

Govt starts consultation on streamlining association registration

40 pct of 12,400 associations are moribund

Tony Wong

The government yesterday launched a 45-day public consultation on drafting a new law to govern the setting-up and operation of the city's associations, aiming to address operational irregularities and strengthen government oversight.

The government noted yesterday that there were fewer than 2,000 associations shortly before the establishment of the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) on December 20, 1999, whereas the number has grown to approximately 12,400 today.

However, only about 60 percent of these 12,400 community, sport, educational, business, welfare, mutual aid, professional, neighbourhood, cultural, artistic and other kinds of associations remain active. The remainder have either ceased operations or never began operating after their establishment, the government said yesterday.

Labour unions are regulated by specific legislation.

To resolve this, the government proposes designating the Identification Services Bureau (DSI) as the sole public entity formally tasked with supervising the city's associations. The proposed law would streamline administrative registration procedures and establish a formal legal mechanism to dissolve inactive entities.

Additionally, the government proposes having the power to abolish any association if its objectives or operations are found to endanger national security.



Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak (centre) speaks during yesterday's press conference at the Forum Macao Complex near Macau Tower as other officials, including Identification Services Bureau (DSI) Director Sonia Chan Hoi Fan (second from left), look on. Chan, a former secretary for administration and justice, has headed the bureau since December last year. — Photo: Tony Wong

The public consultation will run for 45 days until September 23. It was officially announced during a press conference yesterday at the Services Platform Complex for Commercial and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Forum Macao Complex) in Sai Van.

The public consultation document, available in Chinese and Portuguese, is available on a dedicated website (<https://www.dsi.gov.mo/assocp>).

Three public feedback sessions are scheduled for August 16, August 22, and September 3 on the first basement floor of the Public Administration Building on Rua do Campo.

The establishment and operation of associations are currently regulated by Law 2/99/M – enacted in 1999 shortly before Macau's return to the motherland – as well as provisions in the Macau Civil Code. The government proposes introducing a new, unified law to replace Law 2/99/M.

Speaking at yesterday's press conference, Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak acknowledged that existing legislation can no longer meet the demands of Macau's current socioeconomic development. He noted the need to safeguard the right of association, enhance internal governance, and optimise government oversight. Consequently, Wong emphasised, a modern law dedicated to associations is necessary.

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Colombia quake leaves 69 dead, with more trapped under rubble



Rescuers look for survivors at a collapsed building after an earthquake in Pereira, Colombia, yesterday. — AFP

BOGOTÁ – A magnitude 7.4 earthquake struck western Colombia yesterday, killing at least 69 people, toppling dozens of buildings and reverberating in nearby countries too.

Emergency teams rushed to help victims and search for survivors under the rubble after the quake hit the coastal Choco region at 7:34 a.m. (local time).

The tremor, with an epicenter 100 kilometers deep in the San José del Palmar municipality, killed at least 40 people in the Risaralda region.

"The situation is critical," Mayor Mauricio Salazar of the provincial capital Pereira told Caracol Radio.

Twenty-seven people were killed in the Valle del Cauca department, and two more died in the city of Manizales, in Colombia's coffee-growing region.

The quake caused a tower of Manizales' beloved cathedral to fall over, an AFP journalist observed.

"A great many buildings" in the city sustained damage, said administrator Jaime Zuluaga, 50. "Traffic is paralyzed and people don't want to go back to their homes for fear of an aftershock."

Twenty buildings crumbled in Colombia's third-largest city Cali, trapping people beneath the debris, Mayor Alejandro Eder said. — AFP

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PBOC reform plan targets high-level financial opening-up

The People's Bank of China (PBOC), China's central bank, has issued a reform and development plan for the 2026-2030 period, aiming to accelerate the building of a nation with a strong financial sector.

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Drought forces water restrictions across nearly 70 pct of France

Nearly 70 percent of France is subject to water-use restrictions as drought conditions worsen amid successive heatwaves, the government said yesterday.

— Story on p. 10

Meta releases new AI model as Zuckerberg lays out vision

Meta chief executive Mark Zuckerberg called yesterday for lower barriers for open-source AI, as his company introduced a new model that can run on a personal computer.

— Story on p. 11

Govt's 2 action plans for elderly, rehabilitation services cover 162 strategies

Armando Neves

The Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) held a press conference yesterday at the Macao Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape to outline details of its 10-Year Action Plan for Elderly Services and 10-Year Action Plan for Rehabilitation Services.

Both action plans were launched by the local government earlier this year.

IAS Director Wilson Hon Wai said in a speech that the elderly services plan comprises 96 action strategies centred around four key areas: Physical and Mental Well-being, Active Ageing, Diversified Provision, and Social Inclusion. Meanwhile, the rehabilitation services plan includes 66 action strategies focusing on Physical and Mental Rehabilitation, Developing Potential, Support and Safeguards, and an Inclusive Environment.

Together, the two plans contain 162 action strategies. By adopting a flexible framework of a "10-year strategy and two-year plan," specific implementation plans for the next two years will be formulated on a

rolling basis to adapt to evolving social needs. The framework also includes annual reviews and a mid-term evaluation in the fifth year to ensure timely policy adjustments, according to Hon.

Both plans feature a dedicated, two-pronged governance approach: the Cross-Departmental Coordination Group for Elderly Protection and the Cross-Departmental Coordination Group for Rehabilitation Services., both headed by Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam, with the IAS director serving as deputy head.

According to IAS Social Solidarity Department Acting Chief Kam Kit Leng, the first phase of the elderly services plan – covering this year and next – will execute 77 action strategies through 104 specific action plans. Key focus areas include integrated health (wellness), smart technology, the silver economy, and age-friendly inclusive environments.

For the rehabilitation plan's first phase, 56 action strategies will be implemented through 83 specific action plans. Priorities include



Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) President Wilson Hon Wai (centre) speaks to reporters on the sidelines of yesterday's press conference at the Macao Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape. – Photo: Armando Neves

smart technology, accessible infrastructure, and an inclusive social environment.

Regarding accessible infrastructure, Kam noted that an accessible public library will be established in Zone A, while a bus-stop announcement app for visually impaired passengers will be introduced on at

least five bus routes. Accessibility requirements will also be integrated into the approval process for new taxi licences.

Additionally, the government will pilot indoor navigation robots, incorporate real-time AI translation/interpretation at public conferences, and collaborate with Amap*

to integrate wheelchair-accessible route planning across Macau.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the event, Hon addressed updates to legislation on removing architectural barriers, noting that the Social Affairs Bureau has entered the stage of signing a preliminary assessment agreement. Given the constraints of the historic city centre and heritage protection rules, authorities must identify specific compliance challenges and balance them against requirements such as fire safety regulations, Hon stressed.

Hon also emphasised that both plans consist of routine policy measures executed across various government departments, meaning a consolidated overall budget will not be compiled separately for the two action plans. ■

*Amap (高德地图) is one of China's leading digital map, navigation, and location-based service platforms. Owned by Alibaba Group, it serves as a primary alternative to Google Maps across the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, and Macau. – Gemini

Local woman nabbed for stealing temple cash

Armando Neves

The Public Security Police (PSP) arrested a local woman on Thursday for stealing cash from a temple on May 18, PSP spokesman Lei Chan Hong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Lei identified the suspect as a woman in her seventies surnamed Cheong, who claimed to be unemployed.

According to Lei, on May 18, the PSP received a report from a staff member of a temple in the city's northern district. A male worshipper had placed an envelope containing a donation of 2,200 patacas on the temple counter. When the worshipper returned more than 10 minutes later, he discovered that the envelope had vanished and reported the matter to staff.

Through CCTV footage, PSP officers identified Cheong and intercepted her at the same temple on Thursday, Lei said, adding that Cheong denied the theft when questioned.

However, after reviewing the temple's surveillance footage,



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

police confirmed that Cheong was seen taking the envelope from the counter, according to Lei.

Cheong has since been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), where she faces a theft charge. ■

Central govt to issue 6-billion-yuan bonds in Macau next week

Tony Wong

The Central People's Government will issue sovereign bonds worth six billion yuan (7.19 billion patacas) in Macau on Thursday next week, the Ministry of Finance in Beijing and the local government announced yesterday.

The Macao Government Information Bureau (GCS) issued a statement outlining details of the upcoming offer.

The value of the renminbi-denominated sovereign bonds to be issued in Macau this year will remain unchanged from last year. "Renminbi" ("people's currency") is the official name of the nation's legal tender, commonly referred to as the "yuan."

Next Thursday's issuance will mark the sixth issuance of sovereign bonds by the Central People's Government in Macau. The first issuance took place in July 2019, followed by the second in September 2022, the third in

September 2023, the fourth in October 2024, and the fifth in July last year.

The Ministry of Finance issued sovereign bonds worth two billion yuan in Macau in 2019 and three billion yuan in 2022. The value increased to five billion yuan in 2023, remained at five billion yuan in 2024, and rose to six billion yuan last year.

Yesterday's GCS statement noted that the local government welcomes the central government's decision to issue renminbi-denominated sovereign bonds in Macau once again, marking the fifth consecutive year of sovereign bond issuances in the city.

The statement underlined that the continuous issuance of sovereign bonds highlights the central government's strong support for the development of Macau's bond market and the city's broader strategy for appropriate economic diversification.

Furthermore, the statement

noted that the continuous issuance will provide investors with secure and stable renminbi-denominated options, improve the local financial ecosystem, and enhance connections between Macau's bond market and both Chinese mainland and international markets.

It added that the ongoing programme will attract more high-quality issuers and international investors to Macau, leveraging the city's strategic advantages in the nation's opening-up while helping Macau better integrate into and serve the overall national development.

As with the previous four years, this year's sovereign bond offering will be restricted exclusively to professional investors. By contrast, the two billion yuan offering in 2019 comprised 1.7 billion yuan allocated to institutional investors and 300 million yuan in retail bonds offered to the Macau public. ■



This photo taken from Small Taipa Hill earlier this year shows the Macau peninsula's skyline. – Photo: Tony Wong

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MACAU POST

Macau Weather

VERY HOT.
CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS.
A FEW SHOWERS LATER.
FORCE 2 TO 3 NORTHWESTERLY WINDS, BECOMING FORCE 4 SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 55% AND 95%.



28°C~35°C

Source: SMG

Mavericks-Rockets NBA China Games tickets to go on sale tomorrow



This poster provided by NBA China yesterday promotes its upcoming "NBA China Games 2026 presented by Taobao 88VIP", featuring the Dallas Mavericks and Houston Rockets.

Khalel Vallo

Tickets for the "NBA China Games 2026 presented by Taobao 88VIP" featuring the Dallas Mavericks and Houston Rockets, will go on sale to the public tomorrow, with the two teams set to play preseason games at The Venetian Arena in Cotai this October, according to an NBA statement yesterday.

The US National Basketball Association (NBA) and Sands China Ltd. announced in the statement that tickets will go on sale at 12:00 p.m. tomorrow through Cotai Ticketing, Taobao 88VIP, Trip.com, and MPay, the statement said.

The Mavericks and Rockets will face off in two preseason games at The Venetian Arena, with the first scheduled for October 9 at 7:30 p.m., followed by the second on October 11 at 5:30 p.m., the statement noted.

Tickets for the games will start at 588 patacas. The statement also announced a lineup of Asian artists who will perform during the games and NBA Fan Day: Gen Z group KiiiKiii will perform at halftime of the NBA China Games, while Hong Kong singer-actor and MIRROR member Keung To alongside K-pop star EVAN (Hee-Seung) will perform at NBA Fan Day on October 10 at 3:30 p.m.

Hosted by rapper-actor Jin Au-Yeung, known professionally as

MC Jin, NBA Fan Day will feature Mavericks and Rockets players, mascots, and a range of fan activities – including a skills challenge, three-point contest, Shooting Stars challenge, and a slam dunk show featuring professional dunkers, the statement said.

According to the statement, tickets for NBA Fan Day on October 10 will start at 488 patacas.

The Mavericks' current roster includes nine-time NBA All-Star and 2016 NBA champion Kyrie Irving, 2025–26 NBA Rookie of the Year Cooper Flagg, and 2026 No. 9 overall pick Morez Johnson Jr., the statement said, adding that the Rockets feature two-time NBA champion and 16-time NBA All-Star Kevin Durant, two-time NBA All-Star Alperen Şengün, and 2024–25 NBA All-Defensive First Team member Amen Thompson.

In conjunction with Sands China, the organisers have also launched NBACHinaGames.com, a digital platform providing official information about the games, surrounding events, fan experiences, venues, and tickets.

The "NBA China Games 2026 presented by Taobao 88VIP" will be broadcast and distributed to fans in more than 200 countries and territories through television, digital media, and social media, the statement said. ■

Ant Bank (Macao) launches 'Financial Services Station' in Galaxy Macau

Staff Reporter

A "Financial Services Station" – a set of self-service kiosks for various financial services – run by Ant Bank (Macao)* has opened in the Galaxy Macau casino-hotel resort in Cotai, according to a joint statement.

An opening ceremony for the station was held at the resort on Friday.

