

Tam vows assessment of northern district's run-down buildings

Tony Wong

Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man yesterday paid inspection visits to various dilapidated buildings in the peninsula's northern district, urging all respective public entities to thoroughly assess the structural safety of all dilapidated buildings in the district, in order to carry out the necessary repairs to eliminate safety hazards.

A statement released by Tam's office yesterday underlined the government's ongoing commitment to advancing the city's urban renewal in three major aspects: building repair or renovation, old neighbourhood revitalisation, and the redevelopment of whole areas or individual buildings.

According to the statement, Tam led a team yesterday to conduct an on-site inspection of the condition of various dilapidated buildings in the northern district. The team consisted of officials from the Lands and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU), the Public Works Bureau (DSOP), the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA), the Transport Bureau (DSAT), and the Housing Bureau (IH), and



Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man (centre) gives instructions to officials under his portfolio during his inspection visit to Yau Seng Building, located near Mong-Ha Sports Centre, yesterday. – Photo: Tam's office

representatives from local power utility CEM.

Yesterday's on-site inspection covered the seven building clusters of Iao Hon Estate, as well as San Mei On Building (新美安大廈), Yau Seng Building (祐昇大廈),

Kam Heng Building (錦興大廈), and Man Lei Building (萬利樓).

The dilapidated Iao Hon Estate, which was built in the 1970s, comprises seven clusters of low-rise buildings – Hong Tai Building (康泰樓), Kat Cheong Building (吉

祥樓), Son Lei Building (順利樓), Heng Long Building (興隆樓), Mau Tan Building (牡丹樓), Man Sau Building (萬壽樓), and Seng Yee Building (勝意樓).

These seven clusters currently comprise 46 buildings consisting of

2,556 residential and commercial units, after four buildings were demolished in 2009.

San Mei On Building, Kam Heng Building, and Man Lei Building are all run-down low-rise building clusters located near Iao Hon Estate.

Similarly blighted, the low-rise Yau Seng building cluster stands near Mong-Ha Sports Centre.

According to the statement, members of Tam's team inspected the common areas of these buildings, including external walls, concrete floors, and staircases. The inspection assessed the structural safety of the buildings, electricity supply facilities, tap water supply facilities, and traffic conditions on surrounding roads.

Tam instructed all respective public entities to carry out thorough assessments of the structural safety of all dilapidated buildings in the northern district. The public entities should also coordinate with power utility CEM and Macao Water to step up inspections of power and water supply facilities, in order to carry out the necessary repairs to these facilities to eliminate safety hazards, according to the statement. ■

HK issues pilot licence for autonomous vehicle trial for inter-station passenger connection

HONG KONG – The Transport Department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government announced yesterday that it has issued a pilot licence for an autonomous vehicle trial connecting Hong Kong West Kowloon Station of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) and Kowloon Station of the Airport Express.

The trial will involve four private cars operating in autonomous mode, each monitored by an on-board backup operator to take over control when necessary.

A spokesperson for the Transport Department said that the HKSAR government has been actively supporting autonomous vehicle development through policy, regulation, and funding. This project aims to demonstrate the safety, stability and operational feasibility of autonomous vehicle technology in complex traffic conditions.

Once the autonomous vehicles commence regular operation, a seamless autonomous link will be formed to enhance the travel experience and attract more travelers to use the XRL and the Hong Kong International Airport, the spokesperson added. – Xinhua



Staff members work at the assembly workshop of ARIDGE's mass-production plant for flying cars in Guangzhou on Monday. A roll-off ceremony for the 1,000th electric propulsion system for ARIDGE'S "Land Aircraft Carrier" flying car was held at the facility on Monday. ARIDGE is a pioneering developer of low-altitude mobility solutions. Its Guangzhou manufacturing base primarily produces the airborne component of the "Land Aircraft Carrier." – Xinhua

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The Macau Post Daily

Striving for High-Quality Development during Macao's 3rd Five-Year Plan

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai yesterday published an article titled "New Blueprint, New Journey, New Opportunities – Striving for High-Quality Development during Macao's Third Five-Year Plan" in *China Newsweek*. – Story on p.5 & 6

Attackers kill 60 people in S Sudan cattle raid: local official

Armed attackers have killed at least 60 people in central South Sudan, according to local officials and media, in the country's latest deadly cattle raid. – Story on p. 11

Colombia scrambles to find survivors as quake kills 240

Colombian volunteers cleared rubble by hand yesterday in the hunt for survivors from an earthquake that killed at least 240 people and levelled more than a hundred homes and office buildings. – Story on p. 12

2 Filipino cross-dressers steal cash from client: police

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested two cross-dressers from the Philippines for stealing money from a customer on Monday, PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a special press conference at the PJ headquarters yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspects a 21-year-old unemployed person surnamed Montero and a 28-year-old makeup artist surnamed Pascual. Both entered Macau as visitors.

According to Cheong, at around 3:00 a.m. on Monday, a visitor encountered the two suspects near a hotel in Zape. The duo approached him and offered massage services, Cheong said, adding that the trio then returned to the victim's hotel room.

After placing his crossbody bag – which contained HK\$58,000 (59,784 patacas) in cash – by the bedside, the victim went into the bathroom. During their stay, the duo gave the victim a massage.

After the massage, the victim took HK\$1,000 from his bag to pay them, whereupon the duo departed. Upon checking his bag, the victim discovered that HK\$41,000 had vanished, leaving only HK\$16,000, according to Cheong.

The victim immediately went to search for the duo in the surrounding streets. After finding them at around 5:00 a.m., he reported the matter to the police, Cheong said, adding that the Public Security Police (PSP) later transferred the case to the Judiciary

Police for further investigation.

Cheong said the investigation revealed that on that day the duo had been targeting potential victims in Zape and conspired together in the crime. PJ officers seized HK\$41,000 in cash from the hotel guestroom where the duo were staying.

Cheong also noted that the Judiciary Police will continue to investigate whether the pair have been involved in other crimes, such as prostitution, adding that no further victims had been identified at the time of the press conference.

The duo were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, each facing a charge of theft. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the two hooded cross-dressers from the Philippines to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. – Photo: Armindo Neves

S. Domingos, Three Lamps Activity Centres to close for revamp



This photo taken at S. Domingos Activity Centre yesterday shows its auditorium. – Photo: Khalel Vallo

Khalel Vallo

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) announced in a statement yesterday that it will carry out renovation works at the S. Domingos Activity Centre (營地活動中心) and Three Lamps Activity Centre (三盞燈活動中心) starting Monday, with parts of both facilities closing in phases during the project.

The revamp will mainly involve repainting walls at both activity centres and renovating the public toilets at the S. Domingos Activity Centre, the statement said, adding that to ensure safety and smooth implementation, affected areas will temporarily close according to the following schedule.

At the Three Lamps Activity

Centre, the entire first floor will close from Monday to September 5, affecting its table tennis room, recreation room, TV room, seating area, and public computer area. The entire second floor will subsequently close from September 7 to 30, affecting the Arts and Culture Room and reading room.

Meanwhile, at the S. Domingos Activity Centre, the auditorium and activity rooms will close from Monday to September 20, while the publicly accessible areas will close from October 14 to December 15.

The bureau urged the public to observe the arrangements, follow on-site notices and staff instructions, and avoid entering cordoned-off areas during the work. ■

Illegally occupied plot in Patane to become leisure space

Ida Cheong

The government launched a joint cross-departmental operation yesterday to repossess a plot of government-owned land on Rua do Patane. The site is among 39 plots earmarked by the government for temporary utilisation, with plans to use it for new road development and a temporary leisure space, according to a statement issued by the Lands and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) yesterday.

The statement said that the illegally occupied plot, located between Rua do Patane (沙梨頭街/石牆街) and Rua da Harmonia (福安街), covers about 985 square metres. The site had been fitted with unauthorised metal gates, hoardings, scaffolding, and canopy structures, and was being used to park a large number of vehicles.

The bureau had previously



This undated handout photo provided by the Lands and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) yesterday shows a large number of vehicles parked on the illegally occupied plot on Rua do Patane (沙梨頭街/石牆街) and Rua da Harmonia (福安街).

initiated land clearance procedures, ordering the illegal occupants to vacate and return the land to the government within a designated deadline, the statement said,

adding that as the deadline expired without compliance, the government initiated the joint operation yesterday to officially repossess the property. ■

FrieslandCampina launches test report lookup system

Armindo Neves

FrieslandCampina (Hong Kong) Ltd announced in a statement on its Facebook account on Monday that it has launched a test report viewing system on its official website.

According to a July 27 report by the Post, the local government recently ordered the withdrawal of Dutch infant formula, Frisolac Prestige Stage 1 Infant Formula (imported by FrieslandCampina (Hong Kong) Ltd), after a sample was found to contain 0.2 mg/kg of lead. This exceeded the maximum legal limit of 0.02 mg/kg for lead in infant formula, as stipulated in Macau's Maximum Limits of Heavy Metal Contaminants in Food regulations.

According to the statement, the lookup system allows consumers to access professional testing reports for the company's

products. Consumers can visit the website and enter the product batch number to view the test report for the specific batch, the statement said, adding that the system currently supports enquiries for product batches manufactured from July 2025 onwards. As testing is carried out by different certified laboratories, the report formats may vary, but all results are authoritative and reliable, the statement noted.

FrieslandCampina emphasised that it fully understands parents' concerns regarding the health and safety of infants and young children. The company has always adhered to strict quality and safety standards as its guiding principle and regards safeguarding the health of infants and young children as its foremost responsibility, the statement said, adding that it maintains firm confidence in the

safety and quality of its products and will continue to ensure that all items meet Hong Kong and Macau food safety standards. ■



Undated file photo of a can of Frisolac Prestige Stage 1 Infant Formula 800g – Photo courtesy of foodpanda

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Macau Weather

VERY HOT.
CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS.
A FEW SHOWERS LATER.
FORCE 3 TO 4 WEST TO SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 60% AND 95%.



29°C~34°C

Source: SMG

2026 Population By-Census to end Saturday

Khalet Vallo

The Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC) said in a statement yesterday that it has urged sampled households that have yet to complete the 2026 Population By-Census to submit their questionnaires by Saturday. All completing households will automatically be entered into a lucky draw for a chance to win an electronic red envelope worth 100 patacas.

Online submission for the 2026 Population By-Census ended on Monday, while DSEC enumerators will continue visiting households that have not completed the survey until this Saturday, the statement said.

Enumerators will conduct household visits in pairs, usually between 2:30 p.m. and 10:30 p.m., the statement said, adding that they can be identified by navy blue uniforms bearing the DSEC logo, grey work bags, and official 2026 Population By-Census ID badges.

Households can verify an enumerator's identity by scanning the QR code on the notification letter or calling 8809 8809, the statement noted, underlining that if enumerators are unable to reach a household, they will leave an appointment card.

Residents can then provide information through a telephone interview or arrange a household visit by calling the hotline, according to the statement. The bureau also reminded households that it will never request identity card, bank account, or credit card details, nor ask respondents to make bank transfers or remittances. Residents who have doubts can call 8809 8809 to verify information.

The statement added that residents can also check fraud risk scores and report suspicious messages through the Judiciary Police's (PJ) WeChat anti-fraud programme, or call the anti-fraud enquiry hotline on 8800 7777 or the crime report hotline on 993.

The 2026 Population By-Census is conducted in accordance with Decree-Law No. 62/96/M, which requires respondents to provide the requested information within the specified period, the statement noted. Households that complete the survey, regardless of the submission method, will automatically enter the "Cooperating Households Lucky Draw," with winning households receiving an electronic red envelope worth 100 patacas.

The draw results are expected to be published on the 2026 Population By-Census website at the end of September, after which winning households will be notified, the statement said. DSEC called on sampled households to complete the survey by Saturday, stressing that their participation will help provide data for future policy planning and contribute to the development of a more liveable Macau.

Macau's population stood at 686,500 at the end of the first half of the year, according to official demographics. ■

This infographic provided by the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC) yesterday shows that households completing the survey will automatically be entered into the bureau's "Cooperating Households Lucky Draw".

Students' fashion competition aims to cultivate youth creativity



Contestants in the "Macao Student Fashion Creativity Competitions" create their competition entries yesterday at the Seac Pai Van Vocational Technical Education Activity Centre in Coloane. — Photos: Ida Cheong

Ida Cheong

The opening ceremony for the Macao Student Fashion Creativity Competitions was held yesterday at the Seac Pai Van Vocational and Technical Education Activity Centre in Coloane.

The event aims to cultivate young people's cross-disciplinary abilities while showcasing their creativity and professional potential.

Running through Friday under the theme "Green City", this year's event features four categories: fashion design, visual merchandising technology, beauty and makeup technology, and fashion illustration. A total of 54 contestants from 22 schools are participating.

Vong Mei Nei, a local secondary school student, told reporters on the sidelines that her passion for fashion design was initially sparked by an interest in anime. She added that she completed preparatory training courses to understand the competition process after making her contest debut last year.

Through structured training and hands-on competition, participants are able to master the entire garment

manufacturing pipeline — from pattern drafting to final assembly, Vong said. She noted that students also learn colour theory and how to adapt core concepts into customised client design proposals, significantly enhancing both their critical thinking and practical skills.

Vong added that while Macau has a growing market demand for bespoke tailoring and fashion design, the broader industry serves a global audience, encouraging local youth not to limit their career aspirations to the local market.

Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Centre (CPTTM) President Victoria Alexa Kuan Chan pointed out that Macau contestants have achieved a strong international track record, earning one gold, two silver, and two bronze medals, along with 15 medallions for excellence. She noted that many top representatives reaching global stages built their foundation, honed their skills, and gained critical experience through local training and competition pathways.

