THE Macau POST DAILY 澳門郵報

DIRECTOR: Harald Brüning | YEAR 21 | NO.5369 | MONDAY August 17, 2026 | https://www.macaupostdaily.com | MOP 6.00

Sam gathers views from lawmakers for 2027 Policy Address

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai addresses Friday's banquet at MGM MACAU in Nape with all members of the Legislative Assembly (AL). – Photos: GCS

The 33 legislators attend Friday's meeting at the Forum Macao Complex near Macau Tower to raise opinions on Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai's 2027 Policy Address. The meeting was chaired by Sam.

Tony Wong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai had a meeting with all members of the Legislative Assembly (AL) on Friday gathering their opinions and suggestions concerning the government's drafting of his 2027 Policy Address. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to improving Macau's executive-led system and strengthening positive interaction between the executive and legislative organs, according to a statement by the Macao Government Information Bureau (GCS) on Saturday morning.

The closed-door meeting was held at the Services Platform Complex for Commercial and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (aka Forum Macao Complex) in Sai Van. Sam's five policy secretaries also attended the meeting.

According to the statement, Sam said that hosting a special meeting – in collaboration with the legislature – to gather opinions and suggestions from legislators concerning the government's drafting of his policy address was an innovative initiative of his government. This initiative demonstrates the government's commitment to upholding and improving Macau's executive-led system while strengthening positive interaction between the executive and legislative organs, he underlined.

The 33-member Legislative Assembly comprises 14 deputies directly elected by universal suffrage, 12 deputies indirectly elected by association representatives, and seven deputies appointed by the chief executive after the direct and indirect elections – which are held every four years.

According to the statement, Legislative Assembly President André Cheong Weng Chon underlined during the meeting that the government and the legislature have maintained close communication and effective collaboration. The government's proactive outreach to legislators during its policy address preparation process has fostered positive interaction between the executive and legislative organs, he said.

Continued on p.3

Remains of late national leader Zhu Rongji to be cremated tomorrow

BEIJING – The remains of late Chinese leader Zhu Rongji will be cremated in Beijing tomorrow.

Zhu, who passed away on August 12 at the age of 98, had served as a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the 14th and 15th Central Committees of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and premier of the State Council.

To mourn his death, national flags will fly at half-mast tomorrow in Tian'anmen Square, Xinhuamen, the Great Hall of the People, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, seats of provincial-level committees of the CPC and provincial-level governments, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR), border ports, seaports and airports, and Chinese embassies and consulates.

Zhu was praised in an obituary jointly issued by the CPC Central Committee, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), the State Council and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), as an excellent Party member, a time-tested and loyal communist fighter, and an outstanding proletarian revolutionist, statesman and leader of the Party and the state.

Macao to mourn Zhu with flags at half-mast

Meanwhile, the MSAR Government said in a statement yesterday afternoon that "in line with the overall arrangements of the Central People's Government, flags at Government Headquarters, the local government guesthouse [known in Portuguese as Palacete de Santa Sancha] and at all border checkpoints of the MSAR, will fly at half-mast on August 18 [tomorrow] to mourn the late premier.

– Xinhua, MPD

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

War shrine tributes on surrender day reveal Japan's lingering militarist obsession

August 15 marks the 81st anniversary of Japan's unconditional surrender in World War II. On the day, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi sent a ritual offering to the notorious war-linked Yasukuni Shrine. *– Story on p. 7*

Iran offers US$30,000 bounty for killing, capturing US soldiers

Iran's military announced yesterday that it was offering a bounty equivalent to US$30,000 for killing or capturing US soldiers, with the reward doubled if carried out by a woman. *– Story on p. 10*

Burnham shifts messaging to TikTok, podcasts

Whether he is pulling a pint, tossing a builder's helmet in the air or running with Olympic medallist Mo Farah, the UK's new prime minister Andy Burnham has embraced social media with a deft touch. *– Story on p. 12*

Published by Macau Cultural Box Ltd. Printed by Welfare Printing Ltd. Head office: 39 Rua dos Mercadores, Centro Comercial Ou Chong, 5/F, D, Macau.
Tel.: 2833 1050 E-mail: macaupost@macau.ctm.net Fax: 2833 1104 GCS Registry Nº. 223 ISSN 1813-2898

4th Macau Abilympics spotlights abilities

Contestants in the garment tailoring category create their entries for the "4th Macau Abilympics" competition at the University of Saint Joseph (USJ).

– Photos: Ida Cheong

Caritas Macau Coordination Manager Eva Ho Kin Lam speaks to reporters on the sidelines of the "4th Macau Abilympics" competition on the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) campus on Saturday.

Ida Cheong

The "4th Macau Abilympics" competition for persons with disabilities, jointly organised by the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL), the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS), and Catholic charity Caritas Macau, concluded yesterday at the University of Saint Joseph (USJ), with the aim of showcasing the workplace capabilities of individuals with disabilities, dismantling societal bias, and establishing an industry-linked platform that encourages local enterprises to create inclusive job opportunities.

The two-day competition drew 117 local participants with disabilities, recording 156 total entries across 14 category events, including crocheting, hand weaving, dressmaking, tailoring, photography, painting, waste recycling, and cleaning services.

Caritas Macau Coordination Manager Eva Ho Kin Lam told reporters on the sidelines of the competition on Saturday on the USJ campus in the Ilha Verde district that the total number of competition categories was reduced from 16 to 14 compared to previous years, adding that the adjustment stems from a shortage of skilled talent in certain traditional crafts. For instance, the bamboo basket weaving event was cancelled after the number of eligible local contestants fell below the minimum participation threshold.

Conversely, according to Ho, a new cleaning services category benchmarked against international competition standards was added this year. The addition directly matches current hiring demands in the local labour market, paving the way for post-competition employment.

Ho noted that since joining international vocational skills competitions for persons with disabilities in 2011, Macau delegations have participated in three editions, accumulating two silver medals, two bronze medals, two special awards, and two awards of excellence.

Alongside the event, the newly opened "Yi Hui" (怡暉) Integrated Rehabilitation Services Centre in the New Urban Zone A has begun operations. Centred on vocational training, its inaugural programme covers preparatory physical conditioning, technical skills instruction (such as computer operations), and external workplace internships, Ho added.

An official awards ceremony will take place on September 19 to present medals and cash prizes to top performers. Select winners will earn the opportunity to represent Macau at the upcoming International Abilympics in Finland's capital city Helsinki, from May 10 to 13, 2027. ■

Macau peninsula's first 'butterfly-friendly garden' slated for next month

Ida Cheong

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) will launch phased enhancement works in Luís de Camões Garden (賈梅士公園) starting today to develop the Macau peninsula's first "butterfly-friendly garden". The project is scheduled for completion next month, according to an IAM statement on Friday.

The statement noted that through introducing a diverse variety of butterfly-attracting flora and upgrading the ecological environment, a natural green corridor suitable for butterfly habitat, foraging, and breeding will be established on the peninsula.

The enhancement project focuses on cultivating a natural habitat for butterflies through the introduction of attractive plant species tailored to the local climate, the statement said, adding that these plants will support butterflies across all stages of their lifecycle from egg to adult by providing both nectar-rich flowers for adult feeding and host plants for larvae, such as blood-flower milkweed, firespike, blue plumbago, and buddleia.

The statement added that through multi-layered planting arrangements, the layout aims to encourage butterflies to linger while boosting pollinator diversity and strengthening ecological connectivity across the area. Once complete, visitors strolling through the park will have enhanced opportunities to observe butterflies fluttering among the blooms.

During the execution phase through next month, the bureau pointed out that specific sections of the park will be cordoned off. Visitors should pay close attention to onsite warning signs, refrain from entering restricted construction zones, and prioritise personal safety. ■

This undated handout photo provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) on Friday shows a butterfly feeding on nectar.

Police warn of scammers impersonating DSF staff

Khalel Vallo

The Judiciary Police (PJ) have warned residents to beware of phishing text messages impersonating Financial Services Bureau (DSF) officials, which falsely claim recipients have failed to pay July's salaries tax and threaten fines if payment is not made within 24 hours, according to a police statement yesterday.

Scammers are randomly sending the messages to residents and directing them to a link purportedly for tax payments, the statement said, adding that the link leads to a fake DSF website designed to steal personal and credit card information.

The phishing site requests users to enter their name, ID card number, credit card number, expiry date and security code, the statement underlined. The police said that scammers may use the stolen information to conduct unauthorised high-value transactions.

The statement reminded residents that local government entities do not send text messages containing links. Residents should not click on links in unsolicited messages without verifying their authenticity, the statement added.

According to the statement, the bureau has also clarified that it does not ask residents via text message to click links to handle tax matters or provide personal information, bank account details, credit card information or one-time verification codes.

Residents who need to check their tax status may call the DSF tax enquiry hotline on 2833 6886, the statement said, adding that residents who suspect they have encountered a scam can use the Judiciary Police's "Anti-Fraud Programme" to check the risk level, or seek assistance by calling the anti-fraud enquiry hotline on 8800 7777 or the crime report hotline on 993. ■

This infographic provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) yesterday warns the public against clicking fake Financial Services Bureau (DSF) tax payment SMS links to prevent personal and credit card data theft. Translation from Chinese was arranged by the Post.

Published since Aug 2004

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

MacauPOST

Macau Weather

VERY HOT.
CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS.
A FEW SHOWERS.
LIGHT WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 65% AND 95%.

26ºC~32ºC

Source: SMG

The Parisian celebrates 10th anniversary with Le Petit Prince theme

Rui Pastorin

Installations, along with co-branded products, featuring French writer and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's (1900-1944) beloved novella "Le Petit Prince" (The Little Prince) are being showcased at The Parisian Macao in Cotai as part of the integrated resort's 10th anniversary.

The themed installations can be found across the resort, ranging from "The Secret Rose Garden" at the hotel lobby to "The Love-Lit Way Home" at Eiffel Tower level 7 observation deck, according to a recent statement by The Parisian Macao, adding that an afternoon tea set and pastries are also featured at The Lobby Café.

All, the offerings are in line with Le Petit Prince's philosophy, which is "What is essential is invisible to the eye", the statement said.

Also showcased are a limited-edition tote bag that features the prince and the integrated resort's resident Master Pastry Chef "Bao Bao".

The statement added that "Interstellar Adventure Programme" also encourages youngsters to collect stamps at designated locations for a chance to redeem "The Parisian Macao 10th Anniversary × Le Petit Prince" tote bag upon completion. Sands Lifestyle members can also get a themed blind box through spending or after collecting stamps, as well as a chance to win a themed gold pendant, the statement said.

One can find more information on https://www.parisianmacao.com/offers/le-petit-prince-2026.html. ■

This undated handout photo recently provided by The Parisian Macau shows a Le Petit Prince installation displayed at the integrated resort's lobby.

Edmund Ho underlines need for revamp of association law

Tony Wong

Edmund Ho Hau Wah, Macau's first chief executive and currently a vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), has said that the local government's ongoing proposal to draft a bill governing the setting-up and operation of the city's associations is not intended to interfere with their operations, but rather to better safeguard national security and Macau's security, optimise resource allocation, and foster the healthy and sustainable development of associations.

CPPCC National Committee Vice Chairman Edmund Ho Hau Wah addresses Thursday's session at the Forum Macao Complex near Macau Tower. – Photo: DSI

Ho made the remarks during a closed-door feedback session held by the local government on Thursday concerning its ongoing public consultation on the matter. The session was held for Macau deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC) and Macau members of the CPPCC National Committee.

The Identification Services Bureau (DSI) issued a statement on Thursday night about the feedback session.

Macau has 12 deputies to the NPC and 38 CPPCC National Committee members.

Ho is one of the 38 Macau members of the CPPCC National Committee.

Among the various CPPCC National Committee vice-chairpersons, Ho is the sole representative from Macau.

The 12 Macau deputies to the NPC include Kou Hoi In, the sole Macau member of the elite NPC Standing Committee. Kou is a former president of the Macau Legislative Assembly (AL).

According to the DSI statement, Thursday's feedback session was attended by all 12 Macau deputies to the NPC and 27 Macau members of the CPPCC National Committee.

During Thursday's session, Ho also urged local NPC deputies and local CPPCC National Committee members to fully cooperate with the local government's ongoing initiatives to propose new legislation on associations, give full play to their role as a bridge for communication, offer constructive suggestions, and publicise the government's objectives to propose the new legislation to various segments of civil society and representatives of the city's various associations.

The session was chaired by Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak. DSI Director Sonia Chan Hoi Fan gave a presentation about the government's legislative proposal to the attendees. ■

Senior hit, killed by coach: police

Armindo Neves

The Fire Services Bureau (CB) announced in a statement yesterday morning that a 73-year-old local woman died after being struck by a coach near the Barrier Gate.

According to a Public Security Police Force (PSP) statement, the bureau received a report that a traffic accident had occurred on the outbound vehicle lane at the Barrier Gate, involving a coach that hit a pedestrian.

According to the CB's statement, the woman suffered an abdominal contusion and was found without a pulse or heartbeat. She was rushed to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre (CHCSJ) for resuscitation, but was later pronounced dead at 8:23 a.m. yesterday morning.

Confirmed to the *Post* by phone, a PSP spokesman said that the driver holds a Special Driving Licence, adding that the PSP has completed preliminary evidence-gathering and has obtained surveillance footage.

As the case has entered the judicial process, the spokesperson said it was inappropriate to disclose further details.

