

Govt to launch new round of consumption scheme next month

E-coupons can be used every day each week

Tony Wong

The government announced yesterday that it will launch a new round of its community e-coupon consumption stimulation programme next month. Several changes will be introduced to this new round's modus operandi, compared to the previous round implemented earlier this year.

In the previous round – lasting 10 weeks between April 10 and June 18 – e-wallet users had the chance to win e-coupons on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and had to use them between the immediately following Mondays and Thursdays; otherwise, they were to expire.

In the new round starting next month, e-wallet users will also have the chance to win e-coupons with a purchase on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, but they can then use the coupons for the next purchase on the same day right after winning them. The period for using the won coupons will run through to the following Thursday. This means that an e-wallet user will have up to seven days to use the coupons each week before they expire.

As with previous rounds, the upcoming new round of the programme will be run by the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) in collaboration with the Macao Chamber of Commerce (ACM), colloquially known in Cantonese as Chung Chung. The programme will be implemented with the assistance of the Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM).

The programme's new round was announced during a press conference at the bureau's headquarters in Nam Van yesterday.

The new round will run between October 9 and December 17, also lasting 10 weeks.

Unchanged from previous rounds, in the new round, all real-name authenticated users of any of the eight e-wallets covered by the programme, regardless of whether they are local residents or non-locals, who have spent at least 50 patacas in a purchase at participating businesses will then have three chances to win e-coupons with a face value of 10 patacas, 20 patacas, 50 patacas, 100 patacas, or 200 patacas.



Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) Director Yau Yun Wah speaks during yesterday's press conference at the bureau's headquarters in Nam Van. – Photo: Tony Wong

However, each authenticated e-wallet account will be entitled to up to three draws per week, regardless of the number of 50-pataca-plus transactions made during the period.



Unchanged from previous rounds, in the new round, each e-coupon stored in the smartphone user's e-wallet will be automatically redeemed in a purchase if the transaction amount is at least three times the face value of the coupon.

If the e-wallet has more than one coupon at the same time, the e-payment platform will automatically validate one or more coupons after the user spends at least three times the total value of these coupons.

Continued on p.5



A robot demonstrates picking fruit during an expo of the World AgriFood Innovation (WAFI) Conference in Pinggu District of Beijing yesterday. WAFI 2026 is held here from Thursday to Saturday under the theme "Green and Healthy Transformation of AgriFood Systems." The conference features an opening ceremony, parallel sessions, thematic forums, meetings, side events, innovation shows, and an expo, offering a diverse range of activities in various formats. – Xinhua

Archbishop of Canterbury 'withdraws' award given to Muslim cleric who praised bin Laden

LONDON – The office of the Archbishop of Canterbury yesterday withdrew an interfaith award given this September 11 to a Muslim cleric who praised Osama bin Laden, after the decision sparked backlash.

Sarah Mullally, the head of the Church of England, last week handed awards to faith leaders including Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, for "reconciliation and interfaith cooperation".

Ashrafi is the chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council, a prominent body of religious scholars.

In 2007, he told AFP it was

giving then-Al-Qaeda chief bin Laden its "highest title for a Muslim warrior" in protest at Britain awarding writer Salman Rushdie a knighthood.

"We are pleased to award the title of Saifullah (Sword of Allah) to Osama bin Laden," Ashrafi told AFP at the time, calling this "the highest title for a Muslim warrior".

Bin Laden orchestrated the 9/11 attacks on the United States and was killed by US forces in 2011.

"Previous comments made by Imam Ashrafi have come to light that have led Lambeth Palace to reconsider this award and we

can now confirm today that the award has been withdrawn," the office of the archbishop said in a statement.

The statement added that the award had initially been given to Ashrafi for his "longstanding support for religious minorities in Pakistan, particularly the Christian community."

A spokesperson for Ashrafi said earlier his comment had not been "an endorsement of bin Laden" but "made in the context of explaining the hurt felt by many Muslims over the British honour" for Rushdie. – AFP

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Wang Yi holds phone talks with Marco Rubio on high-level interactions

Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke by phone yesterday with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on high-level interactions between the two countries.

– Story on p. 7

King Charles disputes claims in book by Princess Diana's brother

Britain's King Charles III has taken the rare step of hitting back at criticism after Princess Diana's brother alleged that the monarch acted insensitively following her death in a car crash three decades ago.

– Story on p. 11

Lula says he will go to UN to tell Trump to 'stay out' of Brazil's elections

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said on Wednesday he will tell US President Donald Trump "not to meddle in Brazil's elections" next week during the United Nations General Assembly.

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A Transition and an Opportunity for Sport

Commentary by Manuel Silvério
*Independent public policy and regional development analyst
(Former senior public official with international experience and a longstanding commitment to public policy and sports development)*

I had not intended to comment on this appointment. As it is a temporary arrangement within an already announced restructuring process, I initially thought it more prudent to await the Administrative Regulation that will define the future organisation.

However, some of the reactions that have since emerged suggest that it may be useful to recall a few background details that help explain the present situation.

The merger of the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), the Sports Bureau (ID) and the Cultural Development Fund is not a new proposal. Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai announced it when presenting the 2026 Policy Address on November 18, 2025, as part of a broader public administration reform intended, according to the government, to strengthen coordination and improve the effectiveness of governance.

The decision to appoint Deland Leong Wai Man, an architect by profession, as acting president of the Sports Bureau, concurrently with her presidency of the Cultural Affairs Bureau, from September 20 to October 31, should therefore be understood within this planned process.

That is 42 days.
The duration does not appear incidental. Several appointments of Sports Bureau officials expire on October 31, including those of the vice-president, the head of the Sports Development Department and the head of the Sports Associations Support Division.

These coinciding dates suggest an administrative timetable coordinated with the restructuring underway. The 42 days can therefore be understood as a period of preparation and transition. The definitive arrangements will become clear when the relevant Administrative Regulation* is published.

This is also why I find it overly simplistic to focus the entire discussion on whether the appointee “comes from sport”.

In Macau, particularly, I do not believe that a sporting background should be the decisive criterion for leading sports administration. Knowledge of the sector matters, and technically competent professionals within the organisation are indispensable. But leading a public body requires broader abilities: management, leadership, coordination, decision-making and, increasingly, a regional and international outlook.

Macau is a small city, but its sporting ambitions should not be small.

Major events, athlete and youth development, relations with international federations, cooperation with the Chinese mainland and the Greater Bay Area (GBA), the use of facilities, sports tourism, attracting competitions and supporting sports associations all require the ability to work across sectors.

A good leader does not need to replace specialists. A good leader must listen to them, coordinate their work and create the conditions for technical knowledge to become policies, decisions and results.

Leong’s career also deserves consideration before her appointment is judged solely on the absence of a professional background in sport.

She joined the Cultural Affairs Bureau in 2009 and spent much of her career working in cultural heritage, holding management positions before becoming vice-president and, in 2022, president.

Over these years, she has worked within an organisation responsible for complex matters: heritage conservation and management, urban revitalisation, major cultural events, and regional and international cooperation. Leong has also chaired the Cultural Heritage Council in an acting capacity, overseeing discussions on matters including the Historic Centre’s protection and management plan, restoration projects and intangible cultural heritage.

The international dimension has also become more prominent. Macau’s 2025 “Culture City of East Asia” programme

provided a platform for cultural cooperation between China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, involving local coordination and regional exchanges. The bureau has also organised international forums, including the International Cultural Forum on the Maritime Silk Road, bringing together institutions and specialists from different parts of the world.

These achievements should not be attributed to the president alone. Public bodies have their own teams and operate under government supervision. They do, however, point to accumulated experience in project management, institutional coordination, heritage, major events and external relations. That experience should also be considered when assessing the choice made for these 42 days.

Two questions must nevertheless be distinguished.

One is how to ensure an administrative transition lasting just over a month. The other is who should lead Macau’s sports development within the new organisation in the years ahead, and how.

It is the second question that concerns me most.

I sincerely hope this restructuring will open better prospects for sport in Macau: for our young people, athletes and associations, and for everyone with experience, contacts, ideas and a willingness to contribute.

The ability to receive and assess proposals for international sporting initiatives also deserves attention.

Good ideas, interested partners and willing counterparts abroad are not enough. Macau must also be able to receive a proposal, assess it, discuss it and reach a timely decision.

Naturally, not every initiative can or should be accepted. The administration has a duty to examine the public interest, feasibility, costs, risks and practical requirements of each proposal.

But between acceptance and refusal lie some essential responsibilities: analysis, dialogue, explanation and a reply.

That is also what I expect of the future organisation.

Administrative procedures are necessary. So is rigour. What must be avoided is a situation in which unnecessary bureaucracy, inadequate coordination or technical capacity, insufficient transparency, a lack of dialogue or delayed replies – sometimes no replies at all – discourage people and projects that could contribute to Macau.

Submitting a serious proposal does not entitle anyone to approval. It should, however, allow them to know whom to contact, which rules apply, what conditions must be met, whether the proposal is viable and, ultimately, to receive a clear answer within a reasonable period.

That, too, is good public administration.

Perhaps this is one of the merger’s greatest opportunities: to create an organisation better able to connect culture, sport, major events, youth, tourism and external relations while preserving the specialist knowledge each field requires. The change should be reflected in working practices and the results achieved.

For sport, this will require good technical professionals. It will also require capable managers, effective decision-making and a vision that reaches beyond Macau towards the Greater Bay Area, the country and the world.

The 42 days are merely a transition.

What truly matters begins afterwards.

Let us await the Administrative Regulation, hoping that the next stage will provide better conditions for those who wish to contribute – for sport, for young people and for Macau.

Macao SAR, September 16, 2026.

End

**An administrative regulation (regulamento administrativo/行政法規) in Macau serves a similar legal function to a by-law or secondary legislation in other jurisdictions – it is a subordinate instrument passed by the executive branch to implement and detail primary laws enacted by the legislature. In Macau, unlike a law proposed by the executive, an administrative regulation drafted by the government does not require the legislature’s approval– Gemini/MPD*

POLY MGM MUSEUM to spotlight Zibo liuli artistry in new exhibition

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operator MGM and Poly Culture announced in a joint statement on Tuesday that “POLY MGM MUSEUM” in Zape is set to present its new exhibition “Luminous Brilliance: The Artistry of Zibo Liuli” that will showcase close to 180 historic and contemporary glass masterpieces.

Kicking off from October through March next year, the statement said that the exhibition is held in conjunction with the National Museum of China and the Zibo Ceramics and Glass Museum.

“Liuli”, as defined by AI chatbot Gemini, is a traditional Chinese crystal glass art, renowned for its rich colours, luminous depth, and thousands of years of cultural history.

Zibo in Shandong Province is a historic centre for Chinese glassmaking, having a thousand years of continuous tradition and recognised intangible cultural heritage, the statement said, adding that it taken along the Silk Road to destinations across Asia and beyond.

The exhibition spans three chapters, with the first “Forging a Millennium Legacy” highlighting the deep roots of Chinese glassmaking, while Roman, Sasanian Persian, and Islamic glass from the National Museum of China are also displayed alongside the Chinese works, the statement said.

The second, “Eternal Iridescence”, looks



This photo provided by MGM on Tuesday shows a section of the Luminous Brilliance: The Artistry of Zibo Liuli at POLY MGM MUSEUM in Zape.

at various techniques to highlight the colour palette and Eastern aesthetics of liuli, the statement said. The final section “Exquisite Objects of Timeless Elegance” highlights outstanding contemporary glass works.

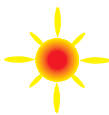
Moreover, the exhibition includes signature works such as the Grape Shaped Glass Bottle, Liuli Phoenix Crown, and Butterflies and Spirit Serpent Floral Crown. The statement added that the exhibition also features a liuli garden, which

is “anchored by the Twelve Flower Deities installation”, along with works by US glass artist Dale Chihuly from the MGM collection.