While the student fashion illustration competition kicked

off at the CPTTM headquarters, the remaining three categories are taking place at the Seac Pai Van centre through Friday. According to a CPTTM statement, champion, runner-up, second runner-up, and excellence awards will be presented across all four categories. ■



Vong Mei Nei, a participant from a local secondary school, speaks to journalists during yesterday's opening ceremony for the "Macao Student Fashion Creativity Competitions" at the Seac Pai Van Vocational Technical Education Activity Centre in Coloane.

Man nabbed for defrauding pawnshop staff

Staff Reporter

A man from the Chinese mainland has been arrested for fraud, the victim of which was a staff member of a pawnshop, a Public Security Police (PSP) spokesperson said during a regular press conference yesterday.

The suspect surnamed Zhang told the police that he is a businessman.

The staff member reported the case to the police on June 10.

Zhang, aged 40, hocked a smartphone at the pawnshop in Taipa on May 15. He returned to the shop the next day and requested to temporarily borrow the pawned smartphone, claiming he needed it to contact family and friends, and promised to return it immediately after use.

As Zhang was a regular customer, the employee agreed to the request. However, Zhang left with the phone and never returned. The employee subsequently paid HK\$8,500 out of his own pocket to compensate the pawnshop owner.

After reviewing the citywide



This undated handout photo released by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows two police officers escorting the fraud suspect to a police station in Taipa.

CCTV camera system, the police identified Zhang as the suspect. He was arrested on Thursday last week when he re-entered Macau via the Barrier Gate checkpoint.

Under questioning, Zhang

admitted to taking the smartphone, but claimed he had lent it to a friend who subsequently lost contact.

Zhang has been referred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) for further investigation. ■

Transforming Stage to Society: How MATA reimagines drama for community healing

Interview by William Chan

Driven by the belief that theatre can serve as a catalyst for reflection, dialogue, and social healing, the Macao Applied Theatre Association (MATA) has spent the past months bringing interactive drama directly into everyday life.

In an exclusive interview, theatre scholar and MATA president Mabina Choi Leng Chi told the *Post* how the association's initiatives this year are bridging stagecraft and real-world issues – ranging from family conflicts and youth emotional literacy to building a sustainable platform for local arts criticism.

Rewriting household struggles on stage

One of MATA's flagship initiatives this summer was Rewriting the Hard-to-Read Family Scriptures (改寫這家這本難念的經), a forum theatre project supported by the Cultural Development Fund. Concluding its performances in mid-July at the Sing Wo Theatre in Fai Chi Kei and Ha Van Baptist Social Service Centre, the production attracted local residents as well as audience members from Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

Unlike conventional plays where spectators passively watch, forum theatre invites the audience to intervene. During the performances, audience members called out to stop the action, stepped onto the stage, and replaced actors – specifically taking on the role of the mother – to test real-time strategies for resolving intense domestic disputes.

“Applied theatre isn't merely about entertainment or commercial appeal,” Choi noted. “It creates a safe, comfortable space for people to step outside their comfort zones. In forum theatre, there are no predefined ‘correct’ answers. Through the guidance of a ‘Joker’ – a facilitator bridging the actors and the audience – citizens explore different choices on stage and reflect on how those decisions might transform their daily relationships and family communication.”

The arts critique workshop

Beyond interactive performance, MATA tackled a persistent void in the local art scene: the lack of written records and critical reviews for children and youth theatre. From July 19 to August 10, the association hosted the Arts Criticism Co-Learning Workshop.

Preceded by outreach lectures across local secondary schools reaching over 100 students from April to June, the workshop featured lectures by Choi alongside veteran critics Hsieh Hung-wen and Wu Yueh-lin from China's Taiwan region. Participants engaged

in structured analysis, attended local youth productions, and interviewed creative teams to dismantle the notion that viewing theatre is “just for entertainment.”

“Children's and youth theatre has long suffered from a shortage of documented evaluation,” Choi pointed out. “Reviewing children's theatre requires understanding child psychology, educational philosophy, and theatrical aesthetics. By training local enthusiasts to write critical reviews, we hope to establish a dedicated publishing platform over the next five years, preserving Macau's theatrical footsteps.”

As a reviewer myself, I often struggle to find angles to comment on children's art. Choi advocated a distinction between showcases and professional productions. When reviewing showcases, she argued that critics should focus on the societal issues raised, theatrical elements, and educational reflection. Conversely, for professional children's theatre, evaluation must move beyond superficial entertainment to scrutinise how thematic depth, acting, and design elements work together, underlining that the greatest artistic triumph in youth theatre lies in seamlessly transforming educational intent into rich, non-preachy theatrical aesthetics.

Emotional literacy & school tours

Looking ahead to the upcoming school season, MATA is preparing a new interactive project focused on youth mental health and emotional expression. Recognising the emotional pressures and resilience challenges faced by young students, the association is creating a portable touring performance designed specifically for kindergarten and primary school environments.

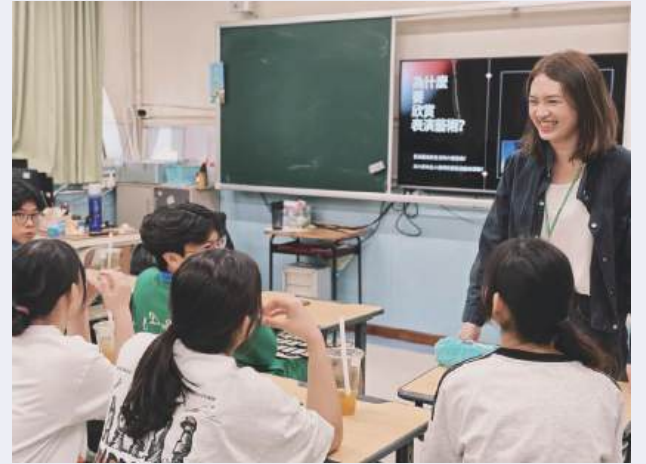
The production utilises an innovative “pop-up book” format – a light, dynamic visual structure that unfolds during storytelling workshops to help children process complex emotions in an approachable, tactile way. Alongside the school tours, MATA plans to host practitioner sharing sessions and masterclasses featuring leading theatre directors from Hong Kong and Beijing, introducing collaborative creation techniques to Macau's youth.

For Choi, all these efforts align with a single underlying vision: using drama to give back to society. “Whether we are addressing family dynamics, training critical writers, or helping young children understand their feelings, drama holds immense functionality in this contemporary moment,” Choi underlined. “It gives our community a voice and a mirror to explore life together.”

For more information, visit: www.facebook.com/MacaoAppliedTheatreAssociation



This undated file photo shows Mabina Choi posing.



Mabina Choi hosts an outreach lecture at local secondary school, giving insights on how to appreciate art. – Photos provided by the Macao Applied Theatre Association (MATA)



Veteran Taiwanese critics host review workshops in Macau earlier this year.



First-time actors perform Rewriting the Hard-to-Read Family Scriptures at the Sing Wo Theatre in Fai Chi Kei last month.



Striving for High-Quality Development during Macao's Third Five-Year Plan

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai yesterday published a signed article in Chinese titled "New Blueprint, New Journey, New Opportunities – Striving for High-Quality Development during Macao's Third Five-Year Plan" in *China Newsweek** (中國新聞周刊). The following is the translation of the full text of the article.

"A shining pearl on the coast of the South China Sea and a treasured place of the great motherland" is a heartfelt description of Macao by President Xi Jinping. Since its return to the motherland, Macao has, under the firm leadership of the central authorities, forged a development path suited to its own realities and characteristics, making it a widely recognised example for the international community of the successful practice of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle.

From a new and historic starting point, the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) is proactively aligning itself with the country's 15th Five-Year Plan by scientifically formulating the Third Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the MSAR (2026–2030), striving to realise the cherished vision of "Law-based Macao", "Vibrant Macao", "Cultural Macao", and "Blissful Macao" – important missions for the MSAR in the new era.

On May 20, 2026, the MSAR Government released a consultation document on the MSAR's Third Five-Year Plan. Through the public consultation process, the MSAR Government has widely solicited opinions and suggestions from all sectors of society and the general public, bringing together collective efforts to jointly shape Macao's new development blueprint.

The MSAR's Third Five-Year Plan is a guiding framework for Macao's economic and social development over the next five years, setting the direction and pathway for the MSAR's future. We hope that friends at home and abroad will visit Macao to experience its unique charm and convergence of Chinese and Western cultures, while jointly exploring the opportunities arising from the MSAR's future development.

I. Focusing on Key Areas: Advancing Appropriate Economic Diversification through Four Major Projects and a Government Guidance Fund

Appropriate economic diversification is the essential path to Macao's long-term prosperity and stability – an imperative task for the MSAR Government. No matter how difficult this task may be, Macao must carry it through successfully, ensuring its effective implementation.

Over the next five years, the MSAR Government will continue its efforts to promote appropriate economic diversification, leveraging Macao's strengths and resource endowment to focus on key areas. The MSAR Government will strengthen policy support and financial investment, make better use of market forces and the initiative of enterprises, and enhance its own role in guiding market expectations and providing institutional and policy support. Through four major infrastructure projects and a government guidance fund, the MSAR Government aims to advance the "1+4" strategy for industrial diversification and increase the contribution of the gross value added (GVA) of non-gaming sectors to Macao's gross domestic product (GDP) to around 60 percent by 2030.



Undated handout photo of MSAR Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai released yesterday by the Macao Government Information Bureau (GCS).

Specific policy measures will include:

1. Strengthening coordination for appropriate economic diversification;
2. Establishing a government guidance fund and expanding its scale as appropriate;
3. Effectively implementing the MSAR's four major infrastructure projects;
4. Deepening Macao-Hengqin integration and enhancing the role of Hengqin in support of Macao's appropriate economic diversification;
5. Fostering a "fair, transparent, and predictable" market order and business environment;
6. Establishing institutional mechanisms that are better able to attract advanced international technologies, enterprises, and high-end talent;
7. Ensuring adequate land supply for economic and industrial development; and
8. Promoting urban renewal and cultivating new economic growth engines.

Macao will make substantial and tangible investments in appropriate economic diversification. By strengthening the synergies between investment promotion and talent attraction, and leveraging the guiding role of the new government guidance fund, Macao aims to foster the clustering of industries, talent, and technology. Preliminary estimates indicate that total budgeted investment in major economic diversification projects during the period covered by the MSAR's Third Five-Year Plan will reach approximately 130 billion patacas.

Macao will focus on its four major infrastructure projects as strategic drivers to accelerate appropriate economic diversification:

— Accelerating the construction of the Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town. Leveraging the synergistic strengths of Macao and Hengqin, Macao will provide support to enable a greater number of qualified public and private higher education institutions in the MSAR to extend their operations to Hengqin, expanding the development space for Macao's higher education. Key projects of the Macao-Hengqin International Education (University)

Town will be developed in three phases. The first phase will commence operations in August 2026. The University of Macau's campus in the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin will begin trial operations in 2028 and be fully completed and put into operation in 2029. The main construction of the Cooperation Zone facilities for Macao Polytechnic University and Macao University of Tourism will be basically completed by 2030. Through internationalised talent development, scientific research, and technological exchange, Macao aims to attract high-quality academic and research resources, and gradually form a cluster effect in higher education, providing a new pillar for Macao's appropriate economic diversification.

— Advancing the high-standard construction of the Macao Technology Research Industrial Park. Focusing on four key sectors – digital technology, biomedicine, integrated circuits, and aerospace technology – Macao will cultivate promising sub-sectors such as artificial intelligence, innovative pharmaceuticals, RISC-V (Reduced Instruction Set Computing – fifth generation) open-source architecture, and aerospace data services. Specialised industrial support policies will be formulated, in conjunction with the government guidance fund, to attract high-quality technology enterprises and research institutions. In 2026, the overall design and planning for the Macao Technology Research Industrial Park will be completed. Meanwhile, construction of the Macao International Technology Industry Centre – a pilot platform for the Industrial Park – will also be completed and the facility will be brought into operation. Development of supporting infrastructure and construction works for the Industrial Park will be carried out in phases during 2027 and 2028. By 2030, the first construction project of the Industrial Park will be completed and operational. Through the Industry Centre, it aims to attract a first batch of at least 20 technology enterprises as pioneer tenants.

— Progressing with the Macao International Integrated Tourism and Cultural Zone project. Drawing on Macao's advantages of a unique blend of Chinese and Western cultures and the MSAR's role as "One Centre" and "One Base", new cultural tourism land-

marks combining sightseeing with immersive experiences will be developed, injecting fresh vitality into Macao's cultural and tourism markets. Construction of the Macao National Museum of Culture will proceed in two phases. Phase one, comprising exhibition facilities, is expected to be substantially completed by 2029, while planning for phase two will proceed concurrently. In 2027, planning will commence for the International Performing Arts Centre and the International Museum of Contemporary Art, with the aim of completing the architectural designs and launching tendering procedures for both venues by 2030.

— Advancing the construction of the Macao International Airport Hengqin Upstream Cargo Terminal. In tandem with the development of an international air transport hub (port) on the west bank of the Pearl River, Macao will advance the land reclamation work for Macao International Airport, as well as the construction of the Macao International Airport Hengqin Upstream Cargo Terminal. The relocation of security-screening and cargo-loading functions to the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin and the upgrade of airport freight facilities aim to enhance the efficiency and capacity of Macao's air cargo operations. It is expected that the Hengqin Upstream Cargo Terminal will enter trial operation in August 2026 and commence full operations in the first half of 2027, with a target annual handling capacity of 300,000 tonnes, thereby strengthening Macao's competitiveness in air freight.

During the period of the MSAR's Third Five-Year Plan, Macao will further strengthen its integrated tourism and leisure sector, actively attract more international visitors, and consolidate its position as a world centre of tourism and leisure. Macao will strive to build a globally competitive and distinctive biomedicine and "Big Health" industry. Macao will accelerate the development of specialised financial services such as bond markets, investment funds, and green finance, and advance the China-Portuguese-speaking countries financial services platform. Deeply integrating into the national innovation system, Macao will develop high-tech industries suited to the MSAR's strengths. Macao will also enhance the competitiveness of its MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) and commerce sectors, and promote sustained growth in culture and sports.

