang Yidi and Chen Yi were also through after a 3-1 win over Romania's Elizabeta Samara and Bernadette Szocs.

On the men's side, world No. 1 Wang Chuqin reached the last 16 with an 11-3, 11-5, 11-9 victory over India's Manav Thakkar.

"He made big improvement recently in terms of his ability and performances, so I was well prepared for this match," Wang said after the match. "After going through a period without playing matches, I need to make adjustments as the tournament progresses with tougher matches ahead."

Wang was joined by fifth seed Lin Shidong, who swept Japan's Yuta Tanaka 11-9, 11-8, 11-5.

"Playing Tanaka again in this tournament, I did well at the start and held off his challenges. Winning the first game is quite crucial," Lin said.

In the men's doubles round of 16, Chinese duo Wen Ruibo and Yuan Licen stunned French brothers Alexis and Felix Lebrun 11-8, 11-4, 11-9.

Wen and Yuan, who made their WTT debut as a pair a few weeks ago at the WTT Contender Zagreb, blew the men's doubles race wide open with a straight-set victory over the 2026 Singapore Smash champions.

"We controlled the tempo well, leaving few opportunities to them," Yuan explained.

"We just tried to challenge them, and we adjusted our mentality quite well," Wen said.

Top-ranked pair Lin Shidong and Huang Youzheng also made the last eight after sweeping Romania's Eduard Ionescu and Darius Movileanu 11-4, 11-2, 11-4. *– Xinhua*

Sony to stop releasing PlayStation games on discs

PARIS – Sony said yesterday that it would stop releasing new video games for the PlayStation on disc in January 2028 following a shift in consumer preferences.

"Following this date, new games will be available on PlayStation Store and at retailers in digital formats only," the company said on its official PlayStation blog.

In practice that means gamers will have to download directly from Sony's PlayStation store or will obtain a download code when purchasing a title from a retailer.

The announcement comes as the upcoming exclusively digital release of "Grand Theft Auto VI", which is predicted to become the biggest-selling cultural product of all time, has caused some consternation among gamers.

There was grumbling on social media that the lack of a physical disc would eliminate any second-hand market for the title.

Sony said the upcoming shift "has no impact on games that already released, or will be releasing, prior to January 2028 in disc format."

"This is a natural direction for Sony Interactive Entertainment to adapt to consumer trends as the general preference for digital media significantly outpaces physical discs," the company said.

"We remain committed to delivering a world-class gaming experience to our fans," it added.

"I'll admit, even I, the guy who won't shut up about digital taking more and more market share each year, am surprised to see this happen so soon," said Daniel Ahmad at Niko Partners, a video game market research firm.

Sony began its move towards digital downloads in 2020 with the release of the latest console, PlayStation 5, that had a version without a disk drive.

Ahmad said Sony's announcement "pretty much confirms PS6 will be digital only."

The release of the next generation console could come as soon as next year although high prices and shortages of key components could delay its launch, according to industry players. – *AFP*

Madison Square Garden: from Nazis to Knicks, and now… Taylor's wedding?

Gregory Walton

NEW YORK – New York's iconic Madison Square Garden, the apparent venue for pop sensation Taylor Swift's weekend wedding to NFL superstar Travis Kelce, is a storied arena that has hosted memorable basketball and hockey clashes, celebrity weddings and even a Nazi rally.

Here is what to know about the Manhattan fixture locals universally refer to as "MSG":

Dubbed "The World's Most Famous Arena," the 20,000-seat venue is the home of the New York Knicks, the most recent NBA champions, as well as the New York Rangers ice hockey team.

It is a frequent and lively concert venue, hosting all the big names from the Rolling Stones to Madonna to hometown hero Billy Joel, who staged a record-breaking 10-year residency of monthly shows that ended in 2024.

Swift herself has packed out the venue – often known simply as "The Garden" – on several occasions, notably in 2011 during her Speak Now World Tour.

It is also used by Democrats and Republicans alike for political conventions and events: Marilyn Monroe famously performed her legendary rendition of "Happy Birthday" for then president John F. Kennedy at a 1962 fundraiser.

A wedding here would not be a first: funk and soul star Sly Stone tied the knot at MSG in 1974, bringing thousands of fans and guests with him to exchange vows with actress Kathy Silva.

But the Garden is also forever associated with an infamous 1930s Nazi assembly held at its former location, not far from the present-day iteration.