Poly Culture’s patented multifunctional holographic display cases aim to tell the stories of the exhibits, while also being interactive, the statement said, adding that a large-scale glass art installation is to be displayed in MGM MACAU’s Grande Praça during the exhibition period. ■

Macau Weather

MAINLY FINE.
FORCE 3 TO 4 EAST TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 55% AND 90%.



25°C~32°C

Source: SMG

Published since Aug 2004

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- Graphic Designer – Colin Zhong
- Administrative Assistants – Ester Mak, Carl Leong
- Printed by Tipografia Welfare Lda., 82-86 Rua dos Pescadores
- Ai tools: DeepSeek, Gemini
- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua

MasterChef Asia filmed in Macau to premiere Tuesday

Khalel Vallo

The reality cooking competition *MasterChef Asia*, filmed entirely in Macau, will premiere on HBO Max in the US next Tuesday, followed by telecasts on TLC and Discovery Channel, according to a recent statement by HBO Max.

MasterChef Asia is a regional competitive cooking reality show based on the original British show MasterChef. Produced by Warner Bros. Discovery, CreAsia Studio and Banijay Rights, the 10-episode series features former MasterChef contestants competing in new culinary challenges for the *MasterChef Asia* title, the statement said, adding that Chefs Edward Lee (Lee Kyun), “Pam” Pichaya Soontornyanakij and Kelvin Cheung serve as judges.

According to the statement, the contestants feature Vietnamese-Australian chef Khanh Ong, restaurant owner Sahadol “Pond” Tantrapim, Malaysian pastry

chef Marcus Low, South Korean gastronomy specialist Areum Yoon, Nambie Jessica Marak, and Asian cuisine chefs Audrey Wicksana, Therese Lum, Mime Kataniwa, Ivory Yat and local contestant Sandy Tang (鄧善婷).

The statement also said that guest judges include Mark Wiens and Julien Tongourian.

Filmed in Macau in partnership with the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), the competition features challenges at local markets, Michelin-starred restaurants and a dedicated MasterChef Asia kitchen, the statement noted, underlining that Macau’s designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy also provides the setting for the series’ focus on the city’s culinary culture.

The series will premiere on HBO Max next Tuesday, TLC will air it in Macau at 9:00 p.m., while Discovery Channel will premiere it at 7:10 p.m. next Wednesday, according to the statement. ■



This poster provided by HBO Max recently promotes its upcoming MasterChef Asia reality show, filmed in Macau, which will premiere next Tuesday.

Macau selects 4 reps for WCBC national finals



(From left to right) Lee Kwok-ho, Xu Jinhua, Mok Wa Hun, and Leong Seng Meng pose with their trophies during yesterday's two-day regional selection for the 2026 WCBC (World Coffee Blending Championship) at the public Macao University of Tourism (UTM) in Mong Ha.
— Photo: Khalel Vallo

Khalel Vallo

The local two-day regional selection for the 2026 WCBC (World Coffee Blending Championship) concluded yesterday at the public Macao University of Tourism (UTM) on its Mong Ha campus, with four contestants selected to represent Macau at the national finals in the Chinese mainland.

Organised by UTM’s Institute for Executive and Professional Development (IEPD), in conjunction with the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) and the Macau Coffee and Tea Association, the two-day competition focused on coffee bean blending and sensory evaluation.

It also included public tasting and voting sessions, providing a platform for industry professionals and young talent to exchange skills while allowing the public to learn more about specialty coffee.

During yesterday’s awards ceremony, Xu Jinhua from Guangdong received the contest’s top prize, followed by local contestants Mok Wa Hun and Leong Seng Meng, in second and third place respectively. Meanwhile, Lee Kwok-ho from Hong Kong won the popularity vote.

The competition was part of UTM’s efforts to combine skills training, professional certification and industry exchanges, according to a statement by the public university yesterday.

Speaking to the media after the ceremony, Xu said: “Our company produces coffee, and our two bosses have received good reviews on this award”, adding that she wanted to do her best as a member of the company and gain experience for next year’s competition.

She described the local contest as different to others, praising the atmosphere, opening ceremony, fans and fellow competitors. Reflecting on her win, Xu expressed gratitude to her boss for providing her with support and said she was proud of herself.

Xu also observed a difference in local coffee preferences: “I think Macau people prefer coffee with less sugar”.

The four selected contestants will represent Macau at the subsequent WCBC national finals in the Chinese mainland. The statement said that the competition also aims to connect coffee culture with tourism experiences and further develop Macau’s identity as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

The statement did not mention when and where the national finals will take place. ■

SJM presents lantern art exhibition by 4 artists

Rui Pastorin

SJM Resorts and the Macau Artist Society (MAS) are jointly presenting a lantern art exhibition themed “Legacy of Light and Craft” at Grand Lisboa Palace’s (GLP) Jardim Secreto (“Secret Garden”), showcasing lantern installations by four local artists.

According to a statement on Wednesday, the free admission exhibition, which is part of SJM’s wider programme for both the Mid-Autumn Festival and the National Day Golden Week, runs through November 15.

The works comprise Sit Ka Kit’s “Knight’s Shadow” that utilises geometric lines and a chess knight; Jovina António’s “Brocade Scroll” that features cloth-dyed motifs and contemporary print patterns; Felipe Wong’s “Shared Moon” that combines metalworking technique Cloisonné* with Costa Rican festival oxcart-inspired motifs; and “Lotus Realm” by Leong Sin Teng that brings together ancient music and responsive sensor technology.

In her speech at the opening ceremony on Wednesday, SJM Managing Director Daisy Ho Chiu Fung was quoted as saying: “Through collaboration with artists across

disciplines, we seek to give time-honoured craftsmanship innovative relevance and allow it to flourish in a contemporary context”.

She added: “We also hope to support Macau’s creative industries, strengthen the synergies of ‘Tourism + Culture,’ and reinforce Macau’s role as ‘a base for exchange and cooperation where Chinese culture is the mainstream and diverse cultures coexist,’ enriching cultural tourism offerings for Macau”.

Meanwhile, the statement highlighted that several activities will also be held. Among them are the “Costa Rican

Painted Lantern Workshop” on September 19 and the “Intangible Cultural Heritage Paper-cut Lantern Workshop” on September 26, hosted by GLP Arte and having a 125 pataca-admission fee.

The Lantern Sketching Day at Grand Lisboa Palace & Dining Package will also be available from October 10. ■

* Cloisonné is a decorative technique in which a design is formed by thin metal strips (cloisons) soldered onto a metal base, with the resulting compartments filled with enamel paste and then fired. - DeepSeek



This photo provided by SJM Resorts on Wednesday shows the installation “Lotus Realm” displayed at Grand Lisboa Palace’s (GLP) “Secret Garden”.

Four Seasons to present special edition of Zi Yat Heen Masters Series

Rui Pastorin

The Four Seasons Hotel Macao will be presenting a special Zi Yat Heen Masters Series from October 31 to November 1, inviting the Chengdu restaurant “The Bridge” Creative and Culinary Director Chef André Chiang, along with his Chef Sean Li.

Taking place at the Michelin-starred Zi Yat Heen at 6:00 p.m., the five-star hotel said in a statement on Wednesday that the series will see Chiang and Four Seasons Hotel Macao Executive Chinese Chef Anthony Ho Yam To presenting an eight-course four-hands dining experience that celebrates the rich culinary traditions of Macau and Chengdu.

The menu will present the chefs’ distinctive styles and philosophies, while the experience will also feature a wine pairing with rare selections from Il Borro, which the statement added is the “renowned Tuscan wine estate owned by the Ferragamo family”.

The statement quoted Chef Ho as saying: “Together with Chef André Chiang and Chef Sean Li, we celebrate a culinary dialogue where the elegance of Cantonese cuisine meets the dynamic flavours of Chengdu, creating a dining experience that is both distinctive and enriching.”

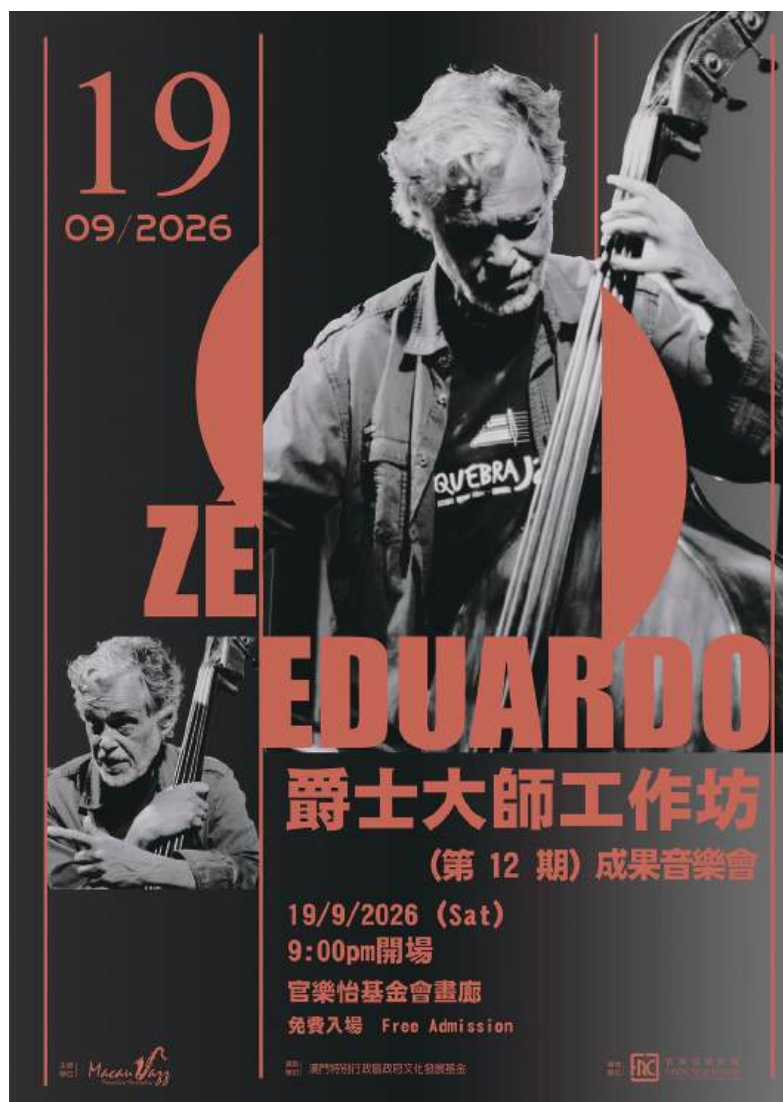
Chef Chiang was quoted by the statement as saying: “Macau has always held a special place in my culinary journey, and I am delighted to return once again, this time

alongside Four Seasons Hotel Macao and Chef Anthony Ho. Together with Chef Sean Li, a Sichuan native whose cuisine embodies the authentic spirit of Chengdu, we look forward to sharing the city’s distinctive culinary heritage with guests in Macau”.

The event is priced at 2,388 patacas per person, with an optional 698-pataca wine pairing. ■



This photo shows Four Seasons Hotel Macao Executive Chef Anthony Ho Yam To (left) and The Bridge Creative and Culinary Director André Chiang. -Photo provided on Wednesday by Four Seasons Hotel Macao



Zé Eduardo conducts the Jazz Mission Big Band at the Dom Pedro V Theatre on December 21, 2024.

Nurturing Macau's rhythm: Zé Eduardo on building a grassroots jazz culture

William Chan

The Rui Cunha Foundation Gallery will play host to a showcase performance highlighting the results of the 12th Jazz Masterclass Workshop tomorrow.