Friday's joint statement said that the Financial Services Station jointly developed by Galaxy Macau and Ant Bank (Macao) marks a milestone as it debuts a first-of-its-kind experience at an integrated resort in Macau. The overall experience will be diversified and streamlined as a collection of self-service banking, interactive online and offline consultations, and the upcoming all-new Galaxy membership programme is provided under one roof, the statement said.

The statement added that as tourism consumption continues to evolve, financial services are expanding beyond traditional transactional roles to encompass a wide range of travel, payment, membership, and lifestyle scenarios, becoming an integral driver of enhanced visitor experiences and consumer engagement.

A pioneering step taken between an integrated resort in



This handout photo released on Friday shows the newly set-up Ant Bank (Macao) "Financial Services Station" in Galaxy Macau in Cotai. – Photo Galaxy Ant Bank

Macau and Ant Bank (Macao), the newly set-up Financial Services Station embodies Galaxy Macau and Ant Bank (Macao)'s shared vision of advancing "Finance + Tourism" convergence, the statement said.

By leveraging the synergistic interaction between fintech innovation and tourism consumption, the collaboration aspires to offer visitors a more intelligent, convenient, and integrated one-stop service experience, the statement said.

Equipped with Ant Bank (Macao)'s smart self-service platform, the statement said, the Financial Services Station is home to a range of financial services, including cash deposits

and withdrawals and Macau Pass card top-ups. Users are able to familiarise themselves with fintech and its applications at the station with the help of a dedicated showcase and professional team. ■

*Ant Bank (Macao) is a fully licensed bank in Macau that operates full-scale banking operations. It provides digital banking services, including deposit accounts, cross-border payments, and mobile financial solutions tailored for local residents and small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs). As a joint venture backed by Ant Group, the bank leverages Alipay's technological expertise and ecosystem to drive digital financial innovation.

WORLD NA TCHA FOLK BELIEF CULTURE FESTIVAL 2026



NA TCHA FOLK BELIEF EXHIBITION

Sept 15th - 18th

WELCOMING DINNER

Sept 15th 19:00
Barra Kitchen

NA TCHA JOINT PARADE

Sept 16th 11:00
From Ruins of St. Paul's
to Senado Square

PARADE ROUTE

Ruins of St. Paul's

to

Senado Square

BLESSING CEREMONY

Sept 16th 16:00
Barra Kitchen

FAREWELL DINNER

Sept 16th 18:30
Barra Kitchen





Photos taken at the CCI gallery on July 30 by Khalel Vallo



Cheang Chi-Tat explores life, music, & art in new ‘Dark Shards’ exhibition

Khalel Vallo

Creative Macau – Centre for Creative Industries (CCI) in Nape has launched “Dark Shards”, a solo exhibition by local multidisciplinary artist Vincent Cheang Chi-Tat showcasing visual artworks and original design products inspired by everyday life, music, and personal reflection.

The exhibition, which opened on July 30, features visual artworks alongside original design products. According to a gallery statement, “Dark Shards” explores how fragments of everyday experiences and fleeting inspirations transform into artistic expression. The statement describes the works as “unspoken thoughts from busy days and inspirations stirred by radio tunes”, with Cheang acting as “a collector and conductor of the night” who reorganises scattered moments into visual

narratives. The concept of “shards” symbolises renewal, suggesting that fragmentation can mark the starting point for rebirth and new perspectives.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Cheang reflected on the spontaneous nature of the exhibition and its live-painting element. “Sometimes art is like free-flow”, Cheang remarked, emphasising that his creative process relies heavily on intuition rather than rigid planning. He noted that sudden life experiences often trigger artistic momentum, adding, “Sometimes you just have to follow your emotions”.

Describing the collection as a personal milestone, Cheang highlighted how the new works represent a fresh phase in his visual journey while expressing gratitude to supporters. “What you see in this series is a new worldview

for me”, he noted, explaining that the live-creation process allowed him to channel immediate thoughts directly into his art without overthinking the outcome.

Cheang, who is also a musician, balances commercial design with personal artistic practice. The gallery noted that his experience hosting a five-day-a-week radio programme influences his visual art, giving it a distinct sense of rhythm and musicality. He previously participated in exhibitions such as Highway Star (2018), Parallel Universe (2022), When Tat Chi Meets Chi Tat (2023), and Art Macao: Synchronicity (2023).

Running through August 22, the exhibits are on display at the CCI gallery on the ground floor of the Macao Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape. Admission is free, Monday through Saturday, from 2:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Govt starts consultation on streamlining association registration

Continued from p.1

According to the consultation documents, the government proposes that a non-local (“external”) association will only be allowed to set up a branch in Macau if it has been legally established in its home jurisdiction for a least three years. The number of branches would be limited to one per non-local association.

Following the consultation period, the government will review public feedback, draft the final bill, and submit it to the legislature for debate and voting. Wong said that the government aims to submit the bill to the Legislative Assembly within this year.

The consultation document highlights that Law 2/99/M and the Civil Code currently contain numerous overlaps and inconsistencies regarding association supervision. Furthermore, registering a new association currently involves three separate entities – the Identification Services Bureau, the Notary Office, and the Legal Affairs Bureau (DSAJ).

The registration process is inconvenient for the public and incurs substantial administrative costs, the consultation document acknowledges, pointing out that the government proposes a single, specific public entity formally tasked with handling the registration of new associations and supervising

their operations – the Identification Services Bureau.

The government proposes that a new association must be set up by at least seven individuals, who are required to submit an application to the Identification Services Bureau. After the establishment of the association, all the founders must be first-term board members.

The government proposes that the statutes of newly set-up associations will no longer be required to be published in the Official Gazette (BO). Instead, the Identification Services Bureau will publish their statutes on its website.

DSI Director Sonia Chan Hoi Fan said during the press conference that in the future after the new law comes into force, the bureau will also publish the statutes of existing associations on its website, which were previously published in the gazette.

Chan noted that according to the current law regulating trade unions, the statutes of newly established trade unions must still be published in the gazette.

The government proposes that the Identification Services Bureau can decide to abolish an association after the MSAR’s Committee for Safeguarding National Security has concluded that its objective or operation will endanger national security. ■

APE says net profit surges nearly 90-fold in H1

Staff Reporter

Asia Pioneer Entertainment Holdings Limited (“APE” – 8400.HK), a Macau-based electronic gaming equipment (EGE) supplier listed on the Growth Enterprise Market (GEM) market of the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, issued a positive profit alert on Friday for the six months ended June 30, 2026.

The *Post* received the company’s statement about its profit alert yesterday.

Based on a preliminary review of APE’s latest unaudited consolidated management accounts, it expects to record turnover of approximately HK\$34.0 million for the six-month period, representing a year-on-year increase of approximately 47.3 percent compared to HK\$23.0 million for the corresponding period in 2025, the statement said.

In terms of net profit performance, the statement noted that APE expects Total Comprehensive Income (after tax) for the first half of 2026 to be approximately in the range of HK\$2.2 million-HK\$2.4 million, representing a substantial surge of nearly 90-fold, compared to HK\$24,959 recorded in the first half of last year, the statement underlined.

The APE board of directors attributed the jump in improved revenues and profits to its core business segment of technical sales and distribution of Electronic



A handout photo provided by Asia Pioneer Entertainment yesterday shows a selection of its gaming technology solutions and equipment portfolio.

Gaming Equipment (EGE) which grew by 56.2 percent in revenue for the first six months of the year compared to the same period in the previous year, the statement noted.

According to the statement, the company expects to officially announce its finalised interim results for the first half of the year by the end this month.

The statement quoted the company’s CFO Tony C.L. Chan of APE as saying that APE “delivered a very solid operational performance in the first half of 2026, underscored by robust growth in our core EGE distribution business.

“Alongside our financial recovery, we achieved crucial

strategic milestones in H1 by launching BEE MACAU – Macau’s first casino-grade playing card manufacturer – and the rollout of our cash conversion tech solutions.

“While these new ventures are in their early stages and have not yet contributed directly to H1 revenue, they lay a solid foundation for future top-line growth. “This positive profit alert validates the strength and resilience of our core business.

“Together with these two new business lines, we are exceptionally confident in our vision to provide a seamless, ‘one-stop shop’ ecosystem”. ■

Xi diplomacy: From promise to progress

BEIJING – On a crisp autumn day in Beijing, a clear blue sky stretched above the Chinese capital as world leaders gathered for the 2014 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders’ Meeting.

The azure skies of Beijing soon became known as “APEC blue,” though some viewed the phenomenon as a fleeting moment confined to the summit period.

At the welcoming banquet, Chinese President Xi Jinping directly addressed such doubts, expressing his hope and determination that “with persistent efforts, the ‘APEC blue’ will be here to stay.”

More than a decade later, Xi’s promise has been fulfilled through concrete action.

The results are visible in the air. Between 2013 and 2025, Beijing’s average PM2.5 concentration fell by 69.8 percent. The United Nations Environment Programme has hailed the city’s achievements in improving air quality as the “Beijing Miracle.”

The story of “APEC blue” reflects a cherished value passed down through generations of the Chinese people: promises must be honored through actions. This philosophy has also guided China’s efforts to forge stronger connections with the world. “He who has credibility connects the world,” Xi once quoted a saying from “The

Guanzi,” a collection of ancient Chinese writings, to underscore the importance of matching words.

Every autumn, the lights of the National Exhibition and Convention Center in Shanghai illuminate a global gathering, where products, technologies and ideas converge in the vibrant metropolis.

At the first China International Import Expo (CIIE) in 2018, Xi made a clear promise: “The CIIE, which will be held on an annual basis, will feature good performance, fruitful results and continued success in the years to come.”

Eight years on, the CIIE has grown into a premier global platform for trade, investment and cultural exchanges, connecting businesses, innovators and consumers from around the world.

The expo, the world’s first import-themed national-level exhibition, stands as a vivid reflection of Xi’s commitment to China’s high-level opening-up. Beyond the CIIE, this commitment has been put into practice through concrete measures, ranging from the launch of island-wide special customs operations at the Hainan Free Trade Port to the expansion of visa-free transit and entry policies.

In a world facing mounting uncertainty and fragmentation, these actions deliver a clear message: China will continue to open its door wider to the world.

Xi’s commitment to delivering on promises is also reflected in long-term partnerships built on shared development.

More than half a century ago, Chinese engineers traveled to East Africa to help build the Tanzania-Zambia railway, a landmark project that stretched across the region.

In March 2013, standing before the cemetery of Chinese experts in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Xi paid tribute to those who sacrificed their lives during the construction of the railway, and called on the two countries to cherish the deep-rooted friendship between China and Africa.

Two years later, during talks with then Zambian President Edgar Lungu, Xi reaffirmed that China would collaborate with Zambia and Tanzania in the railway operations to “promote the development and prosperity of the region along the line.”

In September 2024, Xi, together with Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan and Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema, witnessed in Beijing the signing of a memorandum of understanding on the railway revitalization project. In November 2025, the groundbreaking ceremony was held in Zambia. Once upgraded, the railway is expected to significantly improve regional connectivity, with annual freight capacity rising to at

least 2.4 million tons and shipping times reduced by nearly two-thirds.

“China helped us build the railway in the past and is now helping us make it better and more modern. China has always kept its word,” said 74-year-old Solomon Mwakasanga, who joined the railway service in 1970 as a clerk and retired in 2005 as a senior station foreman.

Across Africa, China’s efforts are transforming promises into progress, supporting the continent’s modernization drive.

From fully implementing zero-tariff treatment to all 53 African countries that have diplomatic ties with China to advancing “small but beautiful” livelihood projects such as Luban Workshops and Juncao technology, China’s cooperation with Africa is increasingly focused on delivering tangible benefits.

As Paul Frimpong, executive director of the Africa-China Center for Policy and Advisory, a Ghana-based think tank, observed, “China will always remain Africa’s most reliable partner on its path to modernization.”

A promise kept in times of crisis matters greatly. When the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the world, Xi stressed China’s firm determination to strengthen international cooperation as a responsible major country.

China was the first country to propose COVID-19 vaccines as

a global public good and worked with developing nations to produce vaccines locally, mobilizing resources to help bridge the global “immunity gap.”

Xi’s commitment to honoring promises is also borne out by China’s sustained efforts over the years to build a better future for all.

In September 2020, Xi announced that China would strive to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

Over the past years, China has taken solid steps to turn this vision into action. It has built the world’s largest renewable energy system and developed the most comprehensive clean energy industrial chain, while continuing to improve energy efficiency and accelerate the global green transition.

“China has a reputation of doing what it says it’s going to do,” said UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Simon Stiell. The leadership China has shown and the contributions it has made in terms of driving technological advancement and providing support to developing countries within the Global South can push other countries to step up, he added.

As Xi said, “We Chinese people attach great importance to taking action to keep promises. We will do whatever it takes to honor our commitment.” – *Xinhua*

China's quantum technology goes from lab to life

Analysis

HEFEI — Chinese scientists have reported a series of advances in weather forecasting and drug discovery powered by quantum technology, highlighting how a field once regarded as a distant scientific ambition is steadily transitioning from the laboratory to real-world use.

Researchers from Fudan University and University of Science and Technology of China (USTC) recently demonstrated that quantum machine learning could outperform large-scale classical neural networks in certain real-world weather forecasting tasks, including urban temperature and humidity prediction.

