

Sam vows 4 focus areas for Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (centre) addresses yesterday's press conference about Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan at Government Headquarters as other officials look on, comprising (from left to right) Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man, Secretary for Security Chan Tsz King, Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak, Secretary for Economy and Finance Dora Ng Wai Han, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam, and Policy Research and Regional Development Bureau (DSEPDR) Director Cheong Chok Man. – Photo: Tony Wong

Tony Wong

The local government yesterday announced and published the final version of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan.

Addressing a one-hour press conference yesterday afternoon, Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai stressed the government's commitment to advancing the implementation of the plan in four major aspects: promoting Macau's appropriate economic diversification with its four future large-scale projects as key drivers, advancing Hengqin's development, accelerating Macau's urban renewal, and better integrating Macau's development into the nation's development.

The chief executive also described the commencement of the implementation of the 3rd Five-Year Plan as "a major event" this year for the local government and Macau's civil society as well. For the next step, he said, the government will draft details aiming to ensure that all major tasks and targets listed by the 3rd Five-Year Plan will be implemented as scheduled.

The government held a 40-day public consultation between May 20 and June 28 on its drafting of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan. Afterwards, the government assessed the opinions gathered during the consultation period and incorporated them into the plan's final version, which was published yesterday.

Yesterday's press conference was held at Government Headquarters. Chaired by Sam, it was also attended by his five policy secretaries and Policy Research and Regional Development Bureau (DSEPDR) Director Cheong Chok Man. The bureau is the public entity tasked with the drafting of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan.

The plan's final version, available in Chinese and Portuguese, can be downloaded from the bureau's website on the plan (<https://www.dseprd.gov.mo/zh-hant/event/plan3/plan3>).

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

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

During the press conference, Sam said that the 3rd Five-Year Plan is a blueprint that reflects scientific rigour, has a forward-looking vision, and is practical in terms of feasibility, underlining that the plan aims to put into practice the spirit of President Xi Jinping's various important speeches and instructions concerning Macau's development.

Continued on p.7

Memory may involve brain chemistry, not just electrical signals: study

JERUSALEM – Israeli researchers have linked memory to brain chemistry, not just electrical signals, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem said in a statement yesterday.

The study, published in the *International Journal of Psychiatry Research*, explored how memories may be created and retrieved in the brain.

The researchers suggested that memory may involve chemical interactions among brain cells, the material surrounding them, as well as electrical signals between neurons.

They focused in particular on astrocytes, brain cells that support and interact with neurons, and on chemicals such as metal ions and neurotransmitters.

The study proposed that these chemical processes may help the brain store information and connect memories with emotions. For example, a smell, song, or familiar voice can bring back a memory while also triggering a strong emotional response.

The researchers said their theory could offer a different way to think about artificial intelligence (AI).

While computers can store and process information, the researchers questioned whether increasingly powerful AI systems could develop consciousness without the biological and chemical processes found in living brains. – Xinhua



A child experiences jasmine tea scenting under the guidance of an artisan at the Shangxiahang historical and cultural block in Fuzhou, Fujian Province, on Monday. Jasmine tea is tea scented with the aroma of jasmine blossoms and typically has green tea as its base. The Jasmine tea scenting techniques of Fuzhou have been enlisted as a state-level intangible cultural heritage in China. In recent years, businesses in Fuzhou have built on the traditional tea culture while developing innovative jasmine tea inspired product categories such as beverages, desserts and daily-use items. Meanwhile, the city has rolled out measures to promote jasmine tea brands and the integration of tea culture and tourism, aiming to stimulate cultural and tourism consumption. – Xinhua

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The Macau Post Daily

Xi calls for stronger China-Ecuador synergy in development strategies

President Xi Jinping yesterday emphasised that China and Ecuador should strengthen the synergy of their development strategies and implement the cooperation plan for jointly building the Belt and Road (B&R). – Story on p. 8

Trump says no Iran talks planned, claims Hormuz 'new US territory'

US President Donald Trump said yesterday that no talks with Iran are under way or scheduled, as he posted a map showing the Strait of Hormuz as a new American territory in a fresh jibe at Tehran. – Story on p. 11

Lula hails new oil find as 'passport to the future'

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on Monday hailed the discovery of oil near the Amazon coast as a "passport to the future," despite strong opposition to drilling in the area from environmentalists. – Story on p. 12

Spokesperson for Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council: Macao's New Five-Year Plan Guides High-Quality Development to Open New Vistas and Write a New Chapter

A spokesperson for the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council issued a statement yesterday, stating that the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government released Macao's Third Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development (2026–2030) yesterday.

This marks another vital step in the successful practice of “One Country, Two Systems” with Macao characteristics, holding milestone significance by providing a long-term roadmap to foster Macao's high-quality development.

The spokesperson noted that the new Five-Year Plan earnestly implements the spirit of President Xi Jinping's important instructions, reflecting higher strategic vision and clearer direction.

The plan fully and faithfully adheres to the principle of “One Country, Two Systems”, actively aligns with the country's 15th Five-Year Plan, balances development and security, and upholds and improves the executive-led system.

Closely focusing on Macao's strategic positioning conferred by the Country – to act as “One Centre, One Platform, and One Base” and to build an international talent hub – the plan provides top-level design and systematic planning for Macao's development over the next five years and beyond, demonstrating foresight, initiative, and a scientific approach.

Serving as a programmatic document to guide the comprehensive development of various undertakings in Macao, it offers essential guidance for the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) to further enhance governance efficiency, leverage its unique strengths, and achieve better self-development through integrating into and serving the overall development of the nation.

The spokesperson pointed out that the new Five-Year Plan is pragmatic, progressive, focused, targeted, and robust, featuring strong relevance and practical feasibility.

Adhering to reform and innovation, the plan focuses on promoting appropriate economic diversification. It highlights four major flagship projects – Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town, the Macao International Integrated Tourism and Culture Zone, Macao Science and Technology Research and Development Industrial Park, and the Macao International Airport Hengqin Upstream Cargo Terminal – alongside a government guidance fund as key drivers to actively build a new structure for diversified industrial growth.

The plan remains goal-oriented and problem-focused, aiming to accelerate the construction of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin and foster the integrated development of education, science and technology, and human resources.

Guided by a people-centred approach, the plan dedicates a separate chapter to urban renewal and aims to continuously improve public well-being across education, employment, housing, elderly care, and poverty alleviation, giving residents a greater sense of gain, happiness, and security.

The MSAR Government will also establish lists of key projects, assign responsibilities for major tasks, and outline key reform measures to break down deployment targets and ensure the plan is thoroughly implemented.

The spokesperson emphasised that the formulation of Macao's new Five-Year Plan fully demonstrates the MSAR Government's



Front cover of the 150-page Chinese-language booklet on the Macao SAR's Third Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development (2026–2030), released by the local government yesterday.

sense of responsibility and the unity and drive of Macao society.

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai and the MSAR Government have faithfully fulfilled their responsibilities as the primary stewards and party accountable.

They conducted comprehensive, in-depth research to formulate the plan, organized a 40-day public consultation, and held 14 consultation sessions to gather wide-ranging feedback.

The Legislative Assembly actively cooperated and participated in research, diligently gathering and reflecting public opinion while maintaining close, constructive communication with government departments.

All sectors of society responded enthusiastically, with major associations mobilizing members to hold discussions and submit proposals, while professionals and residents proactively contributed ideas through diverse channels.

During the consultation period, 1,716 submissions comprising 8,230 specific comments were received, over 90 percent of which were positive. This represents another vivid practice of high-quality democracy with Macao characteristics, consolidating strong consensus and momentum across Macao society to jointly build a better home.

The spokesperson concluded that a grand blueprint has been drawn up and the clarion call sounded.

Every Macao resident is a participant, implementer, and beneficiary of this new Five-Year Plan.

With the full support of the Central People's Government and the Chinese mainland, and under the leadership of Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai and the MSAR Government, all sectors of Macao society will unite, seize opportunities, and work with solid dedication under the plan's guidance. Together, they will continually advance Macao's high-quality development, opening new vistas and writing a new chapter to make greater contributions to the building of a strong nation and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

End

N.B. The translation of the unabridged statement from Chinese was arranged, reviewed and edited by The Macau Post Daily.

Spokesperson for Liaison Office of Central People's Government in Macao: Supporting Macao to Achieve Better Development Led by New Five-Year Plan

Yesterday, the Third Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the Macao Special Administrative Region (2026–2030) was officially published.

Commenting on the release, a spokesperson for the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in Macao stated that “a single plan guides the future”, expressing support for Macao to achieve better development led by the new Five-Year Plan and to propel all undertakings in Macao to a new level.

The spokesperson remarked that Macao's new Five-Year Plan explores building a new governance model that integrates a “capable government” with an “efficient market”, marking a milestone significance.

The Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Government has thoroughly implemented the spirit of President Xi Jinping's important instructions, combining governance in accordance with the law with active responsibility.

By proactively aligning with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, the MSAR Government has established top-level design and systematic planning for Macao's development over the next five years.

This represents another pioneering accomplishment in the successful practice of “One Country, Two Systems” with Macao characteristics, holding great significance for promoting Macao's integration into and service towards the overall national development, as well as achieving Macao's high-quality development.

The spokesperson pointed out that Macao's new Five-Year Plan is a collective creation of all Macao residents, fully reflecting the expectations and consensus of all sectors of society.

During the drafting process, the MSAR Government adopted a pragmatic approach of “drafting the plan with open doors” to gather a wide range of public suggestions.

It held 14 consultation sessions and received a total of 1,716 submissions containing 8,230 opinions, ensuring that public expectations, civic wisdom, and expert advice were fully incorporated.

This demonstrates the MSAR Government's resolve and capacity to adhere to a people-centred approach,

pursue reform, and assume responsibility.

It also highlights the strong consensus and desire among all sectors of Macao society to unite, accelerate appropriate economic diversification, participate deeply in the development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), and better integrate into and serve overall national development.

Centered on long-term prospects while highlighting key priorities, the new Five-Year Plan presents a comprehensive blueprint and vision for Macao's development over the next five years.

The plan outlines a series of key measures, including safeguarding national security and social stability, improving MSAR governance efficiency, solidly promoting appropriate economic diversification, advancing high-quality construction of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, accelerating urban renewal, effectively guaranteeing and improving public welfare, and better integrating into and serving overall national development.

Lists detailing key projects, division of responsibilities for key initiatives, and major reform measures will also be established.

Together, these will form a programmatic document to guide Macao's development over the next five years.

The spokesperson added that all sectors of Macao society are participants, practitioners, and beneficiaries of the plan.

It is hoped that all residents will take active action, pool their wisdom and strength, and support the MSAR Government in delivering each measure outlined in the plan.

The Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the MSAR will, as always, support the Chief Executive and the MSAR Government in fulfilling their duties as the primary stewards and responsible authorities, uniting and leading all sectors of society to turn this blueprint into reality. We are confident that, guided by the new Five-Year Plan, Macao's tomorrow will be even brighter.”

End

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS. OCCASIONAL SHOWERS. A FEW THUNDERSTORMS AT FIRST. FORCE 4 TO 6 EAST TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS WITH GUSTS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 70% AND 98%.



26°C~31°C

Source: SMG

Third Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the Macao Special Administrative Region (2026-2030) Highlights

The years 2026 to 2030 are a crucial period for Macao, marking a new stage in the journey towards high-quality development. We must intensively and thoroughly implement the spirit of the series of important speeches and instructions of President Xi Jinping, to fully and accurately implement the "One country, two systems" principle, firmly seize the significant opportunities during the period covered by the country's 15th Five-Year Plan, reform with determination and fulfil responsibilities, promote appropriate economic diversification, enhance administrative effectiveness, raise the platform for opening up to the outside world to a higher level, maintain social harmony and stability, better integrate with and contribute to national development, and diligently forging ahead for quality development of "One country, two systems" with Macao characteristics.

Basic Principles

- Effectively safeguarding the country's sovereignty, security and development interests;
- Maintaining and perfecting the executive-led administration;
- Continuously advancing reform and innovations;
- Promoting appropriate economic diversification;
- Maintaining the people-centred approach;
- Persisting with opening up and inclusiveness;
- Integrating with and contributing to national development;
- Strengthening liaison and coordination; and
- Adopting goal-oriented and problem-based approaches.

Development Goals

- Ensure full implementation of the holistic approach to national security;
- Further enhance the effectiveness of lawful governance;
- Achieve substantial progress in appropriate economic diversification;
- Ensure progress with high-quality development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin;
- Yield visible results from the integrated development of education, technology and talent;
- Optimise progressively the protections for the people's well-being;
- Achieve significant progress in building a beautiful "smart" Macao; and
- Strengthen integration with, and support for, national development.

1. Safeguarding National Security and Social Stability

Optimising and perfecting the system and mechanism for safeguarding national security

Enhancing Law Enforcement Capabilities

Building a safe city with high standards

Bolstering growth of patriotic forces



2. Enhancing the Effectiveness of the MSAR's Governance

Deepening public administration reform

- Enhance overall liaison and coordination capability;
- Reorganise the functions and structures of public departments;
- Deepen the development of e-governance;
- Reform the civil servant management system;
- Increase positive interactions between the Government and society;
- Perfect community-level governance; and
- Perfect system on anti-corruption, auditing and supervision.