Behind this workshop is Zé Eduardo – born in Lisbon in 1952 and widely dubbed the “godfather of Portuguese jazz.” A regular visitor to Macau since 1996, and a regular interviewee for the *Post*, Eduardo has collaborated closely with the Macau Jazz Promotion Association (MJPA) since 2013 to cultivate local musical talent.

My first interview conducted with Zé Eduardo was in 2023, at the Orient Foundation's local headquarters, where he was staying. Back when I still hadn't been in touch with jazz. Now, as I get more in touch with jazz, including local players, I recognise his importance to local jazz improvement.

Reflecting on the evolution of Macau's music scene, Eduardo notes an immense shift since his initial visits. In his early years teaching in the territory, jazz lacked a structured foundation; amateurism prevailed, with local enthusiasts relying almost entirely on visiting musicians to glean insight into the art form. Today, the landscape is gradually reshaping itself, with many prominent and professionally trained jazz musicians in the local scenery, though Eduardo emphasises that building a self-sustaining jazz ecosystem – comprising local teachers, bandleaders, and venues – requires an integrated process where audiences and performers grow side by side. He highlights the necessity of government support, educational grants for young musicians to study abroad, and, crucially, small venues that regularly put on local bands.

Eduardo points to past successes, such as the “Jazz Mission Big Band” Christmas concerts supported by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), which brought together Portuguese and Chinese musicians from Macau for performances locally and in Portugal in 2024.*

For him, these initiatives represent more than mere commercial sets; they serve as cross-cultural incubators that offer young musicians invaluable personal and musical interactions. Despite these positive steps, Eduardo stresses that Macau remains at the beginning of its transformation. “While the environment has improved significantly over the past decade, a persistent shortage of intimate clubs continues to bottleneck consistent growth,” he underlined.

This structural challenge is not unique to Macau. Eduardo observes that musicians across Europe face similar financial hurdles, often balancing teaching responsibilities with gigs due to the financial

constraints of smaller spaces. Yet, the drive to build educational pathways remains strong, even as Eduardo shifts his personal focus towards performing and composing at this stage of his career.

Mars Lee Siu Hong, chairman of the MJPA, echoes Eduardo's stance on the necessity of intimate settings. While Macau is famed globally for its massive resort arenas, Lee highlights that a parallel grassroots scene is steadily taking root in local lounges, cultural foundations, and smaller spaces. Organisations like the MJPA continue to drive this movement through regular workshops and collaborative showcases like tomorrow's concert at 9:00 p.m. “As local audiences increasingly seek authentic, close-up cultural experiences, these smaller venues serve as the essential heartbeat and incubator for Macau's homegrown jazz talent,” Lee said.

* www.macaupostdaily.com/news/23649

Zé Eduardo (centre) coaches local musicians at the venue of the Macau Jazz Promotion Association (MJPA) in Areia Preta district earlier this month.



Zé Eduardo plays a duet with local trombonist Gregory Wong Weng Hou at the Orient Foundation in 2023. – Photos provided by Mars Lee Siu Hong

Zé Eduardo performs during his Jazz Workshop Presentation Concert at the Rui Cunha Foundation (FRC) in Nam Van last year. – Photo: Khalel Vallo

Govt to launch new round of consumption scheme next month

Continued from p.1

Addressing the press conference, DSED Director Yau Yun Wah said that the government decided to change the programme's modus operandi (coupons can be used every day each week) with the aim of making it more convenient for residents to use their e-coupons – thereby enhancing their consumption flexibility, while also encouraging them to stay more often in Macau to spend money during weekends.

In all previous rounds implemented before the round earlier this year, smartphone users received their e-coupons in their e-wallets between Mondays and Fridays and had to use them on the immediately following Saturdays and Sundays.

2 new types of coupons

According to Yau, in addition to the changes to the days each week when e-wallet users can win and use e-coupons (the normal ones financed by the government with a face value of 10 patacas, 20 patacas, 50 patacas, 100 patacas, or 200 patacas), the upcoming round will include two new types of coupons, which will be offered by shops, restaurants, and other businesses.

Yau said that the two new types of coupons aim to highlight government-business collaboration in boosting community consumption.

The first new type of coupon will provide a 12-pataca discount on a purchase of 100 patacas or more.

The second new type of coupon will offer a free gift upon spending a certain amount. The gifts and the spending thresholds will be determined by the participating businesses. For instance, Yau said, a restaurant can offer a patron a free snack or side dish if he or she spends 100 patacas or more.

Different to the normal e-coupons with a face value of between 10 patacas and 200 patacas financed by the government, these two new types of e-coupons will be paid for by the participating businesses.

As with the normal e-coupons, e-wallet users will also have the chance to win the two new types of e-coupons on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays and can then use them through the immediately following Thursday.

The three chances of winning e-coupons each time will include the normal e-coupons and the two new types of e-coupons.

5 rounds previously

The government first rolled out its community e-coupon consumption stimulation programme in 2024, but only for the peninsula's northern district at that time. The government launched the programme once again later the same year, with that round extended to the whole city. Afterwards, the government launched two rounds of the programme last year, covering businesses across the city.

After a round launched earlier this year (also a citywide one), the government will now launch a new round next month.

As previously, this time the government-financed e-coupons cannot be used in certain types of transactions and businesses, such as water and electricity bills, large supermarket chains, and all shops and businesses in resorts and properties run by the city's six gaming operators.

Yau said that large supermarket chains and shops and businesses in gaming resorts can nevertheless offer their customers the newly introduced 12-pataca discount e-coupons.

E-coupons for seniors

In the new round, according to the press conference, senior citizens can continue to receive an additional

500-pataca e-coupon by topping up their version of Macau Pass cards at over 100 designated service points across the city.

Only local residents aged at least 65 are entitled to apply for a Senior Citizen Macau Pass card.

As previously, senior citizens can use the e-coupons on their Macau Pass cards every day during the programme's period. When a senior citizen makes a purchase, half of the transaction's amount will be paid by the e-coupons, while the other half will be deducted from the card's remaining balance that he or she has top-up loaded with their own money. Consequently, with the 500-pataca e-coupons to be provided by the government, senior citizens can buy goods and services worth 1,000 patacas in total, with the other 500 patacas paid with their own money.

E-coupons for people with disabilities

Moreover, in the new round, according to the press conference, people with disabilities can continue to receive an additional 500-pataca e-coupon.

Holders of government-issued Disability Assessment Registration Cards will receive their 500-pataca

e-coupons by topping up their version of Macau Pass cards at over 100 designated service points across the city, an arrangement similar to that for senior citizens.

A Disability Assessment Registration Card is only issued to local residents. Disabled residents need to be assessed by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) first before they can get the card.

Those holding a Disability Assessment Registration Card are entitled to apply for a Disability Macau Pass card.

Senior Citizen Macau Pass cards and Disability Macau Pass cards entitle their holders to free public bus and Light Rapid Transit (LRT) rides.

As previously, the modus operandi of the use of e-coupons on Disability Macau Pass cards will be the same as that for Senior Citizen Macau Pass cards.

Yau said that the government expects to spend 468 million patacas on the programme's upcoming new round, comprising 400 million patacas for e-coupons issued to those using any of the eight e-wallets and 67.5 million patacas for e-coupons issued to holders of Senior Citizen Macau Pass cards and Disability Macau Pass cards. ■

Sam mulls staffed counters for Macau's public admin services in Zhongshan



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (right) meets with Zhongshan Mayor Yin Nianhong at Santa Sancha Mansion on Wednesday. – Photo: GCS

Tony Wong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai has met with Zhongshan Mayor Yin Nianhong, where Sam highlighted a proposal to set up staffed counters for Macau's public administration services in Zhongshan, according to a statement by the Macao Government Information Bureau (GCS) yesterday.

The meeting was held at Santa Sancha Mansion – the local government's guesthouse – on Penha Hill on Wednesday.

Sam said that Macau and Zhongshan have been maintaining sound cooperation, which can be further strengthened in fields such as culture and tourism. Sam said that both cities can complement each other's strengths and capitalise on the opportunities

presented by Hengqin's development, encouraging major sci-tech projects to extend their development into Zhongshan to achieve a win-win scenario.

Sam also expressed support for establishing an area of cross-border government service counters in Zhongshan to serve the more than 30,000 Macau residents living there.

Yin expressed his gratitude to the Macao Special Administrative Region Government (MSARG) for its long-standing and robust support for Zhongshan's development. He stated that Zhongshan is seizing the major historic opportunity presented by the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). ■

2026 Domestic Violence Prevention Series to feature youth ambassador programme

Sherwin Hng

The 2026 "Zero Violence in the City – Domestic Violence Prevention Series" will run from September through November, featuring a new youth participation programme aimed at promoting domestic violence prevention and positive communication, programme organiser Wong Lei Lei announced during the launch conference yesterday.

The annual series is organised by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) and the Women's General Association of Macau (commonly known as Fu Luen), with the Anti-Domestic Violence Working Group as co-organiser and support from the city's "6+1" District Collaboration Network.

A launch ceremony was held yesterday afternoon at the Fu Luen "Joy in Harmony" Family Integrated Service Centre (婦聯樂融家庭綜合服務中心). Attendees included IAS Family and Community Services Department Chief Lei

Lai Peng, Fu Luen President Un Sio Leng, and Service Director Ho Ka Ian, alongside representatives from the working group and district collaboration networks.

Ho noted that the Social Welfare Bureau and Fu Luen have jointly organised the "Zero Violence in the City" series since 2015. This year's edition marks the first time the programme will focus specifically on engaging local youth, with organisers hoping to mobilise more residents to join domestic violence prevention and community outreach efforts.

The newly introduced "Zero Violence Promotion Ambassador" programme targets local youth aged between 15 and 35. Registration runs from yesterday to October 4, with about 20 participants expected to be recruited.

Ambassadors will undergo professional training, attend talks, participate in organisational exchanges, and conduct community outreach, while leveraging social media platforms to

spread awareness. Participants will also be encouraged to invite at least six local businesses to display promotional posters.

The ambassador scheme will host activities on October 10, October 17, and November 7. In addition, interactive promotional activities targeting integrated resort and tourism enterprise employees will be carried out across local businesses.

The series will culminate in a thanksgiving carnival on November 21 to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on November 25. The event will feature a recognition ceremony for the ambassadors and interactive community booths.

Lei stressed that the campaign aims to promote gender equality, reduce stereotyping, and foster early identification and intervention to mitigate family crises, while encouraging residents, shopkeepers, and corporate enterprises to join as community partners in tackling domestic violence. ■



Guests attend the launch of the "zero-domestic violence" promotion campaign at the Women's General Association of Macau headquarters on Rua do Campo yesterday. – Photo: Sherwin Hng

Macau police nab 2 locals, 9 mainlanders over fake jobs

Sherwin Hng

Eleven males have been arrested for operating a fake employment scheme through a property management company, earning about one million yuan (1.2 million patacas) by “selling” unused non-resident worker (NRW) quotas, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Lei Chi Hou said during a special press conference yesterday at its Zape headquarters.

Lei identified the suspects as the company’s 56-year-old local owner and 66-year-old local manager, a 37-year-old mainland supervisor, a 48-year-old former mainland employee, and seven mainland men aged between 25 and 59 who obtained bogus work permits.

According to Lei, the case was uncovered while police were investigating a separate illegal employment case involving another company. Officers subsequently discovered that several NRWs registered under the property management company had no salary records and that their entry and exit records at the Zhuhai border did not match the working hours of their purported jobs.