According to the Transport Bureau (DSAT), a Special Driving Licence is a work permit document designed to facilitate legal representatives of companies headquartered on the mainland. It allows mainland drivers who hold a mainland driving licence to drive specific dual-plate passenger or goods vehicles in Macau. Holders of this licence are only permitted to drive dual-plate vehicles registered in the name of their employing company and used for travel between the mainland and Macau. ■

This photo, downloaded from Facebook yesterday, shows the victim lying under a coach after yesterday afternoon's crash near the Barrier Gate. The Post *cannot independently verify its authenticity.*

Sam gathers views from lawmakers for 2027 Policy Address

Continued from p.1

Cheong said that the special meeting has also enabled the legislature to better fulfil its roles of providing political guidance and legislative oversight while serving as a key bridge between the government and Macau's civil society.

The current four-year term of the Legislative Assembly started on October 16 last year. Cheong is one of the seven members whom Sam appointed to the 33-member legislature. Cheong is a newcomer to the legislature after serving as the government's secretary for administration and justice between December 20, 2019, and October 15 last year. He was unanimously elected by his peers as the legislature's speaker.

According to the statement, all members of the Legislative Assembly spoke during the meeting, offering views and suggestions on a wide range of topics.

Sam expressed his gratitude to the lawmakers for raising substantive and practical proposals. He said that their suggestions were comprehensive, covered short-, medium-, and long-term development needs of Macau, and offered valuable input.

Sam said that the meeting effectively promoted mutual understanding and consensus-building between the executive and legislative organs, underlining that the government will thoroughly assess the legislators' opinions and incorporate the practical ones into his 2027 Policy Address.

Sam is slated to deliver his 2027 Policy Address in the legislature's hemicycle in November.

The legislature has its two-month summer recess every year between the middle of August and the middle of October. After its normal operation ended on Saturday, the legislature is now on its two-month summer recess.

After the meeting on Friday afternoon, Sam hosted a banquet with the lawmakers in the evening – before the start of the legislature's summer recess, the statement said.

During the banquet held at MGM MACAU in Nape, Sam said that since its operational start in October last year, the current-term legislature has effectively fulfilled its legally mandated duties and continuously improved its legislative and oversight work, while maintaining close ties with civil society and offering constructive policy recommendations. The collaborative mechanism between the government and the legislature will continue to be improved, he said.

Sam sets up Leadership Group for Promoting Urban Renewal

Meanwhile, Sam convened and chaired a regular meeting with his five policy secretaries on Friday, where he decided to set up a Leadership Group for Promoting Urban Renewal, according to a GCS statement yesterday.

During the meeting, Sam said that urban renewal is a vital issue concerning Macau's urban image, safety, and resilience. It serves as a key measure to foster new drivers of economic growth and acts as a major development strategy during Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan period.

Sam said that the government will explore a comprehensive urban renewal model characterised by these elements: government guidance, market operation, tailored solutions for specific districts, integrated utilisation, and the combination of redevelopment, revitalisation, and district-based development.

According to the statement, the newly set-up leadership group, chaired by Sam, is tasked with leading and coordinating all respective public entities in implementing the government's various urban renewal initiatives and measures.

The leadership group consists of two working groups, one of which is chaired by Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak and is tasked with studying legislation and policies necessary for advancing urban renewal. The other working group is chaired by Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man and is tasked with studying technical matters concerning urban renewal. ■

The Young Post

MONDAY August 17, 2026

ABOUT The Young Post

The Macau Post Daily's The Young Post will be published every Monday to present and discuss topical issues that may interest not only the younger but also all the other generations.

From teen barber to business owner: Macau's youngest barbershop owner takes the leap

Khalel Vallo

At 24, local Filipino Danielle Estanislao – known to most as Dan or Danny – has gone from picking up his first pair of clippers as a teenager to becoming the owner of "Chico's Barbershop", reputedly making him Macau's youngest barbershop owner.

After spending seven years building his career and clientele, Dan said opening his own shop was both "nerve-wracking and deeply rewarding." When Dan first unlocked the door of Chico's as its owner, the significance of the moment quickly sank in. "I'll be honest, it was very nerve-wracking," he told the *Post* on Saturday, adding that "we're finally here after seven long years."

The opening marked a major step from his beginnings as a 17-year-old learning to cut hair to running a business of his own. Dan said he was also excited to finally see a dream that began with his first pair of clippers become reality.

The decision to open Chico's came as his growing client base began to outgrow his personal schedule. "There were times when I needed to give other barbers my clients because I couldn't fit them in my schedule," he said. Rather than wait several more years, Dan decided to make use of the momentum he had built. "I was thinking about the momentum, and I felt like it was time for me to use this momentum to have my own shop," he said, noting, "Why open at a later time when you can do it now?"

The transition from barber to owner, however, has brought a new set of responsibilities. While previously he could simply arrive at work, cut hair, and leave, running Chico's means dealing with everything from setting up the shop and checking the numbers to paperwork and administrative duties. "I need to think about a lot of 'admin' stuff that I'm not used to," Dan noted.

The name "Chico's" also reflects Dan's own journey. He and his girlfriend came up with the name while casually brainstorming ideas, even before opening a shop had become a concrete plan. "The term 'Chico' made the most sense because it means 'young man' in Spanish," he said.

Dan began barbering at 17, when he was still young and uncertain whether the craft would become his career. Seven years later, the name has taken on a more personal meaning. For him, Chico's is about how customers feel after leaving the chair. "I want people to come out fresh, like a 'young man,'" he noted, elaborating that "right after the cut, I want them to walk out of here with confidence, with a smile on their faces – like that's what being in Chico's means to me."

Although Dan is reputed to be Macau's youngest barbershop owner at 24, he said that the title itself is not what matters most to him. "When I was younger, it meant a lot, because I was the youngest barber at that time at 17," he said. Today, he would rather Chico's be judged by the experience it provides. "The most important thing is they come because they like the haircut, they like the vibes, they like the community," he said, adding: "That's what I want Chico's to be."

The difference between the 17-year-old who first picked up clippers and the 24-year-old now running a shop is not only professional experience, but also a change in his outlook. Dan said he used to overthink every step of his career and try to force things to happen. Now, he is more willing to trust the process. "If it happens, it happens, as long as I did my best, then it's all good," Dan said.

That same philosophy shapes the advice he would give his younger self. "Don't overthink," Dan noted, reflecting that "sometimes, all you have to do is take the leap of faith, and just do it." The advice echoes what Dan told the *Post** last year, when he was still working towards his dream of owning a shop. At the time, he said young people should not be afraid to pursue what they want.

Now that the dream has been achieved, Dan's ambitions have shifted from opening a shop to growing it. Chico's currently has two of its three chairs occupied (by him and an employee), and Dan's next goal is to fill the remaining chair while helping the barbers working alongside him succeed. "My next dream is to fill the other chair, and then to make whoever is working at Chico's a successful barber as well," he said.

He hopes Chico's can become more than a place for haircuts – a community where customers feel comfortable returning again and again. "I want people to be able to come in here, and think that, 'oh, this is my second home,'" Dan told the *Post*.

For the 24-year-old who first picked up his clippers at 17, becoming Macau's youngest barbershop owner may be a headline achievement, but for Dan, it appears to be only the beginning.

The barbershop is located at 30D on Avenida do Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida. It is open Monday to Saturday from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

**From first clippers to career dream: Macau-Filipino Dan's journey in barbering* - https://www.macaupostdaily.com/news/25669 *(August 12, 2025)*

Undated photos provided by Dan Estanislao

Dan Estanislao (second from right) and his employee Patric Bicarme (second from left) cut the hair of their clients at Chico's Barbershop on Saturday. – Photo: Khalel Vallo

These handout photos provided by Dan show him posing with the US National Basketball Association's (NBA) Devin Booker from the Phoenix Suns and working on his beard last October.

36 outstanding students receive SJM scholarships

Rui Pastorin

SJM Resorts presented scholarships to 36 "outstanding children of employees for their academic excellence" during a ceremony at Grand Lisboa last week, the integrated resort operator said in a statement last Tuesday, marking the 22nd year of the scholarship programme.

Each scholarship is worth 20,000 patacas, according to the statement. The scholarships were presented during last week's 22nd SJM Scholarship Award Ceremony at Grand Lisboa, with 10 new recipients this year.

The new scholarship recipients, the statement said, have chosen to pursue higher education in Macau, Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland, taking on disciplines spanning technology and innovation, healthcare, and financial services.

In her speech, SJM Managing Director Daisy Ho Chiu Fung, as summarised by the statement, encouraged students to "stay curious, work hard, and strive for excellence, turning their knowledge into meaningful action", as well as "called on the students to give back to their community after graduation, and to play their part in Macau's continued prosperity and the nation's development".

According to the statement, scholarship recipient Cheong Iok In expressed gratitude for the recognition. He said he will pursue dental studies in Hong Kong and hopes to return to Macau to apply what he has learnt.

The statement added that the SJM Scholarship is the "longest-running and most far-reaching educational support programme among Macau's integrated tourism and leisure enterprises", having benefitted hundreds of families across Macau. ■

SJM Managing Director Daisy Ho Chiu Fung (seated, centre), SJM Director and SJM Staff Welfare Consultative Committee Chairman Angela Leong On Kei (seated, left), and SJM Secretary-General Rui Cunha (seated, right) pose with scholarship recipients during the ceremony held at Grand Lisboa last week. – Photo: SJM Resorts

Police nab mainlander over bogus slot machine vouchers

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a man from the Chinese mainland on Thursday for possessing and distributing counterfeit slot machine vouchers on Wednesday and Thursday, PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a special press conference on Friday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 32-year-old unemployed man surnamed Li. Cheong also noted that four victims—one man and three women, all from the Chinese mainland—were involved in the case.

According to Cheong, on Wednesday and Thursday, the four victims purchased slot machine vouchers with face values ranging from HK33,000 (33,9710 patacas) to HK36,000 from strangers in various casinos. However, when they attempted to redeem the vouchers, they discovered that they were all counterfeit. Cheong added that the victims subsequently reported the matter to the Judiciary Police, with total losses amounting to 117,616 yuan. Following an investigation, PJ officers identified Li, who is believed to be responsible for manufacturing the fake vouchers.

On Thursday afternoon, PJ officers arrested Li at a casino in Zape. Officers seized a mobile phone and 12 counterfeit slot machine vouchers – with face values ranging from HK3,000 to HK36,000 – from him.

Cheong noted that the counterfeit vouchers were created using genuine vouchers from various casino operators as templates, which were digitally reproduced with the face values enlarged. Although the paper quality and fonts of the counterfeits differ from those of genuine vouchers, members of the public who fail to examine them closely could easily be deceived, according to Cheong.

Li was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on Friday, where he faces charges of fraud and document forgery.

Meanwhile, Cheong said that the Judiciary Police were intensifying their efforts to apprehend other accomplices involved in using fake vouchers to commit fraud. ■

This undated handout photo provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) on Friday shows evidence seized from the counterfeit slot machine vouchers suspect surnamed Li.

Customs seizes frozen chicken feet weighing 1.5 tonnes worth 19,500 patacas

Armindo Neves

Macau Customs Service officers raided a parallel-trading den in the peninsula's northern district on Thursday where they seized 1,800 kg of frozen chicken feet worth around 45,000 patacas in total.

According to Friday's statement, customs officers detained for questioning a 41-year-old local female who ran the den and had hired parallel traders to smuggle frozen chicken feet from Macau to the Chinese mainland.

The suspect faces a fine in compliance with the relevant provisions listed in the External Trade Law, the statement said.

Moreover, the statement added, the suspect violated the Food Safety Law as the supposedly frozen chicken feet were actually stored merely at room temperature, adding that the Macau Customs Service has meanwhile transferred the case to the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) for follow-up action.

Meanwhile, as the business premises in question did not possess a valid operating licence, the case has been referred to the Financial Services Bureau (DSF) for follow-up. ■

This handout photo released by the Macau Customs Service on Friday shows chicken feet weighing 1.5 tonnes in total, stored at room temperature, at a parallel trading den in the Macau peninsula's northern district on Thursday.

HK airport passenger traffic up 11.7 pct in H1: FS

HONG KONG – Hong Kong's airport handled 32.8 million passenger trips in the first half of 2026, surging 11.7 percent from a year earlier, Paul Chan, financial secretary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government, said in his blog yesterday.

In the first six months, Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) recorded more than 200,000 flight movements, up 4.4 percent from a year earlier, according to Chan.

About 140 airlines currently operate flights connecting Hong Kong with over 225 destinations worldwide. The city's efficient transport network, paired with a series of mega-events and exhibitions held this year, has boosted both business and leisure arrivals, Chan said.

During the January-July period, Hong Kong recorded 31.22 million visits, up 12 percent year-on-year, injecting renewed momentum and business opportunities into its economy.

Chan expected that the new passenger departure facilities at Terminal 2 of the HKIA, which opened in May, will be able to handle around 8 million passenger trips in the first year of operation.

– Xinhua

Long March-12 rocket launches new internet satellite group

WENCHANG, Hainan – China sent a new batch of internet satellites into orbit yesterday from a commercial spacecraft launch site in the southern island province of Hainan.

The satellites, the 24th group of the low-orbit internet satellites, lifted off aboard a Long March-12 carrier rocket at 12:10 p.m. and entered their preset orbits successfully. *– Xinhua*

How flutters of great little birds weave together Asia-Pacific community

Analysis

BEIJING – Each year, millions of migratory birds embark on grueling transcontinental journeys along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF), braving storms, food shortages and human-made threats as they travel between breeding and wintering grounds.