Building Macao as a modern city governed by the rule of law

- Maintain and perfect the executive-led administration;
- Promote modernisation of the legal system;
- Perfect the judicial system and enhance judicial efficiency; and
- Deepen regional and international legal cooperation.



3. Steadily Advancing Appropriate Economic Diversification

Consolidating and enhancing Macao's advantages as a world centre of tourism and leisure

Creating a new paradigm for industrial diversification

- Establish government guidance fund;
- Facilitate the development of traditional Chinese medicine and Big Health industries, expedite the development of a specialised financial services industry, develop high technology industries that are suitable for Macao, enhance Macao's competitiveness in the MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions) and trade industries, and promote sustainable development of cultural and sport industries; and
- Expedite development of the digital economy and fully support transformation and upgrading of traditional industries.

Creating a more competitive business environment

Boosting the competitiveness of SMEs



4. Advancing High-quality Development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin

Deepening the integrated development of "Macao + Hengqin"

- Actively implement and perfect the model of "mutual discussion, joint construction, joint administration and shared benefits";
- Continuously deepen "institutional connectivity" of rules and mechanisms, and steadily implement "hardware connectivity" of infrastructure; and
- Jointly develop spatial infrastructure for iconic projects and industries.

Promoting joint industrial development between Macao and Hengqin

- Jointly develop a hub for culture, tourism, conventions and exhibitions, and commerce and trade; create a new traditional Chinese medicine and Big Health industrial chain; build a new Macao-Hengqin cross-boundary financial landscape and jointly cultivate high-tech industries; and
- Optimise the business environment and strengthen solicitation of investments.

Achieving in-depth integration of people's livelihoods



5. Coordinating Integrated Development of Education, Technology and Talent

Developing a high-quality Macao education system

Strengthening technological innovation and development

Building a hub for attracting international high-end talented people

6. Effectively Securing and Optimising People's Livelihoods

Perfecting the social security system

Optimising the population policy

Safeguarding local residents' employment rights

Improving healthcare service standards

Optimising the housing policy

Promoting culture and sports

Supporting the growth and success of the younger generation



7. Building a Beautiful "Smart" Macao

Refining urban planning

- Continuously optimise urban planning;
- Strengthen land resource management; and
- Strengthen maritime area management and utilisation.

Expediting urban renewal

- Perfect the system and mechanism for urban renewal;
- Implement the protective renewal and revitalisation of the neighbourhood of the Ruins of St Paul's; and
- Accelerate comprehensive renewal of old districts and old buildings such as lao Hon.



Accelerating urban development

Optimising traffic management

Enhancing nature conservation



8. Better Integrating with and Contributing to National Development

Enhancing exchanges and cooperation with the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong

- Actively participate in high-quality development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area;
- Deepen cooperation with Chinese mainland provinces and cities; and
- Strengthen Hong Kong-Macao cooperation.

Building an important bridgehead for the country's high-level opening-up

- Expand the functions and contents of the platform between China and Portuguese (Spanish) -speaking countries;
- Intensively participate in high-quality joint development of the "Belt and Road" initiative; and
- Strengthen city-friendly development and external exchanges and cooperation.

Creating an important window for mutual learning and exchanges between Chinese and Western civilisations

- Perfect the working mechanism for constructing "One Base";
- Leverage Macao's East-meets-West advantages, to facilitate international cultural exchanges; and
- Tell good Macao stories based on the principle of "One country, two systems".

9. Planning Implementation of Protective Measures

Strengthening coordination and connectivity for the Plan

Improving the mechanism for implementing the Plan





Local filmmaker Keo Lou explores civilian trauma in wartime

Interview by William Chan

Following the success of last year's "The Rhythm of War" (烽火之聲) – which depicted Macau compatriots supporting their nation's resistance during the 1938 fall of Guangdong through the narrative of a Ne Zha opera troupe* – local filmmaker Keo Lou (勞嘉濤) has continued exploring wartime themes with his latest release, "Peaceful Journey" (和平之路), as he told the *Post* in an online interview last week.

Directed by Lou's longtime collaborator Sam Choi (蔡德銘), with Lou starring and co-producing, "Peaceful Journey" is a black-and-white narrative short film. While both short productions received financial support from the Macao Cultural Development Fund and draw upon the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, they offer starkly contrasting artistic perspectives and storytelling styles.

Where "The Rhythm of War" relied on a direct narrative with intense dramatic conflict, as I wrote in my review of the 15-minute film earlier this year, "Peaceful Journey" abandons traditional, grand, soldier-centric wartime narratives entirely. Instead, it turns an intimate lens toward the deep psychological trauma experienced by ordinary civilians amidst war. Set in the winter of 1938 following the fall of Guangzhou, the story follows a farmer, played by Lou. After losing his seven-year-old son while fleeing the invasion, the farmer backtracks into the war-torn wilderness of Wuyi and Jiangmen to search for the boy, clutching only a remaining wooden pendant.

Rendered in stark monochrome, Lou noted that the film depicts the protagonist trapped in an agonizing, endless loop through deserted villages. As surrounding refugees flee toward Hong Kong or Macau – urgently urging him to seek safety in Macau as well – the farmer remains obsessively fixated on finding his son. Rather than showcasing physical battles against enemy forces, the film focuses on the devastating psychological destruction inflicted on ordinary people. "This intense inner conflict and poignant atmospheric depth ultimately earned the short film significant praise from international film festival judges," Lou underlined.

The short film has not yet been released to the public.

Lou's versatility in filmmaking

Transitioning between the roles of producer, director, and actor has provided Lou with a valuable perspective on cinematic style. He noted that visual language in cinema is infinite: straightforward commercial styles easily attract mainstream audiences, while introspective works expand global awareness through international film festivals. "Crafting two drastically different films under the exact same historical backdrop served as an invaluable exploration for our creative team," he said.

Playing the tragic father required intense physical and emotional immersion, Lou said, adding that to authentically portray a starving father searching for his missing son in a war zone, he grew a full beard over a month and deliberately restricted his food intake to physically experience genuine hunger and emotional exhaustion.

Meanwhile, stepping back from the director's chair proved surprisingly liberating. Given his long-standing partnership with and deep mutual trust in Choi, Lou felt entirely at ease on set. "When producing, you deal with tedious pre-production logistics like location scouting and budget control, while directing requires pouring all your energy into visual composition," Lou pointed out. Acting allowed him off-camera moments to step back, observe the overall production workflow, and seamlessly assist the crew whenever minor issues arose.

True self and love

Looking ahead, Lou's production company is preparing a new commercial feature film titled "True Self and Love" (抬頭再愛你). The project recently secured two million patacas in funding through the Macao Cultural Development Fund's 6th Feature Film Production Support Programme. Directed by Lou and executive-produced by renowned Hong Kong cinematographer O Sing-pui (柯星沛), the film is planned as an in-depth Hong Kong-Macau co-production aimed at a nationwide cinema release and global distribution.

The feature boasts a high-concept commercial premise set against the hotel industry in Macau and Hengqin, blending modern romantic comedy with family elements. Notably, it integrates traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) culture into commercial genre cinema. Featuring a dual-timeline structure similar to "Cape No. 7", the movie weaves modern romance with historical TCM heritage. "This approach reflects our ongoing vision for 'Macau Style' – using engaging commercial hooks infused with local history and cultural treasures to foster sustainable industry development," Lou noted.

*www.macaupostdaily.com/news/27379



Keo Lou addresses the Macao International Audio-Visual Festival at Wynn Macau in June.



This undated photo shows director Sam Choi (蔡德銘) answering a reporter's question. – Photos provided by Keo



Scenery of Peaceful Journey (和平之路)



Qatar waives visa fee for MSAR passport holders

Khalel Vallo

In a statement issued by the Identification Services Bureau (DSI) yesterday, Macao SAR passport holders are now eligible for a gratis visa when arriving in Qatar, allowing stays of up to 30 days, according to a notification received by the local government from the Consulate General of Qatar in Hong Kong.

The arrangement took effect yesterday, the statement said, with eligible MSAR passport holders able to obtain a tourist visa on arrival without paying a visa fee for stays of up to 30 days.

The statement noted that travellers may refer to the consulate's official website (<https://hongkong.consulate.qa/en/services/consular-services#visa-for-macau>) for details on the visa arrangement.

Residents planning to travel to Qatar are advised to check the latest entry requirements and policies through official government or consular channels before departure, as entry policies may vary between countries, the statement said, adding that travellers should also have the required documents according to their individual circumstances and complete any necessary procedures in advance to avoid disruptions to their journeys.

Information on visa-free entry or visas on arrival for holders of MSAR travel documents is also available through the bureau's website (<https://www.dsi.gov.mo/en/visa>). ■



This image downloaded from Wikipedia yesterday shows the flag of Qatar.

Brian Vong wins 'Outstanding Person Award'

Khalel Vallo

Local musician Brian Vong (黃信斌), also known as BV, has been honoured with an "Outstanding Person Award" at the 2025 Outstanding Person Annual Awards organised by the *Chinese Today Press* in recognition of his musical work and contribution to the community, according to a recent report by *Macao Daily News* (澳門日報), Macau's top-selling Chinese-language newspaper.

The statement said that the awards ceremony was held on July 16 at Asia Television in Hong Kong, where Vong received the Outstanding Person Award.

In his acceptance speech, Vong said he hopes to continue spreading warmth through music creation and live performances and give back to society through his music, the report noted, adding that throughout last year, Vong continued creating and performing a diverse range of musical works.

Earlier this year, he staged three free public concerts in Macau, Hong Kong and Zhuhai's Jinwan district, attracting large audiences and using music as a means of connecting with the community, the report underlined.

Addressing the ceremony, Vong said that society is facing considerable pressure amid ongoing uncertainty around the world, the report said. He believes that "positive energy" is needed more than ever, and hopes to use music to bring comfort and strength to his fans and the wider community, the report noted, adding that he also encouraged people to rediscover the courage to face



This handout photo provided by Macao Daily News (澳門日報) recently shows local musician Brian Vong (黃信斌) posing with his award during the "2025 Outstanding Person Awards Ceremony" at Asia Television in Hong Kong on July 16.

challenges and maintain their aspirations for a better life, pledging to continue producing inspiring works that can bring light to both himself and others.

The award recognised Vong's musical talent as well as his commitment to public service through his performances and community-oriented activities, according to the report.

Vong also announced plans to hold the "BV Concert 2026 (Hengqin)" in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone later this year, according to the report. The concert will

continue his focus on public spirit and positivity, with details of the date and venue to be announced later, the report highlighted.

The report also said that Vong described Hengqin as a new platform where he aims to bring the courage and hope conveyed through his music to a wider audience. With his latest award and plans for a new gig in Hengqin, Vong said he will continue using music to connect with audiences and contribute to the community, the statement added. ■

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Xu Beihong youth competition features over 300 artworks

Ida Cheong

An exhibition of artworks by the winners of the “10th Xu Beihong Cup International Arts Competition for Youth & Children (Macau Division)” is taking place at the Chun Cao Tong Exhibition Hall in Lou Lim Ioc Garden, featuring over 300 artworks.

The exhibition of the award-winning artwork ends next Thursday.

According to Gemini, Xu Beihong (1895–1953) was a master painter, art educator, and pioneer of modern Chinese art who synthesised traditional Chinese ink painting with Western realist techniques. He is widely recognised as the father of modern Chinese painting and celebrated for his dynamic ink paintings of galloping horses and his monumental historical works.

The exhibition showcases a diverse array of themes to pay tribute to Xu’s artistic spirit through traditional motifs such as galloping horses, ink wash landscapes, and Chinese calligraphy, with some works drawing inspiration from Macau’s street characteristics, natural ecology, family affection, and imaginative realms, according to a statement by the organisers.

Art Teacher Communication Association of Macau President Leong Hong Si addressed yesterday’s awards ceremony,



Entries from the traditional Chinese ink painting's category of the “10th Xu Beihong Cup International Arts Competition for Youth & Children (Macau Division)” through next Thursday at the Chun Cao Tong Exhibition Hall in Lou Lim Ioc Garden yesterday.

– Photo: Ida Cheong

saying that the biennial competition aims to further promote Xu Beihong’s artistic legacy, immerse the local younger generation in art to inspire perception, and leverage the local unique blend of Eastern and Western cultures to deepen artistic and cultural exchanges.

Curator Liang Jiajie noted that the exhibition is structured around the life education philosophy of “Joyfully Experiencing the Truth, Goodness, and Beauty of Life”, with the aim of connecting the legacy of Xu’s artistic spirit with children’s

growth and development.

The Xu Beihong Cup, themed “Ten Thousand Horses Galloping” (萬馬奔騰) this time, is being held in Macau for the first time. This year’s competition received over 710 entries from different local schools, as well as mainland Chinese schools and art institutions in places such as Beijing, Shanghai, Sichuan, and the Hengqin Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone, highlighting its cross-regional artistic exchange, according to a statement from the organisers. ■

Police nab woman for falsely accusing ex-boyfriend of rape

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a woman for falsely accusing her ex-boyfriend of rape on Monday, PJ spokesman Ho Ka Weng said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Ho identified the suspect as a 35-year-old unemployed local woman surnamed Chan. Ho also said the victim is a middle-aged man from the Chinese mainland.