Further investigation revealed that the company’s business had declined in late 2023, leaving several NRW quotas unused. The



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the eleven hooded suspects to a PJ vehicle outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. – Photo: Sherwin Hng

owner and manager then decided to profit by falsely employing individuals through the unused quotas, with the assistance of a company supervisor and a former employee in sourcing candidates.

Each candidate paid 45,000 yuan for the first year and 36,000 yuan annually for renewals. The scheme had generated about one million yuan since late 2023, Lei said.

The seven fake NRWs allegedly did not work for the property management company after entering Macau. Instead, they took private jobs involving furniture installation, interior renovation, and the removal of construction waste.

PJ officers took action on

Wednesday, intercepting the seven suspected fake NRWs at several border checkpoints and arresting the four company members at different locations across Macau. Documents related to the case were also seized at the company’s office in the northern district.

The 11 suspects were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing charges of fake employment. The case has also been referred to the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL), while police continue to investigate whether other individuals were involved.

The suspects face between two and eight years behind bars, according to Macau’s immigration control law. ■

Beyond expo floor, AI opens new frontiers in China-ASEAN cooperation

Analysis

NANNING – Wei Qiaomei, a Chinese livestreamer, once struggled to grasp what her Thai customers wanted, though she speaks fluent Thai.

Once, ahead of her pitch for a portable fan, AI analyzed Thai e-commerce data and popped up two selling points for her: quiet motors and long battery life.

The trial has proven rewarding. Her employer, based in south China’s Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, reported a 300 percent sales jump.

“Speaking the language isn’t the same as understanding the market,” said the 23-year-old, noting that AI had transformed her from a mere translator into a market-savvy presenter.

Her story reflects a broader shift in relations between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as both sides aim to expand AI’s role in bilateral trade, which exceeded US\$1 trillion last year.

In the first seven months of 2026, China-ASEAN trade rose 24.7 percent year on year to US\$744.41 billion, Chinese customs data show, as AI use expands in marketing, agriculture, logistics and finance.

The system, built with Chinese technology, local field data and training support, has been tested on more than 20,000 mu of crops, said project head Wen Biaotang.

CROSS-BORDER DEPLOYMENT NARROWS AI DIVIDE

In Guangxi’s border city Chongzuo, the center for disease control and prevention has partnered with neighboring Vietnamese provinces to deploy a bilingual AI platform for early disease detection.

It can slash epidemiological reporting time from four hours to 30 minutes, the project manager said.

In Nanning, RunDo, a platform operated by Runjian Co. Ltd., monitors almost 300 megawatts of solar capacity across nearly 3,000 sites in Malaysia remotely, with drones and AI replacing manual inspections.

“The platform has boosted maintenance efficiency by over 30 percent, raised power output by up to 5 percent, and cut labor costs by more than 20 percent,” said Yang Yexi, marketing manager of the operator’s Guangxi branch.

Leveraging Nanning’s computing infrastructure, ASEAN companies can avoid building large intelligent computing centers and remotely access models and computing power for their business needs, Yang said, whose company has launched more than 80 computing projects across ASEAN.

These cases highlight the prerequisites for cross-border AI deployment: computing power, local data, skilled workers, and capable local partners.

Guangxi’s China-ASEAN Artificial Intelligence Application Cooperation Center has cataloged more than 1,000 potential AI scenarios, opened 279 to developers, set up offices in Vietnam, Laos, and Malaysia, backed more than 30 cross-border projects, and assembled an alliance of 55 companies.

To address the low-resource challenge faced by some Southeast Asian languages, a training base in Malaysia has logged more than 1,900 hours of multilingual data annotation, while a six-month regional competition attracted more than 200 teams.

Liu Jianmin, a professor at the School of Big Data and Artificial Intelligence of Guangxi University of Finance and Economics, said ASEAN universities, companies, and professionals could contribute to collecting, labeling and updating data if AI models are to work locally.

“No matter how accurate a system is, if no one uses it, can afford it, or can keep it running, it remains just an exhibit,” Liu said.

The challenge is acute for ASEAN’s smaller economies.

Without collective action, the cost of cybersecurity, data governance, and reliable AI frameworks could deepen an “intelligence divide,” said Miguel Marques Gonçalves Manetelu, Timor-Leste’s minister of transport and communications. – Xinhua

Macau designers step out at fashion extravaganza

Review by Stefan Hammond in HK

Fashion designers aren’t shy. Hong Kong’s CENTRESTAGE [sic], a fashion event organised by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC) early this month, sported names of design firms that bristle in all caps or boast otherwise eccentric spellings.

The show featured seven Macau-based designers in a runway show titled “Macao Fashion Parade” at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC) from September 2 to 5. The participating brands also had dedicated booths in a Macau-centric area on the show floor. The runway show was held under the auspices of the Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Centre (CPTTM).

Dim the lights and crank the techno

The runway show attracted over 300 visitors, according to a Chinese-language press release on the CPTTM website (<https://www.cpttm.org.mo/>). Guests filed into the dimly lit venue – once they perched on seats of padded cubes, attention turned to the runway space as loud electronic music (the soundtrack of today’s fashions) thudded in the speakers.

The designers

The show opened quirky and cute with adult and child models showing fashions from HKQC (Hakachi City). Founded in Macau in 2021, HKQC is an eco-friendly high-performance children’s wear brand tailored for kids aged 3 to 12.

Next up was a return to basic black from XU’S, which draws inspiration from natural and mystical imagery and incorporates Gambiered Canton Silk (香雲紗) – a China National Intangible Cultural Heritage textile – into contemporary design vocabulary.

JYUT: a modern Chinese womenswear brand from Macau infuses ancient botanical dyeing into modern tailoring and emphasises natural plant tones.

Common Comma focuses on fabrication and functionality, bringing the spirit of streetwear with a

hint of high-end fashion trends, yet maintains a quiet attitude.

SHEFEELING is a modern female fashion manufacturing enterprise that incorporates product development, design, production, and sales under one roof. It provides mid- to high-end female fashion for elite urban females that is wearable on multiple occasions.

LA FINE offers pieces that embody passion, purpose, personality, and identity, for today’s youth.

Cloé Jewelry & Art is an independent jewellery design brand based in Macau that uses a variety of natural gemstone materials to create retro-minimalist jewellery. ■



Models from Macau’s HKQC pose on the runway during the September 2-5 CENTRESTAGE 2026 fashion event at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC).

– Photo: David von Eiff (Instagram: @iblis_photo)

Xi stresses sustained efforts to expand, strengthen advanced manufacturing

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping has urged sustained efforts to expand and strengthen advanced manufacturing to provide strong support for advancing Chinese modernization.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks in a recent instruction, which was conveyed at a national conference on advanced manufacturing held in Beijing on Wednesday and yesterday.

Efforts should be made to ensure

both high-quality development and greater security, pursue smart, green and integrated development, and make the country's industrial chains more self-supporting and risk-resilient, Xi stressed.

He emphasized the need to accelerate the development of a modernized industrial system with advanced manufacturing as the backbone, and reinforce the foundations of the real economy.

Premier Li Qiang, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, delivered a speech at

the conference.

Xi's important instructions provide essential guidance for developing advanced manufacturing, Li said, noting that China must treat developing advanced manufacturing as a major strategic task, and press steadily to boost its strength in manufacturing.

Li stressed that next-generation intelligent manufacturing should serve as the primary direction, with greater emphasis on digital and intelligent empowerment, high-end manufacturing and self-reliance, green and low-carbon development,

and cross-sector integration.

Efforts should be made to continuously strengthen the innovation capacity, competitiveness and overall strength of advanced manufacturing, Li said.

Li called for deepening the "AI plus manufacturing" initiative, stepping up guidance and support for enterprises' digital and intelligent transformation, and consolidating the foundation of intelligent software and hardware.

China should also advance the deep integration of advanced manufacturing and modern services,

foster service-oriented manufacturing, and cultivate advanced manufacturing clusters according to local conditions.

In his concluding speech, Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing, also a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, said China should further implement the initiative for high-quality development of key industrial chains, accelerate the building of a high-quality standards system, continue to address disorderly and irrational competition, and create a sound ecosystem for advanced manufacturing.

— Xinhua

Wang Yi holds phone talks with Marco Rubio on high-level interactions

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke by phone yesterday with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on high-level interactions between the two countries.

During the talks, Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, said that China-US relations have for some time generally moved forward along the track of constructive strategic stability charted by the two heads of state, which helps meet the expectations of the international community.

Noting that head-of-state diplomacy is the anchor of China-US relations, Wang said the two sides should prepare for the next stage of high-level exchanges in a spirit of equality, respect and mutual benefit, strengthen communication, advance cooperation, manage differences, respect each other's core interests, and send a positive message that the two countries are committed to advancing a constructive bilateral relationship of strategic stability and jointly promoting world peace and development.

Wang also exchanged views with Rubio on the Middle East situation and other issues.

— Xinhua



Attendees pose for group photos at a swearing-in ceremony for volunteers of the upcoming 48th WorldSkills Competition at Shanghai Exhibition Center in Shanghai yesterday. More than 3,800 volunteers have been recruited for the 48th WorldSkills Competition, which is scheduled to take place here from September 22 to 27.

— Xinhua

The 'cabbage revolution' – How China is using science to feed 1.4 billion people

Analysis

WUHAN – There is nothing remarkable about the tiny cabbage seedlings growing in the fields of Jiayu County in central China.

They are barely more than rows of green tufts against the soil, too young to look anything like the firm heads that will eventually find their way onto dinner tables across the country.

Yet these modest plants tell the story of a decades-long scientific effort to develop better seeds, breed tougher varieties and make one of China's most ordinary vegetables more productive and reliable.

Known as China's "cabbage UN" for its vast collection of varieties, Jiayu in Hubei Province has become a major hub for cabbage breeding, testing and production.

The effort goes back to the 1980s, when China still relied on cabbage seeds imported from countries including Japan and the Netherlands.

"We were determined to build our own capacity and take food production into our own hands," said Qiu Zhengming, chief scientist with the Hubei Academy of

Agricultural Sciences, who works at a vegetable science and technology demonstration park in Jiayu.

Led by pioneers, including Fang Zhiyuan of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, generations of researchers set out to find a way to ensure that people in China could have fresh, high-quality cabbage throughout the year.

They started with the seed.

Scientists developed China's first cabbage hybrid, followed by disease-resistant varieties and strains suited to different growing seasons. For winter harvests, they bred varieties that could withstand the cold while producing sweeter heads.

The results have accumulated over decades. Today, more than 70 percent of winter cabbage grown in China's major winter-cabbage producing areas comes from domestic varieties, according to researchers.

"Using science and technology to improve production is important," Qiu said. "Once you have that foundation, farmers' incomes become more stable."

At Jiayu's 460-mu (31-hectare)

vegetable science and technology demonstration park, researchers test more than 2,000 cabbage varieties each year, continually introducing and screening new ones to find those best suited to local conditions.

The experiments go beyond cabbage. Researchers are also developing new varieties of vegetables that are staples on Chinese dinner tables, including winter melon, pumpkin and Chinese cabbage.

Modern breeding techniques, including hybrid breeding and genetic technologies, are being used to improve resistance to cold and disease and to increase levels of fiber, vitamins and minerals. A nearly 100-mu area has also been established for fully mechanized cabbage production trials.

The fields themselves have become part of the experiment.

At the demonstration park, a network of digital sensors monitors weather, temperature, soil conditions, pests and diseases, as well as water and fertilizer levels.

When something goes wrong, an alert can be sent directly to a farmer's smartphone. Drones fly over the

fields to monitor crop health.

The shift is giving farmers more control over their fields. Instead of relying on unpredictable weather, they can make decisions based on data.

Farmers can also order seeds directly from a researcher-managed seed bank, saving them the time and uncertainty of breeding their own varieties and helping them avoid losses caused by bad weather.