In another breakthrough, Chinese tech company Origin Quantum and USTC researchers developed a quantum-enhanced graph neural network on China's independently developed superconducting quantum computer, Origin Wukong, that boosted HIV antiviral drug screening accuracy from 73 percent to 97 percent and Alzheimer's drug prediction accuracy from 64 percent to 70 percent.

While fully fault-tolerant quantum computers remain years away, these advances reflect a broader reality: different branches of quantum technology are beginning to mature at different speeds, with applications already emerging in secure communications, healthcare, scientific research and industrial computing.

Among them, quantum communications have moved furthest toward commercialization. More than 40 major Chinese cities have deployed metropolitan quantum communications networks, providing the infrastructure for quantum-secured services to move into commercial use.

At China Telecom Quantum Group, visitors can try what appears to be an ordinary smartphone. Once users activate its quantum-encrypted calling function, conversations are secured using quantum key distribution, making intercepted

communications unreadable.

The company says its quantum-enabled communications, cloud and digital platform services now serve more than 7 million users and over 5,000 institutional customers across industries including finance, healthcare, manufacturing and government services.

Quantum technology is also beginning to reshape healthcare. Every heartbeat generates an extremely weak magnetic field that conventional medical instruments cannot directly detect. Quantum sensors, however, can measure these tiny signals.

One example is a magnetocardiography system developed by Chinese quantum technology company CIQTEK. Using quantum spin magnetometers, the system can complete a cardiac scan in just a few minutes, providing physicians with a new tool for early cardiovascular screening and risk assessment. The technology has already been deployed at several major hospitals in China.

For now, the most promising path toward practical quantum computing lies not in replacing today's supercomputers, but in combining the strengths of both technologies.

Inside the next-generation computing cluster in Hefei, capital of Anhui Province, China's first locally deployed hybrid quantum supercomputing center combines a high-performance supercomputer with two superconducting quantum computers and one trapped-ion quantum computer.

"We break a large computational problem into smaller tasks," said Wang Guyue, director of the Project Management Center at Hefei Big Data Asset Operation Co., Ltd, operator of the computing center.

"Subproblems that have relatively simple inputs and outputs but extremely complex calculations are processed by quantum computers, while the remaining tasks stay on the classical system," Wang said. "We see quantum computing as complementing rather than replacing classical computing."

The commercial potential is already beginning to emerge.

Chen Zhengping, deputy director of the research institute at Guochuang Software, said quantum computing has been applied to photovoltaic power forecasting, improving prediction accuracy by about 5 percent compared with conventional algorithms, and could help reduce solar power curtailment by several million kilowatt-hours annually across China, making renewable energy systems more efficient.

These applications are part of a broader effort to move quantum technology beyond research laboratories and into commercial use. Over the past two decades, Hefei has developed one of China's largest quantum technology ecosystems, bringing together more than 100 companies across the industrial chain.

To accelerate commercialization, Anhui has launched an initiative encouraging quantum technologies to be tested in hundreds of real-world scenarios, from secure communications to renewable energy. Hefei is also establishing a 10-billion-yuan fund to support emerging technologies, including quantum technology, according to Chen Jun, director of the Anhui provincial development and reform commission.

Chinese quantum companies are also expanding internationally. Origin Quantum has begun exporting quantum computing equipment and cloud computing services, particularly to Belt and Road (B&R) partner countries. In July 2026, Thailand's Chulalongkorn University announced a partnership with University of Science and Technology of China and Chinese quantum computing company Unitary Quantum to jointly build Thailand's first trapped-ion quantum computer.

While many challenges remain before large-scale quantum computing becomes commonplace, the industry's focus has already shifted from proving that quantum technology works to discovering where it can create real economic and social value. — Xinhua

Kenyan expert denies 'China Squeeze' claim, praises Global South role

Interview

NAIROBI — China's manufacturing sector has provided important support for industrialization in countries of the Global South through infrastructure, capital, technology, production experience and global markets, a Kenyan expert has said, slamming the so-called "China squeeze" accusation.

In a recent written interview with Xinhua, Lewis Ndichu, a research policy analyst at the Kenya-based think tank Africa Policy Institute, said that the so-called "China squeeze" narrative is deeply misleading. It oversimplifies complex international economic dynamics into a zero-sum contest, falsely assuming that China's economic development inevitably comes at the expense of other developing countries.

"The reality is that China has become a major trading partner, source of investment, infrastructure developer and technology partner for much of the Global South," he said. "Its engagement has increasingly moved beyond the traditional export of raw materials toward supporting connectivity, manufacturing and industrial capacity."

In Ndichu's view, China's manufacturing sector has helped lower the costs of industrialization for many African economies.

He said to understand this, one must look at the foundational prerequisites for industrialization. For years, China has participated in the development of Kenya's railways, roads, ports and energy infrastructure, improving connectivity, easing logistical bottlenecks and strengthening Kenya's links to regional markets.

"Better connectivity has lowered cargo transport costs, attracted investment, strengthened supply chains, and positioned Kenya as a regional production and logistics hub," he noted.

Ndichu said that as infrastructure conditions have improved, Chinese companies have also increased their manufacturing investment in Kenya, with cooperation extending from building materials and agricultural processing to electric mobility and renewable energy.

"These investments are creating jobs, strengthening local supply chains and introducing new technologies and skills," Ndichu said.

He added that Chinese manufacturing investment was becoming "a catalyst for deeper industrialization, stronger domestic enterprises and greater integration into regional value chains," helping Kenya move gradually from a market for finished goods toward a center of production, value addition and technological learning.

The ultimate measure of the development value of foreign investment should not only be the scale of capital inflows, but also whether it creates jobs, develops suppliers, transfers skills and technology, and embeds production within the local

economy, according to Ndichu.

Ndichu said investment by Chinese companies in the electric mobility sector has brought advanced technology and manufacturing capabilities to Kenya, helping electric buses, electric motorcycles, batteries and related services gradually form a new industrial ecosystem.

"The deeper value, however, lies not simply in the capital invested, but in the capabilities that remain, like skills, technology, suppliers and productive capacity," he noted.

He highlighted that the development of local industrial capabilities was closely linked with Kenya's green transition.

Kenya currently derives about 90 percent of its electricity from renewable sources, with geothermal, hydro, wind and solar forming the backbone of its energy system.

Ndichu said Chinese green technologies have contributed to Kenya's energy transition not only by providing clean-energy equipment, but also by lowering technological and cost barriers.

Chinese expertise in solar photovoltaics, batteries, power electronics and electric mobility has helped broaden that transition, he said, adding that "the significance is increasingly moving from importing technology to embedding green technology within Kenya's productive economy."

Speaking of the Chinese market, Ndichu said it has provided new space for industrial development in the Global South.

Since May 1, China has fully implemented a zero-tariff treatment for 53 African countries with which it has diplomatic relations.

Ndichu said the policy would not only help reduce the costs of such goods as avocados, coffee, chilies and apples entering the Chinese market, but could also stimulate investment in agricultural processing, cold chains, packaging and logistics, helping Africa move from exporting primary commodities toward exporting processed and higher-value products.

On China's cooperation model with other countries of the Global South, Ndichu said a distinctive feature of China's cooperation was its emphasis on development through infrastructure, productive capacity and economic partnership, while traditional Western development assistance was often accompanied by broader governance requirements involving institutional, market, democratic and social-policy reforms.

He said China's cooperation model was attractive to the Global South in part because it placed greater emphasis on allowing developing countries to choose development paths suited to their own national circumstances.

"China's approach has generally placed greater emphasis on sovereignty, non-interference and practical development outcomes," he added. — Xinhua



A foreign tourist poses with a themed installation at the east square of Shenzhen North Railway Station in Shenzhen yesterday. Shenzhen marked the 100-day countdown to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting yesterday with vibrant outdoor displays and interactive installations. — AFP

Central bank reform plan targets high-level financial opening-up

BEIJING – The People's Bank of China (PBOC), China's central bank, has issued a reform and development plan for the 2026-2030 period, making work arrangements aimed at accelerating the building of a nation with a strong financial sector and improving the central banking system.

The plan said measures will be taken to "prudently advance high-level financial opening-up," noting efforts will be made to expand the global use of the renminbi in international trade, investment and

financing, deepen two-way financial market access, quicken steps to build Shanghai into an international financial center and enhance the role of Hong Kong as a global financial center.

As part of the opening-up drive, the PBOC will enhance the multi-tiered and broad-coverage Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) and push forward the development of offshore renminbi markets.

On the domestic monetary policy front, the plan sets out

to build a more scientific and robust framework by refining the modern monetary policy system with Chinese characteristics, improving the base-money issuance mechanism, and making better use of both aggregate and structural tools.

It stresses the need to enhance market-based interest rate formation, transmission, and adjustment mechanisms, while allowing the market to play a decisive role in exchange-rate determination and keeping the renminbi broadly stable

at a reasonable and equilibrium level.

To fortify financial stability, the central bank will expand the coverage of macro-prudential management, enrich its policy toolkit, and establish a monitoring and evaluation system to mitigate systemic risks in key areas.

A major pillar of the plan is to strengthen the real economy's access to quality financial services. The PBOC has pledged to build a precise and effective policy system to support major strategies, key

sectors, and address weak links. This includes developing a financial system tailored to scientific and technological innovation. It also aims to enhance green and low-carbon financing, expand inclusive finance, improve the pension finance system and accelerate digital finance.

Looking ahead to the 2026-2030 period, the PBOC says it will ensure all measures in the plan are executed effectively to boost China's strength in finance and support high-quality economic development. – Xinhua

Milk tea helps nourish grassroots governance, ethnic unity in Xinjiang

Analysis

URUMQI – In a community in northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, milk tea is not just a beverage.

While a pot of milk tea simmers in a courtyard, local residents gather with cups in hand to discuss everyday issues – faulty streetlamps, alleys in need of repair, or other minor neighborhood disputes.

Kunqi Maili Community in the city of Yining, in the Kazak Autonomous Prefecture of Ili, is home to more than 2,100 residents from nine ethnic groups, including Uygur, Han, Hui, Kazak, Mongolian and Uzbek.

Using the popular local beverage as a bond, the "milk tea gathering" replaces dreary formal meetings, offering a relaxed space for residents to sit down and speak their minds over a cup of tea.

At one such meeting in late July, resident Batnasun Badma, a regular attendee, raised her concerns about child safety during the summer break.

"Many children swim in the nearby river to escape the summer heat, which is quite dangerous," she said.

The community took notice. Later, a large inflatable pool was bought and installed, and college student volunteers were invited to provide childcare and tutoring services, ensuring that children have a safe and happy summer.

For some, the tea gathering may help boost their business. Local craftsman Abduxukur Abdukadir has a problem. His handmade leather boots are of fine quality, yet the steady stream of tourists during peak season has not translated into sales. At the gathering, the neighbors suggested he turn the boots into souvenir keychains, while Zulayat Nurat, a local gourd painting artist, offered to help.

Zulayat Nurat also put forward demands for wider promotion of her traditional gourd painting craft. The community responded swiftly, promoting her works on official platforms and offering a 30-square-meter studio free of rent. "The

community truly values our efforts," she said.

The milk tea gatherings started in 2023 and have been held monthly ever since, according to Nijat Parhat, Communist Party of China (CPC) chief of the community.

"We intended to sit down with residents from all ethnic groups, listen to their difficulties and concerns, and help solve their problems so that they can have a better living environment," he said. Thanks to such gatherings, a parking lot and a small football pitch were built after complaints were raised about difficulties to park and a lack of playing ground for children.

From January to May this year, 4,260 gatherings were held in Yining across its 24 townships and sub-districts, with 127,800 resident participations. Over 2,000 suggestions were collected and nearly 1,000 livelihood issues were resolved.

The approach is not unique to Xinjiang. In Wuyishan, a county-level city in east China's Fujian Province, the local people's congress in Wufu Township has set up a tea lounge on an ancient street, inviting residents to share tea and, more importantly, their opinions and concerns.

Nationwide, China is promoting the "Fengqiao Experience," a community-level social governance model that originated in Fengqiao, a township in east China's Zhejiang Province, in the 1960s.

Under this model, social disputes are resolved at the grassroots level, among the people themselves and without escalation to higher authorities.

In Xinjiang, specifically, this community-level self-governance model has been promoted to all villages and communities across the region. Over 85 percent of matters for decision-making at grassroots self-governance organizations come from public proposals, demonstrating the effectiveness of primary-level democracy.

"When we sit together and talk together, it helps bring our ethnic groups closer," said Nijat Parhat.

– Xinhua

Central govt allocates emergency disaster relief funding as Typhoon Dolphin affects vast regions



A drone photo taken yesterday shows a staff member operating an excavator to clear a collapsed section of a road in Luojialiao Village in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province. Typhoon Dolphin is moving inland after making two landfalls along the coast and is expected to bring heavy precipitation to more than 10 provincial-level regions, according to the National Meteorological Center yesterday.