According to Ho, on August 6, Chan filed a report with the Public Security Police Force (PSP), claiming that last month she had been raped on four separate occasions by the victim, whom she had met and formed a relationship with at a casino in June. The case was subse-

quently transferred to the Judiciary Police for follow-up.

In the course of the investigation, Ho said PJ officers discovered that the suspect’s account was inconsistent with the facts. This included the finding that she had continued to engage in intimate behaviour with the accused after the alleged incidents, and that both medical and forensic reports showed no signs of injuries caused by resistance or violence.

The woman ultimately admitted that, dissatisfied with her ex-boyfriend’s decision to end their relationship, she had fabricated the rape allegations out of a desire for revenge, according to Ho.

Chan was transferred to the



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Ho Ka Weng looks on during yesterday’s regular press conference.

– Photo: Armindo Neves

Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on Monday, facing a charge of making a false report. ■

Gambler short-changes elderly woman in banana deal: police

Armindo Neves

The Public Security Police Force (PSP) arrested a woman from the Chinese mainland for short-changing on Saturday, PSP spokeswoman Kong Chi Ian said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Kong identified the suspect as an unemployed woman in her 50s, surnamed Yao. Kong also said that the victim is a local resident in her 80s.

According to Kong, on Friday, the victim was walking along Rua do Dr. Soares (蘇雅利醫士街) in the city centre when Yao approached her, offering bananas for sale at three patacas each.

The victim initially took out a 1,000-pataca banknote to pay, but then found smaller change and asked the seller to return the banknote,

Kong said, adding that Yao handed back one 100-pataca banknote and ten 10-pataca banknotes, totalling 200 patacas, and then left.

Upon counting the money, the victim realised the amount was blatantly insufficient – she had lost 800 patacas – and immediately reported the matter to the police.

According to Kong, PSP officers identified Yao through the city’s CCTV footage and intercepted her on Saturday. Yao admitted that she had gambled away all her cash and had resorted to using the change-giving trick while selling bananas to defraud customers, Kong said.

Yao has meanwhile been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a fraud charge. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows PSP officers escorting the short-changing scam suspect to a police station.

Gongbei Customs seizes 158 terrapins in Gongbei

Armindo Neves

Zhuhai’s Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 158 terrapins from a Macau resident at Gongbei checkpoint on July 24.

Gongbei Customs said the suspect, surnamed Ung, attempted to smuggle the reptiles into the mainland.

According to the statement, Ung entered the mainland on that day via the “nothing to declare” green channel in the passenger inspection hall. Customs officers noticed that he was unusually nervous as he walked through the area and stopped him for a search. Upon further examination, officers discovered four transparent plastic food containers inside his shoulder bag, each containing a large

number of live terrapins, totalling 158.

The terrapins have been identified by the Technical Centre of Gongbei Customs as *Sternotherus odoratus* (common musk turtle), a species listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The species is native to Canada and the United States.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public that, under relevant laws and regulations, carrying endangered species or their products into or out of the Chinese mainland without a valid import/export permit is strictly prohibited. Serious breaches constituting a criminal offence will be prosecuted in accordance with the law. ■



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai’s Gongbei Customs yesterday shows 158 common musk turtles seized by its officers at Gongbei checkpoint on July 24.

Mainland tourist dies after being hit by taxi

Khalel Vallo

A female Chinese mainland tourist in her eighties was pronounced dead after being struck by a taxi near the Treasure Island Hotel near Praça de Ferreira do Amaral yesterday evening, according to a statement

released by the Public Security Police Force (PSP) that evening.

The statement said that she suffered a fractured forearm and a laceration to the corner of her eye, adding that the accident occurred at around 5:36 p.m., when a taxi hit the tourist.

The police and the Fire Services Bureau (CB) dispatched personnel to the scene, the statement said. According to the statement, the woman was initially found without a pulse and was not breathing so she was rushed to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre for emergency treatment.

The bureau later said in a statement last night that the taxi driver involved in the accident is a local resident.

According to a statement by the police last night, the woman was pronounced dead at 5:52 p.m. after being rushed to the hospital.

Initial evidence collection and video surveillance retrieval have been conducted, and the cause of the accident remains under further investigation, the statement said. Members of the public who witnessed the incident or have any relevant information are urged to contact the Traffic Department at 2837 4214. ■



The official logo of the Fire Services Bureau (CB)

Sam vows 4 focus areas for Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan

Continued from p.1

3 key lists

For the next step, Sam said, the government will draft three key lists aiming to ensure that all major tasks and targets listed by the 3rd Five-Year Plan will be implemented as scheduled: a list of key projects, a list of key tasks with clearly defined and assigned responsibilities, and a list of major reform initiatives.

Strength of executive-led governance

Sam said that the 3rd Five-Year Plan also highlights the strengths of Macau's executive-led governance system. Throughout the plan's drafting process, there was close coordination and efficient collaboration among all respective public entities, while the legislative and judicial organs also offered their respective feedback to the government, demonstrating Macau's institutional advantage of distinct yet coordinated roles among the executive, legislative, and judicial organs, he said.

Sam also said that the 3rd Five-Year Plan is a strategic document that underscores Macau's commitment to integrating itself into and making greater contributions to

the nation's overall development. The nation's 15th Five-Year Plan sets new requirements and provides fresh development opportunities for Macau, he said, pledging that the Macau government will ensure the implementation of the measures outlined by the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan concerning Macau, while aligning with the respective development plans of Guangdong Province and Hong Kong.

The 3rd Five-Year Plan represents a significant innovative step in deepening Macau's implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle and its alignment with the nation's overall development, Sam said.

Broad public consensus

Sam also said that the final version of the 3rd Five-Year Plan is a product of democratic consultation and broad public consensus. During the 40-day public consultation, residents from various segments of civil society offered constructive opinions, which were extensively incorporated into the plan's final version, he said.

4 major implementation aspects

For the implementation of



Media workers attend yesterday's press conference at Government Headquarters on Avenida da Praia Grande in Nam Van. — Photo: Tony Wong

the 3rd Five-Year Plan, Sam said, the government will place strong emphasis on four major aspects.

The **first** is to advance Macau's appropriate economic diversification with its four future large-scale projects and a government guidance fund as key drivers. Sam said that the government will strengthen policy support and capital injection, and leverage market forces and enterprise-based initiatives, aiming for the value added of all non-gaming sectors to account for around 60 percent of Macau's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2030 – an increase from 56.7 percent in 2024.

The **second** is to deepen Macau-Hengqin integration and advance Hengqin's high-quality development, Sam said, pledging Macau's commitment to strengthening the alignment of rules and mechanisms between Macau and Hengqin and enhancing the infrastructure connectivity between the two places. He also underlined his government's efforts to enable Hengqin's development to deliver tangible results to Macau's appropriate economic diversification.

The **third** is to accelerate Macau's urban renewal, Sam said, underlining that the government will

adopt innovative thinking and bold actions to speed up urban renewal. The government will propose improvements to the legal system for urban renewal, facilitate better coordination of funding, resources, and policy support for urban renewal, and establish a sustainable urban renewal mechanism.

Sam said that the government will advance the conservation-led revitalisation of the area around the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St. Paul's landmark, while accelerating the redevelopment of dilapidated buildings in districts such as Iao Hon.

The **fourth** is to better integrate Macau's development into the nation's development. Sam said that Macau will leverage its unique advantages brought about by the backing of the motherland and its connection to the world, underlining its extensive participation in the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and commitment to strengthening cooperation with Hong Kong.

Sam also reaffirmed Macau's efforts to expand the functions and scope of its service platform role serving China and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries. ■

COD unveils luxury hotel REM



This photo provided by City of Dreams (COD) on Monday shows The Haven in newly unveiled REM hotel at COD in Cotai.

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operator Melco Resorts & Entertainment has unveiled its latest luxury hotel REM at City of Dreams (COD), boasting 149 rooms and welcoming its first set of guests through a private invitation-only programme.

Set for a grand opening in October, the hotel takes its core concept and name from Rapid Eye Movement, the sleep stage where most vivid dreaming happens, while the brain is also almost as active as when awake.

"Built around this core concept, the hotel creates an immersive sanctuary between reality and imagination, where inspiration, discovery and sensory experiences converge", the company said in a statement on Monday, noting that the newest addition, along with Morpheus and NÜWA, completes COD's "dynamic luxury hospitality landscape"

The rooms are mainly composed of suites across seven room types, namely Premier Room, Twilight Suite, Luminous Suite, Euphoria Suite, Hypnotic Suite, The Haven, and The Lair. It also features a third-floor pool, dining options at "Reverie Café", and a fitness centre with a "bright and open design", among other lifestyle facilities.

"Through its exceptional guest experiences, bold and avant-garde design and highly personalised service, REM further enriches City of Dreams Macau's portfolio of luxury hotels. The unique position as a destination where futuristic artistry, innovation and contemporary come together in the integrated luxury resort is reinforced, while supporting Macau's strategic aspiration to develop as a 'World Centre of Tourism and Leisure'."

The statement said that more "exclusive privileges" will be unveiled in due time. ■

SJM welcomes 'Forge My Own Journey' programme's 2nd cohort

Rui Pastorin

The SJM "Forge My Own Journey" Development Programme welcomed its second cohort of 61 new students as well as celebrated the achievements of the inaugural group during a launch and recognition ceremony earlier this week at Grand Lisboa Palace (GLP) in Cotai.

The programme by SJM Resorts in partnership with the Macao University of Tourism (UTM) was launched in 2025 with the support of the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) and the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ). It combines academic study with paid workplace training over four years, an SJM statement said on Monday.

In her speech, the statement quoted SJM Managing Director Daisy Ho Chiu Fung as highlighting: "The outstanding achievements of our inaugural cohort, including their success at the WorldSkills Macau Selection Competition and

selection to represent Macau at the WorldSkills Competition, demonstrate the effectiveness of university-industry collaboration in nurturing the next generation of hospitality professionals with strong expertise and global outlook."

Achievements included participants from the inaugural cohort securing first, second and third places in the Hotel Reception category at the 48th WorldSkills Macau Selection Competition, with SJM becoming "the only integrated resort operator in Macau to have representatives selected for the Macau delegation to this year's WorldSkills Competition", according to the statement.

Outstanding students of the inaugural cohort were also recognised with awards during the ceremony, where 250 attendees were present, the statement said. The recent event also saw the inauguration of the first cohort's student association committee and the handover of the student association flag. ■



Guests, representatives and participants of the SJM "Forge My Own Journey" Development Programme pose for a group photo during the "Second Cohort Launch Ceremony and Recognition Ceremony" at Grand Lisboa Palace (GLP) on Monday. — Photo: SJM Resorts

Xi calls for stronger China-Ecuador synergy in development strategies

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping yesterday emphasised that China and Ecuador should strengthen the synergy of their development strategies and implement the cooperation plan for jointly building the Belt and Road (B&R).

The two countries should deliver on cooperation projects in energy, minerals, infrastructure, finance and other sectors, and actively explore cooperation in areas including the digital economy, green development, new energy and artificial intelligence, Xi said when holding talks with President of the Republic of Ecuador Daniel Roy-Gilchrist Noboa Azín in Beijing.

Noboa is on a state visit to China from August 16 to 23 at the invitation of Xi.

Noting this year marks the 10th anniversary of the China-Ecuador comprehensive strategic partnership, Xi said no matter how the international landscape changes, China has always viewed China-Ecuador relations from a strategic and long-term perspective.

China stands ready to work with Ecuador to continuously elevate bilateral relations to new heights and deliver greater benefits to the

people of both countries, he said.

Xi said China respects and supports Ecuador in exploring a development path that suits its national conditions. China is willing to intensify exchanges between the two countries across various sectors, including governments, legislatures, and political parties, and enhance experience sharing on governance, he added.

The Chinese president encouraged both sides to continue unlocking the potential of the free trade agreement so that its dividends can benefit more businesses and consumers. He also expressed China's willingness to cooperate with Ecuador in areas such as healthcare, poverty alleviation, disaster prevention and mitigation, in support of Ecuador's national development.

Calling China an important partner and friend of Ecuador, Noboa said bilateral relations have entered a new phase, delivering tangible benefits to the two peoples.

He said Ecuador is willing to deepen political mutual trust with China, supports China in safeguarding its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and respects China's position on the Taiwan question.



President Xi Jinping shakes hands with President of the Republic of Ecuador Daniel Roy-Gilchrist Noboa Azín, who is on a state visit to China, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

Noting that Ecuador attaches great importance to cooperation with China, Noboa called on the two sides to strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation in economy and trade, finance, minerals, renewable energy, science and technology, culture and other fields.

Ecuador will expand its exports to China, and welcomes more Chinese enterprises to invest and operate in

Ecuador, which is expected to help improve the well-being of the people and facilitate the development of the country, he added.

The two heads of state exchanged views on the situation in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Xi said China supports Latin American countries in upholding independence and self-reliance,

pursuing foreign cooperation based on their national interests, and safeguarding regional peace and stability.