Jiayu's vegetables now reach markets across the country, including Hong Kong, Shanghai and Guangzhou. About 75,000 local farmers are involved in vegetable cultivation and their incomes have increased.

For farmer Liu Lianhong, the benefits are measured in more familiar terms. Her household income comes mainly from land-transfer payments and annual dividends from a vegetable farming company, while she also works there. These days, she is busy transplanting cabbage seedlings and clearing weeds.

What is happening in Jiayu is part of a much larger effort in China to use agricultural science to

strengthen domestic food supplies.

Perhaps the best-known example is hybrid rice, pioneered by Yuan Longping. The breakthrough dramatically increased rice yields and helped China meet much of its own demand for rice.

Hubei, a major grain-producing province, is now developing high-yield, high-protein corn as an alternative that could help reduce reliance on imported soybeans. Researchers are also breeding fish with improved meat quality.

In neighboring Henan Province, scientists have developed rice varieties less prone to lodging. In Shaanxi Province, researchers have developed drought-tolerant, high-yield wheat.

Some of these agricultural technologies and varieties have also traveled beyond China, helping farmers in Central Asia and Africa increase production and incomes.

These efforts are about more than seeds, technology and yields. They are ultimately about people's lives.

"Of all the things that matter, the well-being of people matters most," Qiu said.

— Xinhua

Indonesia ends search for journalists missing on volcano mission



Wives of the missing journalists react upon hearing that the search was officially called off at the Search and Rescue command post in Marina Carita, Pandeglang, Banten, Indonesia yesterday.

— AFP

INDONESIA — Indonesian rescuers formally called off a search yesterday for eight people, including five journalists sent to cover a volcanic eruption, nearly two weeks after their speedboat went missing in waters between Java and Sumatra islands, an official said.

“The national search and rescue said that as this search and rescue operation has been deemed ineffective, with a heavy heart the joint operation... is hereby declared terminated,” Banten province governor Andra Soni told reporters.

“From the first day of the joint search and rescue operation up to the tenth day, including the three-day extension, it has been reported that no signs have been found of the vessel, its passengers or the crew on board.”

The five Indonesian journalists on board were sent to capture photos and video of the eruption of Mount Anak Krakatau, which blanketed cities in volcanic ash and prompted multiple airports to close.

They were working for local and international media, including state news agency Antara, Turkish state-run news agency Anadolu, and local website iNews.

The group, which also included two crew members and a guide, set out by speedboat from an area west of the capital Jakarta on the afternoon of September 7, but lost contact somewhere in the Sunda Strait soon after.

The journalists were Muhammad Bagus Khoirunas (28), Firdaus Wajidi (42), Donal Husni (50), Arie Basuki (52) and Yudistiro Pranoto, accompanied by skipper Warta (55) and crew Surakman (60), as well as

guide Heriyanto (49).

Firdaus worked mainly for Anadolu and freelanced at AFP.

The search and rescue agency said on Wednesday that a total of 22 naval assets were deployed to sweep the search area, which covered more than 3,400 square nautical miles.

Marine accidents are a regular occurrence in the Southeast Asian archipelago, due in part to lax safety standards and inclement weather.

At least six people were killed and 129 are still missing after a passenger ship carrying 243 people capsized early Sunday morning en route from Surabaya in East Java to Banjarmasin, in South Kalimantan.

Indonesia sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire, where the meeting of continental plates causes high volcanic and seismic activity. — AFP

IAEA members raise ‘concern’ over N Korea’s nuclear expansion

VIENNA, Austria — The UN nuclear watchdog’s members yesterday expressed “growing concern” about increased atomic activity in North Korea, including a recently reported “long-term plan to strengthen the national nuclear force”.

In a resolution passed at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) annual conference, members noted an “increased level of activity at some of the DPRK’s nuclear facilities and further development of the DPRK’s nuclear programme”, referring to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the country’s official name.

Some 103 countries backed the motion, that was proposed by 61 members, with just six opposing it, including Russia and China. There were 14 abstentions.

The resolution said North Korea’s nuclear activities “continue to be a cause of serious concern” and called on the government to “halt all such activities”.

The IAEA’s annual conference has repeatedly passed resolutions raising fears over the North’s nuclear weapons programme.

Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of North Korea’s leader, said yesterday that the country’s nuclear-armed status was “absolute”, calling those hoping for its denuclearisation “idiots”.

In a statement carried by the

official Korean Central News Agency, she said the “familiar silly talk” of efforts to denuclearise the North was expected at the IAEA conference.

North Korea, under rafts of UN sanctions for its development of banned weapons, is believed to operate uranium enrichment facilities at sites at Yongbyon, Kangson and Kusong.

It cut off access to IAEA inspectors in 2009. Since then the agency has had to rely on satellite imagery and open sources to monitor the country’s nuclear programme.

In a report ahead of the conference, the agency’s head Rafael Grossi said it had identified an additional uranium enrichment facility at Yongbyon, which Pyongyang purportedly decommissioned after talks but later reactivated in 2021.

The report also said an annex built at the Kangson enrichment site appears to have entered operation in January, noting a “further expansion” in the country’s ability to produce weapons-grade nuclear material.

It also references a “long-term plan” to strengthen the “national nuclear force” announced by Kim Jong Un in February, as well as a June visit by Kim to a “newly inaugurated nuclear materials production factory”.

— AFP

Japan eyes changing prostitution law to punish sex buyers

Tomohiro Osaki

TOKYO — Japan should overhaul its prostitution law to punish those who seek to buy sex, experts recommended yesterday in proposals likely to lead to changes to the decades-old legislation.

Currently, street sex workers face fines or imprisonment for public solicitation, but their customers face no punishment, making Japan an outlier among developed countries.

Calling for the abolition of this asymmetry, the panel of legal experts proposed in a report that clients also be penalised for solicitation both in public and online.

It is seen as almost certain that the justice ministry will make legal amendments based on the panel’s conclusions.

Acts such as negotiating paid sex in public and loitering on the street to “browse” sex workers should be considered punishable, the panel said.

Some campaigners have demanded a “Nordic model” that decriminalises selling sex while criminalising paying for it - adopted by countries like Sweden, Norway and France.

However, the panel did not recommend decriminalising sex work altogether or redefining prostitution to include acts beyond vaginal intercourse.

Some sellers, the panel said, “willingly” joined the sex trade and their solicitation “disrupts social order”.

Risa, a member of the sex trade survivor group Toka (“Light”), said if the laws continue to target sellers, “they won’t be able to report violence and other terrible experiences to police, for fear of being labelled criminals”.

The concept of free will in sex work is a myth given that compounding difficulties like poverty, trauma and disability push many women into the trade, the 37-year-old told AFP, using a pseudonym.

In her 20s, “I did think I was doing it voluntarily” to survive adversities including her abusive, drunk father, a job loss and depression, Risa said.

But “I wonder how many people would still say they want to keep doing it” if they had a chance at re-education, employment and mental health treatment, she added.

“I had to act like a doll, switch off all emotions and pretend to be pleased no matter what was done to me.”

When enacted in 1956, Japan’s anti-prostitution laws viewed sex workers as an “evil” who seduced married men, the antithesis of the “chaste wives” that society



This photo taken on March 31, 2025 shows advertisements for entertainment clubs reflected in the window of a passing car, along a street in the red-light entertainment area of Kabukicho in the Shinjuku district of Tokyo.

— AFP

expected women to be, feminist lawyer Yukiko Tsunoda told a recent symposium in Tokyo.

“Nobody even thought of the sex trade as violence” against women, she said.

‘Underground’

Any legal change is overdue for Nao, a Toka member who fled abuse by her mother and lived under a bridge from age 14, turning to street prostitution to “survive the day”.

As morning arrived, the “mostly

middle-aged men on their way to work” would approach her and offer around 5,000 yen (US\$32) for sex, she told AFP.

Back then, “I needed to feel that I had something that made my life worthwhile”, recalled the now 25-year-old Nao - a pseudonym she uses when campaigning.

“But now I know I was a victim of sexual exploitation.”

Opinions are split over whether criminalising customers will help curb street prostitution in Japan.

Ronald Weitzer, a professor emeritus at George Washington University, predicted it will “push commercial sex underground”.

It is “likely that they would move to an area that is less policed than where they operate now”, he told AFP.

Ranging from brothel-like “soaplands” to call services and erotic massage parlours, Japan’s adult industry involves an estimated two-plus million women, roughly making two to five trillion yen annually, lawyer Sho Wakabayashi told the panel hearing.

Even if they move indoors, it doesn’t mean women have broken free of the clutches of the sex industry, said Yumeno Nito, founder of youth protection group Colabo, who has called for the establishment of publicly-funded specialised support institutions for those in need of help.

A potential role model is South Korea, which not only offers temporary protection but also helps women build new lives after sex work.

“Examples overseas teach us that if there is support and a system in place, women can have and choose from a range of options and live their lives accordingly,” she said.

— AFP



Farmers block railway tracks to protest over minimum support price (MSP) for their crops, on the outskirts of Amritsar, India yesterday. – AFP

Australia to cut migration to fix housing crisis: minister

SYDNEY – Australia will reduce migration by curbing “visa hopping”, tightening rules on students and working holiday makers as well as cracking down on overstayers, its interior minister said yesterday, as the far-right surges in the polls.

Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke told the National Press Club in Canberra that immigration was “fundamentally a strength” for Australia, but accepted that housing pressures required changes.

He denied his ruling Labor party was tightening visa rules in response to the rise of One Nation, which has become one of the country’s most popular parties this year with pledges to drastically slash migration. Business groups warned such cuts would cause economic damage.

“We need immigration to soften enough that housing has a chance to catch up,” he said, while stressing the housing shortage was not caused by migrants.

Net overseas migration – the net gain or loss to the population through movement to and from Australia – reached a peak of 538,000 in 2022 after a surge in arrivals when borders re-opened after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Numbers fell to 292,100 in the year to March, data yesterday showed.

Burke said this was 47 percent below the post-COVID peak - and that policy changes would help to reach a target of 225,000 for next year.

Australians want to know the government was “taking control” of migration but also “being decent about it”, he said.

Students are the largest group of arrivals, with 753,000 international

students in Australia, most from China and India, data shows.

Under the new rules, family members seeking to join students in Australia will face new curbs and it will become harder for students to move between courses to extend their stay, Burke said.

A backlog of applications from the UK for working holiday visas would continue to be processed slowly after a record 80,000 applications – a matter that is under discussion with the UK government, he said.

Working holiday makers in rural areas will enter a ballot to stay for a second or third year, with just 5,000 visas available for the latter.

Family members seeking to visit Australians will have “no further stay” conditions attached to their temporary visas.

Migrants with construction and housing skills will be prioritised for visas, he said.

Australia would return to a policy of a decade earlier in which visa overstayers were given two weeks to leave the country or face detention and deportation, he said.

An additional 100 compliance officers and 250 more beds in immigration detention centres would show there are consequences to overstaying a visa, he said.

But he stressed “this is not the sort of operation that some people have seen on TV happening in other countries” – a nod to hardline immigration policies in the United States.

A third of Australia’s resident population of 27.6 million was born overseas, the latest census data shows. – AFP

Nepal floods among ‘most challenging’ disasters: WFP

Paavan Mathema

KATHMANDU – Aid operations after Nepal’s devastating floods rank among the World Food Programme’s most challenging, its country chief said yesterday, as cargo drones and helicopters delivered food to isolated communities.

The catastrophic August 26 flood was triggered by a Himalayan glacial mountain collapse on the China-Nepal border, that scientists have linked to climate change.

The tsunami-like floodwaters tore through mountain districts, destroying roads, bridges and hydropower dams, and killed at least 1,446 people. More than 6,500 remain missing across both countries.