– Xinhua

BEIJING – The Central People's Government has urgently allocated funding to support disaster relief efforts in the country's eastern regions currently dealing with torrential rains and severe flooding caused by Typhoon Dolphin, the 13th typhoon of the year.

The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) announced yesterday that it has allocated 200 million yuan from the central government budget to support disaster recovery efforts in Zhejiang Province, following the devastation caused by the typhoon.

The funds will be primarily used for the emergency restoration of damaged infrastructure, including roads and water conservancy facilities, as well as public service facilities such as schools and hospitals, it said.

Typhoon Dolphin made its second landfall at Yueqing City in Zhejiang Province at around 6:40 p.m. on Sunday, about an hour after it first landed at Yuhuan in

Taizhou City, Zhejiang.

The Ministry of Water Resources has maintained a Level-III emergency response in Zhejiang, as well as a Level-IV response for six other provincial-level regions across eastern, central and northeastern China, instructing local authorities to strengthen monitoring and research efforts and step up patrols to detect and address potential hazards. It said that priority will be given to flood defense along small and medium-sized rivers and the prevention of mountain torrents.

Also yesterday, the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Emergency Management allocated 180 million yuan from the central natural disaster relief fund to support disaster-hit areas across the country.

Of the total, 120 million yuan was earmarked for five provinces – Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian, and Jiangxi – to support emergency response and rescue efforts following the flooding and

typhoon damage. The remaining funding was allocated to Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang to address ongoing drought conditions.

The National Meteorological Center (NMC) forecasts that from 8 p.m. Monday to 8 p.m. today, parts of Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Anhui, Henan and Hubei provinces will be hit by torrential rain, with extraordinarily heavy rainstorms to hit southern Henan and northwestern Hubei.

While the moving speed of Typhoon Dolphin will slow down significantly after Tuesday, its remnant vortex is expected to linger and stall over the border areas of Hubei, Henan, and Anhui provinces, triggering a new round of regional heavy rainfall, the NMC said.

With the rain belt moving further northward, the NMC forecasts that from today to Thursday, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region will experience heavy rainfall, with Beijing to see heavy to torrential rain during the period.

– Xinhua

Ex-Thai MP shoots dead local official over money row

BANGKOK – A former Thai MP yesterday shot dead a local government official in broad daylight over a financial dispute before being arrested and confessing to journalists at the police station.

The attack took place outside a government building in Nonthaburi province, north of Bangkok, just days after a school shooting in the same region that raised questions over gun control in Thailand.

Flanked by police officers following his arrest, former MP Chalong Riewrang told reporters he had tried to talk to local official Thongchai Yenprasert about money.

“I followed him to his car and hit his car’s window, saying I want to talk. He said he will not talk, so I pulled my gun,” Chalong admitted, handcuff-free and smoking a cigarette.

“I did not aim to shoot, but his driver pulled a gun and pointed it at me so I fired.”

Thongchai, who was chairman of the Nonthaburi local government administration, later died of his wounds, according to a hospital director, Sakon Sukprom.

He was hit in the neck and lost a lot of blood, the director said.

Thongchai’s driver was also shot, wounded in his right arm, but he successfully underwent surgery, Sakon said.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters that no one in Thailand except on-duty officials was legally allowed to carry a gun in public, noting the last gun-



Former MP Chalong Riewrang (left) exhales smoke during a press conference at a police station in Nonthaburi province, north of Bangkok, yesterday. – AFP

carry licences were issued three years ago and were only valid for one year.

Anutin said authorities will pursue “full legal action” against Chalong, a former member of the prime minister’s party.

“No matter who he is, he is now a murderer,” Anutin said.

Private issue

Chalong had confessed to being the sole shooter during the incident, but “both sides had guns”, regional police commander Wattana Yeechin told reporters earlier.

A firearm was found in Thongchai’s vehicle but had not been used, while CCTV footage showed only Chalong firing his weapon from close range, he added.

Wattana said the dispute was over several million baht (tens of thousands of dollars).

“It was a private issue.

According to his confession, it was about money that the... chairman borrowed from him for several years, and he asked for the return of the money several times,” he said.

Nonthaburi governor Chestha Mosikarat earlier told reporters the suspect and victim were “friends for a long time” and the incident likely stemmed from a misunderstanding.

Thailand has one of the highest rates of gun ownership in the region, with around 10 million firearms estimated to be in circulation—roughly one for every seven inhabitants.

On Friday, a 14-year-old boy shot dead the grandparents who raised him in Nonthaburi before killing six others at his school and then turning the gun on himself.

Officials have since promised stricter gun laws, but previous pledges have failed to prevent repeated shootings. – AFP

Indonesian clerics warn against men in dresses for independence festivities

JAKARTA – Indonesia’s top Islamic clerical body has warned men not to wear “women’s clothing” for Independence Day festivities despite a long tradition of men in dresses playing football as part of the annual fun.

Amid a rising tide of anti-LGBTQ sentiment in the Muslim-majority Southeast Asian nation, the influential Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) said in a statement such behaviour was “haram” or forbidden.

The MUI said its intervention was “an effort to prevent the covert campaign of the Lesbian, Gay, Sodomy and Obscenity (LGSP) movement”—the acronym it promotes as an alternative to LGBT for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender.

Each year, Indonesians engage

in games and parades to celebrate the nation’s declaration of independence on August 17, 1945 from centuries of colonisation.

Across the vast archipelago, citizens take part in tugs of war, sack races and cracker-eating contests, clamber up greased poles and attend colourful float parades.

In some communities, men put on dresses and hijabs to play football, a tradition widely seen as comical and not a statement on gender identity. Men sometimes also dress up to take part in independence parades.

But in last week’s statement, the MUI’s Fatwa Commission said “the rise of deviant actions such as male participants in women’s clothing... is considered to have led to violations of sharia and social norms”.

The warning also goes for women dressing as men.

It is not the first time the MUI has spoken out against cross dressing, but the latest warning follows a spate of physical attacks on gay people and a presidential regulation classifying “LGBTQ culture” as a security threat.

Dede Oetomo, founder of the GAYa Nusantara rights group, told AFP that men playing football or parading in what are traditionally women’s clothes “is a long-time custom and part of Independence Day celebrations in many communities.”

The MUI’s warning was part of a move to “Islamise” many aspects of daily life, he said, further marginalising trans women “who had been tolerated for many centuries in different parts of Indonesia”. – AFP

Indonesian drag car race crash kills 8: police

JAKARTA—A drag car veered out of control and crashed into spectators at a weekend race in Indonesia, killing eight people and injuring nine others, police said yesterday.

The crash happened late Sunday during an organised drag car race in the city of Kotamobagu on Indonesia’s Sulawesi Island.

“Eight people have died, eight

are in intensive care, and one person sustained minor injuries,” North Sulawesi police chief Roycke Harry Langie told reporters.

Police have questioned several witnesses including the driver, he said.

One witness, Areng Mokoginta, told reporters on Sunday the accident happened when a race car skidded shortly after the start.

The car swerved out of control and ploughed into spectators at the race in Kotamobagu, which lies about 180 kilometres southwest of the North Sulawesi capital Manado, he said.

Fatal traffic accidents are common in the Southeast Asian nation of 280 million people, where road rules are routinely ignored and vehicles are often poorly maintained. – AFP

Days of heavy rain leave at least 16 dead in Philippines

MANILA – Floods, landslides and accidents driven by a nine-day downpour equivalent to more than a month’s worth of rain in some areas have killed at least 16 people in the northern Philippines, rescuers said yesterday.

The rains, exacerbated by tropical storms, have led to school and government office closures across the main island of Luzon and flooding in the streets of the capital Manila.

Seven of the deaths occurred in the resort of Baguio, as a rain-drenched mountainside collapsed on three houses, city rescuer Esther Banawe told AFP. Three people remain unaccounted for.

“Rescue efforts are continuing, but they are doing it manually because of the heavy rain,” she said, adding that work was being supervised by a designated safety officer for fear of further landslides.

State weather forecaster Dan Villamil said rains in the vacation town, four hours north of the capital, were already 47 percent higher than normal for the whole month.

“The rainfall recorded for August 1-9 was highest in Baguio, with an accumulated 1,413.2 millimetres (56 inches),” he said, adding the city’s typical

downpour for the month was 963.2 millimetres.

Parts of Metro Manila had recorded rain equivalent to about 90 percent of a typical August, he added.

Landslides killed six other people elsewhere on Luzon, while another drowned, one was hit by a falling tree, and one was electrocuted, according to a civil defence office tally.

While heavy rain continued to fall yesterday evening, Public Works Secretary Vince Dizon told a news conference that floodwaters were receding.

“Our interventions are continuing, but we really need to fix the years and decades’ worth of faulty flood mitigation interventions,” Dizon told reporters, referencing a scandal over bogus flood-control projects that have cost taxpayers billions of dollars.

The Philippines is the first major landmass facing the Pacific cyclone belt, and the archipelago is hit by an average of 20 storms and typhoons each year, putting millions of people in disaster-prone areas in a state of constant poverty.

Scientists say human-driven climate change is making extreme weather more frequent, prolonged and intense. – AFP



Rescuers use a water-hose to clear mud amidst rubble as they search for survivors after a rain-drenched mountainside collapsed on several houses in Baguio City, north of Manila yesterday. – AFP

Police seek charges against Bangkok bar owner for deadly fire

BANGKOK – Thai police intend to charge the owner of a Bangkok bar with six offences, including negligence, over a fire last month that killed 37 people, the lead investigator said yesterday.

Suvicha Salaibatr, the owner of the popular Rong Beer Na Lad Phrao restaurant and bar, was among dozens of people hospitalised when a blaze engulfed his venue on the evening of July 12.

“We issued an arrest warrant last week against him on six charges” including negligence causing death, serious injury, harm and fire, as well as criminal mischief and running an entertainment venue without a licence, chief investigator Isara Na Phatthalung told AFP.

“He has left the intensive care

unit but the doctor has not yet allowed police to read the charges to him,” Isara said, adding that police hoped to charge him as the sole suspect in the next few days.

If convicted, the bar owner faces up to 10 years in prison for the negligence charge alone.

Most of the victims died from smoke inhalation during the fire, which was caused by an electrical short circuit in the ceiling, police have said.

Thailand’s approach to health and safety regulations – particularly in bars and nightclubs – has long raised concerns.

A fire tore through Bangkok’s Santika club during New Year celebrations in 2009, killing 67 people and injuring more than 200.

– AFP

Giant ice sheets in N America alter Australia's climate: study

SYDNEY – Giant ice sheets covering much of North America during the last ice age altered rainfall patterns in Australia, despite being thousands of kilometers away, a new study shows.

Researchers found that the height of the North American ice sheets produced the biggest changes in atmospheric circulation, redirecting winds across the globe and shifting the tropical rainfall belt southward, according to a release by Australia's University of New South Wales yesterday.

This southward shift strengthened the circulation that drives Australia's summer monsoon, increasing summer rainfall across much of Australia while reducing rainfall in parts of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, it said.

The study, published in *Climate of the Past*, focuses on a climate about 49,000 years ago during the

last ice age, when atmospheric carbon dioxide levels were very low and large ice sheets covered parts of North America and northern Europe.

The giant ice sheets in North America were not yet as large as when they reached their peak around 21,000 years ago, but they were already large enough to influence climate far beyond their edges.

Building ice sheets of this size required enormous amounts of water. As more water from the oceans became locked away as ice on land, sea levels fell by around 60 meters, exposing underwater landscapes, joining Australia and New Guinea into a single landmass known as Sahul, the study noted.

These results show that changes in one part of the world can trigger responses thousands of kilometers away through the atmosphere, the researchers said. – Xinhua

8th day of wildfires in Indonesian national park

SURABAYA – Indonesian firefighters backed by helicopters and drones battled devastating flames for an eighth day yesterday in a national park on Java Island where over 500 hectares have been lost, an official said.

The blaze has forced the closure of the Bromo Tengger Semeru National Park, a popular tourist destination, and razed an area equivalent to more than 700 football fields.

By yesterday, "the fire has spread towards residential areas" in the Dingklik Valley area of the park, East Java disaster mitigation agency official Satriyo Nurseno said.

Two water-bombing helicopters, several fire engines and drones with sprinklers were aiding forest rangers and soldiers deployed to fight the flames, Satriyo added.

Forestry Minister Raja Juli Antoni said on Sunday it would not be possible to fly cloud-seeding missions to trigger rain over the Bromo area for several days given the lack of clouds.

The process involves spraying particles such as silver iodide and salt into clouds from aircraft to produce rainfall.

Flames devoured more than 500 hectares of land on Mount Bromo in 2023, sparked by a couple lighting a flare during a pre-wedding photo shoot.

Indonesia is forecast to experience a long, intense dry season this year with high risk for drought and wildfires due in part to the El Niño weather phenomenon, the weather agency BMKG has said.

El Niño is a naturally occurring climate phenomenon that brings worldwide changes in winds, air pressure and rainfall patterns.

In India and Southeast Asia, it typically causes drier conditions.

The last El Niño helped make 2023 and 2024 the two hottest years globally on record.