Some 20,000 US-based Nazi sympathisers gathered under the banner of "Americanisation," denouncing Jewish "conspiracies" and then-president Franklin D. Roosevelt, sparking fierce counter-protests outside.

US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift (left) and US NFL football player Travis Kelce attend the men's final match between Italy's Jannik Sinner and USA's Taylor Fritz on day 14 of the US Open tennis tournament at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Centre in New York City, on September 8, 2024. – AFP

The 1939 rally was complete with eagles, Nazi insignia and Hitler salutes.

Located above a busy mainline railway station, MSG is slap bang in the beating heart of tourist and commercial Manhattan.

Security and crowd control measures at the Garden spark epic traffic snarls, like when US President Donald Trump, a native New Yorker, attended the third game of the NBA Finals between the Knicks and the San Antonio Spurs.

The neighbourhood was equally inconvenienced when Trump hosted a rally in 2024 ahead of the presidential election that propelled the Republican back into the White House. The gathering was marred by a warm-up comedian who told racist jokes and was widely condemned.

Absolute secrecy

Security is expected to be tight for the weekend nuptials between Swift and Kelce, a three-time Super Bowl champion, with a slew of A-list celebrities – all of whom will reportedly be required to sign non-disclosure agreements – expected to be in attendance.

Preparations for the event have been conducted in the utmost secrecy, with top reporters from the usually staid *The New York Times* forced to sleuth through local hotels for hints of the guest list.

National Guard troops have been spotted in the vicinity of the venue in recent days, a not uncommon sight under a state-level deployment to secure major venues and transit hubs in the Big Apple.

MSG's owners have courted controversy by aggressively using facial recognition technology to detect and exclude not only lawyers who have sued the company – but all of their colleagues too.

The firm's colourful owner James Dolan, who has clashed with New York's leftist Mayor Zohran Mamdani, has said through his company that "litigation creates an inherently adversarial environment."

– *AFP*

Canada to join Eurovision Song Contest

Robin Millard

GENEVA – Canada will take part in next year's Eurovision Song Contest, organisers announced yesterday, expanding participation in the world's biggest live televised music event to the Americas for the first time.

"The European Broadcasting Union and its newest member CBC/Radio-Canada, Canada's national public broadcaster, are excited to announce that Canada will participate in the 2027 Eurovision Song Contest in Bulgaria," the EBU said in a statement.

Canada is the first new country to join Eurovision since Australia in 2015.

"While born in Europe, the contest continues to welcome the world," Eurovision director Martin Green said in a statement.

Bulgaria won Eurovision 2026 in Vienna in May with Dara's catchy floor-filler "Bangaranga" sweeping the 70th edition of the glitzy TV extravaganza, meaning they will get to host next year's edition.

The 2026 contest was watched by 131 million viewers, down 35 million on the year before after five countries stayed away over Israel's participation.

Spain, the Netherlands, Ireland, Iceland and Slovenia staged the biggest political boycott in Eurovision history, citing the war in Gaza.

Only 35 countries took part this year – the fewest since entry was expanded in 2004.

Céline Dion star turn

The EBU is the world's biggest public-service media alliance, with more than 100 member organisations in more than 50 countries.

CBC had been an associate member since 1950, and became a full member last week following a vote at the EBU's 96th general assembly in Prague, paving the way for its Eurovision debut.

"Our participation... will allow Canadian talent to be showcased on one of the most storied music stages in the world," said CBC/Radio-Canada president Marie-Philippe Bouchard.

CBC will unveil how Canada's entry will be chosen later this year.

The EBU said Canada was among the top three countries participating in the "Rest of the World" televoting, while Canadians were among the largest ticket-buyers outside of Europe for the shows in May at the Wiener Stadthalle ("Vienna City Hall").

Canadian viewers will now have "the added thrill of seeing their own country represented on the Eurovision stage", said Bouchard.

Canada has form in Eurovision: appearing for Switzerland, Canadian then-starlet Céline Dion triumphed in 1988 singing "Ne partez pas sans moi" ("Don't leave without me"), launching her career internationally.

Other Canadians have graced the Eurovision stage: Annie Cotton represented Switzerland in 1993 with "Moi, Tout Simplement" ("Me, Quite Simply"), finishing third -- the last French-language song to finish in the top three until 2021.

Singers from Canada have also appeared for France, Greece, Malta, and Austria.

Seven countries took part in the first Eurovision Song Contest in Lugano in 1956. The idea began as a technical experiment: a live, simultaneous, transnational television broadcast.