Xi stressed that China has always maintained that the status of the Latin American and Caribbean region as a zone of peace should not be undermined, the course of development and revitalization of Latin American and Caribbean countries should not be disrupted, and the right of Latin American and Caribbean countries to independently choose their cooperation partners should not be interfered with.

Noting Ecuador highly values China's position and role, Noboa said Ecuador is always willing to be a good friend of China on the other side of the Pacific Ocean.

After the talks, the two heads of state attended a signing ceremony for multiple cooperation agreements in areas such as green industry, economic and trade cooperation, the digital economy and people's livelihood.

Prior to the talks in the Great Hall of the People, Xi held a welcome ceremony for Noboa. Xi also hosted a welcome banquet for him in the evening. – AFP

Xi says China supports LatAm countries in safeguarding regional peace, stability

BEIJING – China supports Latin American countries in upholding independence and self-reliance, pursuing foreign cooperation based on their national interests, and safeguarding regional peace and stability, President Xi Jinping said yesterday when holding talks with President of the Republic of Ecuador Daniel Roy-Gilchrist Noboa Azín.

Xi stressed that China has always maintained that the status of the Latin American and Caribbean region as a zone of peace should not be shaken, the course of development and revitalization of Latin American and Caribbean countries should not be disrupted, and the right of Latin American and Caribbean countries to independently choose their cooperation partners should not be interfered with. – Xinhua



President Xi Jinping (front, left) holds a welcome ceremony for President of the Republic of Ecuador Daniel Roy-Gilchrist Noboa Azín (front, right) in the Northern Hall of the Great Hall of the People prior to their talks in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

Body of former premier Zhu Rongji cremated in Beijing

BEIJING – The body of former premier Zhu Rongji was cremated in Beijing yesterday.

President Xi Jinping and other senior leaders of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the state, including Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, Li Xi and Han Zheng, bid farewell to Zhu at the Babaoshan Revolutionary Cemetery yesterday morning.

Amid solemn music, they walked slowly toward Zhu's body and stood in silent tribute. They then paid their final respects with three bows and shook hands with Zhu's family members. Hu Jintao sent a wreath to express his condolences over Zhu's passing.

Zhu died of illness on August 12

in Beijing at the age of 98.

He had served as a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the 14th and 15th Central Committees of the CPC.

Zhu was extolled in an obituary 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.

Xi Jinping, Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, Li Xi, Han Zheng and Hu Jintao, among others, had either visited Zhu when he was in hospital or expressed deep condolences and offered sincere sympathies to his family through various means after his passing. – Xinhua

CTT to provide postmark cancellation for education fund's 40th anniversary

Rui Pastorin

The Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) will provide commemorative postmark cancellation services on August 28 through Temporary Post Counters at the Philatelic Shop of the General Post Office (GPO) and Macao Science Centre (MSC) for the "40th Anniversary of the Macao Academy Education Fund Society".

CTT made the announcement on Monday.

The statement said that the one-day temporary post counter at the GPO will be open from 3:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., while the one at MSC will provide its services from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Meanwhile, commemorative envelopes will also be distributed to members of the public. ■



This photo provided by the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) earlier this week shows the commemorative envelope marking the "40th Anniversary of the Macao Academy Education Fund Society".

Food safety training courses open for enrolment

Ida Cheong

Aiming to enhance food safety awareness and operational standards within the food sector, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has launched its systematic food safety training courses for active industry practitioners on the last Thursday of every month.

Enrolment is now open for August's "Basic Course on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene" through Friday, according to an IAM statement yesterday.

The two-hour course will be held next Thursday from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Iao Hon Municipal Market. The course is free of charge, and participants who complete it will receive a certificate, the statement added.

The statement noted that the course content includes the local food safety law and its standard guidelines, practical food hygiene operations, and personal hygiene. It will also outline effective methods for rodent prevention and control to raise industry awareness

of maintaining environmental hygiene and pest control.

Interested practitioners can register on the government's "Business and Associations Platform", or complete the application form (<https://www.iam.gov.mo/c/pdf/eformDetail/PDF1147>), send a fax to 8296 1234, or submit in person during office hours to the Iao Hon Municipal Market or any of the bureau's public services centres. For enquiries, please call 8296 1242 or 2833 8181 during office hours. ■

Philippine student killed in livestreamed school shooting

MANILA—A student livestreamed himself shooting another schoolmate dead before taking his own life at a high school in the Philippines yesterday, authorities said.

The school shooting, the country's second in as many months, took place at Ateneo de Zamboanga University, a Catholic private institution in western Mindanao.

"What we know so far is that (the shooter) went to the classroom of our known victim. He shot the victim, and after doing that, he went up to the fifth floor and shot himself," regional police spokeswoman Shella Chang told AFP.

In a separate statement, interior secretary Victor Remulla confirmed the ninth-grade suspect had livestreamed

the incident on social media. The alleged shooter's Facebook account has since been disabled.

In the video, which was circulated by local media, the barrel of a gun can be seen moving down a hallway in the style of a first-person shooter video game before being pointed into a classroom and fired.

Children in school uniforms are then seen screaming and rushing for an exit.

Police have not confirmed any additional injuries.

National police are now trying to "establish the motive behind the shooting, determine the ownership and source of the firearm used, and find out how it was brought inside the school campus", the interior

ministry said in a statement.

'Nightmare for any parent'

Hours later, the Philippines' customs department issued a statement saying it had ordered the "preventative suspension" of an agent who owned the guns "allegedly used by the student involved".

Customs Deputy Chief of Staff Noel Bendijo told AFP they had acted on intelligence from their own officers in Zamboanga.

"The information is that he was the father of (the alleged shooter) ... As for the actual firearms used and how the kid was able to access them, all of those are still under investigation," he said.

"We've also spoken with the party involved. He understands, but

of course, he's also grieving because he also lost his child," Bendijo added.

"That's a nightmare for any parent."

Police said only that they were still investigating when asked about the customs report.

'Deep concern'

Ateneo de Zamboanga president Father Guillrey Andal, confirming the two fatalities, said the school was "deeply saddened" by the shooting and was cooperating with the investigation.

"We are in the process of working with the police for us to be able to identify them, so that we can communicate first with their loved ones," he told reporters earlier in the

day, acknowledging the incident had caused "deep concern and worry".

"Prior to this, our security team had even been preparing a simulation exercise, precisely because we understand the value to everyone – our students, our personnel – of safety."

School shootings are rare in the Philippines, but three teenaged students were killed and 20 others wounded in an attack at a school in the central Philippines in June.

Ateneo de Zamboanga last month became one of many schools across the country to conduct active shooter drills in the wake of that tragedy.

Legal gun ownership is tightly regulated in the Southeast Asian country, but a large black market exists for firearms. – AFP

Singapore tightens anti-scam rules on social media, messaging platforms

SINGAPORE – Singapore began requiring messaging services to restrict unknown contacts and social media services to verify advertisers yesterday, as the city-state clamps down on online scams.

Cyberscam hubs, which lure foreigners into work to carry out online romance and crypto investment scams, have proliferated across Southeast Asia in recent years.

Singapore, the region's second-largest economy, lost over US\$2.8 billion to scams from 2020 through the first half of 2025, Home Affairs Minister Sim Ann told parliament last November.

The new rules under the Online Criminal Harms Act target services deemed to "pose the highest risk of scams" in the country, Singapore's police said yesterday.

"Investment scams are a key concern on online messaging platforms," the police said in a statement.

"In this variant, scammers approach victims using accounts not previously known to the victim ('unknown contact') to offer lucrative investment products."

Seven online services – WhatsApp, Telegram, WeChat, Apple iMessage, Apple FaceTime, Google Messages and Google Meet – must now obtain users' consent before unknown contacts can add them to groups or channels.

They must also warn users about suspicious accounts and allow users to silence, filter or block communications.

A separate code covering Facebook, Instagram and TikTok will require platforms to block suspected scam advertisements, verify advertisers' identities against government records and ensure financial services advertised to Singapore users are offered by licensed providers.

"In 2025... Facebook, Instagram and TikTok accounted for about 30 percent of total scam cases. Facebook alone accounted for about 18 percent of total scam cases," the statement read.

E-commerce services such as Carousell, Facebook Marketplace and Facebook Business will also be required to introduce stronger login safeguards.

Platforms have until January 31, 2027, to comply, while measures against "spoofing" – imitating the Singapore government – must be in place by end-September.

Failure to comply could result in financial penalties of up to 1 million Singapore dollars (US\$782,500), the police said.

In recent years, Singaporean authorities have intensified public education efforts against scamming, including approving mandatory caning of up to 24 strokes for serious scam offences. – AFP

Backlash after Thailand frees 85-year-old drug trafficker

BANGKOK – Thailand's justice minister pledged yesterday to review pardon criteria following backlash over the release of an 85-year-old drug trafficker who served less than a decade of a life prison sentence.

Laota Saenlee, a former anti-communist guerrilla turned drug runner linked to powerful Myanmar drug kingpins, was arrested by undercover officers in 2016 for selling crystal meth in the Golden Triangle drug-producing region.

The rugged Golden Triangle zone – where Thailand, Myanmar and Laos meet – has long been a hub for some of the world's most prolific illicit drug producers.

Organised crime groups move an estimated tens of billions of dollars worth of heroin, methamphetamine and ketamine annually from the region.

Thailand's corrections department said Monday that Laota was released from a maximum-security prison just north of the capital Bangkok on Friday following a series of royal pardons that reduced his life sentence to below the nearly 10 years he served.

The "former key drug offender" was freed due to his age and good behaviour, and local authorities would monitor him after his release, the department said in a statement.

His release was widely



Laota Saenlee (centre), a controversial guerrilla fighter long accused of playing a key role in the Golden Triangle drugs trade, is escorted into a Criminal Court in Bangkok on December 13, 2017. – AFP

condemned on social media, and Rewat Klinkesorn, a former narcotics police chief who once investigated Laota, told local media on Monday he was "shocked that a major drugs dealer was released so early".

"The corrections department should improve their regulations. He should not be classified as a good inmate because he is a major drugs dealer," Rewat said.

Justice Minister Rutthapon Naowarat told reporters yesterday he had ordered the corrections department to clarify the facts related to Laota's pardon and release.

"The officials followed the (pardon) criteria but there are some flaws in the criteria," Rutthapon said, adding that a review was underway.

Before his 2017 conviction, Laota had been detained multiple times over the years but authorities had not managed to make charges stick.

Laota, who hails from the Lisu ethnic minority, joined China's anti-communist Kuomintang as a child soldier and rose up through the ranks, according to a 2011 interview with the Bangkok Post.

Like many Kuomintang cadres, he later fought for Thailand against communist insurgents in the 1970s in exchange for sanctuary.

He is widely thought to have had ties to one of the world's most wanted drug traffickers, Khun Sa, a Myanmar-based rebel leader who died in 2007. – AFP

Number of displaced, injured from Indonesia quake jumps sharply

JAKARTA – The number of people displaced and injured by a powerful earthquake three days ago has jumped significantly, emergency officials said yesterday, with at least 40,000 people living in temporary shelters.

The death toll from the 7.7-magnitude quake that hit Flores Island in Indonesia's east on Saturday also rose to 70 after two more fatalities were confirmed.

More than 40,000 people were now listed as displaced by the quake, according to the national disaster mitigation agency, BNPB, a sharp jump from the figure of 12,800 provided on Monday.

At least 1,100 people were also now listed as injured, an increase of more than tenfold from just a day earlier.

The quake damaged almost 12,000 homes across several towns in Flores, where a BNPB spokesman said many residents were refusing to return home as hundreds of aftershocks rattle the island.

"The number of displaced people does not reflect the extent of damage to houses, but rather the psychological impact experienced by residents," spokesman Berton Suar Pelita Panjaitan told a news conference.

More than 2,100 aftershocks have been recorded since Saturday, including 70 strong enough to be felt by residents, he said.

More government aid began arriving on Monday.

"Essential supplies have been delivered to residents in need by land, sea and air," Berton said, adding that evacuees still require food, clean

water, tents and sanitation facilities.

The BNPB said more than 100 tonnes of relief supplies had been delivered to the island since Saturday.

National Police chief Listyo Sigit Prabowo said separately that police had also distributed nearly 250 tonnes of aid, including food, medicine, clothing, generators and other supplies.

Indonesia frequently experiences earthquakes because it lies on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", a zone of intense seismic and volcanic activity that stretches from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific Ocean.

In 2004, a powerful 9.1-magnitude earthquake off the coast of Sumatra triggered a tsunami that killed about 220,000 people across the region, including around 170,000 in Indonesia. – AFP



Students stage a protest in the city centre a day after the 81st Indonesian Independence Day in Jakarta yesterday, demanding the government stop the state's oppression of its own people, eradicate corruption, collusion, and nepotism, implement agrarian reform, and lower the prices of basic necessities and fuel. – AFP

Blast at Afghan school injures at least 42 children: UN

KABUL – A blast at an education centre in Kabul has injured at least 42 children, the UN mission in Afghanistan said yesterday, without elaborating on the cause of the explosion.