II. Deepening Macao-Hengqin Integration and Advancing High-quality Development of the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin

High-quality development of the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin is key to breaking new ground in Macao's appropriate economic diversification.

The MSAR Government will leverage science, technology, and education to deepen Macao-Hengqin integration, promote high-level economic synergies, enhance alignment of rules and mechanisms, and ensure efficient cross-boundary flow of resources. By 2030, Macao aims for the combined value added of tourism, cultural activities, MICE, commerce, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and other health services, specialised finance, technology research, and advanced manufacturing to account for 65 percent or more of the GDP in the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, thereby making further progress in Macao's appropriate economic diversification.

– Continued on p.6

Striving for High-Quality Development during Macao’s Third Five-Year Plan

Continued from p.5

Strengthening “Macao + Hengqin” integrated development. Aligned with the new positioning of “Macao+Hengqin”, Macao will push forward efforts to refine the Guangdong-Macao mechanism of “mutual discussion, joint construction, joint administration and shared benefits”. Macao will deepen institutional connectivity in rules and systems, aligning Macao-Hengqin mechanisms with high international standards, and creating a legal environment in Hengqin similar to that of the MSAR. Macao will actively explore more open and convenient “tier-specific” management models for the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. Macao will enhance physical connectivity through the Light Rapid Transit network and other infrastructure projects, while developing landmark projects and industrial spaces. Examples include: the Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town; the Macau International Airport Hengqin Upstream Cargo Terminal; the China-Portuguese (Spanish) Speaking Countries Economic and Trade Service Centre; and the Hengqin-Macao Innovation Industrial Park.

Enhancing Macao-Hengqin industrial synergy. Macao and Hengqin will jointly develop as a world-class tourism and resort destination. The “Multi-Venue Event” model will be normalised. Macao will support the establishment of a “Macao-Hengqin joint micro-drama production and export base”. A cross-boundary e-commerce hub will be jointly built to facilitate the efficient entry of Macao and Portuguese-speaking countries’ products into the Chinese mainland market.

Innovating the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and “Big Health” industrial chain. Macao will promote the “Macao Registration+Hengqin Production+Overseas Sales” model for TCM products, gradually extending it to synthetic chemical medicines, biologics, and medical devices, with a view to actively attracting renowned domestic and international enterprises. Enterprises will be encouraged to make good use of the Macao Sub-centre platform of the University Regional Traditional Chinese Medicine Technology Transfer and Translation Centre (Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area) to research, develop, and incubate Macao-branded TCM products. Focusing on wellness and health preservation, Macao will develop high-end health management and medical tourism services.

Jointly building a new landscape for Macao-Hengqin cross-boundary finance. Macao will continue promoting participation in a pilot scheme for electronic fences or multifunctional free trade accounts (EF Accounts**). Macao will support asset management institutions in the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin to establish operations in Macao and make full use of the Qualified Foreign Limited Partner (QFLP) mechanism to channel Macao and overseas capital into the Chinese mainland fund markets.

Jointly cultivating high-tech industries. Leveraging platforms such as State Key Laboratories, Macao will build integrated “research-to-investment” incubation platforms to foster a sci-tech innovation ecosystem under the model of “Macao R&D, Hengqin Transformation”. Macao will advance the Macao-Hengqin joint research funding scheme and expand the cooperation model of “Hengqin posing the challenges, Macao providing the sci-tech solutions”, supporting the transformation of research projects in the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

Hengqin connects Macao’s international

resources with the vast Chinese mainland market, benefiting from special policies such as a tiered customs management system, “double 15-percent” tax incentives, and exemption from corporate income tax on new outbound direct investment. The Cooperation Zone in Hengqin is becoming a hub of openness and a hotbed for investment.

III. Accelerating Urban Renewal, Building a Beautiful and Smart Macao

Urban renewal is not only a matter of city image and a key livelihood issue, but also a vital measure to promote coordinated development between old and new districts, and cultivate fresh economic growth points.

During the period of the MSAR’s Third Five-Year Plan, the MSAR Government will take urban renewal as a key lever in order to comprehensively advance the construction of a beautiful and smart Macao. Under the premise of maintaining overall social stability, Macao will adopt bold thinking and decisive action to accelerate the urban renewal process.

Strengthen overall coordination and planning, and define urban renewal objectives. The MSAR Government will enhance top-level design, and implement systematic and phased measures – starting with simpler tasks before tackling more complex ones. Macao will explore a comprehensive urban renewal model featuring “government guidance, market-based operations, district-specific strategies, integrated utilisation, and a combination of redevelopment, revitalisation, and area-based development”. The aim is to significantly improve the appearance of older neighbourhoods and achieve substantial breakthroughs in urban renewal efforts.

Conduct urban diagnostics and complete the special plan on urban renewal. The MSAR Government will, in a phased manner, compile a database of old buildings, and assess the existing resources and spatial conditions of old neighbourhoods. The MSAR Government will establish fresh renewal principles, and conduct district-level, neighbourhood-level, and community-based micro-renewal projects.

Improve the legal framework for urban renewal. The MSAR Government will conduct amendments to the Legal System Governing Urban Renewal and related regulations, to provide greater convenience and appropriate incentives.

Coordinate funding, resources, and policy support, and establish a sustainable urban renewal mechanism. Macao will integrate government, corporate, and social capital in urban renewal work, make rational use of governmental resources such as replacement and temporary housing, and explore the use of more diverse and equitable urban renewal support mechanisms. Macao will adjust and expand the functions of Macau Urban Renewal Limited to enable it to serve as an effective platform for coordinating urban renewal initiatives.

Advance the conservation-led renewal and revitalisation of the area around the Ruins of St. Paul’s Church. In line with the need to safeguard the integrity of the UNESCO-listed Historic Centre of Macao, the MSAR Government will study the phased implementation of protective renewal and revitalisation initiatives covering the vicinity of the Ruins of St. Paul’s Church. A small area will be selected as a pilot zone to carry out beautification and revitalisation works, with the aim of accumulating experience that can be replicated and scaled up for future urban renewal projects.

Accelerate the comprehensive urban renewal of older districts and buildings, such as the Iao Hon area. Macao will strengthen coordination of resources and funding arrangements in order to advance the redevelopment of key sites, including the seven buildings of Iao Hon Estate, the Tamagnini Barbosa civil servants’ building, and the former dormitory for post office workers near the Red Market. These efforts aim to improve the environmental quality of older neighbourhoods and create model projects for demonstration purposes. The MSAR Government will optimise infrastructure in older districts and promote integrated urban renewal, focusing on the development of the six historic districts and the revitalisation of distinctive commercial areas. Macao will enhance local economic vitality by advancing the integration of culture, commerce, and tourism, driving industrial transformation and functional renewal. Ultimately, these initiatives seek to improve residents’ sense of well-being in older neighbourhoods.

IV. Strengthening Internal Connectivity and External Links: Better Integrating into and Serving the Country’s Overall Development

Macao is an international city. During the period of the MSAR’s Third Five-Year Plan, Macao will better leverage its unique advantage of being “backed by the motherland, connected to the world”, and strive to become an important bridgehead for the country’s high-level opening-up and an important window for mutual learning and exchanges between Chinese and Western civilisations. Macao will better integrate into, and serve, the country’s overall development.

Actively participating in the high-quality development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. The MSAR Government will promote deep industrial collaboration with other Greater Bay Area cities, working with Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Hong Kong to build a modern industrial system with international competitiveness, in order to enhance technological innovation synergies and to build a high-quality living circle.

Strengthening cooperation with Hong Kong. The MSAR Government will enhance collaboration with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in areas relating to economic matters, livelihoods, education, culture, sports, justice, anti-corruption practices, and civil service exchanges. This will enable the two SARs to leverage their platform roles for the country’s high-level opening-up and for supporting the country’s “dual circulation” development strategy.

Expanding the function and profile of the China-Portuguese (Spanish)-speaking countries platform. The MSAR Government will enhance Macao’s role as a “precise connector” between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, strengthen the MSAR’s positioning as a trade and economic services platform, and support Macao and Chinese mainland enterprises in joining forces to “go global” and expand into overseas markets, while simultaneously “bringing in” more enterprises and investment projects from Portuguese-speaking countries. The MSAR Government will actively extend the platform’s reach to Spanish-speaking countries through the China-Portuguese (Spanish) Speaking Countries Economic and Trade Service Centre and the China and Portuguese (Spanish) Speaking Countries Economic and Trade Development Fund,

with a view to strengthening economic and trade exchanges.

Actively participating in and supporting the “Belt and Road” initiative. Guided by the principle of “serving the country’s needs, delivering Macao’s strengths”, Macao will continuously enhance its role in the country’s opening-up, creating landmark projects for Macao’s participation in high-quality “Belt and Road” (B&R) cooperation. Macao will make full use of the bridging role of returned overseas Chinese and their families in order to expand Macao’s external cooperation network.

Building an important window for mutual learning and exchanges between Chinese and Western civilisations. Leveraging Macao’s cultural strengths as a meeting point of East and West, the MSAR will deepen international people-to-people exchanges, significantly enhance the influence of the “Cultural Macao” vision, and highlight Macao’s unique role in the country’s external cultural exchanges.

Macao, a coastal city with nearly 500 years of harmonious East-West cultural exchange, will continue to shine uniquely amidst the tides of national and global development.

Macao has one of the world’s most open trade and investment systems, enjoys the institutional advantages of the “One country, two systems” principle, and benefits from being a free port and a separate customs jurisdiction. With a simple tax regime, Macao is one of the lowest-taxation jurisdictions in the world, making it an ideal destination for investment and business. The MSAR Government warmly welcomes investors from around the world to seize the policy dividends and market opportunities offered by its Third Five-Year Plan by investing in Macao and Hengqin – and in their future development!

Let all sectors in Macao move forward together, strive with determination, and jointly open a new chapter in the development of Macao and Hengqin.

End Item

**China Newsweek is a prominent Chinese current affairs magazine known for its serious journalism and wide influence. Founded in 2000 and based in Beijing, it is published by China News Service, a state-level news agency under the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council. It operates with the founding principle “to influence the influential” and adheres to the values of “International Perspective, Position of China, Appeal of Originality, and Professional Spirit”, It is one of China’s most well-known and influential news magazines, focusing on political and economic news. It has a high-level readership, including Central People’s Government leaders, delegates to the National People’s Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), and is a subscribed publication in many Chinese and foreign embassies. – DeepSeek*

***Multi-functional Free Trade Accounts (“Electronic Fence”) – EF stands for Electronic Fence (电子围网). These specialised accounts manage cross-border capital flows, foreign exchange transactions, trade settlements, and overseas investments under account-level rules rather than traditional quota approvals. – Gemini/Caixin Global*

N.B. Translation provided by the Macao Government Information Bureau (GCS); minor edits, reformatting, asterisks to denote footnotes, and bold subheadings added by The Macau Post Daily.

Chinese AI firms support local large language model development in emerging markets

Analysis

HEFEI – Inside the smart exhibition hall of Safaricom, Kenya's largest telecommunications operator, a digital human supported by a Chinese tech company delivers live demonstrations of core business services and interprets financial report data for visitors through intelligent interactive functions.

Across emerging markets with huge digital-economy potential, Chinese AI companies are partnering with host nations to build home-grown large language models adapted to local languages and industrial demands.

Leading global large language models have long prioritized widely spoken languages, leaving minor-language communities underserved. Multiple experts warn that countries with less-used languages run real risks of being sidelined by AI, and this technological gap has become a key focus for Chinese AI firms.

Leveraging its expertise in speech intelligence and natural-language processing, Chinese tech company iFLYTEK has ramped up research and development for multilingual technologies. Its speech large language model Spark supports speech recognition and simultaneous interpretation for more than 130 languages.

With the ASEAN market in mind, iFLYTEK has forged deep cooperation with south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Drawing on this region's pool of language talent for ASEAN

countries, rich language corpora and digital infrastructure, the company has rolled out the Spark ASEAN Multilingual Large Model Base.

The base covers 10 languages including Malay, Indonesian, Vietnamese and Thai. It delivers performance comparable to top international models with smaller parameter sizes, enabling efficient and secure deployment of industry-specific AI applications across ASEAN member states.

The company has signed cooperation deals with partners in countries such as Laos, Malaysia and Thailand. In Malaysia, it has jointly set up an AI multilingual intelligent dubbing and translation center with Enjoy TV & Film Broadcasting Corporation. Powered by the model, this facility supports translation for over 130 languages and aims to foster an Asian-oriented intelligent dubbing ecosystem.

"Mainstream English large models show clear shortcomings when serving many overseas markets. There is strong, genuine demand for large models customized for local tongues," said Dong Bin, vice president of iFLYTEK's brand marketing center.

Dong added that the company has also open-sourced its large model, allowing nearly 600,000 overseas developer teams to build custom products via its algorithms and speech tools. The firm is pushing for overseas roll-out of proven hardware-and-software AI solutions for education, healthcare



A boy plays Chinese chess with a robot at Qingdao's first robot 6S experience store in Shandong Province. The newly opened facility integrates sales, spare parts, service, survey, leasing, and custom orders, bringing robotic technology into everyday life. – Xinhua

and office scenarios.

More Chinese companies are offering diverse AI options for developing countries through varied business approaches.

Another example is DeepSeek, whose open-source model offers a more affordable option for African developers. At roughly US\$0.27 per million input tokens and US\$1.10 per million output, it is significantly cheaper than many alternatives. Its open-source nature further lowers the financial barriers for local developers to get started.