Riaz Lodhi, head of the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) in Nepal, told AFP that it was among the “top three most challenging disasters” the agency had faced.

“We have seen disasters, we have seen earthquakes, we have seen disasters caused by floods, we have seen war situations, conflicts,” Lodhi said, speaking at the aid hub in the capital Kathmandu.

“We have had access challenges in many of these situations”, he added, but said the challenges in Nepal were extreme.

“This is a very unique access challenge where, in some places, the only way to reach people is by helicopters,” he said.

“It’s a very, very expensive operation.”

The destruction meant journeys that once took two hours can now have become day-long ordeals.

Many communities near the epicentre of the disaster remain cut off, with the UN working alongside Nepal’s government to get emergency supplies into devastated areas.

‘Game-changer’

For the first time in Nepal, WFP deployed cargo drones to deliver food to isolated communities.

“When the first drone went up in the air with the food attached to it, I knew that it was a game-changer... It’s an innovation in delivering food assistance,” Lodhi said.

During a deadly 2015 earthquake in Nepal, WFP relied on mules, yaks and porters carrying food on their back, sometimes taking two to three days to reach those in need.

“Now, the same food, by deploying these cargo drones, we were able to deliver within five to 10 minutes,” Lodhi said.

The drones can carry between 30 and 100 kilograms, depending on operating conditions.

“People in need, they didn’t have to wait for days,” he added. “The food was reaching there immediately.”

Lodhi said that WFP has used drones before, but not at this scale.

“What we are learning in Nepal with the use of these cargo drones will change the way WFP reaches people in need,” he said.

WFP expects to provide food assistance for four to six months, but Lodhi said that would not mean the end of humanitarian needs.

“They have lost their food stocks, they have lost their homes, they have lost their crops. So the needs are huge,” he said.

The sheer scale of the flood was unlike anything witnesses had seen before, with the Nepali government pointing the finger at the dire impact of rising global temperatures on the Himalayan mountains.

Prime Minister Balendra Shah will take his first foreign trip as Nepal’s leader to address the UN General Assembly on the urgent issue next week.

Nepal estimates the reconstruction bill will amount to US\$4.78 billion. – AFP



Activists and supporters of the Pakistan Markazi Muslim League (PMML) shout slogans during a protest in Karachi yesterday following the attack on Islamic holy city of Mecca. Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned on Wednesday “in the strongest possible terms the dastardly and heinous” attack on Mecca, which a Saudi-led coalition blamed on Yemen’s Houthis. – AFP

Pakistan’s maternity ward fire was ‘institutional failure’: inquiry

ISLAMABAD – A fire that killed 14 infants at a maternity ward in Pakistan’s capital last month followed “systemic and institutional failure” at the hospital, according to an official inquiry.

The devastating dawn blaze broke out on the third floor of the Mother and Child Health Ward at Islamabad’s premier public hospital, Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), on August 26.

The official report, dated September 7 and seen by AFP yesterday, found there were no working smoke detectors or sprinklers and that the probable cause of the fire was a faulty air conditioning unit.

Witnesses described chaotic and harrowing scenes to AFP on the day of the tragedy, including intense smoke and broken glass, and a slow response from

emergency services.

One mother who lost her infant in the fire said a door to the neonatal intensive care unit was locked, hampering rescue efforts.

The 42-page report, released within weeks of the fire, said “that systemic and institutional failure is established, while individual responsibility varies with the strength of the evidence”.

“PIMS and its senior management bear the principal institutional responsibility for failing to convert known risks, prior warnings and assigned duties into an effective safety system,” it said.

Fires in large buildings are frequent in Pakistan, often due to poor safety laws and building codes as well as lax enforcement and emergency procedures.

The report into the hospital fire

found that no “nursery-specific” evacuation procedures followed, “nor was a functional automatic smoke detection, alarm or sprinkler system shown to be serving the affected area”.

“The strongest technical evidence” showed the “most probable point of ignition” to be a power supply cable to an AC unit, the report added.

Despite multiple claims that the emergency response had been slow, the report said that it rejected “any generalised allegation that frontline personnel abandoned the newborns”.

At the time of the fire, Prime Minister Sharif called for an investigation and said the “strictest possible action” should be taken against those found to be responsible. – AFP

Prabowo orders police crackdown on companies linked to forest fires

JAKARTA – Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto has ordered police to investigate the potential criminal liability of companies linked to forest and land fires in Sumatra and Kalimantan, saying license revocation alone would not be sufficient.

The order was issued during a cabinet meeting Wednesday that discussed firefighting efforts and mitigation measures for the next month and a half, which authorities consider a

period of heightened fire risk.

Prabowo said companies found responsible for the fires should have their licenses revoked and face criminal investigations.

Indonesia’s Kalimantan and Sumatra regions have faced widespread forest and land fires this year, with haze disrupting flights, forcing school closures and causing hazardous air quality in parts of the country. – Xinhua

Gaza documentary sparks political storm in Israel

Yaelle Ifrah

JERUSALEM — On a street in southern Israel, a graffiti artist paints a mural depicting the filmmakers behind the award-winning documentary “NAZA”. But this is not a tribute.

Red targets are painted next to the two Israeli directors, Yuval Abraham and Rachel Szor, whose faces are branded with the word “TRAITORS”.

A month ahead of close-fought elections, the documentary, which uses anonymous military sources to speak about Israel’s widespread killing of civilians in Gaza, has unleashed a political storm.

An ensuing wave of threats and intimidation has targeted the film’s creators and their families.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has even said he intends to introduce legislation aimed at revoking the citizenship of people who “defame IDF [Israel Defence Forces] soldiers.”

“Their place is not among us,” Netanyahu said in a video posted on X on Wednesday.

At the same time his video appeared on social media, dozens of protesters were gathering outside the home of Szor’s parents in central Israel, shouting “You’re not welcome here!”

The gathering in Savyon was organised by a far-right influencer, Mordechai David, an ally of Israel’s

National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir.

“This is only the beginning!” David vowed.

In the southern port city of Ashdod, the artist behind the mural of Abraham and Szor unleashed a torrent of insults at the filmmakers, who are currently abroad.

“I have zero sympathy for all those pro-Palestinians talking abroad,” Dudi Shuval told AFP.

Broad condemnation

The fierce outrage at the film highlights surging nationalist sentiment following the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, which killed 1,221 people, mostly civilians, in the country’s deadliest ever attack.

Netanyahu’s handling and response to the attack are set to play a central role in the election, scheduled for October 27.

After its premiere at the Venice Film Festival last week, “NAZA” received a record-breaking 25-minute ovation and later won the special jury prize.

The chilling documentary about Israel’s AI-assisted killing of civilians in Gaza uses testimonies from 24 different Israeli military or intelligence whistleblowers who spoke on condition that their identities be protected.

“NAZA” draws its name from a euphemism used by Israeli



This photo shows a cap bearing the slogan “I Vote Bibi” displayed alongside other campaign materials featuring Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ahead of a Jewish New Year greetings event attended by the prime minister and members of the Likud party in Tel Aviv yesterday. Israel heads to the polls on October 27 in its first election since the October 7, 2023 Hamas-led attack, in what is seen as a referendum on Netanyahu.

— AFP

intelligence to indicate the number of civilians that are expected to be killed in an airstrike.

The Israeli military has firmly denied the testimonies in the film and insisted it does everything possible to avoid civilian casualties.

It has also criticised the film’s use of anonymous sources, whose identity and involvement in military activity in Gaza it says cannot be verified.

Israel’s political figures have almost unanimously condemned the documentary.

Opposition politician Gadi Eisenkot, who has emerged as the main challenger to Netanyahu, on Monday denounced “moral blindness, a detachment from reality, and harm to the State of Israel in a difficult hour”.

The head of the centre-left Democrats party, Yair Golan, issued a curt “I condemn” the following day.

Golan accused Netanyahu of using the episode to deflect attention over his reaction on October 7, an issue that has flared anew in recent days.

Taboo discussion

In Israel, criticising the military — in which nearly all Israelis serve — is taboo and carries a heavy cost.

“There’s clearly an intention to not have discussion around the crimes that were committed and to prevent people from speaking about them,” Abraham told AFP on the sidelines of the Venice Film Festival last week.

In a rare dissenting voice, the Israeli-Palestinian movement Standing Together praised the film which it said “exposes another chapter in the war of annihilation in Gaza”.

The Union of Journalists in Israel denounced threats against the filmmakers, saying in a statement that “without freedom of expression, there is no democracy”.

On Wednesday, Culture Minister Miki Zohar, who accused the directors of “treason against the state”, referred the matter to the domestic intelligence services to demand a probe into the film’s anonymous sources.

Israel’s military campaign in Gaza has killed more than 73,700 people, according to the territory’s health ministry, which operates under Hamas authority and does not distinguish between combatants and civilians, and whose figures are considered reliable by the United Nations.

— AFP

Trump admin overhauls key protection for endangered species

Issam Ahmed

WASHINGTON, DC — President Donald Trump’s administration will no longer treat the unintentional killing of protected wildlife as unlawful, officials confirmed yesterday, in a shift conservationists say effectively guts the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Under the sweeping new directive, deaths resulting from foreseeable risks posed by activities such as commercial fishing or logging will be exempt from the landmark 1973 law.

“What’s being put forward by the Trump administration is going to cut the heart out of the Endangered Species Act,” Gib Brogan, campaign director for Oceana Fisheries, told AFP.

He said the law had been successful at saving species for five decades by finely balancing human economic needs against conservation.

The September 14 memorandum, posted online by the nonprofit Centre for Biological Diversity and confirmed to AFP by the administration, redefines the longstanding definition of “take” — a term that relates to pursuing, killing or capturing of a species.

It is now confined to “affirmative conduct intentionally directed against a particular animal or animals.”

The move, first reported by The New York Times, explicitly cites a

dissent by the late Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia in a 1995 case on the matter.

“A vessel that inadvertently strikes a whale has not taken it, because the vessel’s course was not set against the whale,” the document says, quoting the conservative justice.

“Felling a tree is not a take of the bats roosting in it unless the tree is felled for the purpose of killing or capturing them,” it continued.

In the 1995 case, known as Babbitt v. Sweet Home, an association of landowners and loggers tried to challenge the prevailing definition of “take,” arguing a species of woodpecker and an owl had injured them economically by preventing them from conducting their business.

The Supreme Court ultimately ruled against them in a 6-3 decision — but it has since shifted considerably rightward.

Whales, turtles, coral at risk

The new memo was signed by Brian Nesvik, the director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, which falls under the Interior Department.

The department confirmed to AFP that the document was genuine.

“The memorandum accurately reflects the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s guidance for implementing the Endangered Species Act following the final rule

rescinding the regulatory definition of ‘harm,’” the department said.

“Under the guidance, the ESA’s prohibition on ‘take’ continues to prohibit conduct including harassing, pursuing, hunting, shooting, wounding, killing, trapping, capturing or collecting protected wildlife,” it added.

The Trump administration has already finalised a series of rules weakening the ESA.

One rescinded the longstanding definition of “harm,” which had covered habitat destruction. Another scrapped a rule that automatically applied endangered species protections to those listed as “threatened.”

And a third requires the government to consider economic and national security tradeoffs when deciding whether to designate a particular area as “critical habitat.” But the latest attack “is maybe the most significant of them,” said Brogan.

“We’re very concerned what this is going to mean for sea turtles, for corals, for threatened and endangered whale species,” he added.

The North Atlantic right whales would be one of the main species threatened by the changes. There are only around 380 of them left, and their main threats come from entanglement in fishing gear and collisions with ship traffic.

— AFP

French fishermen block ports over petrol prices

NICE — Fishermen yesterday blocked the entrance to two ports and a petrol depot in southern France in protest at rising fuel prices linked to the US-Iran war.