Stretching from Alaska and the Russian Far East to Southeast Asia and Australia, the EAAF is considered one of the world's busiest flyways, with China at its midpoint serving as an irreplaceable rest haven and a core hub for cross-border conservation.

A rehabilitated white-naped crane, a first-class protected species in China, takes off in the Nandagang wetland in Cangzhou, Hebei Province, on April 29. – Xinhua

'REFUELING STATIONS' IN CITIES

The Guangdong Neilingding Futian National Nature Reserve near Shenzhen Bay sits amid one of China's most densely urbanized areas. Its mangroves and tidal flats provide an important wintering and stopover site for migratory birds traveling along the EAAF.

"Migratory birds are a visible barometer of changes in an ecosystem," said Yang Qiong, a senior engineer at the reserve.

"Shorebirds bound for their wintering or breeding destinations must stop along the way to refuel. During migration seasons, many choose to stop over in Shenzhen Bay for one to two weeks," Yang said.

These birds find sanctuary in the lush mangrove forests and forage across mudflats exposed at low tide, feeding on worms, crabs, mudskippers and other prey.

To meet the birds' changing needs, the reserve fine-tunes its habitat management during peak migration periods. Yang and her colleagues closely monitor different species and use smart floodgates to regulate water levels in converted fishponds, helping ensure that migratory birds can find food and suitable roosting habitat whenever they arrive, regardless of the tides.

Yang pointed to the neighboring Mai Po Nature Reserve in Hong Kong as a model of habitat management. Mai Po lies across Shenzhen Bay (Deep Bay) from the Futian reserve and the two wetlands are ecologically connected. They formed "sister wetlands" to foster biodiversity and synergize conservation efforts.

Drawing on its experience in wetland management, Mai Po has also worked with the National Forestry and Grassland Administration to train conservation professionals from countries in the region, Wen Xianji, director of Mai Po Nature Reserve and Flyway Program of the World Wide Fund for Nature Hong Kong, told Xinhua.

"Mai Po is one of the most well-managed wetland areas in the flyway. Last January, we came to Mai Po for a training program offered to ASEAN countries, and saw firsthand some of the best practices. Everything has been accounted for, especially how water levels are adjusted in artificial sites like shrimp ponds to suit different types of birds roosting," said Georgina Fernandez, head of the Sibugay Wetland Nature Reserve in central Philippines.

Fernandez noted Mai Po's use of a smart habitat monitoring network incorporating satellite imagery, remote cameras and drones, as well as the reserve's efforts to provide public access while minimizing disturbance to the wetland ecosystem. She expressed hope that more such training would be offered to conservation professionals from Southeast Asia.

Fernandez said the training also allowed participants to exchange bird-banding data with Mai Po staff. "We are glad to find that at least two species, common redshank and spoon-billed sandpiper, migrate between our site and those in China," she said.

"No one country can protect migratory birds alone. Joint protection is essential because each country protects one part of a shared life cycle," said Jennifer George, chief executive of the EAAF Partnership.

As the world's first intergovernmental organization exclusively dedicated to mangrove protection, the International Mangrove Center (IMC) launched full institutional operation with its first council meeting held in Shenzhen in July.

A CRADLE OF BIRDLIFE

Wetlands are dynamic ecosystems where water meets land, ranging from mangroves and rivers to lakes, floodplains and coasts. Among the planet's major ecosystems, they provide vital habitat for countless bird species. Protecting wetlands is crucial to safeguarding the flyways on which migratory birds depend.

China, whose total wetland area ranks first in Asia and fourth globally, has stepped up wetland conservation and restoration in recent years and made notable progress.

"China will pursue a modernization of harmony between humanity and nature, and promote high-quality development in the wetlands conservation cause," Chinese President Xi Jinping said at the opening ceremony of the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands on November 5, 2022.

Pyae Phyo Aung, executive director at Nature Conservation Society-Myanmar, has worked with Chinese researchers since 2020 to study the wintering activities of the spoon-billed sandpiper along the southern coasts of China and Myanmar. The critically endangered shorebird is believed to number only in the hundreds in the wild.

"China has set an example for the entire flyway in habitat restoration and reversing wetland degradation. Establishing national nature reserves such as those in Yancheng, Jiangsu Province and the Yellow River Delta in Shandong Province is a key step," he said, adding that China's vision of ecological civilization and practical initiatives are tangible contributions to regional cooperation and global ecological governance.

South Korean ornithologist Kisup Lee said that the Tiaozini Wetlands on the Jiangsu coast and Dongtan Wetland on Chongming Island, Shanghai, have undergone systematic ecological restoration, attracting increasing numbers of rare migratory birds, such as the black-faced spoonbill, to stop over.

"China has unleashed swift and effective measures to protect key habitats," said Lee.

In late July, the 48th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Busan, South Korea, approved the boundary modification of the Migratory Bird Sanctuaries along the Coast of Yellow Sea-Bohai Gulf of China, officially incorporating the Changshan Archipelago into the World Heritage list.

Earlier this year, China adopted the landmark Ecological and Environmental Code, further strengthening the legal framework for wetland conservation and broader ecological protection. The country has also expanded its network of internationally recognized wetlands, with 82 Wetlands of International Importance, known as Ramsar sites, and 22 accredited international wetland cities.

"Australia has a lot to learn from China. China and its leadership are really forward-thinking and ambitious in setting strong law and giving clear policy guidance regarding nature, such as strict controls on development activities in red-line areas," said Janice Baird, a regulatory affairs specialist and principal at Australian environmental nonprofit Earth & Every.

COMMUNITY OF ALL LIFE

"Biodiversity makes Earth full of vigor and vitality, and lays the foundation for human survival and development," Xi said in a keynote speech at the leaders' summit of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity on October 12, 2021, calling on the international community to enhance cooperation, build consensus and pool strength to build a community of all life on Earth.

Few creatures illustrate such interdependence more vividly than migratory birds. Crossing national borders along ancient flyways, they rely on a chain of wetlands across countries for feeding, resting and survival, making their protection inherently a shared responsibility.

Sometimes, a tiny leg band is enough to make those otherwise invisible connections visible.

In 2017, a Great Knot, an endangered shorebird, was tagged and released in China with the band number "U72." The following year, staff at the Sibugay wetland, the Philippines' largest Ramsar site, spotted it four times in three months.

Fernandez, the reserve's director, still keeps a photo in her cellphone of U72 foraging on Sibugay's mudflat.

"Birds are not bound by manmade borders; they simply follow the wetlands needed to survive. Still, when people in different countries record and share information, we begin to see the flyway as one connected system," said Jennifer George of the EAAF Partnership.

In April, a white-naped crane, a species under first-class national protection in China, was recorded in the Poyang Lake Nature Reserve in east China's Jiangxi Province. A leg band indicated that the bird had migrated from the Khurkh-Khuiten Nature Reserve in Mongolia, a known breeding site.

"One small bird, identified through its band, showed that wetlands in both countries were part of the same life journey. It carried the message of international cooperation and turned an invisible migration route into something real and personal," George said.

With biodiversity conservation as a shared goal, China has signed bilateral agreements on migratory bird protection with countries including Australia, South Korea, Russia and New Zealand. These agreements provide an institutional framework for monitoring and protecting cross-border populations of endangered species such as red-crowned crane, Siberian crane and crested ibis.

For more than two decades, bar-tailed godwits have linked northern China's Yalu River estuary with New Zealand's Miranda wetlands. Though thousands of kilometers apart, conservationists from the two places have jointly safeguarded the annual voyage of these rare, endangered birds. Their shared conservation efforts have also fostered friendship between the two communities.

Since 2015, the Poyang Lake Nature Reserve and Mongolia's Wildlife Science and Conservation Center (WSCC) have carried out joint research on the precious white-naped crane, with Mongolian researchers visiting China to track banded birds and study their wintering conditions.

"Over the past decade, China's ecological and environmental policies have continued to improve, particularly in the field of wetland conservation, and China has become an outstanding model for the region," said WSCC Director Nyambayar Batbayar. *– Xinhua*

War shrine tributes on surrender day reveal Japan's lingering militarist obsession

Analysis

TOKYO – August 15 marks the 81st anniversary of Japan's unconditional surrender in World War II. On the day, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi sent a ritual offering to the notorious war-linked Yasukuni Shrine, while making no mention of "remorse" in her first war memorial address.

Analysts believe Japan's ruling authorities are persistently pushing to accelerate military expansion and rearmament and promoting right-wing historical views and narratives of "regional threats," with increasingly evident characteristics of "neo-militarism." They warn that today's Japan bears a striking resemblance to the Japan that embarked on a path of aggressive war in the past; if left unchecked, this trajectory poses a serious threat to regional peace and stability, and the international community should remain highly vigilant.

NO SIGN OF REMORSE

On Saturday, Takaichi made a "tamagushi" ritual offering to the Yasukuni Shrine, a symbol of the country's militarism and wartime aggression, in her capacity as president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Before attending the National Memorial Service for the War Dead, she turned toward the shrine across the road and bowed twice, clapped twice and bowed once from the parking area of Nippon Budokan hall, in an apparent act of Shinto worship.

Meanwhile, Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi and several other cabinet ministers showed up at the shrine earlier Saturday, marking the seventh consecutive year that sitting Japanese ministers have paid respects there on August 15. LDP Secretary-General Shunichi Suzuki, other top ruling party executives, and a nonpartisan group of dozens of lawmakers also visited the shrine.

In her speech at the annual memorial held in Tokyo, Takaichi neither mentioned Japan's wars of aggression against its Asian neighbors nor expressed remorse or apology for the suffering they caused. She even altered a phrase traditionally used by previous prime ministers, changing "must never repeat the horrors of war" into "The horrors of war must never be repeated." Japanese media pointed out that the revised wording deliberately obscures the subject responsible for the war, thereby avoiding reflection on Japan's wartime aggression.

This is not the first time Takaichi has employed such rhetorical ambiguity. In speeches earlier this month at ceremonies commemorating the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, she merely stated that Japan "is adhering to the Three Non-Nuclear Principles," while remaining vague about whether her government would continue to uphold them. Some Japanese media criticized the ambiguity as evidence that the prime minister has failed to genuinely learn from history.

Takaichi has long been associated with controversial positions on historical issues. In 1994, she publicly questioned the Murayama government's apology and remorse over Japan's wartime aggression, arguing that a prime minister could not apologize on behalf of the Japanese people. In a television program in 2002, she described Japan's wartime actions as a "war for self-preservation and self-defense," drawing sharp criticism. She has also published articles on her official website endorsing the right-wing "Greater East Asia War" historical narrative and promoting the prewar Imperial Rescript on Education, a document widely associated with militarist ideology.

Takakage Fujita, secretary-general of the Association for Inheriting and Propagating the Murayama Statement, said the ruling authorities not only lack reflection on Japan's aggression but also display a wartime logic disturbingly similar to that of the political leaders who led Japan into war more than 80 years ago.

Anatoly Koshkin, executive council member of the Russian Association of World War II Historians, said the ideological poison of militarism continues to spread in Japanese society; influenced by right-wing propaganda, many in the younger generation, who have no firsthand memories of the horrors of war, hope to see Japan's return as a major military power.

RAPID REMILITARIZATION

The Japanese government has long sought to bolster the country's military capabilities, gradually chipping away at the military constraints imposed by the postwar pacifist constitution and steadily hollowing out the long-standing principle of "exclusively defense-oriented policy."

Since Takaichi took office, her government has only hit the accelerator on military buildup.

At the institutional level, the Takaichi administration has been taking a series of aggressive moves, from seeking to revise the Three Non-Nuclear Principles when updating the country's three key security documents by the end of this year, to speeding up efforts to amend the pacifist constitution, aiming to make headway on a constitutional amendment proposal before next year's Liberal Democratic Party convention.

Meanwhile, a reform to centralize the country's intelligence apparatus is underway, including the establishment of a national intelligence agency, to tighten control over public opinion and facilitate military expansion.

In terms of military deployment and operations, the Takaichi administration has put offensive weapons into actual service, deploying long-range missiles with so-called "enemy base strike capabilities" in Japan for the first time and conducting the first test-firing of US-made Tomahawk cruise missiles.

It has also accelerated efforts to expand the Self-Defense Forces' overseas presence, sending a large contingent of combat personnel to the Philippines for joint military drills for the first time, and is vigorously developing "new ways of warfare" and working to enhance sustained combat capabilities.

On the fiscal front, the Japanese government has significantly increased defense spending. A supplementary budget for fiscal 2025 allowed Japan to hit its target of raising defense-related spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product two years ahead of schedule, and the surge has continued unabated. With the initial defense budget for fiscal 2026 having reached a new record high, the defense budget request for fiscal 2027 is reportedly set to climb even further.

Economically, the Japanese authorities are trying to turn the defense industry into a new pillar for reviving the country's economy. In April this year, the Takaichi government revised the "three principles on transfer of defense equipment and technology" and their implementation guidelines, allowing the export of lethal weapons in principle, and thereby opening up markets for Japan's military industry.

Meanwhile, the country's 2026 defense white paper significantly expanded discussion of reinforcing defense production and technological bases, touting the defense business as a contributor to "Japan's economic growth."

In manipulating public opinion and perceptions, the Takaichi administration has not only continued to downplay, deny, and whitewash the history of Japanese aggression, but has also hyped up alleged "security threats" from neighboring countries, particularly the so-called "China threat," to pave the way for military expansion.