In Cairo, Huawei has launched its first 100-billion-parameter Arabic large model. Trained on local Arabic datasets from finance,

power and oil-and-gas sectors, the model achieves 96 percent speech-recognition accuracy and serves more than 20 Arabic-speaking countries and regions. It helps these economies strengthen domestic AI capacity using locally sourced data that reflects their cultural and linguistic context.

Beijing-based company 01.AI, has jointly established Q.AI with Kazakhstan to develop and deploy large language models, AI agents and enterprise AI platforms tailored to local requirements.

"We respect local data sovereignty and prioritize on-site deployment and local operation under an open, collaborative and

sustainable framework," said Kai-Fu Lee, CEO of 01.AI. He added that emerging economies like Kazakhstan are not advised to simply purchase models or outsource AI capabilities. Instead, they need home-grown, self-sustaining national AI capacity built around their own data, languages, industries and governance rules.

Chinese AI companies share a clear mindset for global outreach, which is to empower local partners rather than replace them. Their work seeks inclusive digital growth and helps developing countries narrow the digital divide – a vision echoed by both Chinese enterprises and policymakers.

The 2026 World AI Conference took place in east China's Shanghai in July. At the event, China advocated developing AI in an open, win-win manner and helping Global South countries with AI capacity building. China has also pledged to provide developing countries with 5,000 opportunities in AI training and seminar programs over the next five years.

"China encourages open-source AI development, and its open-source large models are among the most-downloaded globally and underpin countless applications worldwide. Beyond that, China focuses on real support, to nurture local expertise so each country can develop AI applications suited to its own conditions," said Xue Lan, dean of the Schwarzman College at Tsinghua University in Beijing. – Xinhua

China eyes modern coal industry by 2030 for secure, green energy mix

BEIJING – China aims to establish a modern coal industry system by 2030 as the country seeks to balance energy security with green transition, according to a recently issued development plan.

The plan, released on Monday by the National Development and Reform Commission and the National Energy Administration, said China will accelerate the optimization and upgrading of its coal industry structure during the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030) as the country's coal consumption is expected to peak.

It calls for higher access standards for coal resource development, greater efforts to develop advanced production capacity, the orderly phase-out of outdated and inefficient capacity, and a prudent approach to the exploitation of deep coal resources.

By 2030, large modern coal mines are expected to account for 87 percent of China's total coal production capacity, while intelligent mines will make up 75 percent. The country's five major coal supply bases are expected to contribute more than 80 percent of national output, according to the plan.

An intelligent coal mine is a digitally connected and highly-automated worksite that uses AI and real-time data to optimize mining operations, while minimizing human intervention and hazards.

Coal remains an important pillar of China's energy security as the country accelerates its green transition. China aims to peak coal consumption by 2030 and increase the share of non-fossil energy in total energy consumption to 25 percent, putting greater emphasis on cleaner, more efficient and intelligent coal production and use.

Guided by the latest plan, China's coal industry is expected to become increasingly concentrated during the 2026-2030 period, with smaller mines prone to accidents and those with depleted resources exiting the market at a faster pace, said Qu Yang, a researcher with the Coal Industry Planning and Design Research Institute.

The plan calls for actively promoting clean substitution for coal, significantly improving the quality of commercial coal, accelerating the transformation and upgrading of coal-fired power generation, and orderly expanding the use of coal as an industrial feedstock.

The plan also urges scaled-up development and utilization of coalbed methane, which offers multiple benefits, such as improving coal mine safety, boosting clean energy supply and cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

According to an annex to the plan, China aims to produce 26 billion cubic meters of coalbed methane and utilize 6.5 billion cubic meters of coal mine gas by 2030. – Xinhua



Farmers harvest lotus flowers at a lotus planting base in Longshui Town, Dazu District of Chongqing Municipality, yesterday. Dazu has built a booming lotus industry that generates around 430 million yuan annually from fresh-cut flower sales alone, providing a vital source of income for local farmers. To date, the district's lotus cultivation spans more than 50,000 mu (3,333 hectares), featuring over 1,000 varieties. During the harvest season from May to October, the district produces roughly 90 million stems of cut lotus flowers. – Xinhua

China, Indonesia to conduct naval navigation exercise in waters east of Taiwan

BEIJING – Chinese and Indonesian navies will conduct a naval navigation exercise in waters east of China's Taiwan region in mid-August, the Ministry of National Defense announced in Beijing yesterday.

During the exercise, frigates of the two navies will carry out a series of drills,

including communications exercises and maritime replenishment operations.

The exercise aims to enhance the two navies' joint operational capabilities, deepen practical cooperation and maintain peace and stability in the region, according to the ministry. – Xinhua, MPD

Death toll rises to 19 amid extreme rainfall in Philippines

MANILA – The death toll from extreme rainfall triggered by Tropical Cyclones Luis and Maymay and the southwest monsoon has risen to 19, with 15 others injured and four still missing, according to the Philippine government yesterday.

The Philippine National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said yesterday that landslides caused by incessant heavy rains were the main cause of casualties. Benguet province reported the highest number of deaths at 12, followed by Rizal with four and Batangas with three.

The NDRRMC said that the weather disturbances have affected nearly 2.27 million people across 11 regions. Over 900 evacuation centers have been set up, sheltering about 95,000 people.



Workers collect rubbish washed into a river at the height of heavy rains enhanced by the Southwest monsoon days before, near a shopping complex in Paranaque City, suburban Manila yesterday. – AFP

The Philippine government has provided over 73 million pesos (about US\$1.2 million) worth of

aid as rescue operations for the missing continue, according to the NDRRMC. – Xinhua

Schools closed as Indonesia battles wildfires

SURABAYA – Dozens of Indonesian schools were shuttered for a second day yesterday to protect against the spreading haze from wildfires at the start of a long and intense dry season worsened by El Niño.

On the island of Borneo, the mayor of the city of Pontianak ordered schools closed due to the smoke wafting over the city from fires elsewhere.

Public records show there are tens of thousands of public school pupils in the city, which is in Indonesia's West Kalimantan province.

Indonesia shares the island of Borneo with Malaysia and Brunei.

Children will learn from home for as long as the air quality remains poor, mayor Edi Rusdi Kamtono said in a statement Monday, without stating how many schools were affected.

"We have started to feel it, especially at night and in the morning, as haze has already blanketed the city of Pontianak," he said.

The haze also affected Malaysia.

The air pollution index for Malaysia's small eastern town of Serian, Sarawak, showed an "unhealthy" level of 190 yesterday.

The Malaysian Meteorological Department urged locals to stay indoors, with director-general Mohd Hisham Mohd Anip blaming a "cross-border haze phenomenon from Kalimantan."

In 2015, schools in Malaysia were ordered to close for two days because of health concerns caused by severe haze from Indonesian fires.

On the Indonesian island of Java, firefighters battled flames for a ninth day at a national park where a blaze has scorched 900 hectares, or 2,200 acres – equal to two percent of the park's total area.

The wildfire at the Bromo Tengger Semeru National Park, a major tourist attraction closed to visitors since Saturday, is one of several that have drawn in nearly 50,000 firefighters nationwide.

Indonesia is forecast to experience an unusually tough dry

season this year with high risk for drought and wildfires due in part to the El Niño weather phenomenon, the BMKG weather agency has said.

More than 107,000 hectares of land have burnt countrywide so far this year.

Authorities insist that food stocks remain adequate.

Hot July

Firefighters were in an all-out battle to control the flames in East Java's Bromo park.

"We're making our best effort and mobilising everything... to extinguish and wet-down the area," local disaster official Satriyo Nurseno told AFP.

"We hope that today (yesterday) we can put out the fire in all areas, then carry out soaking so that the fire does not reignite."

Three water-bombing helicopters and fire trucks were providing support to about 200 firefighters, forest rangers, police and soldiers helping to put out the blaze.

According to the BNPB disaster agency, more than 48,000 personnel have been deployed to fight fires in six provinces.

Security Minister Djamari Chaniago said Monday Indonesia had deployed 43 helicopters and up to 15 fixed-wing planes for cloud seeding where needed.

The process involves spraying particles such as silver iodide and salt from aircraft to produce rainfall, but depends on clouds being present.

As Indonesia braces for the worst effects of El Niño, the BMKG said the average air temperature in July was 27C – well above the 26.2C average for the month.

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.

The land razed by wildfires in Indonesia so far this year is double the area burnt in 2023. – AFP

VP Duterte hit with criminal charge over Marcos 'threat'

MANILA – Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte was hit with a criminal charge yesterday over an alleged death threat against the country's president, a key part of the case against her at her ongoing Senate impeachment trial.

The charge of "grave threats" was filed yesterday afternoon in a Quezon City courtroom, Department of Justice spokesman Polo Martinez said.

It stems from a National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) criminal complaint filed in February 2025, months after a late-night news briefing in which Duterte claimed to have hired an assassin to kill President Ferdinand Marcos, his wife and a former congressman cousin should he have her cut down first.

Lawyers for Duterte yesterday argued the case could not be pursued while she was being impeached.

"As a sitting impeachable officer, the Vice President may not be prosecuted for an alleged offense that is also the subject of an impeachment case," defence lawyer Paul Lawrence Lim said in a statement.

Asked if the justice department believed the case could be pursued simultaneously alongside the impeachment trial, Martinez told AFP: "That's correct", adding it was now in the court's jurisdiction.

"That's for the prosecutors in that ongoing trial to present," he said, adding they had met a "high threshold" before moving forward with the case.

Professor Dante Gatmaytan, of the University of the Philippines College of Law, told AFP there was nothing to prevent the cases from proceeding independently of each other.

"This is not unconstitutional,"

he said in a phone interview.

"There might be theories that can be applied later on, but right now, nothing will stop the DOJ from proceeding with the criminal case."

Under the Philippine legal code, a conviction on the charge of "grave threats" carries a jail term of between one and six months.

An additional complaint of "inciting to sedition" included in the original NBI complaint was dismissed.

Duterte was impeached in May on charges that also included graft and corruption.

Yesterday marked Day 14 of a Senate impeachment trial where her political career – and planned 2028 presidential run – hangs in the balance.

A guilty verdict would see her removed from office and permanently barred from elective politics. – AFP

Thai PM suspends gun licences as teen shooter, grandparents cremated

Montira Rungjirajitranon

NONTHABURI – Thailand's prime minister said yesterday he had suspended firearms licences after last week's deadly school shooting, as the bodies of the teenage assailant and the grandparents he killed were cremated.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said he had ordered the interior ministry and police to stop issuing licences to possess, purchase and carry firearms, and called for "tighter controls and decisive penalties".

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

The white caskets of the couple were laid out at the Tem Rak Samakkhi Buddhist temple yesterday, alongside their portraits, ahead of their cremation capping a funeral lasting several days.

The boy's smaller casket was placed to the side at the same temple, surrounded by white flowers.

Among the mourners was Tawee

Piewphong, who paid tribute to his brother-in-law – the grandfather – as "a man of few words, but a very kind person".

Speaking to AFP, Tawee expressed shock at the killings, saying he had no idea what motivated the teenager – but also offering compassion.

"I want to tell him that being 14 is just a small fraction of your entire life, and every problem has a solution. Not everything is the end of the world," the 70-year-old said.

He suggested the boy may have killed his grandparents "so they would not be responsible for the actions he was going to take at school later".

Ajima, who asked that her surname be withheld for privacy reasons, told AFP she was a relative of the boy and felt deeply sorry for him.

"A boy at that age is like a blank piece of fabric. He must have gone through a lot of issues, but nobody knows why he resorted to shooting as a solution. I feel terribly sorry for him," she said.

Investigators are still seeking a motive for the shooting, but police

said on Sunday the boy had watched violent videos online and once taken a BB gun to school.

Officials said previously that he faced academic-related stress, and a classmate said he was bullied.

"I feel really sorry for the boy," said Somjai Poosod, whose grandchildren attend the school attacked, one of whom was a friend of the shooter.

"Of course I feel bad for the innocent people who were killed, but I feel there is an issue of mental health that we may need to address to prevent incidents like this from happening again," she added.

The shooter, who AFP is choosing not to name, used his grandfather's gun to kill his grandparents before heading to the school.

There, he shot dead five teachers and staff and wounded a 12-year-old girl, who died in hospital on Saturday.

Thailand has one of the highest rates of gun ownership in the region, and past promises of tightening gun laws have not prevented repeated shootings. – AFP



A health worker measures the growth of a child during a monthly medical check-up programme for children at an integrated services centre in Banda Aceh, Indonesia on Monday. – AFP

India probes flight plunge as pilot faces drug test scrutiny

NEW DELHI — Indian investigators are examining evidence linked to an Air India flight that plunged sharply mid-air last week, authorities said yesterday, as local media reported the pilot had tested positive for marijuana.

The Airbus A320 carrying 137 passengers and eight crew members lost about 300 feet (91 metres) of altitude shortly after departing from Thailand's Phuket for New Delhi on August 4, before landing safely in the Indian capital.

India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) said 24 people were injured in the incident, a higher figure than the 17

previously reported by the airline.

The AAIB said it was "presently engaged in the systematic collection, preservation and examination of all relevant technical, operational, medical and human-factor evidences".

The agency was "committed to an independent, transparent and professional investigation", it said in a statement.

Indian media reports, meanwhile, said the chief pilot had failed a second drug screening test.

Broadcaster NDTV, citing unnamed sources, reported that the pilot had "smoked marijuana".

The aviation ministry said

on Sunday that both pilots had undergone standard psychoactive substance screening after the flight landed in New Delhi.

The captain's initial screening produced a result requiring confirmatory testing, with samples sent for further analysis, the ministry added.

Both pilots had been removed from flying duties pending the outcome of the investigation, it said.

Air India yesterday said it could not comment on the reported test results because authorities had not shared the findings of the post-flight screening with them.