Richard Bennett, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan, earlier condemned a “heinous attack” near a school in Kabul’s western Dasht-e-Barchi area, which is home to the historically persecuted Shi’ite Hazara community.

The victims of Monday’s blast are aged nine to 14, according to the UN mission, UNAMA.

“UNAMA have not yet confirmed the circumstances of the explosion,” a spokesman told AFP, citing “conflicting reports of either an attack or unexploded ordnance”.

Decades of conflict have left Afghanistan littered with the explosive remnants of war, with the country registering the third-highest casualty rate globally according to the United Nations.

Afghanistan’s Directorate of Mine Action Coordination, which has investigated the scene, said a grenade had exploded at the school on Monday afternoon, matching details earlier provided by the Kabul police.

“Our thoughts are with the children injured and their families,” UNAMA said.

“We call for an investigation to establish the circumstances of this incident. Schools and education centres must be kept safe.”

The private primary school posted a message on its Facebook page asking people to “pray for the injured”, without providing further details.

The blast happened just as the children were being dismissed, a 38-year-old resident who lives nearby told AFP.

“There were so many wounded people that I couldn’t count them,” she told AFP on condition of anonymity for security reasons.

There have been sporadic attacks in Kabul over the past five years of Taliban government rule, including an explosion at a central Chinese restaurant in January which killed at least seven people.

There have been multiple deadly blasts in the Dasht-e-Barchi area, including a car bomb outside a girls’ school in 2021 that killed at least 90 people and wounded hundreds more.

The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for attacks in Dasht-e-Barchi, targeting Shi’ites who they consider heretics. – AFP



A Kashmiri artisan shows spinning yarn to make a pashmina shawl using a traditional handloom on the outskirts of Srinagar, India yesterday. – AFP

Sri Lanka govt proposes contentious judicial reform package

COLOMBO – Sri Lanka’s government unveiled sweeping judicial reforms yesterday that it says will slash a huge case backlog, despite criticism from lawyers and opposition parties that the measures threaten judicial independence.

Two bills put forward in parliament would increase the number of courthouses, create new appeals courts outside the capital, raise the retirement age of judges by two years and recruit additional justices and staff.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake says the measures will streamline the criminal justice system and address staffing shortages across law enforcement and the courts.

But the private bar association opposes them, calling the change to the retirement age an attempt to prolong the tenure of a chief justice seen as close to Dissanayake.

Sri Lanka’s courts face a backlog of about 1.1 million cases, official figures show.

Criminal prosecutions typically take around 17 years to conclude, while civil litigation can drag on for decades.

Dissanayake’s government is proposing a constitutional amendment to expand the Court of Appeal from 20 judges to 25, and establish 10 new High Courts.

It also plans to hike the retirement age for supreme court judges from 65 to 67, create provincial appellate courts to help litigants avoid long-distance travel to Colombo, and hire 10,000 police constables and hundreds of court clerks.

“This is part of a much broader process,” Dissanayake told a meeting with the Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) last week.

“It forms part of an approach that looks at the entire process, beginning with investigations and continuing through the judicial process.”

But the BASL is not convinced, arguing that the move aims to keep 64-year-old Chief Justice Preethi Padman Surasena, who is due to retire in November, in office.

Several opposition parties have accused Surasena, who was elevated to Chief Justice last year under Dissanayake’s administration, of being biased in favour of the government’s policy goals.

The administration denies that claim and also rejects accusations that it seeks to exert influence over the judiciary, saying the changes are necessary to improve efficiency and reduce delays.

Still, the reform package has drawn international attention, with UN Special Rapporteur Margaret Satterthwaite asking Colombo last week for clarification that it “complies with international standards on the independence of judges”.

The reforms require a two-thirds majority in parliament, which the government currently commands. The legislative process is expected to take about two months.

The judicial overhaul comes as authorities intensify anti-corruption investigations involving former president Mahinda Rajapaksa and members of his family, who have faced allegations ranging from corruption and money laundering to misuse of state funds. They deny wrongdoing. – AFP

Pakistan court orders ex-PM Khan moved from jail to hospital

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan’s Supreme Court ordered authorities yesterday to move jailed former prime minister Imran Khan to hospital for medical checks, after the popular politician’s lawyers complained about his poor health.

Imprisoned since 2023 on corruption charges he deems politically motivated, Khan will be moved “within the next two days” to Shifa International Hospital in the capital Islamabad, the court said in its order.

The three-bench court decided that the 73-year-old ex-cricket captain would also be allowed to meet with his family once a week and speak to his sons via telephone twice weekly.

“We are mindful of the constitutional and legal obligation... to safeguard the life, health, dignity and security of persons in custody,” the panel wrote.

Khan’s personal physician Faisal Sultan, and sister and medical doctor Uzma Khan, “shall be permitted to remain associated with the prisoner’s medical examination and treatment”.

A medical board including an eye specialist and experts in internal medicine and cardiology would be established for Khan’s treatment, the order said.

Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi, who is also his spiritual guide, were both sentenced late last year to 17 years behind bars.

The former prime minister received eye treatment at a hospital this year, with his family and lawyer saying at the time that he had lost most of the vision in his right eye.

His lawyers had since petitioned the court, asking for “proper treatment” from a specialist at the hospital.

Yesterday’s ruling granting the petition was “a major step, a major decision, a great blessing”, said Salman Akram Raja, secretary-general of Khan’s political party, in a video shared on Facebook from outside the court.

He called on the supporters of Khan, who remains a dominant political personality, to abide by the party’s agreement with the court that there “must not be any crowding or commotion”.

The judges warned against public gatherings within the hospital grounds or the use of information about Khan’s health for political gain, cautioning any breaches could lead to the order being reversed.

The next hearing was set for September 16.

Khan was prime minister from 2018 to 2022 before being removed in a no-confidence vote during a political crisis over tensions between his government and the powerful military establishment.

He has since faced multiple legal cases on corruption and other charges, which Khan and the PTI maintain are politically motivated.

His arrest triggered nationwide protests in May 2023, some of which turned violent and led to hundreds of arrests.

Ending decades of political dominance by dynastic parties, Khan was voted in by millions of Pakistanis who grew up watching him play cricket, where he excelled as an all-rounder and led the nation to a World Cup victory in 1992.

But his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party made little headway improving the country’s finances, with galloping inflation, crippling debt and a feeble rupee undermining economic reform. – AFP



Skoda Auto’s CEO Klaus Zellmer speaks during an event to launch the new Slavia sedan car in Mumbai yesterday. – AFP

Sri Lanka ex-minister arrested over theft of king’s sacred stone

COLOMBO – A former Sri Lankan minister was arrested yesterday for allegedly aiding the theft of a centuries-old sacred rock from the palace of the island’s last Sinhala king, an anti-corruption body said.

Keheliya Rambukwella was detained over the theft of the heavy carved circular granite rock known as a “moonstone” – part of a symbolic stepping stone entrance to the palace of Veera Parakrama Narendrasinghe, the king who reigned until 1739.

The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) said he had conspired in the removal of the valuable historic object in December 2022, and had also obstructed police investigations at the time.

“He conspired, aided and abetted the theft at a time when he was a minister,” CIABOC said.

It said Rambukwella had also been charged with the unrelated offence of using state funds to employ six people for his private business.

The arrest came amid a separate, ongoing court case against him over the purchase of counterfeit medicines for state hospitals while he was health minister.

Police have told the court that he authorised the purchase of a life-saving cancer drug that turned out to be water.

Several other senior health ministry officials have also been indicted over the drug scam.

Rambukwella was health minister when Sri Lanka faced an acute shortage of medicines after defaulting on its US\$46 billion foreign debt in April 2022, following its declaration of bankruptcy. – AFP

Princess Diana's brother to unveil 'truth' in new book

LONDON – Charles Spencer, the brother of the late Princess Diana, revealed yesterday that he has penned a book “to tell the truth” about his sister and her life as the 30th anniversary of her death looms.

Spencer “tells the astonishing story of his life with Diana and the tragic week of her death,” Penguin Random House said in a statement, adding it marked “the first time that Earl Spencer has spoken openly and at length about his sister”.

“Swan Song: Diana, My Sister” will be published in Britain and other countries on September 22 and translated into 12 languages.

“With the 30th anniversary of Diana’s tragic death on the skyline, I’ve been inundated yet again with requests for interviews about my sister,” Spencer said.

“This has convinced me to write down my own thoughts and memories, once and for all,” he said, adding many opinions were “based on untruths that have become accepted over time”.

“I want to speak on Diana’s behalf and do so in an openly positive way,” added Spencer.

After Diana was killed in a Paris car crash in August 1997, Spencer gave an emotional eulogy at her funeral in Westminster Abbey, London, vowing to always look out for her two sons, Prince William and Prince Harry.

Thirty years on, Diana remains an iconic figure, but Harry and William, now heir to the UK throne, are no longer speaking amid a major rift in the royal family.

And the husband Diana divorced is now the UK’s King Charles III and married to his former mistress, Queen Camilla.

“The aim of this book is to tell the truth about Diana from her brother’s perspective,” Spencer said.

Spencer, 62, has remained close to the two princes, and Harry, his wife Meghan and their two young children reportedly visited the earl’s ancestral home at Althorp, central England, in early July where they were said to have visited Diana’s grave.

Spencer added he hoped his book would interest those who “cherish” her memory and appeal to “those too young to remember her in her heyday”.

He wanted to leave readers with the impression of who she really was “a one-off, dynamic character, full of love, charisma and self-doubt, who gave life a hell of a go, and left the world a far better place”.

Publisher Daniel Bunyard said it was “a book of historic importance” recounting the “story of one of the twentieth century’s most iconic and culturally significant figures”.

– AFP



Charles Spencer, brother of Britain's late princess Diana, arrives at Kensington Palace for the unveiling of a new statue to his sister on what would have been Princess Diana's 60th birthday in London on July 1, 2021. – AFP

UN atomic watchdog says found tonnes of nuclear material at Syria site

DAMASCUS – The head of the UN’s nuclear watchdog said yesterday its inspectors had found several tonnes of nuclear material in Syria, at a site Damascus reported to the agency last month.

The inspectors visited two sites, one in Deir Ezzor and “a second location related to the nuclear material identified by Syria recently”, according to a joint statement.

Speaking at a news conference in Damascus, Rafael Grossi, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), praised Damascus’s “courageous decision” to report the undisclosed site, which dates back to the rule of ousted former leader Bashar-al-Assad.

“We are talking about a few tons of nuclear material that could be put to bad use,” he said, promising that it would be put under international safeguards.

Speaking at a joint press conference with Grossi, Syria’s Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani said: “On July 17, we sent an official letter to the agency, in which we declared of our own free will the presence of nuclear materials at an undeclared site within the legacy left by the former regime.”

Shaibani said technical assessments indicated that the materials do not pose a risk, adding that they “will remain in Syrian national custody and subject to the agency’s safeguards system”.

Grossi meanwhile said “this material will be accounted for, will be put within the international safeguards system”.

Syrian and IAEA experts will work together to safely store the materials, he said.

“We are starting to turn a page, and turning a page does not mean forgetting the past”.

– AFP

Trump says no Iran talks planned, claims Hormuz ‘new US territory’

Danny Kemp

WASHINGTON, DC – US President Donald Trump said yesterday that no talks with Iran are under way or scheduled, as he posted a map showing the Strait of Hormuz as a new American territory in a fresh jibe at Tehran.

Trump has been pressing his threat to claim sovereignty over the crucial energy waterway as the nearly six-month-old Iran war grinds on with little sign of resolution.

Trump’s envoy and son-in-law Jared Kushner had said on Monday that the United States and Iran were having “very positive and active conversations”, but the president denied that was the case.

“There are no talks or conversations going on, or scheduled, with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Naval Blockade remains in full force and effect,” Trump wrote on his Truth Social network yesterday.

“The Hormuz Strait is open and operating. All water mines have been removed or detonated.”

US sources told AFP there had been “positive” discussions with the Iranians, but added that Trump had decided to wait and asked his team not to engage until Iran was ready to make a deal.

Earlier yesterday, Trump posted a map on Truth Social showing the Strait of Hormuz as “NEW U.S. Territory.”

Iran has effectively shut down the chokepoint, through which a fifth of the world’s oil transits, in retaliation for the war Trump started along with Israel in late February.

The US leader revisited the idea again on Monday in comments to reporters in the Oval Office, suggesting it would be a good idea.

This is not the first time that Trump, faced with a foreign policy



US President Donald Trump (centre) meets with 16-year-old California State Parks lifeguard Ryder Williams (left) in the Oval Office at the White House on Monday in Washington, DC. Williams rescued 10-year-old Nathaniel Rai (right) in rough surf at Seabright Beach in Santa Cruz, California last month. – AFP

obstacle, has threatened to annex foreign territory.

Since returning to power in 2025, he has threatened to make Canada the 51st US state, seize Greenland and Cuba, and has even alluded to taking control of the Gaza Strip, without following through on any of these threats.

‘Very patient’

Before the Iran war erupted on February 28, the Strait of Hormuz was an open, international waterway.

Iran says it will not reopen the strait until Washington meets a sweeping list of demands including ending the US blockade of Iran’s ports, lifting oil sanctions, freeing up frozen Iranian assets and paying war damages.