In the first half of this year, more than 107,000 hectares of land burnt countrywide – over twice the area destroyed in wildfires in 2023. – AFP

Indian students step up exam protests in Jharkhand

NEW DELHI – Indian students marched towards the state assembly in Jharkhand yesterday, escalating protests over alleged irregularities in government recruitment examinations, with several students also on hunger strike.

Protests in Ranchi, capital of the eastern state home to more than 33 million people, began on July 29, days after a youth-led "cockroach" movement in New Delhi forced the resignation of the national education minister.

At least six protesters are on hunger strike, including student leader Devendra Nath Mahto, 33, who has been fasting for more than a week.

"We want the whole system to change," Mahto said, as quoted by Indian media, demanding an end to the use of a private company that conducts tests for state civil service.

Yesterday, hundreds of police guarded the assembly behind barbed-wire barricades, after repeated talks between the protesters and the state government failed to reach an agreement.

Large crowds of students chanting slogans marched towards the state assembly.

The protesters are demanding the cancellation of several examinations conducted by a private company on behalf of the state government, as well as an investigation by federal police into their conduct.



Indian Police use water cannon to disperse demonstrators during an ongoing protest against alleged irregularities in the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) and Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC) recruitment exams in Ranchi yesterday. – AFP

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren has sought to defuse the protests by accepting some demands, while several members of the civil service body overseeing the examinations have stepped down.

"Every problem can be resolved through dialogue," Soren said in a speech on Sunday.

The New Delhi protesters, organised by the online Cockroach Janta Party, rallied for 36 days over alleged failures in India's examination system, before the then education minister Dharmendra Pradhan stepped down – giving the

movement an unusual victory and turning examination integrity into a major political issue.

The Jharkhand protests echo those demands, reflecting wider frustration among young Indians who see government examinations as a key route to employment in a country where millions compete for limited public-sector jobs.

The New Delhi protests challenged Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, but the Jharkhand rallies are demanding change from the state government, which stands in opposition to the BJP. – AFP

Sri Lanka arrests Rajapaksa party chief over alleged death threat

COLOMBO – Sri Lankan police arrested a party leader of former president Mahinda Rajapaksa yesterday for allegedly issuing a death threat against the police chief, officers said.

Sagara Kariyawasam, the General-Secretary of the Sri Lanka Podujana Party (SLPP), was taken into custody, the latest in a list of associates of relatives of the once-untouchable Rajapaksa political dynasty to be arrested.

The leftist government

of President Anura Kumara Disanayake came to power in September 2024 on a promise to crack down on bribery and graft.

Kariyawasam, at a press conference in Colombo last week, warned Inspector General of Police Priyantha Weerasooriya that he could be killed if he continued to be partisan.

Weerasooriya "considers this a death threat", a police official said.

"The SLPP General-Secretary was arrested after recording a

statement, and he is being taken before a magistrate."

The former leader, Mahinda Rajapaksa, is himself facing allegations that he received kickbacks from Airbus over an aircraft purchase deal that was eventually scrapped.

The 80-year-old former president's three children, wife, two brothers and several nephews and nieces are facing charges of money-laundering and stealing state funds. – AFP

Dhaka says 16 Bangladeshis killed in Saudi factory fire

Rasheek Mujib

DHAKA – Bangladesh's foreign ministry said it was in "deep shock" yesterday, after reporting the deaths of 16 citizens in a sofa factory fire in Saudi Arabia the previous day.

The foreign ministry reported "the tragic deaths of 16 Bangladeshi nationals in a fire at a sofa manufacturing factory in Riyadh" in its statement yesterday.

Dhaka's Expatriates' Welfare Minister Ariful Haque Chowdhury said that there was "constant communication" with local authorities through the Bangladesh Embassy in Saudi Arabia.

"Officials have been instructed

to ensure the speedy repatriation of the bodies of the deceased expatriates and to secure all necessary government assistance and compensation for their families," he added.

Around seven million Bangladeshis work overseas - the majority in the Middle East.

The civil defence agency in the Saudi capital said a fire at an unlicensed facility where furniture was upholstered had been extinguished, without providing details about any casualties.

"Riyadh civil defence put out a fire at an unlicensed site being used for furniture upholstery," the agency said in a post on X.

"The necessary regulatory procedures were subsequently completed regarding the site."

Like many Gulf nations, Saudi Arabia relies on a vast number of labourers from the subcontinent to help bolster its workforce, especially with jobs involving manual labour.

Reports in Saudi media estimate that over three million Bangladeshi nationals reside in the kingdom.

Foreign workers in Saudi Arabia do everything from management to cleaning the streets and waiting on tables, in a society where many citizens are reluctant to take jobs they consider menial.

– AFP



Refugee children and women participate during a protest in front of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta yesterday, where Hazara refugees gathered to "voice the severe hardships they face without a certain future". – AFP

Drought forces water restrictions across nearly 70 pct of France

PARIS – Nearly 70 percent of France is subject to water-use restrictions as drought conditions worsen amid successive heatwaves, the government said yesterday.

A series of heatwaves over the past three months, compounded by drought, have broken temperature records, caused thousands of excess deaths, and fuelled massive wildfires.

“As France is experiencing a particularly severe drought, the effects of climate change continue to increase pressure on water resources,” the ministry for ecological transition said, adding that “nearly 70 percent of French territory is subject to restrictions on water use”.

As of August 9, the vast majority of mainland France, including Paris, was under at least the first water warning level, with 67 of the country’s 101 departments under the highest crisis alert.

In areas subject to the highest alert, water is reserved for priority uses such as healthcare, civil protection, drinking water and sanitation.

Under lower alert levels, restrictions apply to activities such as watering gardens and green spaces, filling swimming pools, washing cars and irrigating crops.



This photo taken yesterday shows the dried-out riverbed of the Odet River in Trégourez, north-western France.

In a further sign of the worsening drought across much of heatwave-pummelled Europe, two thirds of the aquifers that provide most of

France’s drinking water have dropped below their normal levels, the country’s Bureau of Geological and Mining Research (BRGM)

said on Monday.

The drawdown of groundwater reserves, common during the summer, is particularly pronounced this year “due to the shortfall in effective rainfall in July and the increase in water demand for various purposes”, particularly in agriculture and tourism, the BRGM said.

July 2026 was the hottest month ever recorded in France and the third driest July in terms of precipitation, with a nationwide rainfall deficit of nearly 70 percent, according to national weather agency Météo-France.

Ecology minister Monique Barbut said on July 27 that drinking water supplies were “under strain in several areas”, noting that tap water cuts were already affecting “more than 30,000 people”, with drinking water supplied to residents by tanker trucks or bottled water.

The minister will convene a crisis meeting on the drought tomorrow, which comes as France and swaths of Europe faces another heatwave.

Météo-France warned yesterday that the southeast would see temperatures as high as 35C, spreading further across the country as the week progresses. – AFP

9,000-year-old remains of pregnant woman found in Sweden

STOCKHOLM – The remains of a pregnant Stone Age woman, believed to be some 9,000 years old, and her foetus have been discovered in a cave on a small island in Sweden, an archaeologist said yesterday.

Archaeologist Alexander Roesen Sjostrand, an independent researcher connected to Uppsala University, said the “very unusual” find was made in a cave on a small island off the coast of the Swedish island of Gotland, which he had been excavating since 2023.

Sjostrand and another researcher had now reached the deepest layer of the cave, which was from the Stone Age.

“We have now found the remains of a young woman who has been buried in one way or another. With a very well-preserved

foetus in her womb,” the researcher told AFP.

He said that they estimated the remains to be from 7,000 to 10,000 years ago, but most likely 9,000 years ago due to where the remains had been found.

Sjostrand said the remains would be carbon-dated to determine the age.

According to the researcher, the find of a pregnant woman from so long ago indicated that people were living on the island just after it emerged in the Baltic Sea after the last ice age, and it was not just an exploration party.

“It’s really exciting because it gives an insight into how exploration was carried out. How people travelled around during the hunter-gatherer time of the Stone Age,” Sjostrand said. – AFP

UK radio broke rules in announcing king’s death: watchdog

LONDON – A community radio station breached the rules after accidentally announcing the death of King Charles III in a May broadcast, a UK watchdog said yesterday.

Radio Caroline, a former pirate radio that now mostly plays rock music, apologised in May after airing messages falsely announcing the monarch’s death.

One of the messages had said “we have suspended our normal programmes until further notice as a mark of respect following the passing of His Majesty King Charles III”.

The national anthem was then played, followed by around 16 minutes of silence before the regular programme resumed.

The presenter apologised 30 minutes after the messages were initially triggered, Ofcom said.

The regulator, which received two complaints about the broadcast, said the “very significant inaccuracy” and the “considerable length of time” taken to acknowledge the error breached two of its rules.

One requires news reports to be accurate and impartial.

The other requires significant mistakes to be acknowledged and corrected on air promptly.

Radio Caroline told Ofcom the error occurred when a member of staff accessed sound files pre-recorded in the event of the monarch’s death while carrying out maintenance on the studio computer, as the programme was being streamed remotely.

The staff member played the files “out of curiosity”, which stopped the stream from the presenter’s remote location and broadcast the files on air.

The person then reportedly “panicked and left the premises” after realising what had happened, according to the Ofcom statement.

Radio Caroline said the remote presenter “would not realise that they had gone ‘off air’ unless they were monitoring their output via an internet monitor.”

The presenter, believing they were still on air, was not actively monitoring his or her phone and did not immediately respond to calls from people at the station who had noticed the error, the report said.

The station said the person who played the files had been “reprimanded” and had “apologised”.

It added the pre-recorded files had now been removed from the studio computer. – AFP

Burnham vows to end ‘subscription traps’ amid cost-of-living crisis

LONDON – British Prime Minister Andy Burnham has vowed to crack down on hard-to-cancel subscriptions and fake discounts as part of measures to tackle the cost-of-living crisis, Downing Street said yesterday.

The announcement came as the new Labour leader was set to return to work after a vacation and begin a tour of the country to talk to people about their financial pressures, his office said.

Burnham said in a statement that “people are sick and tired of rip-off discounts and subscription traps”, where subscriptions are hard to cancel or automatically renew at a higher cost.

He said his government would be “making it as easy to leave a subscription as it is to join”.

Currently British consumers are “spending an estimated £1.6 billion (US\$2.2 billion) a year on [subscriptions] they don’t actually want”, Downing Street said.

New rules will come into force in January next year, it said, forcing businesses to give customers “clearer up-front information, regular reminders and a much easier exit to contracts”.

There will be a new 14-day cooling-off period to let consumers cancel after a

trial or a long-term contract renews, the government announced, without describing how this would be implemented.

Burnham also promised to tackle “misleading claims to customers about discounts” based on inflated full-price figures.

After nearly a decade as a regional mayor in northern England, Burnham has stressed his desire to move politics outside Westminster.

The *Mirror* newspaper reported his “cost of living tour” this month would cover all the United Kingdom’s constituent regions and include places such as Port Talbot in Wales, an economically depressed former steelworking town.

“I’ll be asking one question: what would actually make your life better?”, Burnham told the left-wing newspaper.

Entering office, the prime minister promised to draw up a 10-year plan for the country.

His first announcements included a tax cut on energy bills inflated by the US-Iran war, a cap on bus ticket prices and cutting business rates for pubs.

Opposition politicians on the right and left have criticised the measures as not going far enough. – AFP

Sex doll ‘mistaken’ for murder victim in Australia

SYDNEY – A lifelike sex doll was briefly “mistaken” for a murder victim after it was found inside a suitcase dumped in rural Australia, police and local media said yesterday.

Two men were driving through the Australian countryside on Sunday when they stumbled across an abandoned suitcase seemingly packed with human remains.

A strike force of homicide detectives and forensic experts was set up to solve what police initially treated as a murder.

But tests soon showed the suitcase was actually stuffed with a lifelike sex doll, public broadcaster ABC reported.

“They were mistaken for a human originally,” New South Wales Police Superintendent Linda Bradbury told reporters.

“They are very realistic in terms of looking like human remains.”

Police said “forensic examinations” had shown it was actually a “lifelike doll”, replete with clothes, hair and a nose piercing.

Further muddying the waters was the fact the doll “also had markings that resembled bruises and grazes”, police said in a statement.

“Investigations have concluded.” – AFP

US left-wing star reveals decision to freeze her eggs

WASHINGTON, DC – Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, one of the most prominent figures on the US left and a potential presidential contender, has revealed she is freezing her eggs, saying she wants to speak openly about choices confronting women balancing careers and family.

The 36-year-old Democratic congresswoman from New York shared videos of the fertility treatment on social media over the weekend, including footage of herself administering hormone injections.

“This is a choice that I am making to feel more in control of my life,” Ocasio-Cortez said, describing her ability to undergo the procedure as a “very privileged position.”

Her disclosure came as speculation mounts over her political future.

Hours later, Ocasio-Cortez

said in a television interview that she had not ruled out running for the White House in 2028, while also leaving open the possibility of challenging Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer for his New York seat.

“I haven’t ruled out the possibility,” she told ABC on Sunday when asked about a presidential bid, while insisting her immediate focus remains November’s midterm elections.

Ocasio-Cortez, widely known by her initials AOC, burst onto the national political scene with an upset congressional victory in 2018 and rapidly became a leading voice of the Democratic Party’s left wing.