"We will continue to cooperate

with the relevant authorities as required," an airline spokesperson said, adding that the carrier conducts regular drug testing for crew members.

The AAIB inquiry is being supported by Airbus and France's civil aviation safety agency, the BEA.

An Airbus spokesperson said the manufacturer was providing technical assistance to Indian authorities, with a team of experts having been dispatched to Delhi.

The BEA said it was involved in the investigation but did not plan to send investigators to India at this point.

The incident is the latest challenge for Air India as it seeks to overhaul its operations following a string of setbacks.

The carrier has faced disruption from the conflict in the Middle East and continuing operational pressures.

Its reputation suffered a major blow in June 2025 when London-bound Flight 171 crashed shortly after take-off from Ahmedabad, killing all but one of the 242 people on board and 19 people on the ground.

Last week, the airline appointed former Ethiopian Airlines chief Tewolde Gebremariam as its new chief executive. — AFP



A Kashmiri wood carving artisan crafts designs on a wooden board at a workshop in Srinagar, India on Monday.

— AFP

Cambodia deports nearly 18,000 foreign cyber-scam suspects this year

PHNOM PENH — Cambodia has expelled nearly 18,000 foreign online scam suspects this year amid an ongoing crackdown on cybercrime, an immigration official said yesterday.

Lieutenant General Sok Veasna, director general of the General Department of Immigration, said that anti-online fraud operations have scaled up sharply since the beginning of 2026.

"From January 1 to August 9, we deported more than 50,000 foreigners, including over 17,700 online scam suspects," he told reporters.

The remaining deportees consisted of individuals holding invalid documents, such as expired passports, expired visas, or missing work permits, and foreign fugitives, among others.

Thong Mengdavid, deputy director of the China-ASEAN Studies Center at the Cambodia University of Technology and Science, said while mass deportations are a long-overdue step toward salvaging Cambodia's reputation and disrupting massive cyber-scam networks, they remain a temporary fix.

"To truly win this fight, Cambodia must target high-level kingpins and dismantle the local protection networks that allow these operations to thrive," he told Xinhua.

He emphasized that the root of the problem will persist until the underlying issues of human trafficking and corruption are fully addressed.

The Southeast Asian nation has launched an unprecedented nationwide crackdown on cyber-scam networks to protect public safety and restore its international image. — Xinhua

Australia to vaccinate birds against H5 avian influenza

SYDNEY — Australian authorities said yesterday they would vaccinate bird species deemed to be especially vulnerable to the highly contagious H5 bird flu virus.

The country was for years the only continental landmass free of the H5 strain, which has caused severe disease and death in poultry and wild birds worldwide.

The first Australian case was discovered in a migratory sea bird in June and last week the government reported its first mass mortality event in wildlife.

As part of efforts to protect birds, officials said they would roll out targeted vaccinations for both

captive and wild species.

"It is difficult to vaccinate birds in the wild — it does take two vaccination doses to vaccinate birds," environment minister Murray Watt said.

"It is difficult to catch wild birds once, let alone twice," he said.

"Where it is possible to vaccinate wild birds, we will do so, but the priority is to vaccinate birds that are in captivity."

Agriculture minister Julie Collins said Australia should expect to see more mass bird deaths.

"This will continue to spread across the country," she said.

The wild birds most affected

by the H5 strain include waterfowl, shorebirds, seabirds and birds of prey.

As of Monday, authorities have reported there are 231 confirmed or presumed positive detections of H5 bird flu in Australia.

There have been no cases detected in poultry or in the country's agriculture production.

Almost half of Australia's wild bird species, and 83 percent of its mammals, are found nowhere else.

The H5 bird flu strain killed more than 13,000 elephant seal pups after infecting a breeding colony on the remote Heard and McDonald Islands, Australian scientists said in June. — AFP

Typhoon Chan-hom makes landfall in eastern Japan's Ibaraki

TOKYO — Typhoon Chan-hom made landfall in the eastern Japan prefecture of Ibaraki last night, the weather agency said, urging caution against violent winds, high waves and heavy rain.

Chan-hom, traveling in an unusual direction from east to west, was the first typhoon to make landfall in Ibaraki Prefecture, northeast of Tokyo, since records began in 1951, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA).

The year's 15th typhoon is expected to reach western Japan and weaken into a tropical depression by early this afternoon, the JMA said.

Weather officials forecast up to 180 millimeters of rain in the Kanto-Koshin region, 150 mm in the Tohoku region in northeastern Japan, 120 mm in the central Tokai region and 80 mm in the western Kinki region in the 24 hours through 6 p.m. local time today.

— Xinhua

NZ climate adaptation failing to keep pace with rising risks: report

WELLINGTON — New Zealand's adaptation efforts are not keeping pace with escalating climate risks, leaving communities exposed to increasing harm and costs, a climate report said yesterday.

The 2026 assessment of the Climate Change Commission, the country's independent climate advisory body, found the adaptation response remained "patchy" and, in some cases, was "slipping further behind" as climate risks intensified.

"New Zealand is, too often, paying to react and recover after damage occurs, rather than preparing

ahead of time," the commission said, warning this was becoming "increasingly unsustainable."

Recent estimates by insurance company IAG put the direct annual costs to central government and insurers from natural hazards, including climate change, at about NZ\$4 billion (about US\$2.36 billion), with a significant impact on economic growth.

The commission recommended urgent action in six areas: establishing funding and financing pathways for local adaptation, requiring local adaptation planning, aligning legislation, maintaining

national climate risk information, supporting Māori-led adaptation, and strengthening the next national adaptation plan due in 2028.

Nathanael Melia, an adjunct senior research fellow at Victoria University of Wellington, said rising sea levels meant New Zealand faced "difficult and unpopular decisions" on adaptation, insurance availability and retreat.

"Because so many New Zealanders live and work near the coast," damage to coastal homes and infrastructure would become increasingly likely, Melia said. — Xinhua



Pakistan's minority community members stage a demonstration to mark National Minorities Day in Karachi, Pakistan yesterday. — AFP

Syria sentences Bashar al-Assad to death in absentia over atrocities



This handout photo released by Syria's Ministry of Interior yesterday shows former head of political security in south Syria's Daraa province, Atif Najib (left, standing) attending the court proceedings at the Palace of Justice, in Damascus. The court sentenced Najib to death for "crimes against humanity" committed when he was head of political security in Daraa province, the cradle of the country's 2011 uprising.

— AFP

Maher al-Mounes

DAMASCUS — A Syrian court yesterday sentenced former ruler Bashar al-Assad to death after a trial in absentia, convicting him of atrocities committed during the country's nearly 14-year civil war.

It is the first such ruling under Syria's transitional leaders who ousted Assad in December 2024, vowing to provide justice and accountability for crimes committed under his rule.

Assad fled to Moscow as Islamist-led forces closed in on Damascus after a lightning offensive.

At a court in Damascus, Judge Fakhr al-Din al-Aryan convicted Assad for crimes including "premeditated murder, the intentional killing of more than one person, the intentional killing of children under 15 years... torture, torture leading to death, and deprivation of liberty on multiple occasions — classified as crimes against humanity and war crimes".

"He is therefore sentenced to death."

Syria in April began proceedings against Assad and other officials accused in person and in absentia of atrocities during the country's

civil war, which erupted with the former authorities' repression of pro-democracy protesters.

More than half a million people were killed and millions displaced, while tens of thousands of people disappeared, many into the country's prison system.

The court also sentenced six former military and security officials in absentia to death including Assad's brother Maher, who ran the army's elite Fourth Division and also fled the country.

Those convicted included former defence minister Fahd al-Frej and Louay al-Ali, who headed military intelligence in Daraa province in 2011.

The court convicted the officials for crimes including murder, incitement to murder, torture leading to death and repeated deprivation of liberty, also considered "crimes against humanity" and "war crimes".

Former security official Atif Najib — the only one in the dock — was also sentenced to death for "crimes against humanity" committed when he was head of political security in Daraa province, the cradle of the country's 2011 uprising.

Najib, a cousin of Assad who was arrested in January last year, was convicted for crimes including murder, "the intentional killing of children under 15", and "torture leading to death".

The acts attributed to him are "crimes against humanity", the court said as it handed down "the harshest punishment against him, which is the death penalty".

Syria's uprising began in Daraa in March 2011, after 15 students were arrested for allegedly writing anti-government slogans on the city's walls.

Residents said the students were tortured, leading to a protest to demand their release that ended in bloodshed.

Security personnel suppressed peaceful demonstrations with force and fired live ammunition to disperse sit-ins at several locations.

Najib was dismissed after the crackdown, as the protests spread to other provinces.

Aryan said Najib had denied the charges against him and showed "no remorse".

Assad took the Syrian presidency in 2000 after the death of his father Hafez.

— AFP

Former Mossad chief says spies 'toured' Iran nuclear site

JERUSALEM — A former head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency yesterday said its spies had visited Iran's Fordow nuclear site "many times" in the past in order to better understand the facility.

In June last year, Israel launched a war against its arch-foe Iran with the stated goal of degrading its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, which it said posed an "existential threat".

The United States military briefly joined Israel during the 12-day conflict, and used its advanced aircraft to bomb three Iranian nuclear facilities at Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan.

"We toured the Fordow nuclear site many times to understand the site," Yossi Cohen, who led the Mossad between 2015 and 2021, said during a conference of local authorities yesterday, Israeli media reported.

He didn't elaborate on when exactly the visits took place or who made them.

According to Israeli media, Cohen said "the bombing of the site by the Americans was the fulfillment of all my dreams".

Iran's nuclear programme

has long been a major point of contention between it and the West, including in negotiations aimed at ending the current war that Israel and the US launched against it in February.

Tehran has denied that it is seeking to produce a nuclear bomb.

Cohen, who is close to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, played a prominent role during his time in office in achieving US-brokered normalisation deals between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Morocco.

Sudan also signed on to the Abraham Accords, but later descended into war and has never ratified or implemented them.

Cohen was linked to Israel's killing in 2020 of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, although Israel has not commented on the incident.

After finishing his term at the helm of the agency, he has remained in the public eye, giving frequent interviews to Israeli media and repeatedly hinting at a possible foray into politics, which has not yet occurred.

— AFP

Syria slams Colombia's recognition of Israeli claim over Golan

DAMASCUS — Syria yesterday slammed the decision to recognise Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights by the new rightwing government of Colombia, which became only the second country to do so after the US.

Syria "expresses its categorical rejection and condemnation of this position and affirms that the Golan is an inseparable part of its territory", a foreign ministry statement said a day after Colombia announced the move.

Israel captured most of the Golan from Syria in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and later annexed the areas under its control, in a move not recognised by most of the international community.

Colombian President Abelardo de la Espriella took power on Friday following a campaign during which he promised tight relations with the United States and Israel as a way to combat armed groups in his own country.

"Colombia recognises that maintaining Israel's control and sovereignty over the Golan Heights is an essential component of its national defence," the foreign ministry said.

Syria called Colombia's announcement "a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations", recent statements by UN chief António Guterres, and a UN Security Council resolution.

Visiting Syria last month, Guterres said that "violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity are unacceptable", adding: "I'd like to remind the international community that the Golan Heights are Syrian territory."

De la Espriella's leftist predecessor Gustavo Petro had ardently criticised Israel's offensive in Gaza, severing diplomatic relations and halting Israeli arms imports into Colombia.

The US-backed millionaire now in office has promised to restore ties.

After the December 2024 overthrow of longtime Syrian ruler Bashar al-Assad, Israel sent troops into the UN-patrolled buffer zone that had separated Israeli and Syrian forces in the Israeli-occupied Golan since 1974.

It has also carried out strikes and repeated incursions into southern Syria, where it seeks an expanded demilitarised zone.

— AFP

Lebanon formally abolishes death penalty in Mideast first

BEIRUT — Lebanon's parliament yesterday abolished the death penalty, making the country the first in the Middle East to formally end the practice.

"The draft law aimed at abolishing the death penalty in Lebanon was approved," the speaker of parliament's office announced.

Lebanon had not carried out an

execution since 2004.

Justice Minister Adel Nassar called the abolition "historic", and said the spectre of capital punishment had previously prevented Beirut from obtaining the extradition of suspects from countries where it has been outlawed.

Ramzi Kaiss, Lebanon researcher at Human Rights Watch (HRW), told

AFP the move was "a monumental step for human rights in the country, representing a clear break from a cruel and arbitrary sentence that should never be imposed".

The abolition came as part of a series of bills to be discussed in the current legislative session, including a general amnesty law that has been debated for years.

— AFP

Attackers kill 60 people in S Sudan cattle raid: local official

JUBA — Armed attackers have killed at least 60 people in central South Sudan, according to local officials and media, in the country's latest deadly cattle raid.

The young nation has long been plagued by violent cattle raids but is now also seeing clashes between troops loyal to President Salva Kiir and forces loosely allied with the opposition.

Two simultaneous attacks in Tonj North County, Alabek Payam in Warrap State, on Sunday morning (local time), resulted in the death of at least 60 people including 15 attackers, according to a local official.

Last year, Kiir declared a six-month state of emergency in the state after a surge of violent inter-communal cattle raids.

"The senseless act of violence is a direct violation of peace and stability efforts," said Warrap spokesperson William Wol Mayom Bol in a statement on Monday, promising "immediate action to bring the perpetrators to justice".

He said around 50 people were wounded, including 17 transferred to Wau town for treatment, and an unspecified number of cattle had been looted.

Bol added that the South Sudan People's Defence Force (SSPDF) had been deployed to affected areas to "restore order,

protect civilians, prevent further retaliatory attacks".

The incident was also reported by the United Nations Radio Miraya, which gave the death toll as "at least 60 people".

It said dozens more were wounded, hundreds of cattle had been looted, leaving people to flee into the bush.