In total, 52 countries have taken part since then, including Yugoslavia, Morocco, Monaco, and Turkey.

Before Australia, Azerbaijan and San Marino were the last new countries in Eurovision, making their debuts in 2008. – *AFP*

American-Chinese actor and wushu athlete Darren Deng addresses the "Film Independent Presents IndieLink 2026: Actors" event at the Film Independent Theatre on Tuesday in Los Angeles, California. – AFP

World Weather

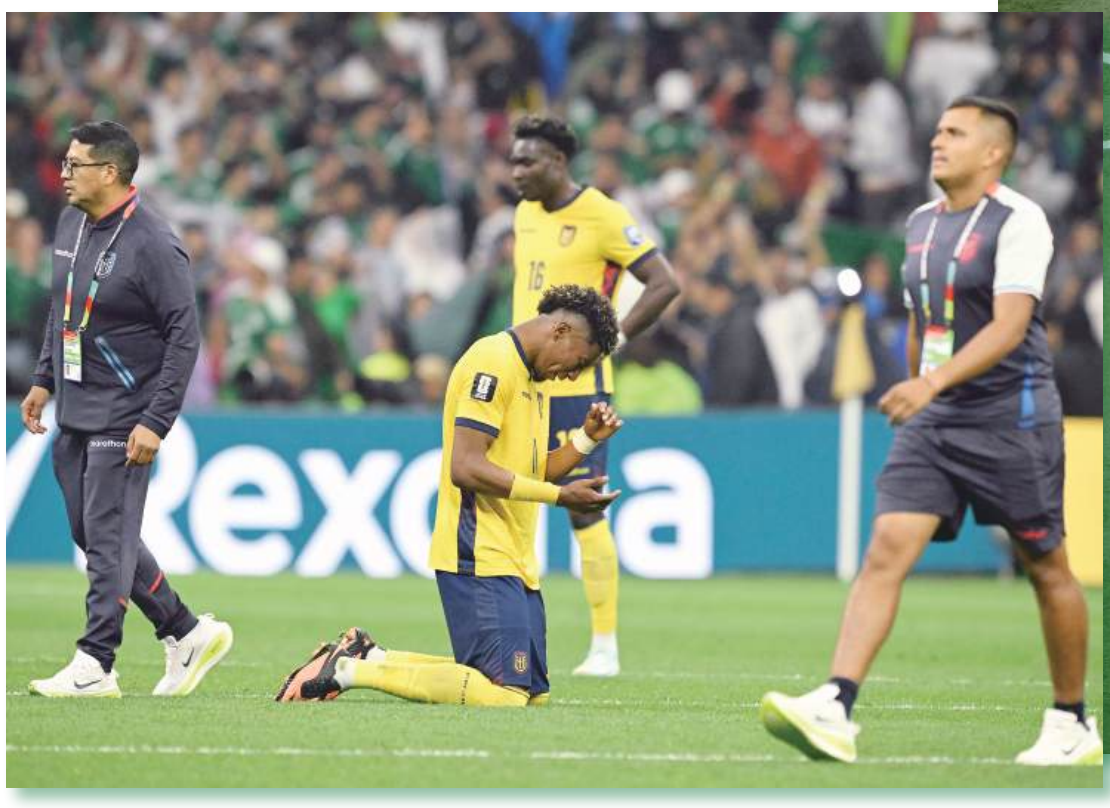
CHINA		ASIA-PACIFIC		WORLD		LUSOPHONE	
Beijing	23°C~35°C	Manila	24°C~31°C	New York	27°C~37°C	Lisbon	24°C~39°C
Shanghai	24°C~29°C	Bangkok	25°C~33°C	London	13°C~25°C	Rio de Janeiro	19°C~29°C
Hong Kong	25°C~31°C	Tokyo	20°C~24°C	Frankfurt	13°C~30°C	Luanda	18°C~21°C
Taipei	24°C~34°C	Singapore	26°C~31°C	Vancouver	13°C~17°C	Maputo	15°C~31°C
Guangzhou	25°C~33°C	Kuala Lumpur	25°C~33°C	Paris	13°C~25°C	Dili	22°C~31°C
Nanjing	23°C~32°C	Jakarta	23°C~33°C	Moscow	19°C~29°C	São Tomé	22°C~30°C
Guilin	22°C~32°C	Seoul	20°C~29°C	Las Vegas	22°C~37°C	Praia	22°C~30°C
Xi'an	20°C~31°C	Sydney	12°C~22°C	Monte Carlo	22°C~31°C	Bissau	23°C~30°C