Takaichi has publicly claimed that a "Taiwan contingency" could constitute a "survival-threatening situation" that could allow Japan to exercise the right of collective self-defense, and has cast China as "an unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge."

Australian business strategy consultant Antony Hing said Japan is "very rapidly" shifting away from its pacifist constitution, and it could be in breach of its international legal obligations in acting the way it's acting.

Ling Tek Soon, senior lecturer at the Institute of China Studies of the University of Malaya, said that Japan is constantly pushing beyond the institutional boundaries of the postwar order, departing from the "peaceful nation" identity and development path it has long professed.

HISTORY'S WARNING

Japanese historians, including Masahiro Yamazaki, have pointed out that Japan's current political, military, economic and ideological trajectory bears striking similarities to the path the country took prior to World War II.

Following the Meiji Restoration, Japan gradually embarked on a course of militarist expansion abroad. During the 1930s, it responded to economic crisis with military buildup and external aggression. Military leaders, politicians and powerful business interests formed close alliances to stoke fears of "external threats" and "existential crisis" to mobilize public support for war. National resources were concentrated in the military sector, benefiting the military establishment and large industrial conglomerates while ordinary people bore the economic burden and ultimately became victims of war.

Today, a similar scenario is playing out again. Faced with domestic challenges such as prolonged economic stagnation, Japan's right-wing conservative forces view "breaking free from the post-war order" and becoming a "normal country" as a supposed way out.

Government resources continue to shift toward defense, with military expansion presented as a means of stimulating economic growth. At the same time, narratives emphasizing "external threats," denying historical aggression and reviving prewar militarist ideology are increasingly used for political and social mobilization, leading to a resurgence of militarism in Japan.

These trends have sparked strong protests and heightened vigilance among the Japanese public.

Yamazaki warned that the government's persistent emphasis on "external threats" could easily steer Japan into war once again. Akira Yamada, professor at Meiji University, said Japan's continued military buildup risks fueling a regional arms race that could become increasingly difficult to reverse once established.

Critics also argue that Japan's remilitarization carries growing domestic costs. As defense spending reaches record levels, military contractors have reaped substantial profits while social welfare and other livelihood-related expenditures face mounting pressure. The result, they say, is worsening public finances and increasing hardship for ordinary citizens.

Atsushi Koketsu, professor emeritus at Yamaguchi University, argued that the government's push for remilitarization comes at the expense of public welfare. "It is fundamentally wrong to place people's livelihoods in insecurity in exchange for so-called national security," he said.

Kim Joo-Yong, professor of history and culture at South Korea's Wonkwang University, said the truly responsible path for Japan is to confront its history and draw lessons from it. "Countries in the region, together with peace-loving forces within Japan, should unite in opposing militarism," he said.

– Xinhua

This photo provided by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on Saturday shows Kim Jong Un, general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) and president of the State Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), paying tribute to anti-Japanese revolutionary martyrs at the Revolutionary Martyrs Cemetery on Mt. Taesong in the DPRK on Friday. Kim visited the Revolutionary Martyrs Cemetery on Mt. Taesong on Friday on the occasion of the 81st anniversary of national liberation, the KCNA reported. – Xinhua

Thousands await aid after deadly Indonesian quake

Marchio Gorbiano with Arnold Welianto in Maumere

RUTENG, Indonesia – Help could not come soon enough yesterday for thousands of evacuees on Indonesia's Flores island after a powerful earthquake killed 53 people, injured dozens and damaged hundreds of houses and buildings.

Some 5,000 people fled their homes as the 7.7-magnitude quake hit the island early Saturday, followed by nearly 1,000 aftershocks of varying intensities in the hours that followed, officials said.

People in some areas were left without electricity and telecommunications and at least one emergency access road remained inaccessible.

"We need food, drink, medicines and diapers for the children," Umri, a resident of Nangahale village on the north coast of Flores, told AFP yesterday morning.

The 55-year-old, who like many Indonesians uses one name, has been hiding out on a hilltop for 24 hours with others afraid to return home.

At Kisol village a few hours away, Bertolomeus Tiga, 42, told AFP his house was one of several collapsed by the quake that also brought down part of the local church.

"The police came yesterday [Saturday] and collected all the data, but there's no aid yet. The most important thing is probably staple foods. Food and drink... medicine," he said.

Bertolomeus said villagers were afraid to return to compromised homes and buildings.

"For the time being, we're still taking refuge outside. We're still living outside."

A motorbike stops next to a collapsed building following a 7.7-magnitude earthquake in Borong, East Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara yesterday. Help started arriving yesterday for thousands of evacuees on Indonesia's Flores island after a powerful earthquake killed 53 people, injured dozens and damaged hundreds of houses and buildings. – AFP

Widespread damage

The head of Indonesia's BNPB national disaster agency, Suharyanto, said at least five helicopters, several planes, a naval vessel and search and rescue ships were on their way to help.

The agency upped the death toll late yesterday to 53 from 47 the day before, with 135 people injured.

There were no reports of missing persons.

Survivors were in urgent need of assistance in the form of emergency tents, food, medicines, blankets, camp beds, mats, clean water and electricity generators, according to rescue officials.

The epicentre of the shallow quake was located just off the north coast of the island, geological authorities said.

The affected areas have few, if any, high-rise buildings.

BNPB spokesman Berton Suar Pelita Panjaitan said at least 914 houses on the island were severely damaged and hundreds of others to a lesser degree.

Dozens of public buildings were also affected, including 93 educational and 36 health facilities and 38 government offices.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said Saturday preparations were under way to bring aid to thousands in temporary shelters.

The government sent 50,000 aid packages weighing a total of 275 tonnes to the area, and European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen offered help from the bloc's Copernicus Earth observation satellites.

'Ring of Fire'

In Ruteng, a town about 200 kilometres from the worst-hit part of the island, AFP saw heavy machinery clearing rubble from the street yesterday.

The local hospital had been badly damaged, and patients were evacuated to tents erected outside.

A woman underwent an emergency C-section in an intact storage room converted into a temporary operating theatre, hospital spokeswoman Yohana Raisita Damalia Mari said.

"Thank God, the surgery went smoothly and both the patient and her baby are safe," she said.

Herybertus Geradus Laju Nabit, mayor of the Manggarai regency, told AFP it was impossible to predict when the aftershocks would end.

"Therefore, our first appeal is: be vigilant. Stay alert," he said.

After Saturday's quake, Flores residents ran for the hills as the sea retreated, a possible sign of an approaching tsunami.

A tsunami warning was later lifted, but authorities urged people not to return to damaged buildings for fear that aftershocks may bring them down.

Waves of up to 1.6 metres were reported in some coastal regions, according to Indonesia's BMKG geological agency.

Indonesia experiences frequent earthquakes due to its location in the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic activity stretching from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin.

Flores was struck by a 7.7-magnitude earthquake in 1992 that triggered a tsunami and killed about 2,500 people.

A devastating 9.1-magnitude tremor in 2004 struck off the coast of Sumatra and triggered a tsunami that killed 220,000 throughout the region, about 170,000 of them in Indonesia.

It was one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history. *– AFP*

Eastern Japan rain kills 10: report

TOKYO – Heavy rain that battered eastern Japan has left nine people dead, public broadcaster NHK said yesterday, after an "unprecedented" deluge that flooded over a thousand homes and snarled up roads and rail services.

Torrential downpours starting late Thursday triggered landslide warnings and power outages, with forecasters issuing the highest-level heavy rain warning for the Chiba region for the first time.

A weather station in the prefecture recorded 30 centimetres of rain in 24 hours, making it the area's wettest August in six decades.

By Friday morning, the city of Chiba logged more than three times the rainfall typically seen in the whole of August, Tokyo's land ministry said.

Ten have since died in the rains, NHK reported yesterday morning, citing its own tally.

Chiba's disaster management office as of Saturday evening listed eight dead, some trapped inside submerged cars and others found on flooded streets.

Over 70 houses across the Chiba region were partially destroyed by the rain, the prefecture's latest tally showed.

And over a thousand households reported being flooded, nearly 600 of which saw water surge above the floorboards.

An estimated 1,200 cars also remain abandoned on roads, local media said, with authorities working on towing them away or using jacks to move them.

An official from Japan's Meteorological Agency told a news conference on Thursday that it was "shaping up to be an unprecedented level of heavy rain".

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

Abandoned cars are seen partially submerged on a flooded road in Sakura, Chiba prefecture, Japan on Friday. – AFP

Singapore criminalises AI-generated abuse images

SINGAPORE – Singapore authorities prepare to enforce legislation that comes into effect today, protecting citizens from online sexual abuse including banning the use of artificial intelligence to create explicit images without consent.

The laws will also allow authorities to prosecute offenders suspected of grooming minors abroad and then sexually abusing them, if either the perpetrator or the victim travelled from the city-state before the offence was committed.

The changes include "a new offence of producing intimate images, including AI-generated materials, without consent", Singapore's home affairs department said on Friday.

Offenders face a jail sentence of up to two years, a fine, or both.

If the material in question depicts a minor younger than 14, "the offence is punishable with mandatory imprisonment of up to two years, and the offender shall also be liable to a fine or caning", the department said in a statement.

Those found guilty of grooming minors overseas and committing sexual offences will now face stricter punishment including a jail sentence of up to seven years if the victim is younger than 14.

Singapore's Home Affairs Minister Sim Ann told parliament last year that the legislation aimed "both to reduce the roadblocks to enforcement and to reduce the supply of such (AI-generated) materials, which contributes to a vicious cycle of abuse."

Singapore still allows judicial caning, including for certain serious sexual offences such as rape and aggravated molestation.

However, revised legislation which also comes into force today will remove mandatory corporal punishment for crimes including piracy, attempted robbery and carrying an illegal weapon, and will now be applied on a "discretionary" basis. *– AFP*

Philippine police seize smuggled cigarettes worth over US$340,000

MANILA – Philippine police arrested seven people and seized an estimated 21 million pesos (about US$341,820) worth of smuggled cigarettes off Sipalay City, central Philippines, on Saturday, according to the Philippine National Police (PNP).

The PNP Maritime Group intercepted the suspects aboard a motorized vessel and confiscated 525 cases of smuggled cigarettes.

The suspects face charges under the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act, and the Graphic Health Warnings Law, according to the PNP. *– Xinhua*

UK-based Afghan writer pleads for country's 'abandoned' women

Caroline Taix

LONDON – Afghanistan's women are "fighting alone" against discrimination by the Taliban authorities and feel abandoned by the world, Afghan journalist Zahra Joya told AFP.

"I lost everything in my country five years ago," she said in an interview in London.

The founder in 2020 of Rukhshana Media – a news agency which aims to amplify the voices and stories of Afghan women – the 34-year-old left Kabul in 2021 after the Taliban returned to power.

As the fifth anniversary of that day loomed, she has struggled to come to terms with how her homeland has changed.

"I really can't see or can't bear how (the) Taliban are celebrating our sorrow in Afghanistan. It is a heavy day and I wish strength and power to women and girls in Afghanistan."

Joya, from the Hazara ethnic minority – historically one of the most discriminated groups in Afghanistan – recalled the shock of August 15, 2021, remembering "a scary time" and "horrible moment".

The previous week, she had had lunch with a friend in a Kabul restaurant and walked around in the capital working as a journalist.

"Then the next week ... I was in prison in my house," she said, noting "the first thing" the Taliban government did for women was order them to stay home.

Joya had never imagined leaving her country, but shortly afterwards fled to Britain.

"From the Taliban perspective, everything – every single thing – about myself was wrong," she explained.

"My dignity, my identity as a woman, my gender, my career as a journalist, and also my ethnicity as a Hazara woman."

'Gender war'

Joya spent some of her childhood living under the previous Taliban administration during which time girls' education was officially banned, before the hardline group which imposes its strict interpretation of Islam was ousted from power in 2001.

She nonetheless disguised herself as a boy to attend school, taking the boy's name Muhammad.

"The idea came to my mum," she recalled. "She made me a boy. She made boy clothes for me. She cut my hair and I went to school."

Afghan journalist Zahra Joya poses for a photograph following an interview with AFP in London on Friday. – AFP

Following their 2021 return to power, Taliban authorities have closed high schools and universities to women and girls over the age of around 12, alongside imposing a series of rules on women's access to public life.

It is the only country in the world where girls' education is banned after primary school.

In Britain, Joya continues to work with journalists who have remained in Afghanistan, operating there in the utmost secrecy because of the personal security risks.

She recently collaborated with British newspaper *The Guardian*, asking Afghan women "what life "looks like on an ordinary day to you".

"We're surrounded by four walls," was the overwhelming response, Joya noted.

A by-fellow at the University of Cambridge, Zoya in July published a memoir, "*The Vanishing Girl of Kabul*" chronicling her life story and the fate of Afghan women.

"Afghan women are fighting alone," she told AFP.

"They are in a gender war. We need your solidarity," she urged the world.

"If there is any possibility to help us, share our stories, listen to us, and make your government accountable in terms of engagement with the Taliban." – *AFP*

A participant celebrates with his donkey after winning the donkey-cart race organised by the local authorities in Karachi, Pakistan yesterday. – AFP

More than 700 humanitarian aid trucks enter Afghanistan from Pakistan

KABUL – More than 700 trucks carrying international humanitarian aid arrived in Afghanistan via Pakistan despite a near-total closure of the land border between the two countries following clashes in October, the United Nations said yesterday.