She said going public about freezing her eggs carried a “political risk,” arguing women running for office face questions about marriage and children rarely asked of men.



US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Democrat from New York, questions US health care CEOs on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on January 22. – AFP

“This is just not something that men deal with,” she said. “Men run for office, or frankly they interview for jobs,” without people

wondering whether they intend to start a family.

Ocasio-Cortez also linked the decision to her advocacy

for reproductive rights, saying political leaders should normalise conversations about women’s health at a time when access to abortion and other reproductive care remains fiercely contested in the United States.

“In this political environment... I think it’s important for us as leaders to have these conversations,” she said.

Egg freezing involves stimulating the ovaries with hormone injections before mature eggs are surgically retrieved and preserved for possible future use through in vitro fertilisation.

The process can be expensive, is not always covered by insurance and offers no guarantee of a future pregnancy. Ocasio-Cortez said she had been saving for the procedure and considering it for a long time.

She did not say whether she ultimately plans to have children.

– AFP

Meta releases new AI model as Zuckerberg lays out vision

WASHINGTON, DC – Meta chief executive Mark Zuckerberg called yesterday for lower barriers for open-source AI, as his company introduced a new model that can run on a personal computer.

The launch comes amid debate in the United States on whether access to the technology should be more restricted, and on local pushback against the buildout of data centres that power it.

This was accompanied by a long essay outlining Zuckerberg’s vision for AI in which he stressed the need to remain competitive against countries like China, among other issues.

Competitors OpenAI and Anthropic largely focus on closed AI models.

Zuckerberg said in an Instagram video yesterday that his company would open the weights for its latest AI model, enabling it to be downloaded by the public.

Weights refer to calculations or rules governing how an AI system behaves.

He said Meta would also release a new class of open-source models, designed to run on a laptop.

“Rather than centralising superintelligence, we should distribute it widely and give every person the ability to direct it,” Zuckerberg said in his essay.

He took aim at other labs that are “focused on building AI for companies, governments or other institutions,” arguing that this would tip the balance of power in favour of institutions instead of individuals.

Zuckerberg added that foreign labs hold advantages over US ones that have to comply with restrictions on training data.

“I do not believe restricting access to foreign open-source models is an effective solution,” he said.

“Our goal should be for American open-source models to be the best globally. This requires removing the hurdles that make it harder for American open-source models to compete,” he said.

Amid growing public opposition to data centre development in the United States, Zuckerberg added that Meta is launching a fund to directly support communities around its facilities.

– AFP



CEO of Meta Platforms Mark Zuckerberg attends the Allen & Company Sun Valley Conference at the Sun Valley Lodge on July 9, 2026 in Sun Valley, Idaho, United States.

– AFP

German killer nurse probed over dozens more deaths

BERLIN – German prosecutors said yesterday they were investigating dozens of suspicious cases which could be connected to a palliative care nurse already jailed for the murder of 10 patients.

The man – partially identified by German media as Ulrich S., who worked in a hospital in Würselen near the western city of Aachen – was jailed for life in November after being convicted of 10 counts of murder and 27 of attempted murder.

Prosecutors in that earlier trial said he injected the mostly elderly patients with large doses of sedatives or painkillers, with the simple aim of reducing his workload during night shifts.

The investigation continued after his conviction and prosecutors in Aachen now say

they are looking at 121 cases they think could be linked to the man and that new charges against him could be filed next year.

Almost 40 bodies have so far been exhumed as part of the new investigation, which covers incidents going back as far as September 2022.

In addition, prosecutors in Cologne are investigating 18 further cases, the earliest of which dates from 2010.

Before working at the Würselen hospital, the nurse is believed to have been active at a clinic in Cologne, according to local media reports.

At the time of his conviction, the court also determined that the offences carried a “particular severity of guilt” which should bar him from early release after 15 years, normally an option in

such cases.

In the trial, prosecutors described him as working “with no motivation” or empathy for his patients.

The case echoes that of nurse Niels Högel, who was handed a life sentence in 2019 for murdering 85 patients and who is believed to be modern Germany’s most prolific serial killer.

Högel killed patients with lethal injections between 2000 and 2005 before he was caught.

Last month, a palliative care doctor in Berlin was sentenced to life for murdering 15 people with lethal doses of sedatives.

In several cases, he allegedly set fire to their apartments in an attempt to cover up the killings.

He too remains under investigation over possible involvement in other cases. – AFP

Finland reopens train service to Sweden, putting Europe in reach

OULU, Finland – A new passenger train service linking Finland to Sweden began running yesterday, creating a rail route stretching from northern Finland to southern Europe for the first time since the 1990s.

The atmosphere at the Oulu train station in northern Finland was filled with excitement as passengers boarded a train headed for neighbouring Sweden early yesterday (local time).

Vaino Jalkanen, 37, woke up at dawn to witness the “historic” resumption of Finnish cross-border trains that were discontinued in 1988.

“Now it will be possible to travel from Paris to Rovaniemi, for example,” he told AFP as he had found his seat, referring to a

city deep in central Finland.

Services will run from Oulu on Finland’s northwest coast to Haparanda, Sweden, twice a day.

From Haparanda, passengers can transfer to trains and routes that run west to the Norwegian sea or south through Stockholm as far as Portugal.

The transfer is necessary because Finland uses the same track widths as in neighbouring Russia, which are wider than the European standard – a legacy of when the Nordic country was part of the Russian Grand Duchy in the 19th century.

After crossing a bridge over the Torne river from Finland’s Tornio, the inaugural train yesterday was welcomed by a crowd of people waving Finnish

and Swedish flags at the red-brick station in Haparanda.

“It’s about security, it’s about the future, it’s about economy,” Finland’s Transport Minister Lulu Ranne told AFP.

She added that cooperation between the two countries was growing “all the time”.

Elisa Markula, chief executive of Finland’s state-owned railway operator VR, said she was hopeful the service would attract passengers because “travelling via land is very popular at the moment”.

“Train travelling in all Europe is having a renaissance. Also in Finland, our passenger numbers are increasing a lot,” Markula added.

– AFP

Brazil-Argentina rift tests LatAm cooperation

Commentary by Xinhua writers
Tan Huiting and Lu Junyu

MEXICO CITY/RIO DE JANEIRO – Brazil’s decision to downgrade diplomatic relations with Argentina has pushed a bitter dispute between their presidents beyond political rhetoric, raising concerns over foreign influence in Brazil’s upcoming election and the future of South American integration.

DIPLOMATIC TIES DOWNGRADED

Relations between the two neighbors deteriorated sharply after Argentine President Javier Milei traveled to Brazil in late July to support Senator Flávio Bolsonaro’s presidential campaign and publicly attacked Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and his government.

Brazil subsequently recalled its ambassador to Argentina, Júlio Bitelli, for consultations. Milei then renewed his attacks during a television interview, calling Lula an “ex-convict,” a “thief” and “corrupt.”

Brazil responded on Wednesday by formally downgrading relations with Argentina to the chargé d’affaires level and announcing that Bitelli would not return to Buenos Aires under the current circumstances. Argentina said it would not take retaliatory diplomatic action.

The move marked the culmination of tensions that have grown since Milei took office in December 2023. The two presidents have yet to hold an official bilateral meeting.

The confrontation had produced an unprecedented degree of diplomatic tension between the two neighbors, said Argentine political consultant Patricio Giusto.

He attributed the immediate deterioration primarily to Milei’s personal and political hostility toward Lula, rather than to



This combination of pictures created shows Argentina’s President Javier Milei (left) speaking during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos on January 21, 2026, and Brazil’s President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva speaking during an event to highlight accomplishments in the first two years in office of his current term in Brasília on April 3, 2025.
– AFP

fundamental differences in bilateral economic interests.

However, the seriousness of the dispute could produce lasting consequences and eventually spill over into trade, Giusto warned.

Ana Prestes, secretary of politics and international relations of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), noted that Milei’s words and actions were explicitly labeled “interference in Brazil’s internal affairs” by the Brazilian Foreign Ministry.

US FACTOR ALSO LOOMS OVER BRAZIL’S ELECTION

The dispute is unfolding at a time when Brazil prepares for its presidential election in October as its relations with the United States are also under strain.

Against this backdrop, Milei’s open support for Flávio Bolsonaro, Lula’s main right-wing rival, has

added an international dimension to the Brazilian campaign.

Milei is one of US President Donald Trump’s closest political allies in Latin America. His intervention has therefore been interpreted by analysts as part of a wider contest over the region’s political direction.

Sebastián Schulz, a researcher at Argentina’s National University of La Plata, said Milei had acted as a regional spokesman and interlocutor for Trump by supporting right-wing candidates and confronting governments that advocate greater strategic autonomy.

The Brazil-Argentina dispute should therefore be viewed not only as a clash between two presidents, but also as part of a broader geopolitical struggle in Latin America, Schulz said.

Lula has framed disputes involving Washington and Buenos Aires as matters of national sovereignty,

potentially strengthening his appeal among voters concerned about foreign involvement in Brazilian politics.

The crisis represents an orchestrated attempt at electoral interference by a “conservative international” operating out of the United States, as Brazil remains one of the last major nations in the region yet to fall to the far-right, said Marcos Pires, Brazilian political economist and former professor of international political economy at São Paulo State University.

REGIONAL COOPERATION FACES A TEST

The diplomatic rift is also testing a bilateral partnership that has long served as the foundation of South American cooperation.

Brazil and Argentina are the region’s two largest economies and founding members of the Southern Common Market (Mercosur). Their industries are closely linked through trade and cross-border production chains, making an economic rupture far more difficult than a political one.

Uruguayan Foreign Minister Mario Lubetkin on Wednesday called the diplomatic tensions “bad news” for Mercosur, saying the deterioration in relations hurts not only Brazil and Argentina, but also Uruguay and Paraguay.

“This doesn’t help anyone,” Lubetkin said, expressing the hope that the two governments would resume state-level dialogue to ease tensions.

He said the dispute was making the bloc’s work more difficult during an important period, as Uruguay currently chairs both Mercosur and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States and is advancing a trade negotiation agenda.

Over the years, the Argentina-Brazil partnership has helped

establish Mercosur as an important pillar of regional stability, said Jorge Taiana, an Argentine lawmaker and former foreign minister.

Although the current dispute could delay integration efforts, economic interdependence and support from the business communities of both countries meant the broader integration process was unlikely to disappear, he said.

The crisis nevertheless points to a more fragmented period for South America. Governments may increasingly diverge over relations with the United States and other global powers, while shared economic interests continue to push them toward cooperation.

Regional integration is therefore likely to become more pragmatic and selective, focusing on trade, infrastructure, energy and industrial supply chains rather than depending on broad political or ideological agreement.

Celso Amorim, chief international affairs advisor to the Brazilian presidency and former foreign minister, emphasized that bilateral ties must not be reduced to friction with Milei’s government.

He noted that while Brazil remains concerned by Milei’s efforts to align with Washington and weaken regional integration, the Brazilian government continues to view Argentina as an indispensable strategic partner, seeking to prevent temporary disputes between leaders from turning into a permanent crisis.

For Brazil and Argentina, the immediate challenge is to prevent presidential confrontation and electoral politics from causing lasting damage to established ties.

For South America, the dispute is a test of whether regional cooperation can withstand growing political polarization and external geopolitical pressure.
– Xinhua

Colombia president says 6 armed rebels killed in clashes

BOGOTÁ – Colombian forces killed six members of armed groups on Sunday, President Abelardo de la Espriella announced, the opening salvo in a crackdown on crime just days after his inauguration.

The far-right leader took office on Friday vowing to crush criminal groups profiting from drug trafficking amid the South American country’s worst wave of violence of the past decade.

Sunday’s military operations are among the first by the new government against the illegal groups, and they mark “a clear and powerful message to all bandits,” De la Espriella said in a statement. “There is nowhere for them to hide.”

The tough-talking former lawyer campaigned on confronting “narcoterrorism without truce” and ending peace talks with armed groups following his inauguration in the southwestern city of Cali.

He has pledged to intensify airstrikes against guerrillas and drug traffickers operating in Colombia and to build mega-prisons similar to the one in El Salvador.

Colombian troops on Sunday killed four rebels of a splinter faction of the former

FARC guerrilla group, including a mid-level commander, in an Amazonian town in central Meta department, the president said.

That dissident faction is led by Iván Mordisco, Colombia’s most wanted guerrilla commander.

The army also killed two members of the Gulf Clan, Colombia’s main drug cartel, in Antioquia department in the northwest.

On Saturday, two bombing attacks in different parts of the country marred De la Espriella’s first day in office, killing at least one police officer and wounding several people.

Colombia’s army said that in one attack, FARC guerrilla dissidents used explosives to destroy a highway tollbooth near Cali, with two security guards suffering minor injuries.

A decade after landmark peace accords, pockets of the country are still ruled by dissident armed groups that dominate global cocaine production.

The confrontational style of De la Espriella, a first-time political leader who openly admires US President Donald Trump and El Salvador’s Nayib Bukele, now faces tough opposition from the guerrilla groups and drug traffickers operating in Colombia.
– AFP

Spanish police dismantle major Mediterranean migrant smuggling network

MADRID – Spanish police said on Friday they had dismantled what they called one of the largest criminal networks involved in smuggling migrants across the Mediterranean, arresting 78 people and seizing 18 high-speed boats.