Earlier this month, the head of the UN mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), Anita Kiki Gbeho, expressed concerns over the cycle of communal violence in places such as Warrap.

"Civilians continue to pay the highest price, facing displacement, losing lives, homes and livelihoods as a result of insecurity," she told the UN Security Council.

Humanitarian workers are also facing increased danger in South Sudan, with 36 killed in 2026 alone, Gbeho said.

South Sudan, which achieved independence in 2011, is scheduled to hold its first elections in December but international observers have raised questions over the feasibility of polls.

Opposition leader Riek Machar remains in detention on trial, and clashes between forces loosely supporting him and others allied to the president are occurring across the nation. —AFP

US rights groups sue Trump over ICC sanctions

Ben Turner

WASHINGTON, DC — Rights groups yesterday sued US President Donald Trump over his sanctions targeting the International Criminal Court (ICC), saying the measures block victims of war crimes from pursuing justice.

The Trump administration, which rejects the ICC's authority, has imposed travel bans and asset freezes on several judges and prosecutors, primarily over their investigations into key US ally Israel.

In a New York court filing, four groups including Human Rights Watch (HRW) said the sanctions should be struck down as they violate laws including First Amendment free speech protections.

"This is an unlawful abuse of power constituting a frontal attack on the rule of law, the independence of judges, prosecutors, and lawyers, basic precepts undergirding the international legal order, and the principle of equal access to justice," the lawsuit states.

The 101-page complaint says the restrictions "cause grave damage to the ability to bring to justice the perpetrators of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity."

The US sanctions, issued under an executive order Trump signed in February 2025, have targeted eight

judges, three prosecutors, a UN expert and three human rights organisations.

The United Nations and the European Union previously urged Trump to reverse penalties against ICC officials.

Many of the measures were directly linked to an arrest warrant that The Hague-based court issued for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the war in Gaza.

Washington has also criticised ICC probes into alleged abuses during the US-led war in Afghanistan.

'Irreparable harm'

Yesterday's complaint, filed by HRW, American Friends Service Committee, Centre for Constitutional Rights, and Open Society Institute, says the sanctions have caused "profound and irreparable harm."

It states that the four groups have been forced to stop fully engaging with the ICC due to fears of civil or criminal penalties, and of being designated for sanctions themselves.

Alongside Trump, the lawsuit names Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, Attorney General Todd Blanche, and Bradley Smith, director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control.

Established in 2002, the ICC prosecutes individuals accused of the gravest atrocities and acts as a

last resort when countries do not have adequate legal systems to ensure accountability.

US reservations about the court predate Trump. The US, like Israel, has not ratified the international treaty that established the ICC, which is backed by nearly all Western countries.

Russia is also not a member. Its President Vladimir Putin has been the subject of an ICC arrest warrant since March 2023.

Washington vowed last month to accelerate its campaign against the ICC beyond the existing sanctions — accusing the court of posing "an intolerable threat to US sovereignty."

A State Department official told AFP the effort would look to pressure other nations to withdraw from the court and cut off any financial support to the court.

In June, three ICC judges sanctioned by the Trump administration filed a lawsuit against the president and other senior US officials, arguing that the measures imposed on them were unlawful.

In a complaint filed in New York, Canadian judge Kimberly Prost, Uganda's Solomy Balungi Bossa and Benin's Reine Adelaide Sophie Alapini-Gansou said the sanctions were intended to "exert extrajudicial pressure." —AFP

Spotify to launch badge identifying AI music

STOCKHOLM, Sweden — Streaming giant Spotify said yesterday it would launch a new "AI Persona" badge in mid-September clearly identifying content producers that are AI-generated and not real people.

"Listeners have been clear in telling us that they don't like seeing an artist profile that seems human, only to find out that the persona is AI-generated," Spotify said in a statement.

The move is the Swedish company's latest effort to be transparent about how the music on its platform was made, amid

growing concern across the music industry over AI-generated content overwhelming streaming catalogues.

In April, the company launched its "Verified by Spotify" badge, signalling that a profile has been reviewed and meets its authenticity standard.

"Alongside artist profiles that self-disclose as AI Personas, we will also start applying badges to relevant profiles," the company said.

Spotify will not include AI Personas in editorial or personalised recommendations, unless a user follows an AI Persona, it said. —AFP

Norway wealth fund manager says fund collapse not impossible

OSLO — Could Norway's sovereign wealth fund, the largest in the world with over US\$2 trillion in assets, go up in smoke? Yesterday, its manager said it was a possibility and that current global tensions made the prospect less implausible.

Fuelled by the Norwegian state's oil and gas revenues, the sovereign wealth fund — commonly called the oil fund — has seen its value rise from under 2 billion kroner at its inception in 1996 to more than 22 trillion kroner (US\$2.3 trillion) today.

Nicolai Tangen, CEO of Norges Bank Investment Management which manages the fund, on Tuesday warned the phenomenal and extraordinary growth, partly due to luck, was not something that could be expected to continue at the same pace in future.

"Can the oil fund disappear? The answer is yes. And the worst thing is that in the world we live in today, it's not totally improbable," he said in a speech in Arendal, a town in southern Norway where the country's elite is gathered this week.

"No country in history has managed to maintain such a vast fortune over the long term. Fortunes always end up disappearing," he argued, citing historical examples such as Spain and the United Kingdom.

Invested in equities, bonds and property across the world, the Norwegian fund is designed to be a long-term undertaking and to benefit future generations.

To balance public finances, which would otherwise be in deficit, the government is currently allowed

to draw up to three percent from the fund each year, a ceiling that corresponds to the estimated annual return on investments and therefore does not eat into the nest egg itself.

Among potential risks, Tangen mentioned extreme scenarios such as a nuclear war or biological terrorism, but also that of a prolonged depression triggered, for example, by the bursting of an "AI bubble" — referring to the high prices of stocks linked to AI — combined with a trade war between the United States and China.

Even though more safeguards are now in place, the latter scenario would be comparable to the great economic depression of 1929 and could wipe out "at least 80 percent" of the value of stock market investments, Tangen said. —AFP



Demonstrators rally during a "FreeDC" protest in Washington, DC, yesterday to mark one year since US President Donald Trump deployed members of the National Guard into the city. Republican politicians — led by Trump — have claimed that the US capital is overrun by crime, plagued by homelessness and financially mismanaged. "DC" stands for District of Columbia.

Sony, TSMC to invest US\$4.7 billion in advanced image sensors

TOKYO — Japanese giant Sony Group and Taiwan chip titan TSMC said yesterday they will invest US\$4.7 billion to manufacture advanced smartphone image sensors.

Production is slated to begin in 2029.

Sony is to invest 465 billion yen (US\$2.9 billion) and TSMC 282 billion yen (US\$1.8 billion) in the joint venture in Koshi City, which lies in southwestern Japan's Kumamoto region, the companies said in a statement.

The venture will serve as a development and manufacturing

hub for the production of image sensors for smartphones, they said.

It will be created at a fabrication plant of Sony's semiconductor business subsidiary in Koshi.

Sony is a world leader in the image sensors sector, accounting for over 50 percent of the global market by value.

The use of image sensors for robots and other machines is expected to expand, driven by the growth of artificial intelligence (AI).

The collaboration is aimed at utilising TSMC's "advanced process

technology and manufacturing expertise," while Sony is to take a lead in developing image sensor technologies and product design, the two firms said.

TSMC is already investing in Japan, announcing in February it would produce three-nanometre semiconductors — among the most advanced chips that can power AI systems — at a factory in Kumamoto.

The firm opened its first Japanese chip plant two years ago in the region, touting it as a move to boost the resiliency of chip supply for Japan and worldwide. —AFP

Colombia scrambles to find survivors as quake kills 240



Residents look at the rubble of a collapsed building yesterday following Monday's earthquake in Pereira, Colombia. – AFP

David Salazar

PEREIRA – Colombian volunteers cleared rubble by hand yesterday in the hunt for survivors from an earthquake that killed at least 240 people and levelled more than a hundred homes and office buildings.

The quake struck several cities across Colombia's coffee region and Pacific belt at 7:34 a.m. (local time) on Monday, toppling structures, swaying towers and tossing roof tiles to the ground.

Pereira, a city of half a million people, was the hardest hit.

Throughout the night from Monday to yesterday, residents navigated blacked-out streets with torches.

Volunteers searched the ruins of a six-story building of shops and offices where two girls were believed to be trapped.

"It's so sad to see the whole city like this, knowing that there may still be people alive under there," said Juana Marin, 25, who joined dozens of volunteers clearing rubble by hand.

This was Colombia's strongest earthquake in a century, according to the US Geological Survey, and one of its deadliest natural disasters in years.

In a joint statement, the mayors of major affected cities said at least 240 had been killed, and more than 1,300 people had been injured.

Colombian President Abelardo de la Escriella – just days into the job – declared a state of emergency and vowed a concerted rescue effort.

'Someone whistled back'

In Cali, volunteers quickly went to work with picks, basic tools and their own hands to try to find survivors.

Rescuers formed human chains to remove bricks and masonry, stopping every few minutes to listen for signs of life from those trapped below.

Andrés Felipe Mejía was among those who joined a makeshift crew.

"We are trying to get everyone out alive," he told AFP.

"One of the rescuers asked anyone trapped to whistle, and someone whistled back," he said near a pancaked building.

"They pulled out a man and a baby, but the wife is still in there."

"A lot of people have come, with supplies, with food, helping the firefighters, helping the people," he said.

Hospitals in five Colombian cities were put on red alert on Monday and a nighttime curfew was declared in Cali, according to local authorities.

"It felt like the end of the world – cars and motorcycles driving the wrong way, everyone searching for their loved ones," said volunteer rescue worker Nelson Moreno.

'Overwhelming'

Colombian pop megastar Shakira led the calls for unity.

"All my strength and love to my homeland. Let's hold each other tight," she said.

At least six local airports suspended operations, the civil aeronautics agency said.

Tattoo artist Andrés Hernández said he was worried about his family and friends, adding that he would stay awake because structures around him were "on the verge of collapsing."

There were scenes of destruction in several cities, with furniture and fabric sandwiched between concrete walls, floors tossed and resting on irregular angles, and cabling strewn across roads.

In Manizales, the quake crumpled a tower of the city's beloved neo-Gothic cathedral.

In Quibdó, the capital of Colombia's Choco department, local official Jenny Rivass said public services and communications had been "virtually shut down."

"People ran out naked, people jumped from the second floor of their homes," Quibdó resident and law student Wilmer Cuesta said.

Dentist Julian Peña said he "ran outside carrying nothing" after feeling strong tremors and found hundreds doing the same.

"People were praying in the street. It was overwhelming," he told AFP.

"There are many buildings with gaps, with cracks. There are others that have completely collapsed."

Overnight searches

The quake was felt across Colombia, including the capital Bogotá, where crowds rushed out into the street in their pajamas.

At a depth of 110 kilometres, the quake was also felt in neighbouring Ecuador and Panamá.

Experts at the US Geological Survey said the quake was likely caused by movement along a deep fault within the Nazca tectonic plate.

The devastation comes less than two months after powerful twin quakes rattled neighbouring Venezuela, killing more than 6,300 people and leaving tens of thousands homeless.

Messages of support came in from countries across the region and the world.

Pope Leo XIV is "deeply saddened" and "raises his prayers to the Lord for the prompt recovery of those affected by this tragedy," the Vatican said yesterday.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Monday the United States was "closely monitoring" the situation and "stands ready to support the people of Colombia."

The US announced US\$15.5 million in emergency relief.

European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen said the EU had mobilised Copernicus, a satellite service, to help with rescue operations.

Israel also offered assistance.

– AFP

Spanish police bust network accused of trafficking migrant girls

MADRID – Spanish police said yesterday they have dismantled a criminal ring accused of recruiting unaccompanied migrant girls from care centres in Gran Canaria and moving them to mainland Spain and France, where some were sexually exploited.

The operation comes as migration debates have returned to the forefront across Europe after a mass border crossing from Morocco into the Spanish territory of Ceuta last month left hundreds of unaccompanied minors stranded in the city.

The Guardia Civil (gendarmerie) said the investigation began after a migrant girl who had been under the care of authorities in Gran Canaria returned to Spain from France and told investigators she had been recruited with the promise of a job.

Investigators subsequently identified several similar cases involving girls who left care centres without their personal documents and were later linked to flights to mainland Spain, the Guardia Civil said in a statement.

The network allegedly exploited the girls' vulnerability, offering to help them leave the Canary Islands

while providing false identity or travel documents and arranging their journeys by air and land.

"All with the aim of facilitating their departure from the islands and subsequently transferring them to mainland Spain and France, where some of them are alleged to have been subjected to sexual exploitation," the statement said.

The Guardia Civil said it rescued two victims and prevented four other minors from leaving the islands.

Five people were arrested, including one minor, following five searches across Gran Canaria.

Some 72,000 migrants breached Ceuta's border in an unprecedented and deadly rush on July 30-31, with 70,000 having since returned to Morocco, according to Spanish government figures.

Spain's Youth and Children Minister Sira Rego said Friday that 1,342 unaccompanied migrant minors had been registered in Ceuta following the mass influx from Morocco.

Aid groups have warned that the minors, many of whom are sleeping rough on the streets of Ceuta, are at risk of abuse and exploitation. – AFP



This undated and unlocated pixelated handout photo released by Guardia Civil (gendarmerie) yesterday shows Civil Guard officers during a police operation to dismantle a network involved in recruiting and trafficking unaccompanied foreign minor girls staying at migrant reception centres, operating primarily from the island of Gran Canaria. – AFP

Food prices help Brazil inflation return to target ahead of election

SÃO PAULO – Lower food and fuel prices helped bring Brazil's inflation back within the target range two months before a presidential election, official data showed yesterday.

Inflation eased to 4.44 percent year-on-year in July, according to Brazil's IBGE statistics agency.