“I want to state clearly that the Strait of Hormuz will not be opened until the American commitments stipulated in the memorandum of understanding... are implemented,” Iran’s top negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said in a speech broadcast on state television.

Kushner told Fox News on Monday that Trump “is going to be very patient... he doesn’t want to rush to a deal”.

But Tehran appears to be content to wait out second-term president Trump, whose approval ratings are falling as his promises to keep the United States out of another “forever war” ring hollow.

The Iran war has driven up prices for US consumers ahead of crucial midterm elections in November that will decide whether Trump’s Republicans keep control of Congress.

Trump has shown signs of frustration, threatening on Monday to “bomb the shit” out of US ally Oman if it interferes with a deal on the Strait of Hormuz.

Meanwhile Qatar, a key mediator in the stalled US-Iran talks, said yesterday that an agreement between Iran and Oman over the Strait of Hormuz would make it easier to resume negotiations to end the Middle East war.

– AFP

Quebec separatists rule out independence vote while Trump in power

MONTREAL – Quebec’s separatist party, the current favourite to win October elections in the Canadian province, said yesterday it will not hold an independence referendum while US President Donald Trump is in power.

The comments from Parti Quebecois (PQ) leader Paul St-Pierre Plamondon highlighted Trump’s broad influence across Canadian politics, with regional actors calibrating their positions in response to the US president’s volatile governing style.

Plamondon, widely known by his initials PSPP, said any decision on Quebec’s independence “requires conditions that allow for an informed and calm debate.”

“It must not be hijacked by the upheavals of American politics, nor by the theatrics of

an unpredictable president,” he added in a social media post.

While polls suggest the PQ is favoured to form Quebec’s next government, surveys also indicate that most people in the majority francophone province do not want to break away from Canada.

An August 8 poll from the Leger firm said 63 percent of Quebecers opposed independence, 28 percent were in favour, and nine percent were undecided.

Experts on Quebec politics have argued for months that Trump would drag down the pro-independence camp.

Through his punishing tariffs and annexation threats, Trump has shaken a bilateral relationship Canadians once viewed as safe.

Voting to create a new country in Quebec would bring fresh uncertainty, with Canada already

under relentless pressure from Washington, experts have said.

Plamondon said if elected his government would work to improve public services, address affordability issues and “restore the confidence Quebecers have in themselves as a nation.”

But, he added, “this would be the worst possible time to reflect on our future because of Trump.”

In the western oil-rich province of Alberta, separatists have argued that Trump’s tenure marks a strategic moment to break free from Canada.

They have generally rejected joining the United States as a 51st state but argued that Trump would provide financial and political support for Alberta independence in exchange for favourable access to the province’s vast crude reserves.

– AFP

Lula hails new oil find as ‘passport to the future’

SÃO PAULO – Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on Monday hailed the discovery of oil near the Amazon coast as a “passport to the future,” despite strong opposition to drilling in the area from environmentalists.

Oil giant Petrobras last week announced it had identified the presence of hydrocarbons off the coast of northern Amapa state, nearly a year after it began drilling.

The majority state-owned firm began exploration after a five-year process to obtain an environmental permit.

The discovery is “a passport to this country’s future and in saying this, I’m not denying my fight to one day be free of fossil fuels,” Lula declared on a visit to Petrobras’s operations base, dressed in one of the company’s orange jumpsuits.

Brandishing a vial containing a sample of the crude, he joked: “I’m going to keep it in a chest, it’s so good, it smells so good.”

The veteran leftist supports the gradual phasing out of fossil fuels to curb climate change.

However, he believes Brazil needs oil revenues to fund the



This handout picture released by Agência Petrobras shows Brazil’s President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva displaying oil-stained hands during a visit to the NS-42 drilling rig, which is conducting exploratory drilling at the Morpho well in deep waters off Amapa state, in Brazil’s Equatorial Margin, on Monday. – AFP

transition to clean energy and achieve energy sovereignty.

The oil was found in a maritime region known as the Equatorial Margin, about 175 kilometres off the Amazon coast.

Petrobras President Magda Chambriard said that another 15 to 20 days of drilling were needed to determine the size of the field.

Experts have warned for years that burning fossil fuels is the main cause of global warming.

Environmentalists also argue that drilling threatens a region rich in biodiversity, situated off the coast of the world’s largest rainforest.

Lula, 80, is seeking a fourth non-consecutive term in October elections.

– AFP

Colombia estimates quake damage at US\$9.6 billion

BOGOTÁ – The powerful earthquake that killed hundreds of people in western Colombia caused US\$9.57 billion in economic losses, President Abelardo de la Espriella said yesterday, issuing a

preliminary estimate.

The 7.4-magnitude tremor, which struck on August 10, was the most powerful in Colombia in nearly half a century.

The death toll stands at 289,

with a further 4,187 injured and 143 missing.

Nearly 27,000 homes were destroyed, leaving many people sleeping in the streets or in public parks.

Dozens of hospitals and schools also collapsed or were damaged.

“Imagine the scale of the disaster,” said De la Espriella, a political novice who took office just three days before the disaster.

The crisis has been a baptism of fire for De la Espriella, a right-wing lawyer and business magnate who was elected on a promise to flush out the drug-trafficking rebels that control part of Colombia.

He said yesterday he had tasked his housing minister with launching a “miracle” reconstruction plan, with the backing of the private sector.

But the minister, Jaime Andres Beltran, has been under fire for taking a Caribbean holiday in the immediate aftermath of the quake.

– AFP



Israeli rescue workers search amid the rubble of the fallen Vanessa building in Cali, Colombia, yesterday, eight days after a 7.4 earthquake. – AFP

Venezuela quake death toll rises to 6,438

CARACAS – Twin earthquakes that struck Venezuela in June killed 6,438 people, according to the latest official death toll released on Monday.

Nearly two months since the disaster, relatives and rescuers continue searching for the missing amid the rubble.

The latest figure, announced by Parliament Speaker Jorge

Rodríguez, brings the death toll up from last week’s figure of 6,301.

The 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude quakes knocked down at least 190 buildings when they struck near Venezuela’s coast on June 24.

Authorities say that at least 60,000 homes were affected in some way, with 24,000 being left uninhabitable.

Thousands of Venezuelan

residents remain in temporary camps, where conditions are precarious.

In Caracas this weekend, heavy rain destroyed some of the tents housing victims.

Interim President Delcy Rodríguez’s government has promised housing for those affected.

To date, 335 homes have been made available out of the 4,000 promised by the end of the year.

– AFP

How only a few tree species drive Amazon forest recovery

Fran Blandy

RIO DE JANEIRO – When a destroyed section of the Amazon rainforest begins to recover, nature deploys only a few tree species, which can withstand poor soil conditions, blazing sun, and grow rapidly, a Brazilian study has shown.

Out of thousands of tree species in the Amazon, a small group of 15 to 25 species do most of the work in regenerating forest and storing carbon when farmers and landowners leave, Fernando Elias, a researcher at the Emilio Goeldi Museum of Para, told AFP on Saturday.

“It’s fantastic because the forest is resilient. These species give the forest a new chance” after the “complete rupture” with the environment that happens when trees are felled, said Elias.

“Once you remove a forest, you’re not just removing biodiversity, you’re not just removing the carbon that’s there. You’re removing the forest’s ability to regulate the climate.”

Elias was the lead researcher on the study published last month by the peer-reviewed scientific journal *Global Change Biology*, which aimed to understand secondary forests that emerge in razed areas of the Brazilian Amazon.

Elias said these pioneer species “have the capacity for rapid colonization” to create conditions for the arrival of species that only occur in mature, primary forests, such as shade – essential for most forest species.

Temperatures under the canopy of these core species can be reduced by up to six degrees Celsius, Elias said.

The pioneer species produce a lot of leaves which fall to the ground, increase organic matter and lead to “the beginning of forest recovery.”

Spanning nine countries, the Amazon’s billions of trees store vast amounts of carbon and are a key buffer against global warming.

– AFP

How forests bounce back

According to the study, the Amazon has an area of secondary forests the size of Uruguay.

Secondary forests emerge in abandoned pastures, farms that went bust, or when a landowner has a legal requirement to restore land.

Studying how they bounce back is key to understanding how to restore lost forests.

The authors used data from these recovering forests in four regions of eastern Amazonia, representing more than 25,000 trees and palms.

Some had been regenerating for as little as one year, and others up to 60 years.

Among the dominant trees were *Cecropia palmata*, with a pale grey trunk and huge hand-shaped leaves, and *Inga alba*, whose long pods contain an edible sweet white pulp.

Palm species like the towering *Inaja* and the *babassu* palm, long valued by rural communities for its oil-rich nuts, were also major players in regeneration.

“If we know which species dominate carbon stocks and dominate the functioning of these ecosystems, we can direct restoration efforts toward them in a way that, for example, makes restoration faster,” said Elias.

According to data from Brazil’s National Institute for Space Research (INPE), an area roughly the size of Spain has been deforested in Brazil in the past four decades.

Under President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s administration, deforestation last year plunged to its lowest levels in a decade. He wants to eradicate forest loss by 2030.

Brazil has pledged to restore 12 million hectares of land under its Paris Agreement commitments.

The research was conducted as part of the Sustainable Amazon Network – an international effort to study how deforestation and other human activities are changing the world’s largest tropical rainforest.



This aerial view shows the Amazon rainforest near the municipality of Paragominas, Pará State, northern Brazil, on November 12, 2025 during the COP30 UN Climate Change Conference. – AFP

Rift deepens as Asia football chief hits back at Qatar in Infantino saga

AFC KUALA LUMPUR - A damaging split within Asian football deepened yesterday as the region's top official hit back at a Qatari challenge over the confederation's move to join UEFA and CONCACAF in targeting FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

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

Infantino came under renewed fire over the scheme last week in a joint letter from the three confederations, including the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), who declared that "football belongs to no individual".

Infantino's critics want him to stand down over the failed plot to sell off stakes in the World Cup.

Recent reports quoted Qatar Football Association president Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani saying in a letter to the AFC that neither he nor the QFA had been consulted before the joint statement was issued.

The Qatari football chief demanded an explanation as to why no consultation had taken place and on what basis the AFC could speak on behalf of its 47 member associations, including Qatar.

AFC president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifa has now hit back to deny he exceeded his authority, saying he acted "within the legal mandate given to me in the AFC's constitution".

"I categorically reject any suggestion that my participation in the joint statement exceeded my authority or that the AFC erred in participating in it," the Bahraini said in a letter seen by AFP yesterday.

"The AFC is the custodian of football in Asia and its president has a responsibility to protect the interests and values of the sport," he added.

"In circumstances such as those giving rise to the joint statement it would be inconsistent with that responsibility to remain silent."

The AFC, CONCACAF and UEFA had been vociferous in their condemnation of Infantino's sell-off plan and have not let up even after it was shelved.

The confederations signed off their letter last week by claiming that under Infantino's leadership "there is silence where there should be accountability, distance where there should be openness".

Infantino has refused to buckle over his position as president and received the "full support" of senior FIFA directors in an emergency meeting he called in Morocco two weeks ago. — AFP

Football shorts

Italy's Vicario joins Juventus on loan from Spurs

SERIE A ROME — Italian goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario joined Juventus from Tottenham Hotspur on a one-year loan, with an option to make the move permanent, the two clubs said yesterday.

The Italy international, 29, is expected to take over in goal from Michele Di Gregorio for the Serie A side, who will play in the Europa League this season, having failed to qualify for the Champions League.

"There's another new Bianconero in Turin," Juventus wrote in a statement announcing the move. "Welcome to Juventus, Guglielmo!"

At Spurs, Vicario was usurped by Antonin Kinsky as first choice towards the end of last season under Roberto De Zerbi as the North London side narrowly avoided relegation from the Premier League.

The shot-stopper joined Tottenham in 2023 from Empoli, after previous stints at Udinese, Venezia, Perugia and Cagliari.

He made 117 appearances for the Premier League team, keeping 29 clean sheets, and playing a crucial role in the club's Europa League success in 2025. — AFP

Simeone insists Atletico to 'build team around' Alvarez

LALIGA MADRID - Coach Diego Simeone again insisted yesterday that Julian Alvarez would not leave Atletico Madrid this year, saying he wanted to "build a team around" the Argentina striker.

Last month, Atletico filed a complaint to FIFA

over Barcelona allegedly tapping up Alvarez.

The 26-year-old has also been linked with a possible move to Premier League champions Arsenal and was the subject of a rejected 150-million-euro (US\$173.4m) bid from Real Madrid in June.

"He's an extraordinary guy. We had a good chat the other day, as we always do," Simeone said ahead of Atletico's La Liga opener against Malaga today.

"He's our best attacking player. I said it last year, and I still think so. We need to try to build a team around him."

Atletico CEO Miguel Angel Marin has also repeatedly stated that Alvarez is not for sale.

"When the club's owner speaks so clearly, there is nothing more to add. It's like in court proceedings - the case is dismissed," added Simeone.

Alvarez has scored 49 goals for Atletico since signing from Manchester City two years ago.

While on World Cup duty with Argentina, he said he "believed a transfer is best for everyone", but did not confirm his preferred destination.