The network allegedly used the vessels to transport synthetic drugs such as ecstasy from Spain to Algeria and, on the return journey, to smuggle migrants to Spain’s Mediterranean coast and the island of Ibiza, police said in a statement.

Investigators believe the group was responsible for at least 64 migrant smuggling operations in which more than 2,000 people were brought to Spain, generating profits of more than 24 million euros (US\$28 million).

Police said the sea crossings were “extremely dangerous”, with migrants travelling “crammed together, at high speed, in rough seas”.

“On some occasions, passengers were even tied up to prevent them from falling

into the water during the journey,” the statement said.

The network charged up to 12,000 euros per person transported, with some operations involving as many as 50 migrants per crossing, police said.

Among those arrested were four alleged leaders of the organisation. Authorities also seized 18 high-speed boats valued at more than five million euros.

The operation was carried out with the cooperation of Europol, the European Union’s law enforcement agency, and police forces in France, Portugal and Poland.

Most irregular migration to Spain by sea takes place along the Atlantic route from west Africa to the Canary Islands, one of the main entry points to Europe for people fleeing conflict, persecution and poverty.

While arrivals to the Canary Islands have fallen in recent months, irregular migration along the western Mediterranean route from Algeria to Spain has increased.

– AFP

Barcelona turn down PSG offer for Torres



BARCELONA – Barcelona yesterday rejected an initial offer from Paris Saint-Germain estimated at 40 million euros (US\$46.2 million) for Spanish World Cup winner Ferran Torres, a source within the Catalan club told AFP.

“Negotiations are ongoing” between Barca and PSG, the same source added, confirming reports from the daily *Mundo Deportivo*.

According to Spanish media reports, Torres, scorer of the winning goal in the 2026 World Cup final, has agreed to join PSG and his former national team coach Luis Enrique.

Out of contract with Barca in June 2027, the 26-year-old forward remained vague about his future in recent interviews he gave during a promotional tour in the United States.

“I have a contract with Barcelona, but in football you never know. I’m just waiting to make the right decision,” he said.

When asked if he had a “dream” destination in mind, Torres answered that he did, without revealing it: “I just want to be happy,” he replied.

Torres, signed in 2021 from Manchester City for more than 55 million euros, has been used as a centre-forward, backing up Polish striker Robert Lewandowski, since Hansi Flick took over on the Barca bench in the summer of 2024.

Often decisive as a substitute, Torres, who came through Valencia’s youth system, has scored 40 goals in 94 matches in all competitions over the last two seasons.

Torres scored Spain’s winning goal in extra time of the World Cup final against Argentina last month, giving La Roja their second world title. – AFP



Norwegian Football Association President Lise Klaveness talks to journalists after the 47th UEFA Congress held in Lisbon on April 5, 2023. A rare woman in a male-dominated world, Lise Klaveness, president of the Norwegian Football Federation, has for years played the role of a thorn in FIFA’s side, and some would be quite happy to see her take over its leadership in place of Gianni Infantino. – AFP

Embattled Infantino target of letter from 3 confederations



LAUSANNE – FIFA president Gianni Infantino came under renewed fire yesterday as a joint letter from three confederations – UEFA, CONCACAF and AFC – declared football “belongs to no individual”.

Infantino has been the butt of scathing criticism ever since launching, and then withdrawing within days, a plan to bring private investment into FIFA competitions, including World Cups.

FIFA had hit back on Saturday at “a concerted and ongoing effort by some to undermine” football’s governing body and Infantino.

However, yesterday’s letter from the governing bodies of European football (UEFA), North and Central America (CONCACAF) and Asia (AFC), showed his critics are unbowed.

“Leadership in football is not a possession. It is not about holding - or demanding - power to be held,” they wrote.

“When trust is broken through deception, when an individual places himself above the collective that entrusted him with authority, that duty has been abandoned,” the confederations added.

The three confederations had been vociferous in their condemnation of Infantino’s plan and had not let up after it was shelved.

CONCACAF president Victor Montagliani is viewed as a potential challenger to Infantino, who will seek a fourth and final term at the FIFA presidential election in Rabat next March.

Candidates have to be declared by November 18.

UEFA’s threat to boycott World

Cups if the private investment plan went ahead - in theory depriving the competition of teams including reigning men’s champions Spain and 2026 semi-finalists France and England - proved pivotal in Infantino withdrawing his plan.

Prior to this debacle Infantino had looked likely to be unopposed, after overseeing a successful World Cup in the United States, Mexico and Canada.

The 56-year-old Swiss, who has been in situ for 10 years, has received the backing of the Confederation of African Football (CAF) while South American governing body CONMEBOL are largely supportive.

The confederations do not vote as blocs and there have been some supportive voices for Infantino from CONCACAF, Mexico, and two AFC members -- Kuwait and 2022 World Cup hosts Qatar, where he has a house.

Although the proposal has been dead in the water for over a week now - UEFA had termed it “a shabby, opaque, backroom deal” - the confederations harangued him for a lack of judgment.

“FIFA’s recent letter to its Vice-Presidents and 211 Member Associations acknowledges that mistakes were made in the process,” they said.

“It treats this as a failure of communication, when what football witnessed was a failure of judgment.”

‘Accountability’

Although Infantino had received the “full support” of senior FIFA directors last week in an emergency meeting he called in Morocco, the confederations said it was meaningless.

“This recent meeting, where a

select number of members of the FIFA Management Committee - not the full Committee - were summoned abroad, rather than leadership going to Zurich to address the heart of FIFA, its staff, only reinforces these concerns and represents a continuation of the very pattern of conduct that brought us to this moment,” they said.

“It is not the conduct of a custodian of the game, but of one who believes the game is answerable to him.”

Infantino had been basking in the afterglow of a hugely successful World Cup – the largest ever involving 48 teams.

However, the confederations made clear in the letter that it was not just Infantino who had made this possible.

“The growth over the past decade has been real,” they said.

“But that progress was never the work of one individual.

“It was the product of FIFA, the Confederations, the Member Associations, and the thousands of people who dedicate their lives to the game.

“The expanded tournaments, the awarding of the 2030 and 2034 FIFA World Cups, the distribution of resources to associations. These were shared achievements, agreed together, delivered together.”

The confederations signed off their letter by claiming that under Infantino’s leadership “there is silence where there should be accountability, distance where there should be openness”.

They added: “That is why we have taken this stance: not lightly and not alone, but together, and out of duty to the game we serve. Football’s strength has always been its unity.” – AFP

World Cup co-hosts US and Canada oppose Infantino

Football

LOS ANGELES – The football federations of the United States and Canada – two of the 2026 World Cup host nations – yesterday backed a statement from three confederations criticising FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

US Soccer, Canada Soccer, the CFU (Caribbean Football Union) and UNCAF (Central American Football Union) said they “stand together, along with our colleagues around the world, in calling for meaningful change that strengthens FIFA’s governance, transparency and accountability”.

That puts the US and Canada at odds with the third co-host of this year’s World Cup, Mexico, which has given Infantino its backing.

Infantino has come under intense pressure since first proposing and then shelving a plan to raise private

investment for a new commercial subsidiary, called the FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE), who he proposed would run the commercial side of World Cups.

FIFA had hit back on Saturday at “a concerted and ongoing effort by some to undermine” football’s governing body and Infantino.

But the FIFA chief came under renewed fire yesterday as a joint letter from three confederations – Europe’s UEFA, CONCACAF for North and Central America and the Caribbean and Asian body AFC – declared football “belongs to no individual”.

“Leadership in football is not a possession. It is not about holding – or demanding – power to be held,” the confederations wrote

The social media post from US Soccer and Canada Soccer contained a link to the joint letter.

– AFP



Outsiders Malawi reach WAFCON semi-finals and World Cup

JOHANNESBURG – Rank outsiders Malawi qualified for the Women’s Africa Cup of Nations semi-finals and the World Cup by coming from behind to beat Ghana 2-1 in Morocco on Sunday.

Trailing after just seven minutes when Chantelle Boye-Hlorkah volleyed Ghana into the lead, Malawi levelled five minutes later as a Temwa Chawinga shot was deflected into the net.

With 79 minutes gone in Rabat, the Malawians went ahead when Rose Kadzere burst into the area and fired past goalkeeper Cynthia Konlan.

Rattled Ghana forced late pressure, but never seriously threatened to equalise in the WAFCON quarter-final.

In the semi-finals tomorrow, Malawi will face Algeria in Casablanca after hosts Morocco tackle Cameroon in Rabat. None of the teams have previously won the WAFCON.

All four semi-finalists secure places at the 2027 World Cup in

Brazil. The losing quarter-finalists will get a second chance via African and inter-continental play-offs.

Malawi were dismissed as no-hopers before the WAFCON as they are ranked 153rd in the world and had never before qualified for the marquee African women’s football tournament.

But they stunned record 10-time WAFCON champions Nigeria in their first match, then beat Egypt. A loss to Zambia did not prevent them winning the group on goals scored.

Ghana had been WAFCON runners-up three times and are ranked 62 places above Malawi, but the longer the quarter-final progressed, the likelier a shock result became.

Earlier in Casablanca, Myriam Nyadjou scored from a free-kick to give Cameroon a surprise 1-0 quarter-final victory over defending champions Nigeria.

The 19-year-old struck after 19 minutes, slamming a rising shot past the outstretched hands of

goalkeeper Chiamaka Nnadozie and into the corner of the net.

Nigeria pressed for an equaliser in the closing stages only to be constantly defied by acrobatic saves from Michaela Bihina.

The closest the Super Falcons came to scoring was in the third minute of added time when Esther Okoronkwo won a race for possession with Bihina, but her shot trickled wide.

Just before the miss, Nigeria introduced six-time African Women’s Footballer of the Year Asisat Oshola, who was not sufficiently fit to start.

But the Saudi Arabia-based striker was unable to make an impact and Cameroon comfortably survived the last few minutes for only their second victory over Nigeria in 14 WAFCON meetings.

As the Namibian referee signalled full-time, the Cameroon substitutes and coaches raced on to the pitch and hugged the Indomitable Lionesses. – AFP

Tentoglou keep bid for 4th Euro title on course, Nowicki misses out

Athletics

Luke Phillips

BIRMINGHAM, United Kingdom – Greek long jumper Miltiadis Tentoglou kept his bid for a fourth European title on track at the opening day of the 2026 championships in Birmingham yesterday.

Double Olympic champion Tentoglou sailed into the final of the men's long jump with an effort of 8.26 metres at the Alexander Stadium that secured automatic qualification.

"Tomorrow I want to jump 8.50m, 8.60m and win," said the 28-year-old Greek.

"I'm good, so I should be able to. I have defended so many titles, so I don't feel the pressure, I feel excited."

Italian Francesco Ettore Inzoli, with a wind-assisted 8.34m, and Serbian Luka Boskovic (8.33) led the way into today's final.

The world outdoor and indoor champion from 2025, Italy's Mattia Furlani, missed out on qualification with one effort of 7.73m on his comeback from injury.

Like Tentoglou, Poland's Wojciech Nowicki is also a serial European gold medallist, having won the last three men's hammer throw titles, in Berlin in 2018, Munich in 2022 and Rome two years ago.

But Nowicki, Olympic champion in Tokyo in 2021 and who also has five world medals to his name (two silver, three bronze), missed out on qualification for today's final.

He managed a best of 74.49m, which saw him finish 13th, 73cm off the 12th and final qualifier spot.

Nowicki's teammate Pawel Fajdek, the five-time world gold medallist who also won a European title in 2016, will ensure Polish interest in an event the country has



Britain's Stephen Mackenzie competes in the men's long jump qualifier during the European Athletics Championships at Alexander Stadium in Birmingham yesterday. – AFP

dominated in recent times.

Czech Volodymyr Myslyvcuk (79.61m) and Hungary's Bence Halasz (79.58) led the qualifiers, the only two athletes comfortably beyond the automatic qualification standard of 78.00m.

The Netherlands' Jessica Schilder looked comfortable in qualifying for the women's shot put, the final of which was held later yesterday.

The two-time defending champion comes to Birmingham in fine form, having made history at the Shanghai Diamond League when she threw 21.09m to not only break the Diamond League record, but also became just the third woman in the world to break 21 metres since the turn of the millennium.

Yemisi Mabry of Germany won gold with a throw of 19.25 metres, Schilder won silver with 19 metres and Auriol Dongmo of Portugal with 18.76 metres.

Max Burgin and Ben Pattison delighted the British crowd by qualifying for the semi-finals of the men's 800m.

France's Yanis Meziane ran the fastest heat, in 1min 45.10sec, but teammate and defending champion Gabriel Tual only just snuck in.

Tual, the sixth-fastest man and the second-fastest European in the two-lap race, was the 13th and final qualifier in 1:46.33.

The evening session at the 18,000-capacity Alexander Stadium features five finals.

Golds will be up for grabs for both men and women in the shot put, while Amy Hunt will be vying for a British victory in the women's 100m.