The actions along the Mediterranean coast to bar access to the harbours of Nice and Sete, and a depot in Frontignan, come as petrol prices at French pumps near an all-time high.

The price of diesel, the most widely used fuel in the country, passed 2.37 euros per litre (US\$2.72 per litre) yesterday, hovering just under its record of 2.38, according to an AFP analysis of government data.

“We’ve really had enough,” protesting fisherman Tony Dalmasso told AFP in Nice.

“The price of diesel, the European regulations — it’s all just become too much.”

Pierre Palumbo was among a group of fishermen who set fire to tyres along a road leading to the oil depot in Frontignan.

“The price of diesel was just the last straw,” he said, after other key concerns including catch limits on bluefin tuna and new regulations for fishing eels.

Crude prices have spiked around 20 percent this month as the United States and Iran remain at loggerheads and Saudi Arabia was forced to shut a key pipeline

as it battles Houthi fighters in Yemen.

As President Emmanuel Macron’s time in office winds down ahead of elections to replace him next year, the government has pointed to the US-Iran conflict as the key culprit.

Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu said on Wednesday the government would increase its petrol subsidies for the fishing trade to the maximum authorised level allowed under EU rules, but the measure did nothing to quell anger.

“Our main request to the minister is a freeze on prices at the pump,” Ange Natoli, a fisherman from the southern town of Martigues near Marseille, told AFP ahead of a meeting with authorities in Paris.

French motorists have clogged TotalEnergies service stations in recent months to fill up with discount petrol, after the energy giant capped its prices at 1.99 euros per litre.

TotalEnergies introduced the cap when political pressure was building to introduce a tax on windfall profits being made by energy companies.

A planned fuel tax hike in 2018 sparked months of Yellow Vests protests during Macron’s first term.

— AFP

King Charles warns tech bosses of 'existential dangers' of AI

Clément Zampa

CUMNOCK – King Charles III warned tech giants of the “existential dangers” posed by artificial intelligence falling into the wrong hands during a conference in Scotland yesterday.

The gathering at Dumfries House brought together senior representatives from Nvidia, Google DeepMind, OpenAI, Anthropic, and Britain’s minister for artificial intelligence.

The debate over the risks of the technology has intensified in recent months, fuelled by several incidents and apocalyptic warnings from industry professionals.

“There seems urgency in adequately considering the existential dangers of such technologies falling into the wrong hands, and being used in potentially catastrophic ways,” Charles told guests at the opening of the conference.

“Those in our world who value our humanity and its vital moral component are anxiously seeking your reassurance that we will not lose control of our destiny.”

The British monarch called on tech leaders to ensure technology “remains firmly in the service of humanity, community and the natural world”.

Among the guests at the conference were DeepMind chair Demis Hassabis, the head of American semiconductor giant Nvidia Jensen Huang and OpenAI’s chief financial officer Sarah Friar.

Paolo Benanti, the Vatican’s



Britain’s King Charles III (left) walks with DeepMind’s Demis Hassabis (centre) and Nvidia chief executive Jensen Huang to attend a conference of leaders from the artificial intelligence (AI) sector and government at Dumfries House in Cumnock, Scotland, yesterday.

– AFP

AI adviser, and Israeli author and historian Yuval Noah Harari were also in attendance.

‘Safety at its heart’

Buckingham Palace expects the conference to mark the beginning of a process to draw up common principles guiding the development and use of AI.

But no formal agreement is expected at the end of the meeting

of tech leaders and other influential figures, which is set to last four to five hours.

The king, who is not taking part in the discussions, urged participants to consider how to harness AI “by putting safety at its heart” and to build international cooperation so that “no nation is left behind”.

‘Serious risks’

Rapid advances in AI have

fuelled concerns over job losses as well as the soaring energy demand and the environmental impact of data centres.

Fears that designers of AI agents could lose control of their creations mounted after several models from OpenAI and Anthropic reportedly broke out of their confined environments on their own, accessed the internet, and intruded on websites and platforms.

“The chance of something bad accidentally happening, if we get things wrong, is definitely non-zero,” DeepMind’s Hassabis said in his opening remarks at the summit.

“We’ve already seen the beginnings of this with the recent cyber incidents involving rogue AI agents, and there could be other, much more serious risks on the horizon, including biological and nuclear threats,” he warned.

Nvidia’s Jensen Huang, meanwhile, emphasised the benefits of AI in research and medicine, as well as its potential for “creating jobs in entirely new industries”.

He told reporters that “we have got to debunk some of the myths out there,” and called for “responsible optimism”.

Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei set off alarm bells on Saturday when he called on companies in the sector to slow down their development in order to better understand the risks, receiving support from OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and Elon Musk.

US President Donald Trump and several members of his government have, by contrast, reiterated in recent days their determination not to constrain the sector, out of concern that doing so would allow China to gain the upper hand.

Mark Zuckerberg, the head of Meta, has also rejected calls to slow the development, arguing that market forces and the risk of litigation are the best safeguards.

– AFP

Nine European countries beat August drought record: AFP analysis

PARIS – Nine European countries experienced their driest August on record as a sweltering summer supercharged by climate change scorched the continent, according to an AFP analysis of figures from the European Drought Observatory (EDO).

Not since the EDO began collecting such data in 2012 have Austria, Belgium, Bosnia, France, Hungary, Luxembourg, Serbia, Slovakia or Switzerland seen a more parched August, the EDO figures show.

On average, 58 percent of the European Union’s territory, or nearly 2.5 million square kilometres, was affected by a lack of water in August.

That is 25 percentage points higher than the 2012-2025 average for the month, but still short of the record of 63 percent seen in August 2022.

Central Europe was the worst-affected region, with two-thirds of Hungary and a third of Slovakia and Serbia under the EDO’s highest drought alert warning in August.

Based on satellite observations, the EDO’s drought alert takes into account three parameters: precipitation, soil humidity and the state of vegetation.

According to a study by the Climameter scientific consortium published on Thursday, “a three-month dry spell as severe as the June-August 2026 European drought is now roughly three times more likely to occur than it was in the past (1950-1987).”

“When similar weather patterns form today, the resulting conditions are significantly drier than they would be in a world without climate change.”

– AFP

King Charles disputes claims in book by Princess Diana’s brother

LONDON – Britain’s King Charles III has taken the rare step of hitting back at criticism after Princess Diana’s brother alleged that the monarch acted insensitively following her death in a car crash three decades ago.

The war of words between the king – who was married to Diana for 15 years – and Charles Spencer featured on the front pages of several UK newspapers yesterday.

Buckingham Palace issued an unusually strong statement after Spencer claimed in his new memoir that days after Diana died in 1997 the future king said to him: “Rest assured, we’ll forget her soon enough.”

A palace spokesperson said on Wednesday they do not normally comment on books, before adding: “His Majesty is mindful that the pain of fraternal grief can cloud reason, affect judgement and colour memory in ways others do not recognise, even many years after such a loss.”

Spencer’s book, titled “Swan Song: Diana, My Sister” and set to be published next week, has been serialised in the *Daily Mail* newspaper.

In excerpts released so far, Spencer claims Charles subjected him to a “stream of anger” after he insisted Diana would not have wanted her

sons, princes William and Harry, then aged 15 and 12, to walk in her funeral procession.

“He unleashed down the phone what I have always taken to be his pent-up contempt for Diana, and his horror that the world was so bowled over by her death. ‘Rest assured’, he hissed, ‘we’ll forget her soon enough!’,” Spencer writes.

Diana, who was hugely popular in the UK, died in Paris aged 36 after the car she was travelling in crashed as it tried to get away from paparazzi photographers.

Her death sparked an outpouring of grief in Britain and led to accusations that the monarchy failed to show the appropriate empathy.

Both heir-to-the-throne William and his brother Harry, who quit royal duties in 2020 but has just returned to Britain, have spoken previously about how difficult it was to walk behind her coffin.

Recollections may vary

Julian Payne, who was communications secretary to Charles on the 20th anniversary of Diana’s death in 2017, said he found it hard to believe his former boss had said what Spencer alleges.

“It’s just not language that I

recognise,” he told the BBC.

Royal watchers said Buckingham Palace’s quick response to Spencer’s allegation hinted at the anger felt within the monarchy at the claim.

“Sometimes the palace have to weigh up whether or not they want to just leave things and adopt the never complain, never explain mantra,” *Sunday Times* royal editor Roya Nikkhah told the BBC.

“But I don’t think that would have washed in this scenario.”

“It’s too big a claim. And they know with the serialisation there are days more of this kind of stuff coming and so they’ll be braced.”

UK media also likened the language in the palace’s statement to the late queen Elizabeth II’s response in 2021 to claims of racism in the royal family from Harry and his wife Meghan.

The queen said that “some recollections may vary”.

Charles and Diana’s tumultuous marriage between 1981 and 1996 was regularly featured in British newspapers, and continues to fascinate.

Diana’s famous “revenge dress” that she wore on the evening in 1994 that Charles made a public admission of adultery is to be auctioned in New York in December.

– AFP

Lula says he will go to UN to tell Trump to ‘stay out’ of Brazil’s elections

BRASÍLIA – President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said on Wednesday he will tell US President Donald Trump “not to meddle in Brazil’s elections” next week during the United Nations General Assembly.

The left-wing leader is slated to give his speech Tuesday at the annual global leadership meeting in New York, where he could run into his US counterpart, who is an ally to his rival in October’s election, right-wing candidate Flávio Bolsonaro.

“I’m going to the UN meeting to have a conversation with Trump and tell him: don’t meddle in the elections in Brazil,” Lula said during a campaign stop in Ceilândia, a working-class neighbourhood in the capital Brasília.

Brazilian foreign ministry official Carlos Bicalho Cozendey said on Wednesday that “no specific bilateral meeting” is planned for Lula and Trump, but they “will probably cross paths at the [UNGeneral] Assembly” like they did last year.

The United States imposed



Brazil’s President and presidential reelection candidate Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva speaks during a campaign rally in Ceilândia, Brasília, on Wednesday. – AFP

two fresh rounds of tariffs on Brazilian products in July, which Lula denounced as an attempt to influence the elections with economic pressure.

Tensions with the Trump administration began in 2025, when

Washington implemented its first wave of tariffs against Brazil in retaliation over the trial of former far-right president and Trump ally Jair Bolsonaro – Flávio’s father, who was convicted of attempting a coup d’état.

– AFP

Brazil’s central bank cuts benchmark rate for fifth time in a row

BRASÍLIA – Brazil’s central bank on Wednesday cut its benchmark interest rate for the fifth straight time, in a move President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva hopes will boost the economy as he seeks reelection next month.

The bank lowered the so-called Selic rate, one of the highest in the world, from 14 percent to 13.75 percent on the same day the US Federal Reserve raised interest rates for the first time since 2023.

The cut is part of a cycle that began in March after almost two years of rate hikes. It had been widely expected.

It was announced hours after the US Fed raised rates by 25 basis points to between 3.75 and 4.00

percent, defying President Donald Trump’s call for cuts ahead of November’s mid-term elections.

Lula is seeking a non-consecutive fourth term in the elections starting October 4.

He has long advocated for lower rates to boost growth.

Higher interest rates make borrowing more expensive and discourage consumption but also tamp down inflation.

The central bank has proceeded with caution, however, given the spike in oil prices caused by the US-Israel war against Iran and uncertainty over the monetary policies of other leading economies.

The bank warned on Wednesday that “higher than usual” risks to

inflation remain, despite inflation falling to within the bank’s target of three percent plus or minus 1.5 points.

Lula is neck-and-neck in election polls with conservative senator Flávio Bolsonaro, son of jailed former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro, whom Lula defeated in 2022.