The convoy was carrying "food and other critical humanitarian items," Olga Cherevko, spokeswoman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Afghanistan, told AFP.

United Nations Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator for Pakistan Mo Yahya said on X that "seven hundred and twenty four trucks of humanitarian cargo have crossed into Afghanistan through Torkham, reaching families who need it most".

He also thanked Islamabad and "all those who made it possible to keep the humanitarian lifeline open".

Acute child malnutrition has reached critical levels in Afghanistan this year, the World Food Programme (WFP) warned in early August.

Following deadly earthquakes last year, several climate-related disasters this year and the return of millions of Afghans from Iran and Pakistan since 2023, nearly 14 million Afghans are facing acute hunger, according to WFP.

The conflict with Pakistan, which has led to the near-total closure of the land border between the two countries since October 2025, has severely disrupted logistical routes for delivering humanitarian aid, WFP Deputy Executive Director Carl Skau told AFP in May.

Fortified biscuits destined for Afghan schoolchildren that were arriving from Pakistan earlier this year had to be rerouted through Iran before the war there also disrupted that route.

The biscuits eventually reached Afghanistan months later after a land and sea journey passing through countries including Jordan, Turkey and Azerbaijan. – *AFP*

Bangladesh says PM will not visit India until Hasina extradited

DHAKA – Bangladesh said yesterday that Prime Minister Tarique Rahman would not visit India until New Delhi extradited Sheikh Hasina, the Bangladeshi former premier who fled during a 2024 uprising.

The countries have had a strained relationship since deadly anti-government protests brought down Hasina's government and prompted her to escape to neighbouring India, where she remains.

She faces the death penalty in Bangladesh after being convicted of crimes against humanity, and Dhaka has repeatedly requested her extradition.

Speaking to reporters yesterday, foreign ministry official A.K.M. Shahidul Karim played down media speculation about a possible trip by Rahman to India next week.

"We are of the view that a propitious environment needs to be created for the visit," Karim told reporters.

"To this end, we have urged the Indian authorities to expedite their efforts to extradite Sheikh Hasina and other fugitives."

India has said Bangladesh's extradition request is "under examination".

Rahman took office in February and has since visited Malaysia and China, departing from the tradition of Bangladeshi leaders heading to India for their first overseas trip.

India's High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Dinesh Trivedi, met Rahman last week, fuelling speculation over a possible breakthrough.

Officials from Bangladesh and India have been in contact in recent weeks about the possibility of a visit by Rahman, Karim said.

"But the process has been vitiated by Sheikh Hasina's open media interactions, despite her being a convict in crimes against humanity."

Hasina, a former pro-democracy leader whom critics said grew increasingly autocratic during her 15-year rule, vowed this month that she would return to Bangladesh in December even if it meant imprisonment.

Karim also said the government would pursue a "Bangladesh First" foreign policy rooted in sovereignty and non-interference while seeking mutually beneficial ties with India and other countries. – *AFP*

S Korean military fires warning shots after DPRK troops cross military demarcation line

SEOUL – The South Korean military fired warning shots after several soldiers of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) crossed the military demarcation line (MDL) earlier this week, Yonhap News Agency reported yesterday, citing a South Korean government source.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is the official name of North Korea.

The incident marked the first time this year that the South Korean military has fired warning shots in response to a DPRK military crossing of the MDL, the report said.

Earlier this week, several DPRK soldiers crossed the MDL in the eastern part of the Korean Peninsula, and South Korean troops fired warning shots in accordance with operational procedures, according to the report. The DPRK soldiers subsequently withdrew to the northern side of the MDL, and no other unusual activity was reported.

Following the DPRK's declaration in late 2023 that inter-Korean relations had become relations between "two states hostile to each other," DPRK troops stepped up efforts in 2024 and 2025 to fortify the border area around the MDL, said the report, adding that during the process, DPRK troops crossed the MDL on multiple occasions, with 17 such incidents reported last year.

Under the South Korean military's rules of engagement, troops first issue warning broadcasts when DPRK soldiers show signs of approaching or attempting to cross the MDL. Once the MDL is crossed, South Korean troops fire warning shots and take measures to push the DPRK soldiers back, the report added.

The DPRK side has not yet commented on the incident. – *Xinhua/MPD*

Hamas expects meeting with Kushner as US pushes Gaza plan

CAIRO – Hamas sources said yesterday that they expected to meet in Egypt with US envoy Jared Kushner, as President Donald Trump's administration seeks to push forward a Gaza peace plan rejected by Israel.

Two weeks after Hamas publicly signed on to the latest phase of the deal, Kushner, who is Trump's son-in-law and special envoy, flew to Egypt ahead of expected talks in Jerusalem today.

"Mediators informed Hamas that US envoy Jared Kushner will hold a meeting with the Hamas leadership, in the presence of Egyptian and Qatari officials, before Kushner travels to Israel to meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu," a Hamas source told AFP, requesting anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomacy.

Kushner met with mediators from Egypt, Qatar and Turkey, as well as Nickolay Mladenov, the Gaza high representative in Trump's "Board of Peace" set up to implement the deal, Cairo said.

Hamas chief Khalil al-Hayya was also in Egypt, travelling on Saturday to the Mediterranean city of El-Alamein in his first trip since taking over the Gaza-based Islamist movement last month.

A second Hamas source said that the United States had sought clarifications from the group on several points, including "genuine, rather than merely symbolic, collection, consolidation and storage of weapons, as well as Hamas's complete relinquishment of governance of Gaza".

Hamas on July 30 said that it would hand over its weapons to a new Palestinian governing body as part of the latest stage in a Gaza ceasefire declared by Trump, who hailed their agreement as a "major milestone".

But Netanyahu, a longtime hawk who faces a tough re-election fight in October, said that Israel rejected the agreement and voiced scepticism that Hamas would actually give up its weapons.

Netanyahu expressed opposition to the plan even after he was assured by Mladenov that Israel would not need to pull troops out of the Gaza Strip until complete disarmament by Hamas.

The board had initially said Israel would start a phased withdrawal in tandem with Hamas's disarmament.

The United States for years refused contact with Hamas, which it classifies as a terrorist organisation and which led the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel that sparked the Gaza war.

But the Trump administration has increasingly been comfortable with direct contact in hopes of ending the devastating conflict, negotiating the October ceasefire agreement that led to the release of remaining Israeli hostages.

Displaced Palestinians check out the damage at the site of a reported Israeli strike on a tent in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. – AFP

There was no immediate confirmation of a meeting between Kushner and Hamas by the United States.

A Board of Peace official earlier said that Kushner and Mladenov hoped for "constructive conversations" with Netanyahu, and that "the United States and Israel agree on the end state, which is a demilitarised Hamas".

Israel keeps up strikes

Kushner discussed the Gaza plan with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi during a meeting that "emphasised the need for all parties to fulfill their obligations under the Gaza Strip ceasefire agreement", according to presidential spokesperson Mohamed El-Shennawy.

Hamas's Al-Hayaa met yesterday with Egyptian intelligence chief Hassan Rashad and "reaffirmed commitment" to the Trump plan, Egypt's state-run Middle East News Agency said.

A Hamas official had told AFP the delegation would brief Egypt on Israeli violations of the ceasefire agreement.

Israel has resumed airstrikes in Gaza after a lull following Trump's promotion of the peace plan, though the October ceasefire had never fully halted the violence in the Strip.

Several people were injured yesterday after Israeli aircraft targeted a house west of Nuseirat, said Mahmoud Bassal, spokesman for Gaza's civil defence agency, which serves as a rescue service under Hamas.

The Israeli military said it was responding to a threat by Islamic Jihad militants and that it tried to mitigate civilian casualties.

"The terrorists advanced terror attacks and were struck in precise aerial strikes to remove the threat," it said.

Several others were injured after Israeli forces opened fire on tents housing displaced people west of Khan Yunis, where separately the body of a child, Suhail Shallouf, was recovered after he was killed by Israeli fire on Saturday, the civil defence agency said.

Israeli operations have killed at least 1,262 Palestinians since the ceasefire came into effect on October 10, according to figures by Gaza's health ministry, which is under Hamas. Its figures are considered reliable by the United Nations.

The Israeli army has reported five deaths in its ranks during the same period. *– AFP*

Mourners pray next to the coffins of Ali Samir Al-Haj Hassan, a commander in Hezbollah's elite Radwan Force, and his family members during their funeral in Beirut's southern suburb yesterday, after they were killed a day earlier in a strike carried out by Israel's military in the village of Ansar. Israel yesterday vowed it would hit Hezbollah again if threatened, as it identified what it described as a commander killed in strikes a day earlier that also left several children dead. Israel earlier said that the strike killed Hassan and acknowledged that his family was present but defended the strike by saying they were not the target. – AFP

Calls for UK inquiry into 'hounding' of ex-Cambridge academic

LONDON – More than 31,000 people, including several MPs, have signed a petition urging UK Prime Minister Andy Burnham to hold a public inquiry into alleged media harassment of the late academic Jason Arday, the organisers said yesterday.

The petition was launched by the Good Law Project activist group after Arday, who was appointed three years ago as the youngest-ever black professor at Cambridge University, was found dead on Friday.

The project had been supporting Arday since he resigned earlier this month from the university and as a fellow of Jesus College after both institutions launched investigations into allegations of plagiarism and fabricating or exaggerating his life story.

"There cannot be any doubt that Dr Arday's tragic death was the direct, foreseeable and foreseen result of press harassment," the Good Law Project wrote on its website.

"A significant element in that harassment was the colour of his skin," it said, adding "there cannot be any doubt that racism lay at the heart of this story".

The allegations against Arday, 41, had received widespread media coverage from the UK press after another academic – self-defined "race realist" Nathan Cofnas, who was sacked from his Cambridge role in 2024 – said in July he found numerous instances of plagiarism in the professor's work.

British media and right-wing commentators seized on the row, claiming Arday, who disputed the allegations, had unfairly benefited from diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) policies.

Warnings of 'suicide risk'

In a letter published when he resigned on August 5, Arday said the move was "the only way" to end a "difficult period", but should not be "mistaken for an acceptance of the narratives that have surrounded me".

Following the shock news of Arday's death on Friday, which police are not treating as suspicious, his family and friends have denounced "a campaign of sustained abuse" since his 2023 appointment.

Other friends have said he was vulnerable, given Arday has written extensively about being diagnosed as autistic as a child, and not speaking until he was 11.

Simon Woolley, Arday's former mentor and a leading member of staff at Cambridge University, told the BBC yesterday that he and a group of friends had seen him last Monday.

Arday "said he felt hounded to death, his words, that he couldn't see a way out", Woolley said.

"On that day, we saw a man half his body weight and desperate beyond belief."

The Good Law Project said "many of the signatories" to its campaign had "warned multiple media outlets privately that their relentless pursuit of Dr Arday risked his suicide".

A vigil for the late academic is set to be held in London's Trafalgar Square today.

And a fundraising campaign to support his family has already raised almost £89,000 (US$120,000). *– AFP*

Iran offers US$30,000 bounty for killing, capturing US soldiers

TEHRAN – Iran's military announced yesterday that it was offering a bounty equivalent to US$30,000 for killing or capturing US soldiers, with the reward doubled if carried out by a woman.

Army chief Amir Hatami said the plan had been drawn up following a "large number of requests" to participate, according to the IRNA state news agency.

There has been no known deployment of US ground forces in Iran during the Middle East war, with the exception of a rescue mission in April for a downed American airman.

Hatami did not provide any details on where or when the killing or capturing of US soldiers was expected to take place.

"Anyone who kills or captures and hands over an invading American military personnel will receive a reward equivalent to US$30,000 or 5 billion tomans from the Islamic Republic of Iran's Army," Hatami said, using an informal unit equivalent to 10,000 Iranian rials.

"Courageous Iranian women who carry out such an action will receive double the reward," he added.

Hatami repeated Iran's call for the US to leave the Middle East, and said "they no longer have permission to enter the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman or the Strait of Hormuz".

The war between Tehran and Washington began on February 28 when the United States and Israel attacked Iran.

Just over a month into the war, the US launched a massive rescue operation to retrieve the weapon systems officer of an F-15 jet, involving around 200 US troops and more than 170 aircraft racing to find the airman ahead of Iranian forces.

During the rescue, Iranian troops damaged an A-10 ground attack aircraft which was ditched over friendly territory. The US also reportedly abandoned and destroyed aircraft used during the mission including a C-130 transport plane.

Days before, the pilot of the F-15 was rescued by a helicopter crew in a smaller operation.

The war was later paused by an April ceasefire after nearly 40 days of fighting, followed by a June framework for peace talks that later collapsed.

Iran and the United States have since traded fire sporadically, with fighting mainly centred in southern Iran and around the Strait of Hormuz.

Indirect contact between the two sides via mediators has continued with little sign of any diplomatic breakthrough. Iran has also set out a list of demands for reopening the strait, including war damages.

The number of US military personnel killed since the start of the war stands at 17, with the most recent deaths in July. They have all been killed outside of Iran, in countries including Jordan and Iraq. *– AFP*

Burnham shifts messaging to TikTok, podcasts

Anna Malpas

LONDON – Whether he is pulling a pint, tossing a builder's helmet in the air or running with Olympic medallist Mo Farah, the UK's new prime minister Andy Burnham has embraced social media with a deft touch.