Jakob Ingebrigtsen is gunning for a seventh European title in the men's 5,000m, while there are also bragging rights to claim in the mixed 4x400m relay. – AFP

Shelton sweeps Fonseca to reach Montreal quarters

Tennis

MONTREAL – Defending champion Ben Shelton kept a clean slate at the ATP Montreal Masters on Sunday, holding off a challenge from Joao Fonseca to power 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) into the quarter-finals.

World number 10 Shelton has not dropped a set in reaching the last eight.

The 23-year-old American left-hander will play for a semi-final berth against 13th-seeded Czech Jakub Mensik, who beat Botik Van De Zandschulp 6-4, 7-5, claiming victory on a winning lob.

Van De Zandschulp served for the second set but was broken, with Mensik seizing the momentum as he won 12 of the final 14 points.

Brazilian teenager Fonseca, billed as one of the faces for the future of the sport, might have compromised his own chances when he landed badly on his ankle after missing a smash while leading 3-1, 40-30 in the second set.

The youngster was plagued by 32 unforced errors as his opponent mastered an annoying evening wind to earn the victory.

"It was tough today, not easy conditions," Shelton said. "With the wind I struggled to find footing on a lot of balls."

"It all came down to grit. The tennis was not clean. Beating a high-quality player like that is huge for me."

Shelton secured his ninth straight victory in Canada on the second of four match points as Fonseca hit the net with a return after leading in both sets.

Daniel Merida smothered Tallon Griekspoor 6-3, 6-1 as the Spaniard continued his rapid

adjustment to hardcourt tennis in Canada.

The world number 63 joins compatriot Rafael Jodar in the Canada quarter-finals and will break through to a career-best spot inside the top 50 as a result of his fourth-round victory.

Prior to making his Montreal debut, clay-courter Merida had never won a tour-level match on hardcourt.

He will try to extend his streak of cement success to five in a row when he plays a first Masters quarter-final against US 12th seed Learner Tien, who wore down Argentine Thiago Tirante 6-4, 6-4.

Tien saved the first eight break points he faced in the second set in a battle of big hitters and secured victory in his fifth match point, with his opponent handing over the final game with four unforced errors.

"Today was humid, conditions are always tough," Tien said. "I'm happy with how the match worked out."

"This was one of those days where I was making good contact with the ball. I was seeing the ball well and returning well."

Against Griekspoor, Merida was deadly with his backhand, leaving the Dutchman flat-footed in the 69-minute triumph.

Spain's title-winner last month on clay in Umag has now claimed 16 victories this breakthrough season.

"This is a dream come true. I'm feeling really great," Merida said. "I'm happy with the level during all the week."

"I was playing great for the last year and the beginning of this year so I just starting to believe more in myself." – AFP

Rybakina survives scare as Gauff, Osaka race into Toronto quarters

Tennis

TORONTO – World number two Elena Rybakina survived a huge scare to battle into the Canadian Open quarter-finals on Sunday in Toronto while fourth-ranked Coco Gauff cruised through.

Kazakhstan's Rybakina recovered from 0-3 and two breaks down in the final set to beat Liudmila Samsonova 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 before American Gauff swept aside Russian teenage qualifier Alina Korneeva, 6-3, 6-1.

Rybakina will face four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka, who eliminated home hero Leylah Fernandez 6-4, 6-4.

Gauff reached the last eight in Canada for the first time since 2023 and next meets 14th-ranked Swiss Belinda Bencic, who won 6-4, 6-0 in 73 minutes over 20th-ranked Alexandra Eala, a Filipina who won her first WTA title last Monday in Washington.

"My main focus today was let me try and close it out," said

Gauff, who has not dropped a set in Canada.

"Probably not the way I should be thinking but it worked today."

"I'm proud of how the last

three matches have gone and just knowing if I have to go the distance I'm ready, but obviously would prefer to cut it short if I can."

Osaka broke in the seventh

game of each set to advance in 82 minutes.

"It was all pretty good for me," the 13th-ranked Osaka said. "She has a great attitude. She's consistent

and she will fight. She's kind of like a bulldog."

The Japanese star, who has never faced Rybakina, said sound groundstrokes were key.

"When I feel comfortable or at least confident in myself knowing I can run things down, I loosen up a lot," Osaka said.

"I was catching my service toss a couple times. Hopefully in the next match I don't do that as often."

"I need to be confident in myself, execute what I can and at the end of the day just try my best and whatever happens happens."

Bencic connected on 64.4 percent of her first serves and won 72.4 percent of those points in a 73-minute victory, her 10th win in a row over left-handed opponents.

"I hate to play against lefties so I'm surprised by this statistic," Bencic said. "Very tricky."

"Maybe helped me I played a lefty the round before against Taylor Townsend. I got used to the serve a little bit. I wish I was a lefty too." – AFP



Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan returns a shot to Liudmila Samsonova during the National Bank Open Presented by Rogers at Sobey's Stadium on Sunday in Toronto, Ontario. – AFP

Ivorians set eyes on ‘talking drum’, looted by France, for first time

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast – The Djidji Ayokwe, a sacred “talking drum” which was looted by French colonial troops in 1916 and taken to France, arrived back in its home village in Ivory Coast on Friday.

The ceremony, on Ivory Coast’s Independence Day holiday, was the first time today’s Ivorians were able to see it.

The imposing wooden drum, more than three metres long and weighing 430 kilogrammes, was used by the Ebrie tribe to transmit messages.

It was officially handed over in February and arrived back in Ivory Coast in March aboard a specially chartered plane but was not taken out of its huge wooden crate.

Ivory Coast had asked in late 2018 for the return of the Djidji Ayokwe among 148 works of art looted during the colonial period.

It is one of hundreds of stolen artefacts Paris is preparing to send back to Africa, aided by the approval in May of a new French law.

On Friday, it was carried in a military parade through the Yopougon district of Abidjan, before continuing on to the village of Adjame, where it was made.

The black, white and red instrument was transported in a glass-fronted case on a large, decorated float and welcomed by Culture Minister Françoise Remarck, traditional leaders and hundreds of local residents.

A dozen people performed a libation ceremony, pouring a few

drops of liquid onto the ground as an offering to their ancestors.

“A nation cannot develop if it doesn’t preserve its memory and promote its heritage,” said Adjame mayor Farikou Soumahoro.

He said he felt “deep emotion and great pride”.

“We want to see the drum with our own eyes so we can truly believe it belongs to us,” 69-year-old villager Jacqueline Akrebie told AFP.

Traditional leader Cyriaque Ahoure, 63, said he had come to share a moment of “great joy, when we remembering our ancestors”.

The talking drum is much more than a musical instrument. It was used by the Ebrie community to warn of danger – particularly from French colonialists, call to war or summon villagers to ceremonies.

It was seized by the French colonial authorities in 1916 before being shipped to Europe in 1929 and exhibited in Paris for decades.

It is due to go on display at the Museum of Civilisations in Abidjan which has been specially renovated.

Senegal and Benin have also asked for the repatriation of their treasures.

The return of cultural artefacts stolen from ex-colonies in Africa and elsewhere has become a sensitive issue, with museums, institutions and collectors in Europe and the United States facing pressure to give them back.

– AFP



Undated file photo of Ivory Coast’s looted “talking drum”, which was returned by France to the West African country on Friday. – Photo courtesy of Anambra Current News

Ithaca bets on hometown hero Odysseus for tourism boom

Yannick Pasquet

ITHACA, Greece – Standing on the ferry as it waits to dock on the Greek island of Ithaca, Giorgia Ongarato is only too keen to talk about the “Odyssey” – the epic poem that inspired Christopher Nolan’s blockbuster film.

The Italian lawyer said it was her dream to come to Ithaca, widely believed to be the same island as the home of Odysseus in the poem.

Dressed in a T-shirt emblazoned with the word “Odyssey” in ancient Greek alongside a line from the poem, she enthused: “I studied Greek when I was a child, and I studied the Odyssey.”

While she stressed that the film was not her entry point into the tale of the hero battling his way back home from the Trojan war, the 50-year-old said she was also a fan of the film – describing it as “wonderful”.

The island’s businesses and officials now expect the film to inspire many more to follow in her footsteps.

Ithaca, in the Ionian Sea off the west coast of mainland Greece is far from the country’s tourist hubs, and despite limpid waters and spectacular bays, it has never been a regular stop for travellers.

Its interior is rugged, carpeted with olive and cypress trees, and strikingly calm even at the height of the tourist season.

Although the movie has undoubtedly piqued the interest of many, it has also been slightly controversial in Greece – although some Greek locations were used, not a single scene in the blockbuster was actually shot on Ithaca.

Homeric monuments abound

That decision has left some crestfallen on the island of roughly 3,000 inhabitants – where the film has been shown twice in open-air screenings since its July 16 worldwide release.

Xhimi Xoxha, who runs a restaurant in Ithaca’s capital of Vathi, said he was content that the movie was already “generating publicity for the island”. He predicted the positive effects would continue.

While Ithaca mayor Dionysis Stanitsas agreed that the publicity was “tremendous”, he could not hide his disappointment that the island itself did not feature.

“We had reached out to the production team and asked that some scenes be filmed here on the island,” he said. “Unfortunately, that wasn’t feasible.”

He is, however, counting on rising demand next year, and the island was already fully booked for this season by the time the film came out.

“As more people see it, they will begin planning trips to visit the island,” he said.

Visitors will not find a palace of Odysseus or any spectacular archaeological site likely to confirm



Tourists stand next to a statue of Odysseus, sculpted by Korina Cassianou, in the town of Vathy on the Greek island of Ithaca in the Ionian Sea last Monday. – AFP



A man walks past a bust of Odysseus in the central square of Stavros village, on the Greek island of Ithaca, last Monday. – AFP



An aerial view shows the town of Vathy on the Greek island of Ithaca last Tuesday. – AFP

the existence of the Homeric hero.

But village squares and the town hall are dotted with statues of Odysseus and Homer.

And there are other pointers to the island’s rich literary heritage.

In the small sun-drenched port, boats bob in the green water bearing names like “Telemachus” (son of Odysseus) and “Calypso” (a goddess and nymph who imprisoned him).

Trinket shops offer busts of Homer and Penelope, Odysseus’s wife.

T-shirts can be found amid the jumble featuring the Cyclops Polyphemus – one of the many monsters vanquished by Odysseus.

And the truly devoted can splash out for a wall plate decorated with a Trojan Horse.

Archaeologist Spyros Couvaras

is among those expecting a dramatic upsurge in visitors, saying it was clear that visitors wanted more than just sand and sea – they wanted the history and the mythology.

None of those are in short supply here.

A short distance from the shops and restaurants of the port, holidaymakers stretch out on deck chairs under parasols at Dexia beach, enveloped by the grating sound of cicadas.

According to legend, this is where Odysseus landed after years of voyaging.

Couvaras said the “driving force” of the renewed interest was undoubtedly the movie.

“But behind Nolan’s film stands Homer,” he said.

– AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 24°C~34°C	Manila 25°C~30°C	New York 23°C~33°C	Lisbon 18°C~30°C
Shanghai 26°C~30°C	Bangkok 26°C~33°C	London 15°C~25°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~21°C
Hong Kong 26°C~33°C	Tokyo 22°C~29°C	Frankfurt 14°C~29°C	Luanda 18°C~22°C
Taipei 25°C~34°C	Singapore 25°C~33°C	Vancouver 13°C~22°C	Maputo 14°C~19°C
Guangzhou 25°C~35°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~33°C	Paris 18°C~32°C	Dili 20°C~31°C
Nanjing 25°C~29°C	Jakarta 23°C~33°C	Moscow 14°C~25°C	São Tomé 24°C~30°C
Guilin 24°C~35°C	Seoul 20°C~34°C	Las Vegas 26°C~39°C	Praia 25°C~31°C
Xi'an 21°C~31°C	Sydney 9°C~21°C	Monte Carlo 25°C~32°C	Bissau 24°C~30°C



1. Customised car

A float is driven during a flower parade in Katwijk, the Netherlands, on Saturday.
— Xinhua

2. Strange hobbies!

Noel Jamet, 10-time champion in the French pig-squealing championship, performs on stage at the 43rd edition of the Pig Festival, in Trie-sur-Baïse, south-western France, on Sunday.
— AFP

3. Labour of love

Farmers prepare to carry flower arrangements known as “silletas” during the traditional Silleteros Parade held as part of the Flower Festival in Medellin, Antioquia department, Colombia, on Sunday.
— AFP

4. Birthday girl

Giant panda Xing Mei enjoys her birthday feast at the zoo of Photosynthesis Valley Tourist Resort in Tianjin Municipality, yesterday. The zoo in the Photosynthesis Valley Tourist Resort celebrated Xing Mei's 15th birthday yesterday.

— Xinhua

5. Whole city running!

Participants run at the start of the annual City to Surf fun run in central Sydney on Sunday.

— AFP

6. Not my birthday...

A lion enjoys a cake during an event marking the upcoming World Lion Day at Bucharest Zoo in Bucharest, Romania, on Saturday. World Lion Day is observed on August 10 every year to raise people's awareness of lion conservation.

— Xinhua