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is seeking a fourth non-consecutive term in the October election, in which cost of living is a key voter concern.

For the first time since April, inflation returned to the government's target range between

1.5 percent and 4.5 percent.

Monthly inflation in July stood at 0.07 percent, down from 0.16 percent the previous month.

Brazil's central bank has one of the world's highest benchmark interest rates in a bid to curb inflation, cutting it from 14.25 percent to 14 percent earlier this month.

However, the monetary authority remains wary over inflationary pressure from the war in the Middle East, which has disrupted oil supply.

Lula's government has subsidized fuel prices to help ease the impact on consumers. – AFP

Football shorts

Barcelona's Bardghji suffers ACL rupture

LALIGA BARCELONA – Barcelona's young Swedish winger Rooney Bardghji faces surgery in the coming days after rupturing the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee, the Spanish champions announced yesterday.

The 20-year-old, who joined Barca last summer from Copenhagen, was injured in training on Monday and could be sidelined for at least six to seven months, according to the Catalan press.

He played just 28 matches last season as he served as back-up to Lamine Yamal and was tipped to leave the club following the arrivals of England winger Anthony Gordon and German international Karim Adeyemi. – AFP

Raid at Galatasaray ultras chief's home yields US\$1.3 million

ISTANBUL – Turkish police have discovered more than US\$1.3 million in cash alongside gold and

jewellery at the home of the leader of the top supporters' group for the Istanbul football club Galatasaray, Turkish media reported on Monday.

Besides over 840,000 euros (US\$970,000) as well as various other currencies, the eight-and-a-half-hour-long raid at the ultras chief's house also yielded a handgun, ammunition and four bulletproof vests, according to the DHA and IHA news agencies.

Sebahattin Sirin, who was arrested on Sunday, is accused of selling tickets on the black market, causing breaches of the peace inside sports stadiums and spreading false information.

The previous day, the ultras chief accused Turkey's justice minister Akin Gurlek on X of being part of a "group within the state that wants to make Fenerbahce champions this season" at the expense of the reigning Super Lig winners.

Neither the minister nor Fenerbahce, Galatasaray's bitter cross-town rivals, has responded publicly to that accusation. – AFP



Uruguay's former player Diego Forlan smiles during his presentation as head coach of Uruguay's Under-20 team and interim coach of the senior national football team at the Centenario Stadium in Montevideo, Uruguay on Monday. – AFP

Liverpool fans seek clarity on Bezos bid to buy stake

Premier League LONDON – Liverpool supporters' group Spirit of Shankly said the interests of the club and fans must come first following reports that a consortium including Amazon founder Jeff Bezos is close to a deal to buy a significant minority stake.

Sky News said Bezos was part of an investor group led by Amit Bhatia, the son-in-law of India steel billionaire Lakshmi Mittal, which also includes Facebook co-founder Eduardo Saverin.

Liverpool owners Fenway Sports Group confirmed the approach from Bhatia's group in July.

Monday's Sky report said the consortium was "closing in on a deal to buy a roughly one-third stake in Liverpool", with FSG preparing to make an announcement "as soon as this week".

Bezos is one of the world's richest men, with a fortune estimated by *Forbes* magazine at more than US\$280 billion, while Saverin's wealth is put at US\$33 billion.

The 62-year-old Bezos has reportedly explored previous bids for the NFL's Seattle Seahawks and Washington Commanders, but decided against pursuing either deal.

Spirit of Shankly has written to Liverpool asking for more clarity and a meeting to discuss the potential changes.

"Putting the interests of LFC and its supporters first is fundamental to us all," said a statement from the group.

"The latest report of a 30 percent sale and the consortium set up to buy it is significant. The ownership and custodianship of our club is paramount to SoS and all supporters.

"We have witnessed similar sales at other clubs resulting in notable changes in the running of that club and football operations, leading to decisions and behaviours that many would not want to see at Liverpool."

Liverpool won the Premier League title in 2024/25 under Arne Slot but the Dutchman was sacked in May after a turbulent season, with Andoni Iraola now in charge.

– AFP

Somali referee denied World Cup 'proud' to oversee UEFA Super Cup



SALZBURG, Austria – Somali referee Omar Artan, who was denied the chance to referee at the World Cup after being refused entry to the United States, will take charge of the UEFA Super Cup between Paris Saint-Germain and Aston Villa today.

Before the World Cup started in June, the 34-year-old referee unwittingly found himself in the media spotlight after being turned away on arrival at Miami International Airport, despite being part of the panel of referees selected by FIFA for the tournament.

"It was a very tough period," Artan said in an interview published on the UEFA website.

"A lot of people have sympathy for me, because when someone has been working a lot of years and is supposed to do something, and then can't do it, it's very challenging."

A US State Department official told AFP that the referee was "associated with suspected members of terrorist organisations", therefore "making the traveller ineligible for admission to the United States".

These allegations were rejected by the referee and caused outrage in Somalia, where Artan had been welcomed as a hero on his return.

"It is unfortunate what happened to the referee from Somalia," FIFA president Gianni Infantino said at the time, adding: "We don't control everything."

In response, UEFA, the governing body of European football, announced that Artan would referee the UEFA Super Cup, which pits Champions League winners PSG against the Europa League winners Aston Villa.

"I was lucky, but I have worked very hard to be here and I'm really proud," Artan told UEFA.

"As you can imagine, I grew



Paris Saint-Germain's Portuguese midfielder Vitorinha takes part in a training session yesterday, the eve of the UEFA Supercup between Champions League winners Paris Saint Germain (PSG) and Europa League winners Aston Villa in Salzburg, Austria. – AFP

up in a difficult situation, but it didn't prevent me from pursuing my dreams."

The first Somali to officiate at the Africa Cup of Nations in 2024, Artan is now set to referee his first match in Europe.

"Having adventures, making memories and learning new things is always great," he added. "When we got this call it was, for me and my family, really a very, very happy moment."

To justify its decision to appoint Artan as referee for the Super Cup, UEFA pointed to the agreement it signed at the end of April with the Confederation of African Football (CAF) to encourage cooperation

between the two confederations.

But it is also a political gesture by UEFA, which is regularly critical of FIFA, and one that takes on even greater significance in light of the conflict that has pitted the European body against Infantino for the past two weeks, centring on the abandoned plan to open up the World Cup to private investors.

The plan's failure was largely due to the revolt led by UEFA, which continues to wield the threat of a boycott of FIFA tournaments - including the World Cups - in an attempt to force Infantino to step down.

The game will be played at 3:00 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time. – AFP/MPD

Jaissle states Newcastle ambition but urges patience



LONDON – Newcastle's new head coach Matthias Jaissle has underlined the club's ambition despite a string of high-profile exits including manager Eddie Howe, but warned success would not come overnight.

Howe left St James' Park at the end of July after nearly five years in charge, with a clutch of senior players - captain Bruno Guimaraes, Sandro Tonali and Anthony Gordon - all departing during the summer transfer window.

Saudi-backed Newcastle have signed a group of young players including Bazoumana Toure, Sean Steur and Aladji Bamba, but the departures have left the squad short of experience.

Nevertheless, former RB Salzburg and Al-Ahli boss Jaissle remains upbeat.

"We are ambitious. That's the most important thing - also why I

decided to come here. But this will not happen overnight," he said at his first press conference at St James' Park yesterday.

"The players who left the club, they were great players, great characters, experienced players and this is now a vacuum. Other players need to step in.

"It's a big challenge, always when there's a transition period, but it's no time to complain. It doesn't make sense to see the negative things. We want to see the chance in that situation and that's our approach from day one."

Jaissle, who guided RB Salzburg to back-to-back Austrian league titles and Saudi side Al-Ahli to successive Asian Champions League crowns, said Newcastle had options in the remaining weeks of the transfer window.

"Either we adjust something in the squad, by signing these players, these profiles, or other

players need to step up and fill these positions, these leadership roles," he said.

"So I am quite optimistic, we can work in both scenarios. My job is to do the best out of it."

Jaissle steered clear of setting a firm target for Newcastle, who limped to a 12th-place finish in the Premier League last season.

"I'm long enough now in the industry that you cannot promise anything," he said. "It makes no sense to promise things now because I don't know how things look in half a year or in one year. What we can control, we will control."

Englishman Howe revitalised a club that had struggled for decades, securing a first major trophy in 56 years by winning the League Cup in 2025 and twice qualifying for the Champions League.

Newcastle start their Premier League campaign at home to Liverpool on August 23. – AFP

Hodgkinson, Werro sail through Euro 800m qualifying

Athletics

Luke Phillips

BIRMINGHAM, United Kingdom – Olympic champion Keely Hodgkinson safely negotiated the heats of the 800m in Birmingham yesterday as she seeks a third consecutive European title.

Home favourite Hodgkinson, who previously won continental crowns in Munich in 2022 and Rome two years ago, timed 1min 57.28sec to win her heat.

“The championship is a fresh start. It felt good. The standard has gone up. That was one minute 57 in the heats!” said Hodgkinson.

“We are dragging the best out of each other and the standard keeps getting higher and higher, but it brings out the best in me.”

Hodgkinson added: “I felt really good. I’m so glad the race was a bit quicker. I felt it was at a similar rhythm to when I train. I’m glad because sometimes a slower race can feel awful.

“I just got back from Portugal so I feel great. I got a nice tan there and had some relaxation time, which is always needed. That has prepared me to be here today.”

World championships finalist Eloisa Coiro of Italy set a national record of 1:57.56 in finishing second behind the Briton, while three-time European silver medallist Renelle Lamote of France could only finish fifth but qualified as one of the fastest finishers outside the automatic spots.

Also qualifying with ease for tomorrow’s semi-finals, with the final a day later, was Switzerland’s Audrey Werro, who won her heat in 1:57.83.

Werro this season clocked the third fastest time ever in the two-lap race and the rivalry between her and Hodgkinson has set the 800m as one of the must-see races at the Birmingham Euros.

The pair last met at the Stockholm Diamond League in June, when Werro outpaced Hodgkinson, timing 1:53.98 for the



Britain's Keely Hodgkinson crosses the finish line to arrive first in the women's 800m heat 1 during the European Athletics Championships at Alexander Stadium in Birmingham yesterday. – AFP

victory to become the first woman to dip under 1:54 since 1983.

The Swiss runner then bettered that with a blistering 1:53.80 to win at the Paris Diamond League.

Hodgkinson improved her own British record to 1:54.33 behind Werro in Stockholm. She then went on to win the London Diamond League.

Don't care about noise

Hodgkinson had broken the 24-year-old world indoor record in Lievin in February before claiming a first world indoor title in March.

“I don’t really care about the noise about me,” said Hodgkinson. “I haven’t got time for that. I just focus on myself and do what I can do.”

Never to be ruled out is Dutchwoman Femke Broeders-Bol, the former two-time world 400m hurdles champion who has transitioned into a 800m specialist.

She, too, won her heat with ease in 1:59.96.

“Those were my very first 800m heats at a major championships so it’s nice to get through to the semis,” said Broeders-Bol.

“I feel very strong and have posted very good times earlier this season, but I do have to admit it was quite exciting and nerve wracking going into this race this morning.”

Given it will be championship racing, which tends to be more tactical and not a pacesetter-led time-based event, it would be a brave pundit to overlook Broeders-Bol, known in her hurdling days for her devastating turn of pace with the finish line in sight.

“It’s nice to just surprise myself, to be the underdog instead of the favourite,” said Broeders-Bol.

“It’s also a bit about finding out how things work and getting used to doing these type of races. I am not too experienced with the tactical part of the 800m. Not being a clear favourite, it means I’m not the one controlling the race this time around.

“In the 400m hurdles, I had my own lane, my own hurdles and I knew what I was capable of. In the 800m, everything is very new but that’s also very exciting.”

Both Hodgkinson and Werro have been quick to play down any chance the oldest world record in athletics history could be broken: the 1:53.28 set in 1983 by Jarmila Kratochvilova of then-Czechoslovakia.

“I don’t have the world record now in my head. My goal for the European championships is to do a podium,” said Werro. – AFP

‘Big Four’ bowlers back as ageing Australia begin gruelling run

Cricket

DARWIN – Australia’s ageing team begin a demanding run of potentially 21 Tests in 12 months when they face Bangladesh this week, with their injury-prone “Big Four” bowling attack reunited once again.

The two-Test series, starting in tropical Darwin tomorrow before moving to Mackay, will be the first red ball cricket the world’s number one side have played since the Sydney Test against England in early January.

It is the start of an intense period that includes series against South Africa, New Zealand and India before culminating in what they hope will be the World Test Championship final and a return blockbuster Ashes showdown in England.

Captain Pat Cummins, veteran quick Josh Hazlewood and spin king Nathan Lyon return after serious injuries curtailed their part in Australia’s dominant 4-1 home Ashes win last summer.

Cummins, 33, played only in the third Adelaide Test as he recovered from a back injury, while Hazlewood, 35, missed the entire five-match series with hamstring and Achilles issues.

The 38-year-old Lyon suffered a series-ending hamstring problem in Adelaide and is only now getting back up to speed, with Mitchell Starc, 36, and Scott Boland, 37, carrying the Ashes load.

With all back in the frame, rotation will be the name of the game to get them through the next year, with one of the five set to miss out in Darwin. Boland is typically the fall guy.

Chief selector George Bailey acknowledged it was “an old group” but stressed that “everyone’s body and mental capacities” were different.

“It’s not a one size fits all,” he said recently.

“And as we’ve seen, not just to cricket but across sport, it’s an exciting time because players are playing older and are training

smarter and are able to potentially perform at their best or at an international standard for longer.”

Only Cameron Green at 27 is aged under 30 in the 13-man squad for Bangladesh, but Bailey said younger players were on the sidelines waiting for their chance.