As well as putting out videos on his own accounts on X and TikTok, he has sought to broaden his audience by appearing on entertainment channels run by creators with large followings.

Compared with predecessor Keir Starmer, "Burnham has a far more astute communications team around him" with a "better grasp of the media environment", said Steven Buckley, a lecturer in digital media sociology at City St George's, University of London.

During his first speech outside No. 10 Downing Street, Burnham addressed a crowd including teenage influencers invited because they make TikTok clips about Labour politics.

Soon after opening a separate office in his native northern England he gave an interview there to Elizabeth Day, a writer, whose podcast "How to Fail" invites celebrities to reflect on mistakes they have made.

The day he became prime minister, Burnham appeared on "Career Ladder", a TikTok series where UK-based Ukrainian Max Klymenko – who has 9.8 million followers – talks to a celebrity about jobs while both stand on a step ladder.

Burnham has also chatted while on a jog with popular athlete Farah, who has millions of followers across social media platforms.

'Natural communicator'

The new Labour leader has won praise for his fluent, natural style on camera, in contrast to Starmer's somewhat stiff delivery.

In a clip on his personal TikTok, Burnham, thanks to clever editing, appears to toss up a mortarboard hat and catch a builder's helmet, as he promotes technical education.

But it ends with a blooper shot where Burnham fumbles to catch the helmet and bursts out laughing.

TikTok does not allow political ads so videos have to compete for views.

One commentator wrote "can't lie the new gaffer is winning me over" using slang for a boss.

In another personal post, Burnham pulls a pint while unveiling measures to help publicans.

"He's communicating through vertical video [designed to be viewed on a phone], through the likes of TikTok, through the likes of Instagram," the right-wing *Spectator* magazine's political correspondent Noa Hoffman said in a blog.

Britain's Prime Minister Andy Burnham reacts during a visit to the Met Office a weather and climate service in Exeter, south west England on Friday. – AFP

More in Common pollsters this month said Burnham was "winning the attention war" for young adults, with over half of 18-24 year-olds saying they had seen his content.

"He is a good natural communicator," the BBC politics specialist Laura Kuenssberg told an in-house podcast.

Burnham told podcaster Day his English degree helped with "getting the emotion into what you do and what you say" and having a "connection with people".

"He's absolutely smashing it," influencer and former reality show star Georgia Harrison, who has 1.3 million followers on Instagram, told Times Radio.

Media 'frozen out'

But some have sniffed at this focus on "vibes".

"This isn't just a brand campaign for a new sparkling canned drink. It's the people who are supposed to be running the country," wrote *The Times*'s social media editor, Esme Hewitt.

"Can you stop wasting your time and ours with these cringe videos," right-wing presenter Piers Morgan wrote on X, while right-wing broadsheet *The Daily Telegraph* accused Burnham of "cheap gimmicks".

But a rival party, the hard-right anti-immigration Reform UK, rallies support on social media thanks to leader Nigel Farage with 1.5 million followers on TikTok, 2.3 million on Facebook and X.

"These days, one of the roles of a prime minister is to act as a content creator," Buckley told AFP.

Despite being dubbed the "first TikTok PM", Burnham only opened an account in May.

Starmer was the first UK prime minister to post there in December 2025, but his top videos only had music and text.

Since taking office, Burnham has given an interview to the BBC but the main national dailies have yet to sit down with the new premier.

His team is pursuing "alternative message delivery methods", realising most people do not directly access traditional media but only "pick up scraps or clips of news on social media," said Buckley.

Burnham's social media presence means "he does not need the media nearly as much as other prime ministers have," said Jonathan Connolly, who works for Inflect political communications agency, on TikTok.

But he predicted a backlash against Burnham from traditional media annoyed at being "frozen out". *– AFP*

Colombian woman dies saving dog from earthquake

PASTO – Colombia – Holding little Salomon in his arms, Michael Ruiz recounted how he found the pet next to his sister's body among the rubble after Colombia's devastating earthquake.

The 7.4-magnitude earthquake, which struck the western parts of the South American country on Monday, has killed at least 294 people and injured nearly 4,000 others, authorities said.

Ruiz said his sister Lenny, who worked as a lawyer, sacrificed herself to save the dog by shielding it with her body when their building collapsed in Cali, one of the cities hit hardest by the quake.

The story of Lenny and Salomon has gone viral on social media, as many remained desperate to locate their pets after the disaster.

"My sister gave her life for him because she was holding him against her chest, and the whole structure fell on top of her," Ruiz told AFP through tears in the city of Pasto.

"I see it as a love story, because obviously she loved that little animal... when you love something, you protect it," Ruiz said.

Salomon is 12 years old and suffers from epileptic seizures that have left him blind.

Ruiz and rescuers managed to find him after digging through the debris.

Six days after the quake, many pet owners held onto hope that their missing animals would be found alive.

Jessica Florez, Lenny's sister-in-law, said the dog is sad over his owner's passing.

A video of Salomon on top of Lenny's coffin has been viewed tens of thousands of times on social media.

"I brought him close to her coffin so he could say goodbye," Florez said. *– AFP*

'People could get hurt': Conservationists decry AI wildlife visuals

Najmi Mamat and Raevathi Supramaniam

KUALA LUMPUR – The black-and-white image appears to show the unlikeliest of interactions: an orangutan cradling endangered leopard cubs deep in the jungles of Malaysia's Sabah state.

But the viral image is not just unlikely, it is fake, part of a trend of wildlife images generated by artificial intelligence that experts warn endanger animals and people.

AFP fact-checkers have debunked scores of similar synthetic visuals, from an elephant climbing a tree to escape flooding in Myanmar to a pink dolphin leaping out of water in the Philippines.

The images are often accompanied by heartwarming anecdotes and have circulated widely in multiple languages on platforms such as Facebook, TikTok and X.

They may seem more like feel-good fiction than dangerous misinformation, but experts warn hyper-realistic visuals of wild animals behaving like pets, or even like humans, can distort public perceptions of wildlife and harm conservation efforts.

"This misunderstanding can lead people to approach animals too closely or interact with them in unsafe ways," José Guerrero-Casado, a zoology professor at Spain's University of Córdoba, told AFP.

He cited a widely reported incident in China's northwest Xinjiang Autonomous Region in January, where a woman was attacked by a rare snow leopard after trying to get closer for a photo.

China's forestry department said it stepped up patrols after the incident and warned the public to maintain a safe distance when encountering wild animals.

Sowing doubt

Conservationists say AI visuals portraying wild animals as cute or cuddly make it harder for social media users to discern what is real and can fuel exploitation.

They increase demand for certain species "to be used in the tourism industry as photo props, exploited to make social media content or to be kept as pets", said Chris Lewis, a researcher at the international wildlife charity Born Free.

And while the visuals could encourage some people to support animal protection, "the negative impacts outweigh that completely," said Jenny Roberts of conservation group WWF.

"People could get hurt," she told AFP.

WWF uses real images for its fundraising efforts, but fake content online "desensitises" people to even the most incredible original visuals, she said.

"When you do have something remarkable, people question it," Roberts said, recounting an incident where a camera trap set up by her charity captured a tiger with five cubs in China.

Such footage had never been filmed before in the East Asian country, she said.

"But when we put the content out there, we were questioned on social media: 'Is this AI-generated?'"

'Major threat'

A September study in the journal *Conservation Biology*, co-authored by Guerrero-Casado, concluded that the rapid spread of AI misinformation and its potential to harm environmental efforts is a "major threat" to society.

The researchers highlighted another challenge for those working in conservation: AI images "could affect the ability of people to identify species" and cause misunderstandings about the abundance and distribution of wildlife.

Scientists often mine data from citizen science platforms that accept photos and recordings of wildlife submitted by users.

But AI generation and manipulation could lead to flawed research, several experts warned in a recent commentary in the journal *Nature*.

They called for more robust authentication of submissions, and education of users about the risks of manipulating images and recordings.

Meta, Facebook's parent company, and TikTok require users to label realistic visuals that have been generated or significantly altered using AI. They also say their platforms have tools that automatically label content as AI-generated.

However, AFP fact-checkers spotted multiple wildlife posts without clear labels – even when users had already said in their captions that they were fake.

Meta and TikTok pay AFP to fact-check posts with potentially false information.

"Conservation depends on a well-informed society that understands the ecological and conservation needs of wild species," Guerrero-Casado said.

"AI-generated fake content does not contribute to this goal." *– AFP*

The scandals looming over Brazil's election campaign

SÃO PAULO – As elections approach in Brazil, separate investigations are looming over the campaigns of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and his rival Flávio Bolsonaro, in a country still traumatised by massive corruption scandals of the past.

Police are investigating allegations of influence-peddling involving Lula's eldest son, nicknamed "Lulinha."

They are also investigating the financing of a film about Bolsonaro's father, former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro, who is serving a 27-year sentence for an attempted coup.

Both candidates have faced legal troubles in the past.

Lula, 80, spent over a year and a half in prison between 2018 and 2019 on corruption charges linked to "Operation Car Wash," the biggest scandal in Brazilian history.

His conviction was later overturned after the presiding judge was found to be biased.

And Flávio Bolsonaro, as a Rio de Janeiro legislator, was accused of involvement in a kickback scheme in which he allegedly took a portion of his aides' salaries. The case was later dropped.

Here are details of current investigations into the two candidates:

Brazil's right-wing senator and presidential candidate for the Liberal Party (PL) Flávio Bolsonaro (centre, right) greets supporters next to his wife Fernanda (centre, left), on arrival at a campaign rally at Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro yesterday. Brazilians will go to the polls next October 4 once again deeply polarized and under the shadow of US President Donald Trump, who has backed conservative candidates in recent elections in Latin America.

Brazil's President and presidential re-election candidate Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (centre) addresses supporters during a campaign rally at the 1º de Mayo Municipal Stadium in São Bernardo do Campo, São Paulo State, yesterday. – AFP

'Dark Horse'

Police are probing the financing of "Dark Horse," a film about Jair Bolsonaro, after allegations that it received funding from a banker accused of orchestrating a massive fraud scheme.

The film, which has yet to be released and stars American actor Jim Caviezel ("The Passion of the Christ"), portrays the former president in a highly favourable light.

The investigation focuses on Daniel Vorcaro, the former owner of Banco Master, who is currently in prison.

The bank was liquidated after collapsing under debts of more than US$7 billion.

In May, investigative news outlet Intercept Brasil published an audio recording of Flávio Bolsonaro asking Vorcaro for money to complete the film.

The report said Vorcaro contributed nearly US$12 million to the project.

After initially claiming he had no connection to the banker, Bolsonaro admitted he had asked Vorcaro for funds for "Dark Horse."

He maintained, however, that they had "no close personal relationship."

The president's son

The Supreme Court has authorized three influence-peddling investigations targeting one of Lula's five sons, Fábio Luis – known as "Lulinha".

The case files are sealed.

Local media report that police are probing whether the 51-year-old businessman used his contacts in the government to help associates secure contracts or advance their interests.

The case has reportedly drawn in Lula's former chief of staff, who received a loan from a businesswoman being investigated alongside Fábio Luis.

His defence team maintains his innocence, claiming he is a victim of "electoral interests."

"I believe him," Lula said in an interview last week.

"No one will ask for the proceedings regarding my son to be closed," he promised, vowing that if his son "is guilty, he will pay the price." *– AFP*

Would-be migrants intercepted near Morocco's border with Ceuta

FNIDEQ – Scores of would-be migrants, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, were intercepted on Saturday in northern Morocco near the border with the Spanish exclave of Ceuta, an AFP correspondent saw, two weeks after thousands of migrants rushed into the tiny territory.

Morocco's *Le360* media outlet reported that 294 people were arrested, 46 of them Moroccan and the rest from sub-Saharan Africa.

"This is a routine operation aimed at preventing attempted irregular migration" toward Ceuta, an official with knowledge of the intervention told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The forests near towns on the border with Ceuta and Melilla – another Spanish exclave to the east – serve as gathering points for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa seeking to reach the territories, particularly in summer.

One of the migrants intercepted on Saturday, 22-year-old Abdessamad Dawad, said he wanted "to come to Europe because my country of origin, Sudan, is plagued by problems and insecurity".

Fellow Sudanese migrant Chams Edine Yakoub, 25, said he had been looking for opportunity.

"In Ceuta, in Europe, people are better cared for," he said.

"There's no work here. There's no money. There's no housing. There is absolutely nothing, I swear."

Spanish army tanks patrol the border fence between Morocco and Spain's North African excclave of Ceuta on Saturday. – AFP

According to the official, who did not provide the number of people detained, Saturday's arrests were part of "extensive security arrangements deployed" to prevent such departures.

Moroccan authorities had announced on Wednesday measures to counter another potential influx of migrants to Ceuta following a new wave of online disinformation saying the border would be open.

Le360 and the *Hespress* website reported that the authorities in recent days arrested more than 60 people accused of inciting or promoting irregular migration on social media.

About a fortnight ago, around 72,000 people, mostly Moroccans, crossed into Ceuta – a territory of 84,000 inhabitants – over the span of a few days, though the vast majority of them have since been returned to Morocco.

Moroccan authorities recovered the remains of 11 people who died in the chaos, while Spain said at least 80 people died.

But the Moroccan Association for Human Rights, a non-governmental group, estimates the death toll to be at least 141. *– AFP*

Cubans find rest on rooftops as blackouts drive them from home

Lisandra Cots

HAVANA – Every night, when summer heat and blackouts make sleep impossible at home, Cubans head for rooftops, porches and public spaces where they can catch a breeze.