Mexico's players celebrate after winning the 2026 World Cup Round of 32 match against Ecuador at the Mexico City Stadium in Mexico City on Tuesday. – AFP

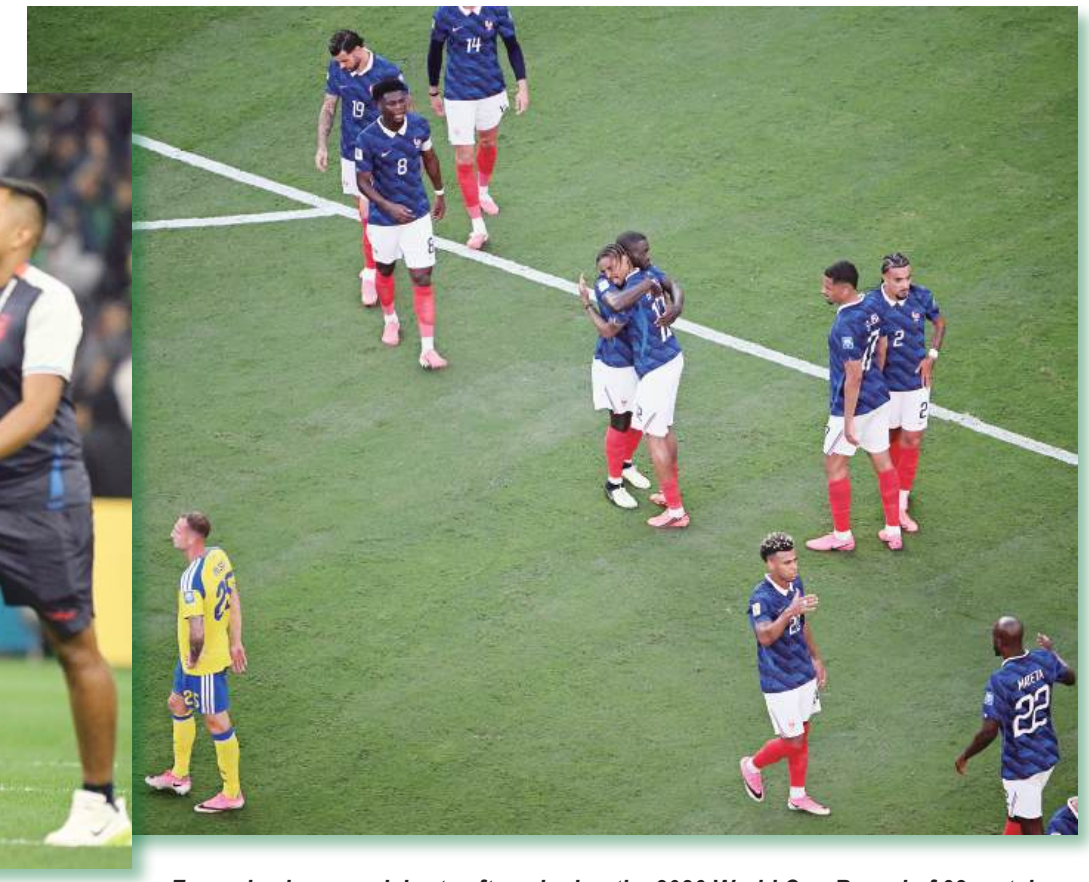
Sweden's defender Victor Lindelof reacts after losing the 2026 World Cup Round of 32 match against France at the New York/New Jersey Stadium in East Rutherford on Tuesday. – AFP

Norway's supporters cheer ahead of the 2026 World Cup Round of 32 match against Ivory Coast at the Dallas Stadium in Arlington on Tuesday. – AFP

Players of both sides react after the Round of 32 match between Cote d'Ivoire (wearing orange) and Norway at the 2026 FIFA World Cup at Dallas Stadium in Dallas, the United States, on Tuesday. – Xinhua



Ecuador's forward Kevin Rodriguez (centre) reacts after losing the 2026 World Cup Round of 32 match against Mexico at the Mexico City Stadium in Mexico City on Tuesday. – AFP



France's players celebrate after winning the 2026 World Cup Round of 32 match against Sweden at the New York/New Jersey Stadium in East Rutherford on Tuesday. – AFP