Atletico finished fourth in La Liga last season, 25 points adrift of champions Barcelona. — AFP

Fuellkrug returns to Bremen on loan from relegated West Ham

BUNDESLIGA BERLIN - Striker Niclas Fuellkrug has returned to former side Werder Bremen on a season-long loan from English Championship side West Ham, the German club announced yesterday.

The 33-year-old has endured a torrid time

Kane confirms Bayern extension talks set to start



MUNICH — Bayern Munich striker Harry Kane has said he is set to start negotiations to extend his contract with the Bundesliga champions beyond 2027.

Speaking at a media day in Munich on Monday, the 33-year-old England captain told reporters the discussions had been delayed until after he returned from a post-World Cup holiday, but would begin soon.

"I'm not sure exactly when, but they'll start this week or next week," Kane said of the extension talks.

"We're calm, they're calm with the situation. Obviously now's the time to start talking, because with only a year left it's important."

"But both sides are relaxed and I'm pretty sure there'll be talks this week or next week."

Kane arrived at Bayern on a four-year deal in 2023 and has won two Bundesliga titles and a German Cup, while making the Champions League semi-finals in two out of three seasons. He has scored a remarkable 146

goals in 147 games in all competitions for Bayern.

Bayern have repeatedly said they want to extend Kane's deal at the club, having called the former Spurs striker their "best transfer ever" at the end of last season.

German media reported Kane's new deal would run until at least 2029.

Yesterday, German World Cup winner Lothar Matthaeus said Kane should be the favourite for the Ballon d'Or, which will be awarded in October.

Matthaeus, who won the award in 1991, said Kane "deserves" the award more than any other player after a stellar season, in which he scored 61 goals in 51 games.

"(Kane) delivered outstanding performances and, in my opinion, didn't have a single weak spell," Matthaeus wrote in a column for Sky Germany.

Defending Bundesliga champions Bayern play at Borussia Dortmund in the season-opening Supercup on Saturday. — AFP



Bayern Munich's English forward Harry Kane celebrates scoring the team's second goal during the German Cup (DFB Pokal) final against VfB Stuttgart at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin, on May 23. — AFP

in east London since joining from Borussia Dortmund in 2024, culminating in West Ham's relegation from the Premier League last term.

Fuellkrug's contract at West Ham runs until 2028 but the Hammers did not assign him a squad number this season as they look to bounce back to the Premier League.

Fuellkrug scored three goals in 29 matches during an injury-hit spell at West Ham and spent the second half of last season on loan at AC Milan, where he scored once in 20 matches.

Youth product Fuellkrug boasts a better record at Bremen, scoring 49 goals in 124 matches and he helped the club return to the top flight in 2022.

"I've never made a secret of the fact that Werder is a very special club for me. Therefore, I was also prepared to accept a pay cut to make the loan happen," Fuellkrug said in a statement.

"It was important to me to play for Werder again."

Fuellkrug has scored 14 goals in 24 matches for Germany but has not played at international level since 2025. — AFP

Vieira appointed Senegal head coach after World Cup disappointment

DAKAR — Senegal have appointed France's 1998 World Cup winner Patrick Vieira as head coach, the country's football federation announced yesterday, succeeding Pape Thiaw who was dismissed after the World Cup.

The appointment of Vieira, who was

born in Senegal, is a "strategic move", the federation said in a social media post, aiming to "establish a high-level technical staff, in line with our country's sporting ambitions".

His main mission will be to revitalise the team after Senegal's bruising loss to Belgium in the last 32 of the World Cup.

Thiaw was sacked less than two weeks later. The 45-year-old former Senegal international had taken over as national team boss in 2024.

The Senegalese Football Federation (FSF) president said at the time that toxicity had surrounded the team at the World Cup after Thiaw demanded a pay rise.

The appointment of Vieira, who grew up in France, was ratified Monday, the FSF said.

His official presentation as head coach and onboarding will occur at a future, unspecified date, it added.

Vieira was a key part of a superb Arsenal side which won the English league three times between 1998 and 2004, before moving to Juventus and then Inter Milan in Italy.

After ending his playing career at Manchester City, Vieira cut his coaching teeth at New York City FC from 2016 before taking over French top-flight side Nice from 2018 to 2020.

The 50-year-old returned to England as manager of Premier League side Crystal Palace in 2021 but was sacked in March 2023 after a 12-match winless run. He subsequently had short stints at Strasbourg and Italian side Genoa.

He played 107 times for France and won the World Cup in 1998 as well as the Euros two years later. — AFP



All aboard as Asian Games preparations enter 'final stages'

Andrew McKirdy

TOKYO – The Asian Games begin in Japan next month featuring teenage prodigies, more athletes than the Olympics and a cruise ship that will house competitors in the middle of typhoon season.

About 15,000 competitors and officials are expected at the event, which takes place in Nagoya and the wider Aichi area from September 19 to October 4.

Among those in action will be Philippine tennis sensation Alexandra Eala and a pair of world-class talents in 15-year-old Indian cricketer Vaibhav Sooryavanshi and 13-year-old Chinese swimmer Yu Zidi.

Organisers hope the athletes will have a “unique experience” staying in accommodation ranging from a cruise liner and wooden containers to standard hotel rooms.

A flame-lighting ceremony was held in Tokyo yesterday, with a similar event planned for 1994 Asian Games host Hiroshima tomorrow, before the flames come together on Saturday in Nagoya to begin the torch relay.

Kazuhiro Yagi, vice-secretary general of the Aichi-Nagoya Games organising committee, told AFP that “it feels like the Games are right around the corner”.

“The final stages of preparation are now upon us,” he said.

“We will continue working as one right until the last moment and we hope that people from all over Asia, not just Japan, will enjoy the event.”

Organisers have opted for temporary athlete accommodation to cut costs, hiring the Italian cruise ship Costa Serena for the event.

Between 4,000 and 5,000 athletes will stay on the ship, which features 571 cabins, seven swimming pools, eight restaurants and nine bars.

Officials are confident that the plan will not be disrupted by Japan's typhoon season, which is usually in full swing in September-October.

Teen stars

A further 2,000 athletes and officials will stay in wooden shipping container-style huts in



Japanese former hammer throw athlete Koji Murofushi (left) and Vice President of the Olympic Council of Asia Tsunekazu Takeda take part in the torch lighting ceremony for the 2026 Asian Games, outside the National Stadium in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Nagoya's Garden Pier area while the rest will stay in hotels.

That includes in Tokyo, where swimming, diving and equestrian events will take place.

“For the athletes the accommodation is a place to relax and socialise with their fellow competitors,” said Yagi.

“To ensure that all athletes can enjoy a comfortable stay and deliver their best performance, preparations for accommodation are entering their final stage.”

Eala will be among the most prominent athletes competing in Nagoya, and the 21-year-old will be looking to continue her rapid rise in women's tennis.

The world number 20 became the first player from the Philippines to win a WTA title when she triumphed at the Washington Open earlier this month.

She is hot property in her home country, sparking a rush of interest in tennis and inspiring youngsters to take up the sport.

Sooryavanshi will also turn heads after announcing himself as a major new talent in world cricket.

The gifted teenager became the youngest cricketer to represent India last month when he debuted in a Twenty20 match against England.

‘Palpable excitement’

Sooryavanshi will be hoping to win gold at Japan's newly built cricket ground, where defending

champions India could face arch-rivals Pakistan in the men's final.

Swimmer Yu has also made a name for herself with her astonishing progress in the pool, setting a new women's 200m individual medley Asian record last year.

Yu, who turns 14 in October, will be part of a Chinese team that will again look to top the medals table after dominating on home soil at the Hangzhou Asian Games in 2023.

China won a record 201 golds, almost four times as many as second-place Japan.

As always at the Asian Games, traditional sports like athletics, swimming and football sit side by side with more local disciplines such as kabaddi, sepak takraw and wushu.

New events at the 20th edition of the Games include mixed martial arts, padel, teqball and virtual taekwondo.

Esports returns after a hugely successful debut in Hangzhou, with Nagoya organisers saying they hope to inspire elderly people to keep their minds sharp by picking up a controller.

With the Asian Games returning to Japan for the first time since 1994, the organising committee's Yagi said the atmosphere was “gradually becoming palpable”.

“We hope to move you and excite you, and to showcase the wonder of sport,” he said. — AFP

India close on victory in 1st Test against Sri Lanka

Cricket

GALLE, Sri Lanka – India took a big step towards victory in the first Test in Galle yesterday after their bowlers reduced Sri Lanka, chasing a daunting 372 to win, to 84-4 on day four.

Left-arm spinner Manav Suthar took two wickets to rattle Sri Lanka's top-order on a pitch offering big turn.

Earlier, India were bowled out for 193 at tea after Rishabh Pant top-scored with 66 and became the fastest player to hit 100 sixes in Test cricket.

Sri Lanka then slipped to 47-4 before skipper Dhananjaya de Silva, unbeaten on 31, and Sonal Dinusha, 25 not out, put on a stubborn stand to steer their team to stumps.

“In Galle if you look at the history, spin plays a big part in the last couple of days and batting gets tough,” said Sri Lanka's pace bowling coach Ryan van Niekerk.

“As a bowling group we have tried to improve and continue to find ways to get wickets. A team like India will continue to take the initiative.”

Opener Nishan Madushka Fernando was the first to go in the chase, top-edging a hook off Mohammed Siraj straight to fine leg to be dismissed for six.

Pasindu Sooriyabandara endured a forgettable debut after coming in as a concussion substitute for veteran Dinesh Chandimal, who hurt himself while fielding when he hit his head on the ground and was ruled out of the rest of the match.

Pant shines

Sooriyabandara was trapped lbw by Suthar for a golden duck.

“The wicket was playing well,” said

Suthar. “Even when we were bowling in the second innings, we were getting only a little turn. Maybe tomorrow [today] there will be more turn.”

Prasidh Krishna then had Kamindu Mendis caught at the first slip for two.

De Silva survived being caught at slip off a no ball by Ravindra Jadeja when he was on seven.

But Lahiru Udara fell to Suthar after close-in fielder Dhruv Jurel took a low catch, which the TV umpire gave out after several replays.

The Sri Lankan camp were disappointed with the decision, as the ball looked to have hit the turf before settling into Jurel's hands.

De Silva and first-innings centurion Dinusha then took Sri Lanka to safety without further drama but the hosts have more than 90 overs ahead of them to draw or win the match.

Weather though could come to Sri Lanka's rescue, with rain again predicted on the fifth day of a weather-hit match.

Sri Lanka earlier struck regular blows in India's second innings, but Pant kept his team in a strong position with an excellent knock including eight fours and two sixes.

The swashbuckling wicketkeeper-batsman became the fastest player to 100 sixes, reaching the mark in 89 Test innings, surpassing Australia's Adam Gilchrist (130 innings).

Devdutt Padikkal, who scored an outstanding 167 in the first innings, looked solid again for his 44 after he arrived at crease in the first over when Yashasvi Jaiswal went for a duck.

Sri Lanka seamer Asitha Fernando stood out with figures of 4-31. — AFP



India's Rishabh Pant plays a shot during the fourth day of the first Test cricket match against Sri Lanka at the Galle International Stadium in Galle, Sri Lanka yesterday. — AFP

F1's Albon re-signs with Williams for 2027

F1

PARIS – Formula One constructor Williams announced yesterday it was extending the contract of driver Alex Albon for next season.

The 30-year-old Thai finished eighth in the drivers' standings last year, securing Williams' best result since 2016.

Albon joined the British team four years ago and will now stay with them to the end of 2027.

“Alex is one of the best drivers on the grid and knows better than anyone the enormous improvements we have made in recent years,” Williams' team principal James Vowles said in a statement.

“Re-signing him shows the belief we both have in the direction

we are heading.”

The deal comes in the wake of Albon bringing up a century of race starts for Williams.

In interviews with AFP in February, Vowles stated it was “not realistic” for Williams to win the world championship this season or next, before Albon said Williams had started the 2026 campaign “on the back foot compared to our rivals”.

However, in a statement released by Williams yesterday, Albon said: “One tough year doesn't tell the full picture, and it only gives me more motivation to keep building and pushing together with the factory and our fans to achieve great things.

“Our story is not over yet, so my full focus now is on doing whatever it takes to get us back up the grid.” — AFP

Japan's Yamaguchi cruises into round 2 of badminton worlds

Badminton

NEW DELHI – Defending champion Akane Yamaguchi began the world badminton championships with a comfortable win in round one of the women's singles in New Delhi yesterday.

The world number two from Japan cruised past Vietnam's Nguyen Thuy Linh 21-12, 21-10 in 26 minutes at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium.

Yamaguchi's win comes a day after men's defending champion

Shi Yuqi suffered a shock first-round exit from the tournament.

Yamaguchi, a three-time world champion, is fresh from her win at the China Open last month where she beat home favourite Chen Yufei in a rematch of last year's world final in Paris.

Chen, ranked fourth in the world, had a come-from-behind win over Hong Kong's Sin Yan Happy Lo as she beat her opponent 18-21, 21-8, 21-11.

Thailand's Ratchanok Intanon got the better of Neslihan Arin of

Turkey 21-14, 21-10 in 31 minutes.