Alexis Milan waits with his blind 17-year-old son for the sun to disappear behind the horizon of Central Havana, so they can head to the roof.

Over the months, the rooftop of his three-storey building has become a communal bedroom.

"We started getting a lot of people coming with us, and now almost the entire building has come up here," the 59-year-old tells AFP.

Among the tanks, pipes, and clotheslines, each family has carved out its own space.

His patch is on top of an empty water tank, where he spreads out a sheet and arranges two pillows.

He does not have a mattress, but up here at least some air is moving.

His apartment is baking and it is "impossible to live with all the mosquitoes."

Looking across the city, only a few patches of light survive, scattered in the gloom.

There is the intermittent purr of generators, dogs barking, and, from time to time, the dry clack of domino tiles echoing in the street.

Since January, a US fuel embargo has worsened prolonged power and water cuts.

Now every night, the roofs, parks, and porches of Havana fill with people lying on cardboard, mattresses, or directly on the ground.

Facing the sea, Havana's famous Malecon seawall has ceased to be a promenade for tourists or lovers.

Now dozens of people settle onto the still-warm concrete after sunset.

While some gaze into the darkness of the Florida Strait, others try to sleep, making the most of the breeze coming in from the sea.

Sheets, backpacks, and outstretched bodies transform the emblematic seafront promenade into an open-air dormitory for a few hours.

At dawn on the rooftop, alarms of the few cell phones that still have battery wake the neighbors one by one.

"I don't see an end to this," says Milan as he folds up the sheet and the pillows before heading to his job at a warehouse. *– AFP*

Real Madrid crush Schalke in friendly as Diomande debuts

Football

GELSENKIRCHEN, Germany – Jose Mourinho's Real Madrid eased to a 3-0 win at Schalke yesterday in their final friendly, with Kylian Mbappe on the scoresheet and record signing Yan Diomande playing for the first time.

After going two seasons without a major trophy Madrid appointed veteran Mourinho for a second spell in charge and made a slate of signings this summer to overhaul the squad.

French superstar Mbappe, playing under Mourinho for the first time, intercepted a poor back pass and fired home in the sixth minute to send the 15-time European champions ahead.

Dean Huijsen headed home the second from Arda Guler's corner as Madrid took full control against their German opponents.

Half-time substitute Carlos Espi nodded home Madrid's third in the second half, before 140 million euro (US$162m) Ivory Coast winger Diomande and England international Jude Bellingham also joined the fray from the bench.

Elsewhere Spanish champions Barcelona recorded an entertaining 5-2 victory at Basel in a friendly as summer signing Anthony Gordon played for the first time since his switch from Newcastle.

Another new arrival Karim Adeyemi put the Catalans ahead after being teed up by Raphinha, but youngster Jean Doucoure slammed home before the break to level for the Swiss.

Egyptian forward Hamza Abdelkarim restored Barca's advantage early in the second half after Adeyemi fed him.

Lamine Yamal, making his first appearance since winning the World Cup with Spain, tucked home a penalty for the third after Jules Kounde was fouled.

Kazeem Olaigbe netted from the spot for Basel before Barca substitute Jesse Bisiwu, signed from Club Brugge, hit a brace in a late but electric cameo.

Barcelona have one more friendly to play, at home against Al Ahly on Wednesday, before their La Liga season begins at Elche on August 23. *– AFP*

Ronaldo says 'probably' in last year of career: *Vogue* interview

Football

MADRID – Cristiano Ronaldo believes this year is "probably" his last as a professional footballer, the 41-year-old Portuguese superstar said in an interview with *Vogue* magazine published yesterday.

Ronaldo, who has established his place among football's all-time greats with more than 950 goals for club and country, had previously spoken of retiring "soon" or within "one or two years".

"This is probably my last year of football, and I want to leave a spectacular legacy," he told *Vogue*, saying his future after football was "all mapped out".

"I have so many things to keep me busy that to tell you just one thing is hard," he said, listing travel and padel among his favourite activities.

"Because football could leave a big hole, you have to fill your time in various ways, not just one," said the former Manchester United, Real Madrid and Juventus forward.

Al-Nassr's Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo (left) applauds his teammates from the VIP box in the stands during the Saudi Pro League match against Al-Fateh at Al-Awwal Park in Riyadh< Saudi Arabia on Saturday. – AFP

Ronaldo married his longstanding partner Georgina Rodriguez in an intimate ceremony in the Portuguese resort of Cascais on Tuesday.

He told *Vogue* he wanted to "continue to enjoy what I've earned – what we've earned. Because after all it's been 25 years with a lot of sacrifice", referring to his glittering career.

After leading Portugal to the last 16 of his last World Cup this summer, Ronaldo is due to link up with his club Al Nassr for the new Saudi Pro League season. *– AFP*

Villarreal battle back to earn draw at promoted Racing

SANTANDER, Spain – Villarreal needed two goals in just over a minute to snatch a 2-2 draw at promoted side Racing Santander yesterday in their opening La Liga clash.

The hosts claimed an early lead but Inigo Perez took a point on his debut as coach of the Yellow Submarine after Pape Gueye and Nicolas Pepe pulled the visitors level against the hosts from Cantabria.

Back in the top flight after a 14-year wait, Racing took the lead at their raucous El Sardinero stadium with an Andres Martin penalty after Santi Comesana was ruled to have fouled Jorge Salinas just inside the area.

Sergio Martinez smashed home a second for Racing with a thunderbolt from distance which ripped into the top corner.

Gueye gave Villarreal, who came third last season, a foothold with a low drive from the edge of the box in the 45th minute.

Just one minute later winger Pepe levelled for the visitors with a superb curling effort from the right side of the box.

Both teams had chances to find a winner in the second half but neither were able to claim all three points.

Spain's biggest sides have a delayed start. Atletico Madrid begin their season at home against Malaga on Wednesday.

Jose Mourinho's Real Madrid are not in action until next weekend, visiting Espanyol on August 22, while champions Barcelona travel to face Elche on August 23. *– AFP*

Odegaard says Arsenal 'want to win everything' after Community Shield success

CARDIFF – Martin Odegaard warned Arsenal's rivals that the Premier League champions want to "win everything" after starting their season by sweeping aside Manchester City in the Community Shield.

Arsenal captain Odegaard delivered a man of the match performance capped by the final goal in his team's dominant 3-0 victory in Cardiff yesterday.

Riccardo Calafiori netted Arsenal's opener after just 24 seconds and Kai Havertz was also on the scoresheet before half-time in the annual curtain raiser to the English top-flight season.

Just four months ago, Odegaard lifted Arsenal's first Premier League crown since 2004 after they finished seven points ahead of second-placed City.

The Norway midfielder believes the dynamic display against City, now managed by Enzo Maresca instead of Pep Guardiola, showed the north Londoners have not lost their hunger for silverware.

"We played some brilliant football. Great performance and a great way to start the season," Maresca said.

"We showed our level today [yesterday]. We're showed we're ready. We're serious and we want to do it again. We want to attack it. We want to do it again.

"When you get a taste of how nice it is you want to do it again. We want to win everything."

Arsenal's English defender Ben White stands over Manchester City's Croatian defender Josko Gvardiol during the English FA Community Shield match at The Principality Stadium, in Cardiff, south Wales yesterday. – AFP

Installed as the bookmakers' favourites for a second successive title, Arsenal begin their Premier League charge at home to promoted Coventry on August 21.

'Things to work on'

City open their bid for a first title since 2024 with a visit from Bournemouth on August 24 and Maresca admitted they have a lot to improve before then.

"We have many things to work on. The season's just started so there are many things we need to do better," he said.

"The goal we conceded after 24 seconds unfortunately affected the game. Disappointed with that because in this kind of game the level is so similar that when you concede a goal, it then becomes difficult."

Maresca endured the joint-heaviest defeat by a City manager in their first game in charge, tying a 4-1 loss for Harry Newbould's side against Arsenal in 1906.

It was also Maresca's joint-worst loss as a manager in England after a 3-0 defeat against Brighton during his time with Chelsea in 2025.

Since the start of the 2023-24 season, City have only won two of their nine matches against Arsenal, showing the widening gap between them that Maresca must find a way to close.

"After the goal, the reaction was quite good. We had three or four chances to score and draw the game. Unfortunately we conceded the second one and it became more complicated," he said.

"From next Sunday we start the Premier League and the focus has to be about that." *– AFP*

Maddison boosts Spurs as he features in Hoffenheim friendly

Football

LONDON – James Maddison played his first minutes of pre-season as Tottenham drew 2-2 with Hoffenheim in a friendly at the club's Hotspur Way training ground yesterday.

Goals by Ben Davies and young forward Luca Williams-Barnett ensured Roberto De Zerbi's men ended their friendly programme unbeaten.

This was the second of Spurs' two fixtures with the Bundesliga side following the Premier League club's 3-0 win in front of over 54,000 fans at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium last Saturday.

Maddison featured for 45 minutes in an encouraging sign for Spurs following an injury-hit 18 months where he suffered two serious knee injuries.

But the absence of Micky van de Ven, Destiny Udogie and Dominic Solanke ahead of their Premier League opener at Brentford remains a concern for Tottenham.

New signing Mateus Fernandes played 90 minutes yesterday as did Kevin Danso and Rodrigo Bentancur.

Spurs fell behind in the 16th minute when Adam Hlozek sent Brandon Austin the wrong way from the penalty spot after Maddison had been penalised for a foul, but the England playmaker was involved in positive fashion for the hosts four minutes later as Davies equalised from a corner.

Highly-regarded 17-year-old Williams-Barnett made it 2-1 in first-half stoppage-time with a fine finish, but Hoffenheim earned a draw after Valentin Gendrey scored in the 55th minute. *– AFP*

Djokovic feels the heat in Cincinnati defeat, Zverev wins all-nighter

Tennis

CINCINNATI – Novak Djokovic suffered from punishing heat and humidity on Saturday but made a match of it before falling 2-6, 6-4, 6-4 to Thiago Tirante in what could be the Serb's last appearance at the ATP-WTA Cincinnati Masters.

The second-round battle lasted for more than two and a half hours, and it proved too much for the 24-time Grand Slam champion who was playing his first match since he lost to Jannik Sinner in the Wimbledon semi-finals more than a month ago.

Top-seeded Alexander Zverev, the French Open champion who fell to Sinner in the Wimbledon final, was more fortunate, squeezing out an opening 3-6, 6-3, 6-3 victory over Cameron Norrie in a match that took two hours and 45 minutes and ended at 2:15 a.m. [local time]

Britain's Norrie has now lost all eight of his matches against the German, winner of the Cincinnati title five years ago who is hoping a return to Ohio will help him shake off an abrupt exit in Canada last week.

Norrie had wrapped up the opening set before Zverev began to find his footing to level the match.

Norrie saved six break points in a 12-minute game to begin the deciding set but was broken twice as Zverev advanced.

"I needed to get a match rhythm," Zverev said. "The confidence was not there after Canada.

"The first set was not great, but the other two were at a high level and I'm happy about that."

Djokovic, who claimed the last of his three Cincinnati titles in 2023, claimed the opening set against Argentina's Tirante with little fuss.

But the sweltering afternoon temperatures took a toll.

"It was a combination of the heat and humidity, all those things," he said. "Everything involved makes it worse."

Djokovic won a brutal 18-minute third game of the second, saving four break points over nine deuces. But he was bent over in distress between several points and even dropped to his hands and knees after one particularly gruelling exchange.

Alexandra Eala of the Philippines plays Elena-Gabriela Ruse of Romania during the Cincinnati Open at the Lindner Family Tennis Center on Saturday in Mason, Ohio. – AFP

Djokovic took a medical timeout after that game, with the physio and then a doctor coming on court to assist with assessments and ice towels.

After Tirante took the second set both players cooled off in the locker room.

Slightly revived, Djokovic set the pace again in the deciding set. But it all went wrong in the ninth game, when Djokovic saved three break points before getting it wrong on a drop shot to bring up a fourth break chance that his opponent converted.

Tirante clinched the biggest win of his career in the next game as Djokovic again failed to land a drop shot on match point.

The Serb, who must now try to regroup before the US Open starts on August 30, admitted he might have played his last match in Cincy.

"It looks like I won't be back, unfortunately to play here," he said.

Tirante called the win the best of his career.

"I managed the nerves of playing a legend like Novak. It was all so much pressure."

'Focused' Eala advances

In the WTA draw, Philippines sensation Alexandra Eala advanced to the third round 6-1, 3-0 as injured Elena-Gabriela Ruse quit their match during a weather delay.

The Romanian had received treatment on her right ankle just before play was halted by a thunderstorm, Ruse pulling the plug during the delay.

Eala, the emerging WTA star who captured her first WTA title in Washington this month, will next play ninth-seeded American Amanda Anisimova, who beat Turk Zeynep Sonmez 6-2, 6-3.

"I was playing well and feeling really focused," Eala said. "I tried to stay in the zone.

"A retirement is not the way you want to end a match," she added. "Injuries are not fun."

Roland Garros finalist Maja Chwalinska advanced 6-2, 6-2 over Spain's Cristina Bucsa.

Wimbledon winner Linda Noskova followed suit with her 6-3, 6-3 defeat of Britain's Katie Boulter.