Boxes to tick

Hazlewood, who needs five wickets to reach 300 in Tests, said the bowlers were excited for the year ahead.

“This group’s been together for quite a long time now, the majority of it, anyway,” he told reporters.

“The big series are obviously England and India. I haven’t won in South Africa either, so there’s three that are coming up that are a few boxes to tick off there for not just me but from this whole playing group.”

Against Bangladesh, Jake Weatherald is expected to open the batting again with Travis Head as selectors continue to look for the right combination following the retirement of Usman Khawaja.

Either Marnus Labuschagne, who is searching for a first Test century since 2023, or Cameron Green should come in at three followed by Steve Smith, with Alex Carey and potentially Beau Webster to follow.

It is the first Test at Darwin’s Marrara Stadium in 22 years and Bangladesh’s first Test tour of Australia in 23 years.

The visitors, who lost their only warm-up game in Australia last week by an innings and 38 runs, are depleted by injury with first-choice quicks Nahid Rana and Shoriful Islam out of the Darwin opener.

But experienced wicketkeeper-batsman Litton Das has given a boost to the squad by recovering earlier than expected from a calf strain.

“I have complete faith in the team that is going to Australia and believe we can play good cricket,” captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said, adding that their main goal was to “earn respect.” – AFP

Swiatek dominates Shnaider to set up Toronto semi with Svitolina

Tennis

TORONTO – Former world number one Iga Swiatek cruised into the Toronto Masters semi-finals on Monday to set up a clash with Elina Svitolina who fought back from a set down to reach the last four.

Poland’s Swiatek, a six-time Grand Slam champion, took just 64 minutes to sweep past Russia’s Diana Shnaider 6-2, 6-1.

Ukraine’s Svitolina, the ninth seed, beat Russia’s Ekaterina Alexandrova 3-6, 6-0, 6-3.

Swiatek reached just her second WTA semi-final this year after Rome and is seeking her first final appearance since winning the Korea Open almost a year ago in Seoul.

“From the beginning I went for it. I felt like I could dominate,”

Swiatek said after dropping just three points on her first serve.

“I was quite happy with the way I played. It was a tricky match with the wind.

“I thought I needed to adjust to that. I just wanted to be more solid,” added the 25-year-old world number eight.

Svitolina won eight consecutive games after losing the first set on the way to dispatching Alexandrova in 93 minutes.

Swiatek leads Svitolina 4-3 in their WTA career rivalry, but lost both their meetings this year.

“I’m gonna talk with my team to adjust a little bit for Iga’s game,” said Svitolina.

“Of course she’s a great champion. She plays really well this tournament. I have to bring my best.”

Swiatek established a 5-2 lead in the first set when she broke Shnaider a second time, courtesy of the Russian netting a backhand, and

served out to take it in 31 minutes.

The Pole broke for a 2-1 lead in the second when Shnaider netted. A forehand winner gave Swiatek a 4-1



Elina Svitolina of Ukraine returns a shot to Ekaterina Alexandrova during the quarterfinals of the National Bank Open Presented by Rogers at Sobeys Stadium on Monday in Toronto, Ontario. – AFP

lead and a third break sealed victory.

Svitolina had more of a battle after sending a backhand long on serve to drop an evenly matched first set.

It fired up the Ukrainian who reeled off four breaks to blank Alexandrova in the second set and take a 2-0 lead in the third.

Svitolina served for the match in the eighth game of the final set only for a double fault to allow Alexandrova a lifeline.

But a pumped-up Svitolina roared back, broke to love and finished the match with a searing return winner.

“Very pleased with my performance. With the fighting spirit,” said Svitolina.

“She was playing really well in the first set. I had to really step into like a fighting mode.” – AFP

Tupac Shakur murder trial begins 30 years after rapper's death

Romain Fongsegrives

LOS ANGELES – The trial of a former gang leader accused of orchestrating the murder of rapper Tupac Shakur finally began on Monday, 30 years after one of America's most high-profile unresolved killings.

The proceedings, expected to last a month, will likely not make clear who fired the shots that killed the California hip-hop legend on the night of September 7, 1996, while he was in Las Vegas to see a Mike Tyson boxing match.

But prosecutors aim to show that the defendant, Duane "Keffe D" Davis, onetime leader of the South Side Compton Crips, ordered the killing and provided the gun used to kill Shakur in a drive-by shooting.

The trial began on Monday with jury selection, a process expected to last through the week.

Davis, 63, appeared in court wearing a light-blue shirt and blue tie. He faces life in prison without parole if convicted.

The killing of Shakur, also known as 2Pac, is one of America's most celebrated cold cases, prompting endless debate among music fans over who did it and why.

The rapper, who died at age 25, was a key figure in a hip-hop rivalry pitting the East Coast against the West Coast.

Known for hits like "California Love" and "All Eyez on Me,"



Defendant Duane Davis (left) and his attorney Michael Sanft look on during first day of jury selection in his murder trial related to the 1996 killing of rapper Tupac Shakur at Clark County District Court's Regional Justice Center in Las Vegas, Nevada, on Monday.

Shakur – the son of a Black Panther – was raised in Harlem and Baltimore, but quickly became the epitome of a California bad boy when he signed with Los-Angeles based Death Row Records.

The trial will revisit the battle between Death Row, founded by Marion "Suge" Knight, and Bad Boy Records, the East Coast label created by Sean "Diddy" Combs and starring Christopher "The Notorious B.I.G." Wallace (murdered in March 1997).

Prosecutors say Death Row Records was protected by Mob Piru, a Los Angeles gang that was part of the wider Bloods alliance. Knight was affiliated with the group.

Bad Boy Records had hired the

rival group South Side Compton Crips, led by Davis, as bodyguards.

After the Tyson fight at the MGM Grand casino, Knight and Shakur beat up Davis's nephew, Crips member Orlando "Baby Lane" Anderson, in retribution over an alleged assault of a Death Row employee.

Davis was out for revenge, the prosecution says.

Later that night, a white Cadillac carrying Davis, Anderson and others pulled up beside Shakur's car in Las Vegas. Shots were fired from the Cadillac, and Shakur was fatally wounded.

Compromising memoirs

The investigation sputtered for decades because of a lack of



Undated photo of Tupac Shakur from his passport, issued on December 8, 1996, edited to remove blemishes and stamps and cropped. - Image courtesy of Moments in Time/Wikimedia Commons

evidence, but the cold case was revived with the publication in 2019 of Davis's memoirs.

In that book, Davis recounted that he was in the front seat of the Cadillac and that he handed a pistol to those in the back seat. But he does not say who opened fire on Shakur. Everyone else who was in the Cadillac that night has since died.

These compromising revelations were consistent with remarks Davis had made previously to reporters. But this time, they came back to haunt him and he was arrested in September 2023.

Davis has since backtracked and pleaded not guilty.

"I'm innocent. I ain't killed nobody. Never did ever kill

nobody," Davis said in March 2025 in an interview from prison with ABC News. "They don't have no evidence against me. They can't even put me in Las Vegas."

Davis now says he was in Los Angeles the night of the Shakur killing and that he has never even read his own memoirs. He asserted that these were inflated by his co-author to generate book sales.

"I just gave him details of my life," Davis said. "And he went and did his little investigation and wrote the book on his own."

In the run-up to the trial, Davis's lawyers tried in vain to keep the book from being introduced as evidence, along with remarks he made in an interview with police in 2008 as a witness to the killing.

Whatever the verdict is, it is unlikely to satisfy those close to Shakur.

In May, the rapper's stepbrother Maurice Shakur filed a wrongful death lawsuit in civil court.

"There remain individuals who were involved in Tupac's murder who, for 30 years, have not been held accountable for their crimes," his complaint says.

The suit cites a recent TV documentary mini-series entitled "Sean Combs: The Reckoning," in which Davis says in an interview with police that Combs, now in prison himself, offered him US\$1 million to kill Shakur. – AFP

US dairy industry muscles up thanks to protein craze

Louise Le Borgne

WASHINGTON, DC – Whey protein used to be considered a mere byproduct of cheesemaking, but the dietary supplement is now coveted due to high-protein diets popularised across social media – an explosion that is radically reshaping the American dairy industry.

Long sold as a mix-in powder or protein bar, whey can now be found across US supermarket shelves in products ranging from breakfast cereals and bagels to pretzels and instant noodles.

Some of the biggest food brands have hopped on the trend, like chip giant Frito-Lay offering "Protein Nacho Cheese" Doritos, and Starbucks debuting a line of "high protein" beverages.

"Seven years ago, a lot of people would take it for training, but now I feel like it's very commonplace for everyone," architectural design coordinator Carly Rowcotsky told AFP.

The 25-year-old said she lives an active lifestyle, and takes whey to help repair her muscles after working out.

"I don't have a lot of time to prepare my own meals, so it's just kind of like convenient to have some type of supplement," Rowcotsky said, downing a neon-pink whey protein shake whose label promised 15 grams of protein per serving.

'Protein-maxxing'

For Chuck Nicholson, a professor of supply chain management at Penn State University, the frenzy is

fuelled by several factors.

"Social media is really driving a lot of people to think that protein is a really healthy alternative," Nicholson told AFP, pointing to diet trends like "protein-maxxing," in which online users try to maximise their protein intake, often to excessive levels.

On top of that, US demand for whey and other protein supplements "is driven a lot by the GLP*-related drugs and the dietary advice that people are getting," he added, as users of weight loss drugs including Wegovy and Ozempic are advised to increase protein in their diets to preserve muscle mass.

Protein mania is even reflected in the US government's nutrition guidelines, which updated in March to raise the recommended levels of daily protein intake from 0.8 grams per kilogram of body weight to 1.2-1.6 grams per kilogram.

"Protein and healthy fats are essential and were wrongly discouraged in prior dietary guidelines," Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said earlier this year.

More whey, more cheese

However, this upsurge in whey protein demand is facing a reality check from the dairy industry.

Since whey is a refined product resulting from cheese production, "there's kind of a capacity constraint, both in terms of what the cows are making, the amount of cheese capacity that we have, and the amount of capacity that we have to

actually make those products from the whey," Nicholson explained.

Beyond that, the whey sold in consumer products requires specialised, expensive equipment to filter it into high-protein concentrates and isolates.

"For a long time we didn't actually do much with the whey," Nicholson said. "In some cases, it was fed to animals or was actually thrown away."

The dairy industry foresaw this growing trend, with International Dairy Food Association CEO Michael Dykes saying "dairy companies have invested US\$13 billion in new capacity, technology and supply chain optimisation" to meet demand.

White gold

Joshua White, an expert at dairy product marketer T.C. Jacoby & Co., said despite the increased capacity for whey production, "the market has still demanded more."

Prices have skyrocketed as a result, with industry data showing cost jumps of around 40 percent in recent months, with the largest hike seen for high-concentrate whey protein, which has soared 150 percent in price.

As a domino effect, those higher prices have increased the product's profitability for cheesemakers, incentivising them to make more liquid whey.

"Sometimes people say, you know, I make the money on the whey and I...cover my costs based on making the cheese," Nicholson said.

An oversimplification perhaps, he added, but "it's definitely true that the

return on whey right now relative to the return on cheese is larger."

But dairy industry expert Kathleen Noble Wolfley cautioned that cheese production still outweighs whey production in the United States.

"Are we going to start making

cheese for the whey? I always think about it as like...is the tail wagging the dog rather than the dog wagging the tail," she said.

"But I say we're probably closer to that commentary than we were five years ago." – AFP



Whey protein is displayed on the shelf of a grocery store in Bethesda, Maryland, on July 27. Whey protein used to be considered a mere by-product of cheesemaking, but the dietary supplement is now coveted due to high-protein diets popularised across social media – an explosion that is radically reshaping the US dairy industry. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 22°C~27°C	Manila 25°C~30°C	New York 21°C~31°C	Lisbon 19°C~31°C
Shanghai 25°C~30°C	Bangkok 26°C~34°C	London 18°C~32°C	Rio de Janeiro 17°C~23°C
Hong Kong 25°C~32°C	Tokyo 22°C~27°C	Frankfurt 16°C~32°C	Luanda 18°C~22°C
Taipei 25°C~34°C	Singapore 25°C~33°C	Vancouver 14°C~23°C	Maputo 13°C~20°C
Guangzhou 25°C~36°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~35°C	Paris 20°C~35°C	Dili 21°C~31°C
Nanjing 24°C~30°C	Jakarta 23°C~34°C	Moscow 11°C~18°C	São Tomé 23°C~30°C
Guilin 23°C~35°C	Seoul 22°C~33°C	Las Vegas 26°C~37°C	Praia 24°C~31°C
Xi'an 20°C~29°C	Sydney 9°C~19°C	Monte Carlo 24°C~32°C	Bissau 23°C~31°C



Prickly waterlilies

A drone photo taken on Friday shows farmers harvesting foxnuts at Bacheng Town of Kunshan City, Jiangsu Province.

— Xinhua



Sun bird protects from sun

Women sit under a phoenix statue in Wat Botum park in Phnom Penh yesterday.

— AFP



Ahoy mateys!

Revellers set sail on makeshift rafts and floats from the harbour towards La Concha Bay beach during the "Pirata Abordaia" (Pirate boarding) festive event in the northern Spanish Basque city of San Sebastian, on Monday.

— AFP

Blue for you!

A jellyfish lies on the shore near the Gravelines nuclear power plant in Gravelines, northern France yesterday.

— AFP



Bubble white!

This photo taken on Sunday shows actors from a show for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Edinburgh, Britain. A series of cultural events, including the Edinburgh International Festival, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, kicked off in Edinburgh on Friday, attracting artists and audiences from around the world.

— Xinhua

Snow in Africa!

A general view of snow fall on Nottingham Road near Pietermaritzburg, South Africa on Monday. Parts of the South African province hit with late snow, just ahead of the southern hemisphere spring.

— AFP