In men's action, world number three Jonatan Christie beat Matthias Kicklitz of Germany 21-15, 21-14 to get his campaign up and running.

Indian hope Lakshya Sen lost the first game in a scare for the home crowd but fought back to win against Austria's Collins Valentine Filimon 16-21, 21-8, 21-4.

The two-time All England finalist, in 2022 and 2026, was roared on as he powered through the final two games. — AFP

‘If you can, move!’ say Rome’s viral dancing seniors

ROME – Bopping to Michael Jackson and Elvis Presley in a Roman square, an elderly dancing duo has become a viral sensation in Italy – something they hope will inspire other seniors to take up a more active lifestyle.

Retired dance instructor Pasquale Iannotta, 70, and his dancing partner Elisa Fava, 79, have won praise from Rome’s mayor and twirled on national TV since one of their street performances was shared online by a social media savvy tour operator last week.

“No one ever thought we could go viral like this,” Fava told AFP last Wednesday, as the pair returned to Testaccio square, in the namesake historic working-class district of the Italian capital, for another spin.

Their moves have struck a chord with many in Italy – whose population is the oldest in the European Union.

The original clip posted by The Tour Guy gathered almost more than 370,000 likes and thousands of comments on Instagram, including from mayor Roberto Gualtieri who complimented the “excellent dancers”, writing: “There’s so much beauty in this simple video”.

Iannotta and Fava have since been invited to perform on the flagship morning TV show of national broadcaster Rai Uno and

other television programmes.

The two met at dancing class, where Fava was one of Iannotta’s pupils, and started performing outdoors regularly in the summer since, as Iannotta puts it, they both “hate sitting around at home”.

Now they hope their sudden popularity will push others off the sofa and onto the dance floor, they said.

“I have many friends who, unfortunately, when they retire, like many others end up sitting on the sofa watching television. I’d like to see them get a bit more active,” Iannotta, who wore a floral short-sleeve shirt and sunglasses, said after the duo showed off their skills to the tune of Presley’s “Jailhouse Rock”.

With a median age of 49.1, Italy is the EU’s oldest country, according to the bloc’s data agency.

Births fell last year by nearly four percent, plunging the fertility rate to an 80-year low, national statistics show.

As the country ages, putting pressure on care among other challenges, doctors say physical activity is vital for older people, helping with brain and heart health among other benefits.

“Don’t be idle: if you can, move,” Fava, who recently became a great-grandmother, said in a message to fellow seniors. “Particularly dancing is good for you”. – AFP



Retired dance teacher Pasquale Iannotta (left), 70, and his dancing partner Elisa Fava, 79, dance at Piazza Testaccio in Rome last Thursday. – AFP

A Viking longship in ‘The Odyssey’? It’s a case of history meets Hollywood

Pierre-Henry Deshayes

OSLO, Norway – The eras of “The Odyssey” and the Vikings happened about 2,000 years apart – so how did a Viking longship end up with a starring role in this year’s blockbuster movie?

Look to director Christopher Nolan, and his obsession with bringing spectacle to life with real props, real scenes.

But also credit a team of Norwegian shipwrights and sailors who built a vessel that speaks to both history and Hollywood.

With its tar-soaked rigging, creaking oak deck and 50 spruce oars, Draken Harald Harfagre is the largest modern replica of a Viking ship.

It mattered little that it had to drop its Scandinavian roots for Greek mythology – the anachronism blended into the service of Nolan’s brand of realism.

For the film, though, Draken had to be stripped of the dragon figurehead at its bow – typical of the Viking era, from the 8th to 11th centuries – as it sailed for the cameras in Greek, Italian and Scottish waters.

“We found a Viking ship that had been built exactly according to those ancient specifications. And it was very much the whole shape and the rig that we needed to do a Bronze Age ship,” Nolan told US television last month.

“We took the crew, and we put their crew all in our costumes. They became part of the movie crew, as it were. And Odysseus’ guys, the actors, joined in with them, and they figured out how to raise the sail, how to rig it, how to row, all of this stuff.”

For months, the longship’s crew of seasoned sailors rubbed shoulders with Hollywood star Matt Damon, who plays Odysseus on-screen, and a host of professional actors.

‘Doing the real thing’

“There was one day where one of the actors who was sitting in



Bjorn Ahlander (right), captain of the Draken Harald Harfagre (the ship used in the movie “The Odyssey”) on board as the ship is docked outside Oslo Opera in the Norwegian capital last Friday. “Draken” means “dragon” in Norwegian. – AFP



The Draken Harald Harfagre (the ship used in the movie “The Odyssey”) is docked outside Oslo Opera in the Norwegian capital last Friday. – AFP

front of me got seasick and threw up over the rail. It blew back on me,” recalled sailor Trammell Hudson.

“I thought that would be my big scene, because the IMAX camera was very focused on him and me in the background dodging the debris. But I didn’t see that particular scene in the film,” he told AFP when the Draken and its crew made a recent visit to Oslo.

Based on Homer’s epic, Nolan’s film retraces the hero Odysseus in a perilous journey to his home on the island of Ithaca after the Trojan War in the 12th century BCE.

Rather than recreating a ship with computer-generated images, Nolan wanted a real one, capable of sailing on the open sea with flesh-and-blood men aboard.

“Most of the scenes would be completely different if it wasn’t for us being there, doing the real thing with the real ship and the real crew in the real ocean and real weather,” said Emanuel Persson, expedition director for Draken.

“I think the viewers can actually feel the genuine materials. I don’t know if you can really smell the tar, but you can tell it’s really genuine handicraft instead of being a digital creation,” he said.

All hands on deck

On board, everyone played their part.

“Matt Damon was very nice and very good. Never complained. Every one of the actors was out for a long time and it was very cold and sometimes rough,” recalled the longship captain, Bjorn Ahlander.

“No complaints, nothing, never. So that was fantastic to see.”

With such a mixed crew on board, it wasn’t always easy to row in perfect sync.

“It’s very important that the hundred rowers coordinate because the oars are quite long and they will tangle with each other,” Trammell Hudson stressed.

He recalled being thrown “a metre-and-a-half into the air”, along with his rowing partner, when the blade of their oar hit a wave head-on.

The sweet memories from the shoot are in sharp contrast to those from neighbouring Sweden.

Like Penelope waiting for Odysseus, the owners of another Viking ship used in the film had their patience tested: after the ship incurred damage during a shoot, they had to wait a year for compensation. – AFP

Paramount demands US\$1.9 billion surety over states’ merger lawsuit

LOS ANGELES – Paramount Skydance is demanding California and other US states suing to block its merger with Warner Bros. put up US\$1.9 billion to cover fees the company will have to pay if the deal gets delayed, according to a lawsuit filed on Monday.

The audacious bid is the latest step in an increasingly high-stakes row pitting the media giant against a coalition of liberal states who say the attempt to swallow a historic studio will be bad for filmmakers and bad for moviegoers.

Paramount, which is run by David Ellison, whose ultra-wealthy family is a close ally of US President Donald Trump, launched a US\$110 billion bid for control

of a stable of assets that includes Warner Bros. Pictures, CNN and the HBO Max streaming service.

Opponents in the movie industry say the combined company would slash jobs in already-under-pressure Hollywood and reduce the number of films produced every year, while news media groups fret that CNN’s independence could be tamed.

Monday’s filing reflects the pressure on Paramount, with a US\$7 million-a-day “ticking fee” due to kick in for Warner Bros. shareholders if the takeover is not complete by October 1.

The suit is an attempt to insulate Paramount from those costs, which it says will only accrue because of

the ongoing legal action.

If a judge approves the move at a hearing today, California and the other 11 states, as well as the Writers’ Guild of America, which is also suing to block the merger, would be on the hook for the cash if their legal action fails.

Last week, Ellison threatened to move the company out of California if the state’s attorney general, Rob Bonta, did not negotiate on his lawsuit.

Bonta dubbed the threat “blackmail.”

The US federal government, the European Union and the British government are among those who have already given their blessing to the takeover. – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 22°C~32°C	Manila 24°C~28°C	New York 22°C~32°C	Lisbon 19°C~28°C
Shanghai 25°C~33°C	Bangkok 26°C~34°C	London 13°C~23°C	Rio de Janeiro 18°C~29°C
Hong Kong 24°C~31°C	Tokyo 22°C~33°C	Frankfurt 16°C~26°C	Luanda 19°C~22°C
Taipei 24°C~32°C	Singapore 25°C~32°C	Vancouver 14°C~23°C	Maputo 15°C~27°C
Guangzhou 24°C~35°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~33°C	Paris 15°C~28°C	Dili 20°C~32°C
Nanjing 23°C~33°C	Jakarta 23°C~33°C	Moscow 11°C~20°C	São Tomé 24°C~31°C
Guilin 24°C~34°C	Seoul 23°C~31°C	Las Vegas 28°C~43°C	Praia 24°C~32°C
Xi’an 20°C~29°C	Sydney 10°C~20°C	Monte Carlo 23°C~31°C	Bissau 23°C~31°C

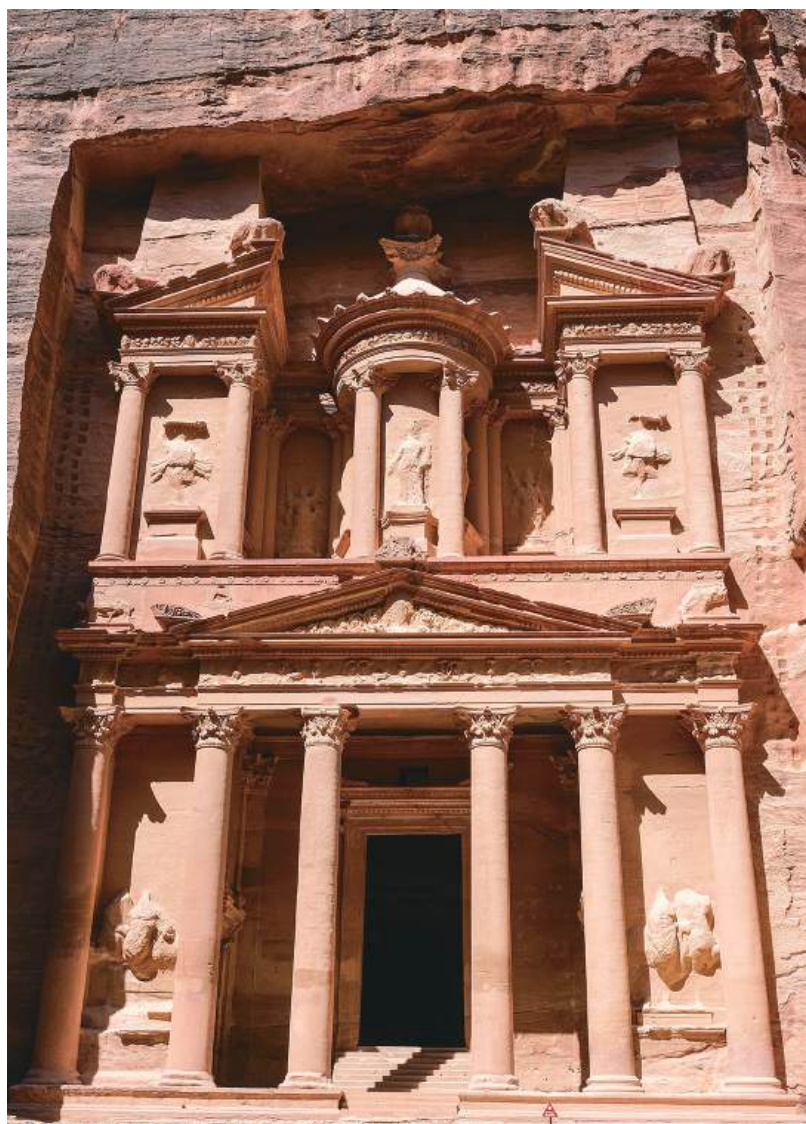


On yer bike!

People take part in a greased-pole climbing competition during a celebration event of the 81st anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Indonesia in Jakarta, on Monday. — Xinhua

Perfect photo op!

This photo released by the Everland theme park, Seoul yesterday, shows a female cub born to giant panda Ai Bao in South Korea. Ai Bao, a female giant panda on loan from China, gave birth to a female cub on June 3. — Xinhua



On the bucket list

This photo taken on July 23 shows the Treasury at the archaeological site of Petra, Jordan. Petra was built possibly as early as the 5th century BC. The city is one of the New 7 Wonders of the World and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. — Xinhua

Maya influence

Salvadoran mural artist Gonzalo Vasquez works during the eighth edition of the PigmenTrip Muralism Festival -part of the local Festival del Jaguar- in Concepcion de Ataco, Ahuachapan, El Salvador, on Saturday. — AFP



Bored bear

A European brown bear (*Ursus arctos arctos*) is pictured in its enclosure at the Berlin Zoo yesterday. — AFP



Water on the inside!

An aerial drone photo taken on Sunday shows an exterior view of the aquarium at uShaka Marine World in Durban, South Africa. Located in Durban, uShaka Marine World is a marine theme park featuring a shipwreck-themed aquarium, marine life exhibits and water attractions. — Xinhua