There was heartbreak for Payton Stearns, who grew up just blocks from the tennis centre. She lost 7-6 (9/7), 1-6, 7-5 to Dane Clara Tauson who played through back pain but rallied from 4-1 down in the final set to win. – *AFP*

India's Sindhu backs monkey measures as badminton worlds set to open

Badminton

NEW DELHI – Indian badminton star P.V. Sindhu yesterday backed New Delhi to deliver a successful world championships, dismissing concerns over marauding monkeys and bothersome birds.

The showpiece returns to India after 17 years when the action begins today at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium.

At the India Open in January at the same venue a monkey was spotted in the stands while bird droppings and debris from a nest disrupted play.

This time monkey whisperers - men who scare off rhesus macaques by imitating the calls of the larger langurs - have been hired to keep the troublesome primates at bay.

"I really appreciate their effort for doing it," Sindhu told reporters in response to a question on hiring a team of "monkey wallahs".

"I have come yesterday [Saturday]and played today [yesterday], we have had really really good sessions out there," said Sindhu, 31, an Olympic silver and bronze medallist.

"Everything is comfortable and everything is good, from the washrooms to the people out here. They have put in all the efforts to make this happen."

The 2019 world champion said the efforts of the organisers have ensured "that this will be one of the greatest world championships".

"Being an Indian I can proudly say that we are fortunate and happy to play here at the home ground."

Sindhu arrives at the tournament in top form after winning the Japan Open last month, ending a two-year wait for a major title.

"Definitely, after winning the Japan Open that gave me a lot of boost and lot of confidence," said Sindhu.

"Looking forward for the world championships to start and since it's happening in India, really excited."

A long-time standard-bearer for Indian badminton, Sindhu said her motivation remained as strong as ever despite more than a decade playing at elite level.

"The hunger towards the game hasn't changed. I know it is in me and I can still do it," she said.

Sindhu is seeded ninth and faces Ireland's Sophia Noble in the first round. – *AFP*

'Something we dreamed of': Bangladesh celebrates historic cricket win

Bangladesh player Hasan Mahmud poses with his man-of-the-match award after his team's victory against Australia on the fourth day of their first cricket Test match at Marrara Stadium in Darwin yesterday. – AFP

Cricket

DHAKA – Former players and fans hailed Bangladesh's first-ever Test win in Australia yesterday as the country's biggest achievement in the five-day game, saying it could be a turning point for their cricketing ambitions.

Bangladesh sealed a historic nine-wicket thrashing inside four days in Darwin, marking their first ever Test victory on Australian soil and only second against their formidable opponents.

"This is, I think, the biggest achievement for Bangladesh cricket in Test matches," former captain Akram Khan told AFP.

"It was something we dreamed of but perhaps none of us expected Bangladesh to dominate and win like this.

"We are extremely happy and proud."

Akram said the big win was built on a complete team performance rather than individual brilliance.

Fast bowler Hasan Mahmud laid the foundation with a career-best 6-55 as Australia were bowled out for 198 on the opening day.

Bangladesh then took charge through Tanzid Hasan's maiden Test century, backed by important contributions from captain Najmul Hossain Shanto and all-rounder Mehidy Hasan Miraz.

Bangladesh Cricket Board president Tamim Iqbal said the way the team outplayed Australia was "extraordinary".

"Playing in Australia is difficult for any team," he told reporters in Dhaka. "After 23 years, the way Bangladesh went there and played cricket and won, the credit goes 1,000 percent to them."

Former spinner and national selector Abdur Razzak said the victory strengthened Bangladesh's case for more Test opportunities against Australia.

This was just the seventh Test match between the teams.

"If you look at this Test and our position in the World Test Championship, there is no reason why we should not get more opportunities," he said.

Razzak credited years of investment in domestic first-class cricket and Bangladesh's Test programme for the team's progress.

Former Bangladesh women's captain Rumana Ahmed said the team's emphatic all-round display made the win especially significant.

"Hasan Mahmud was back in the team after a long time and he did very well, taking six wickets in the first innings. That was a major factor," she said.

"Tanzid's hundred was historic for him as well. The batters took responsibility and scoring more than 400 in the first innings was extraordinary."

The result was all the more remarkable because Bangladesh had been bowled out for just 54 by a Cricket Australia XI in a warm-up match days earlier.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman congratulated the team on a video call with the players.

"We're all eagerly waiting to welcome you home," he said on social media.

Die-hard fans also savoured the win.

"As a cricket fan of Bangladesh we don't get occasions to celebrate very often," Sefat Hasan Sumaiya said.

"Winning against Australia in Australia seems surreal. It feels like a national festival."

Another fan, Sahadat Ahmed Bhuiya, called it one of the defining victories in the nation's cricket history.

"Winning a Test in Australia within four days is a huge achievement," he said. – *AFP*

Fans line Welsh streets as Bonnie Tyler body's returns for funeral

MUMBLES – Bonnie Tyler fans lined the streets of a south Wales suburb on Saturday to pay their respects as the late Welsh singer's coffin returned to her home there ahead of her funeral.

Best known for her powerful, haunting love song "Total Eclipse of the Heart", Tyler died in hospital in Portugal last month. She was 75.

She will be laid to rest today following her funeral in the nearby city of Swansea, which is set to be a celebration of her life attended by family and friends.

Thousands of people flocked onto the streets of Mumbles to watch the procession transporting her coffin back to her home, an AFP reporter saw.

The crowd burst into applause and a rendition of "Total Eclipse Of The Heart" broke out as it made its way through the coastal village on Swansea's southwestern edge.

Some threw flowers onto the hearse carrying her coffin, which was draped in the Welsh flag and accompanied by a framed photograph of the singer.

Teenager Carys Edwards, 18, was among those to turn out with her mum, calling the Welsh legend "an inspiration to everybody".

"Her music touched a lot of people, especially me," she said. "I'm quite surprised how many people came here today, but then not as well, because she was such an icon.

"When we found out she passed away, it was such a heartbreak to all of us. We cried and everything."

Edwards's mum Melanie Smith, 53, added: "Most importantly, she was a Swansea girl, and she didn't forget that."

'Pay our respects'

Tyler, whose real name was Gaynor Hopkins, was born and raised in a traditional coal mining village northwest of Swansea, and divided her time between south Wales and Portugal in recent years.

With her distinctive husky voice, tousled mane of blonde hair and black eyeliner, Tyler was instantly recognisable as the queen of the 1980s power ballad.

She achieved international fame that decade with the release of her "Total Eclipse" mega-hit, which topped the charts in the United States and Britain.

Following her July 8 death, her family said she had passed away as a result of an unspecified illness that she was being treated for, prompting tributes from stars of music and film as well as other figures worldwide.

It came just months after she was treated in intensive care after being placed in an induced coma following an emergency intestinal surgery.

Michael Bone, 58, and his partner Alan Hawkins, 54, travelled from central England to Mumbles "to pay our respects".

"For me personally, it's because in my teens, her music was quite prolific. For me it was her most iconic period, in the 1980s."

– AFP

Mourners and fans line the streets to pay their respects as a hearse carrying the coffin of the late singer Bonnie Tyler is driven through her home town of Mumbles, southwest Wales, on Sunday. – AFP

Monica Bellucci & Florin Serban win at Locarno Film Festival

GENEVA, Switzerland – "You Don't Belong Here" by Romanian director Florin Serban won the Golden Leopard on Saturday at the 79th Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland, while Italian star Monica Bellucci won an acting award in another movie.

Serban, a leading figure of the Romanian New Wave, said on the festival website that his film was "above all, a portrait of a way of seeing the world that may be disappearing. Or perhaps should disappear."

The jury honoured Monica Bellucci for her role in "Kettice" by Giovanni Tortorici, a film about teenagers' search for identity and desire for freedom.

South Korean actress Kim Minhee also won an acting award for "Nowhere to Lay My Eyes," by Hong Sangsoo, the story of a brother and sister visiting their mother on Jeju Island.

Serban's dark film clocks in at more than two-and-a-half hours, exploring the relationship between Marius, the head doctor at the hospital in his small hometown, and his teenage son Ioan, whom he has raised alone since his wife's death.

Marius's world is turned upside down when he learns that the police suspect his son of murder. The festival jury praised the film for the "strength of its writing, the uniqueness of its vision, and its exceptional command of film language".

Seventeen films competed for the Golden Leopard, the highest honour at the film event held every summer in the small Swiss town on the shores of Lake Maggiore. It comes with a prize of 75,000 Swiss francs (US$92,000), shared between director and producer.

– AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 23°C~33°C	Manila 25°C~28°C	New York 21°C~30°C	Lisbon 20°C~32°C
Shanghai 24°C~33°C	Bangkok 26°C~35°C	London 16°C~26°C	Rio de Janeiro 18°C~27°C
Hong Kong 24°C~31°C	Tokyo 21°C~31°C	Frankfurt 14°C~24°C	Luanda 19°C~23°C
Taipei 25°C~34°C	Singapore 25°C~33°C	Vancouver 15°C~24°C	Maputo 13°C~26°C
Guangzhou 25°C~33°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~35°C	Paris 16°C~29°C	Dili 20°C~31°C
Nanjing 23°C~32°C	Jakarta 23°C~33°C	Moscow 12°C~24°C	São Tomé 24°C~31°C
Guilin 23°C~34°C	Seoul 23°C~29°C	Las Vegas 27°C~40°C	Praia 24°C~31°C
Xi'an 21°C~29°C	Sydney 12°C~18°C	Monte Carlo 24°C~31°C	Bissau 23°C~31°C

Disney reveals 'X-Men' cast, slate of sequels at D23 fan event

Paula RAMON

ANAHEIM – Adam Driver, Inde Navarrette and Sadie Sink will be among those joining the cast of Marvel's next "X-Men" movie, Disney announced at its biennial D23 fan gathering in California on Friday.

Marvel Studios chief Kevin Feige took to the stage at Honda Centre on the first night of the three-day convention to give more than 10,000 fans a sneak peek of the so-far untitled film, which is slated for a May 2028 release.

Sink will reprise her role in "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" as Jean Grey, while Navarrette will play Rogue. The cast also includes Kit Connor (Cyclops), Samara Weaving (Emma Frost), Christopher Abbott (Professor Xavier) and Maya Boyd (Storm).

Driver, who joined the event via video, will play the villain Nathaniel Milbury.

"Kevin and I have been talking for years about maybe joining the Marvel Cinematic Universe. And I think we finally found the perfect film at the perfect time," Driver said.

Feige also showed footage from "Avengers: Doomsday," set to be released in December, which will bring together the Avengers, the Fantastic Four, X-Men and Wakandan warriors in an epic clash against the evil Doctor Doom, played by Robert Downey Jr.

Another highlight was the first look at Ryan Gosling in Lucasfilm's "Star Wars: Starfighter," which will hit the big screen in 2027 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of "Star Wars."

Cosplayers pose at "D23: The Ultimate Disney Fan Event" outside the Anaheim Convention Centre in Anaheim, California, on Friday. – AFP

Sequels announced

Disney CEO Josh D'Amaro, who took over in March, kickstarted this year's D23 event, which has become a platform for studios to showcase their latest projects alongside stars, creatives and directors.

Pixar offered previews of its Italian fable "Gatto" and supernatural tale "Ghost Market," as well as "The Incredibles 3" and "Coco 2."

Other sequels unveiled include "Lilo & Stitch 2," "Ice Age: Boiling Point" and "Frozen 3," promoted by stars Kristen Bell, Idina Menzel and Josh Gad.

"Everything's a sequel here," said attendee Gary Aurin, who came to D23 with his son.

"That's Disney, so you just gotta get used to it."

Director Jon Favreau took to the stage to introduce "Oswald the Lucky Rabbit," a mini-series to debut next year on the Disney+ platform.

The cartoon rabbit Oswald preceded Mickey Mouse and was created by Walt Disney and Ub Iwerks in 1927 for Universal Pictures. Disney acquired the rights to the character in 2006.

D23 will wrapped up yesterday. *– AFP*

Mirror cats

People wearing masks made of mirrors dance during the Sziget Festival at Obuda Island, in Budapest, Hungary, on Thursday. *– AFP*

Danger for last man

Afghan roller skaters perform stunts during celebrations to mark the fifth anniversary of the Taliban government's return to power, near the Eidgah Mosque in Kabul on Saturday.
Dancing to loud patriotic music and taking selfies, supporters of the Taliban rallied in central Kabul on Saturday to celebrate the government's five years in power. *– AFP*

Morning rush hour

Wildebeests and zebras cross the Mara River in the Maasai Mara National Reserve in Narok, Kenya, on Friday. The Great Wildebeest Migration is world-famous, but the Maasai Mara has more stories beyond the dramatic river crossings. Herds rest and gather strength. Plants grow and fade. All wildlife follows the rhythm of the savanna, sustaining this land's enduring life. *– Xinhua*

Get back!!!

Corgi dogs take part in a 50m race during the Corgi Race in the Vingis Park in Vilnius, Lithuania on Saturday.
For the fifth time Vilnius has hosted the Corgi Race and costume contest inviting corgis from across Europe. *– AFP*

Black Beauty

Great Britain's Charlotte Fry riding Glamourdale competes in the Grand Prix Freestyle Individual Final of the FEI Dressage World Championship equestrian event Saturday in Aachen, western Germany. *– AFP*

Fragrant carpet

Volunteers arrange flowers to make a flower carpet in the Grand-Place during the 24th Brussels' Flower Carpet show in Brussels on Thursday.
The 2026 edition of the Grand-Place Flower Carpet celebrates 160 years of Belgian-Japanese diplomatic relations. *– AFP*