Even though inflation is easing, many Brazilians say they feel life has become more expensive.

The price of a “picanha” – Brazilians’ favourite steak – has become a symbol of what Lula’s critics see as his failure to tame prices.

During campaigning in 2022 he promised that he would put “picanha” back on the plates of the people but four years later, its price has risen by around 10 percent.

– AFP

Guinea-Bissau PM calls for local cashew processing to boost economy, raise incomes

BISSAU – Transitional Prime Minister of Guinea-Bissau Ilidio Vieira Té said last week that the country should promote local cashew processing to strengthen its economy and increase household incomes.

The prime minister made the remarks in Bissau at a ceremony for the swearing-in of members of the organizing committee for a roundtable on sustainable financing of the cashew value chain, scheduled for November this year.

Té stressed that “cashew is one of the pillars of the national economy and an important source

of income for thousands of families, particularly in rural areas.” He said that the key task is to build a more modern and productive value chain capable of generating more income domestically.

The prime minister called for the establishment of accessible, transparent and sustainable financing mechanisms covering the entire value chain, from production and marketing to transportation to domestic and international markets.

Té added that the initiative would promote cooperation among the government, private sector,

financial institutions, producers and development partners.

According to the government, the roundtable aims to help transform the development model of a sector vital to the national economy and further strengthen its contribution to education, healthcare and employment.

Guinea-Bissau is among the world’s major exporters of raw cashew nuts, which are the country’s main export product. The country exported about 210,000 tonnes of cashew nuts in 2025, with Asian markets being the main destinations.

– Xinhua

Mbappe draws political fire over Ceuta T-shirt row

Robin Bjalon

MADRID – Kylian Mbappe has come under mounting criticism from conservative and far-right politicians in Spain and France after the Real Madrid forward declined to fully wear a T-shirt supporting residents of Ceuta, Spain’s north African exclave grappling with a migration crisis.

Immigration has emerged as one of Spain’s dominant political issues in recent months following July’s influx to Ceuta, and the debate has increasingly spilled into football ahead of next year’s parliamentary elections.

The dispute erupted before Real Madrid’s La Liga match on Tuesday when Mbappe, alongside Vinicius Junior and fellow Frenchman Ibrahima Konate, partially rolled up T-shirts bearing the words “We are all Ceutans”, which was intended to be a message of support for people in the Spanish territory bordering Morocco.

Images of the three players quickly spread on social media and prompted political reactions in Madrid.

A spokesperson for the mainstream conservative People’s Party (PP) said she felt “deep shame” over the incident, while a lawmaker from the far-right Vox party said Spaniards were “perfectly free to feel outraged by three millionaires who live in Spain and then do not support Spaniards”.

Ultras Sur, a Real Madrid supporters’ group linked to the far right and banned from the Santiago Bernabeu, described the players’ actions as “unacceptable” and called for public apologies.

Last week, an AFP journalist witnessed several hundred ultras gathered outside the stadium chanting “Ceuta is not for sale, Ceuta must be defended!” before the 2-1 Champions League win over Inter Milan.

More than 70,000 migrants entered Ceuta from Morocco on

July 30 and 31 in an unprecedented, chaotic surge that left scores dead and sparked European Union infighting over the sensitive topic of immigration.

‘Complete solidarity’

Most returned in the following hours, but thousands remained in precarious conditions in the small, overwhelmed city, sleeping rough or in makeshift tents. Deteriorating conditions have fuelled tensions with local residents and regular protests, some of which have been embraced by far-right groups.

Responding to the criticism, Mbappe told sports daily AS he was in “complete solidarity with Ceuta and all the victims”.

“But I also wanted to make a gesture and express my thoughts for all the immigrants who have lost their lives and who are also living in difficult conditions,” he said.

Mbappe has previously spoken out on issues beyond football, including racism and opposition to France’s far-right National Rally (RN).

French far-right figures also criticised the France captain’s gesture, with RN spokesperson Julien Odoul condemning his behaviour, while European Parliament member Marion Marechal questioned why public figures showed solidarity with migrants but not Europeans affected by the crisis.

The row has become entwined with Spain’s broader political debate over migration, with the PP and Vox accusing Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez’s government of failing to protect Spanish sovereignty in Ceuta.

Sánchez has defended a more open approach to irregular immigration in contrast with tougher policies promoted by European peers.

This year his government launched a scheme to grant legal status to irregular migrants already living in Spain that is expected to benefit around 500,000 people, mostly Latin Americans.

– AFP

EasyJet staff set to strike in Portugal for better pay

LISBON – The labour union for EasyJet’s cabin crew in Portugal yesterday called for two five-day strikes in October and December to press for higher wages from the cut-price airline.

The first will last between October 2 and 6 before another walkout from December 19 to 23, just before Christmas.

In a statement, the National Union of Civil Aviation Flight Personnel said EasyJet’s staff there received “lower pay than that offered by other airlines in Portugal and than that paid by EasyJet in other countries in its network”.

The airline told AFP it was “extremely disappointed” by the decision to strike. It argued that that EasyJet’s “cabin crew members receive pay that is significantly higher than the Portuguese national average”.

A union source cited by Portugal’s Lusa press agency said the October strike could disrupt around 500 flights from Lisbon, Porto and Faro, with the December walkout’s impact likely to be even greater.

EasyJet said if any strike action was confirmed, the airline would do everything in its power to minimise disruption.

– AFP

Carrick takes the blame as troubled Man Utd suffer League Cup misery



Manchester United's English defender Ayden Heaven reacts following the English League Cup third round football match against Brighton and Hove Albion at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on Wednesday. — AFP

MANCHESTER — Michael Carrick took the blame for Manchester United's stunning League Cup collapse against Brighton after furious fans jeered his side at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

Carrick and his players were booed off at the final whistle following a miserable 3-2 defeat featuring a blown two-goal lead.

Shea Lacey and Mason Mount put United two up by the 10th minute.

But the hosts suffered a woeful collapse as Charalampos Kostas reduced the deficit and Pascal Gross equalised before Maxim De Cuyper grabbed the winner.

For the first time in 50 years, United had lost a home game after leading 2-0.

It was another brutal blow for United after their controversial 1-0 home defeat against Manchester City on Sunday.

Carrick branded the third round loss unacceptable, but took the majority of the responsibility himself.

"We had the game exactly where we wanted it and let it get away from us. That's the story of the game," he said.

"There are a number of things we will look at and dissect. I know quite a bit about where it went wrong.

"We can't accept that as a group. Listen, I take responsibility for that, with the performance towards the end of the second half. That is on me."

Having led United to third place last season in his spell as interim boss, Carrick was expected to oversee a title challenge this term after being appointed on a permanent basis.

But United have already lost three times in six games in all competitions, putting Carrick under pressure to turn the tide at Fulham in the top-flight on Sunday.

Amid criticism of United's close-season transfer recruitment, Carrick's decision to make eight changes against Brighton exposed the lack of depth in his squad.

A defeat in west London at the

weekend would leave United in a full blown crisis barely a month into the new campaign.

'It doesn't feel good'

"We will all be better. We have to be better. We have a big game on Sunday that we have to prepare for. We are out of this competition. We've got to get back to winning football matches," Carrick said.

"It doesn't feel good at the moment, let me tell you. It doesn't feel good. We can get back to winning football matches and we can do a lot of things better.

"We want to win and we want to win quickly. It's as simple as that. The next game is Sunday and that is purely all I'm thinking about. We will get better with a number of things."

Carrick was a decorated member of the United sides that won Premier League titles and the Champions League under Alex Ferguson.

His successful interim spell had raised hopes that he could be the man to lead United to their first English title since Ferguson retired in 2013.

But the former England midfielder, whose only previous managerial experience came with second tier Middlesbrough, is in danger of being dragged into a fight to save his job unless results improve quickly.

United co-owner Jim Ratcliffe, who runs the club's football operations, has already sacked Erik ten Hag and Ruben Amorim during his reign.

Asked if he understood why the fans were so frustrated by United's latest failure, Carrick said: "It's pretty obvious isn't it? I totally understand the feelings of the supporters.

"You have to accept it. I totally accept it. It is on me ultimately you know, as a team, what we look like, how we play, what results we get.

"I will take that. I will take the praise and I will stand here and take the criticism and the upset. I totally understand it tonight for the way the game went. We have got to win games." — AFP

Alonso says Chelsea ambition 'very clear' after end of Boehly era



LONDON — Xabi Alonso said Chelsea's ambition was "very clear" after Clearlake Capital took full control of the Premier League club, ending Todd Boehly's chairmanship.

Chelsea announced late Wednesday that Clearlake, led by co-founders Behdad Eghbali and Jose E. Feliciano, would acquire the stakes of Boehly and director Mark Walter.

US billionaires Boehly and Walter partnered with Clearlake to buy the club from Roman Abramovich in May 2022 in a sale mandated by the British government.

Prior to the new deal, private equity company Clearlake had owned 61.5 percent of the club, with Boehly and Walter carving up the remaining shares with another investor, Swiss billionaire Hansjorg Wyss.

Chelsea said Wyss would "remain an important stakeholder and partner in the ownership group".

Boehly and Walter are among the co-owners of the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball team, while Walter recently sold the Los

Angeles Lakers basketball franchise for US\$12.5 billion.

The Financial Times reported that the pair were set to receive £950 million (US\$1.27 billion) for their combined stakes in Chelsea, in a deal that values the club at about £5 billion including debt.

In a fresh statement yesterday, Chelsea said: "Our ambition is clear: to compete at the highest level, to win major trophies, and to build sustained success."

Blues boss Alonso, who started his role at Chelsea on July 1, told reporters that the change was "an important day for the club".

"Thanks to the former owners for what they've done. I was not here, but I know they played an important role," he said on the eve of Chelsea's Premier League match at Brentford today.

"And now that Behdad is taking more control, almost full control, I think it's good that the main one is clear.

"I have very good relations with Behdad. He was the one that

came to Madrid to explain to me the project, to convince me, and we are working well together."

The Spaniard added: "We know where we want to be, we know that everything takes time, but the ambition for that is very clear."

Since the takeover in 2022, Chelsea's highest Premier League finish is fourth, in 2024/25, while the club won the UEFA Conference League and FIFA Club World Cup that season.

Former Real Madrid and Bayer Leverkusen coach Alonso has a brief to revitalise an underachieving Chelsea squad who finished a dismal 10th in the Premier League last season.

The Blues have made a mixed start to the new campaign, taking seven points from their four Premier League games to sit sixth in the table.

Boehly and Walter have also sold their stakes in Chelsea's partner club, French Ligue 1 side Strasbourg, giving full control to Clearlake.

— AFP



English FA calls for Infantino to release World Cup sell-off documents

LONDON — The chair of the English Football Association has called on FIFA president Gianni Infantino to release all the documentation relating to the abandoned plan to sell a stake in the World Cup to private investors.

Infantino's proposal was short-lived after a fierce backlash from across the sport, with European governing body UEFA threatening to boycott all FIFA competitions until it was shelved.

FA chair Debbie Hewitt, who is also a FIFA vice-president and a member of the FIFA Council, has written to Infantino asking for full

disclosure of all information relating to the scheme before the FIFA Council next meets on October 15.

Hewitt has also called for the release of documents relating to the decision to suspend a ban handed to United States striker Folarin Balogun during the World Cup, which followed a phone call from US President Donald Trump to Infantino.

Infantino apologised over the process in regard to the private investor plan in August and a statement from FIFA's management board pledged there would be a review but has not at any stage

confirmed who is undertaking that investigation.

UEFA said it has "lost confidence" in Infantino and has made legal applications in the US court system seeking disclosure of documents related to the private investor plan.

UEFA has also committed to identifying a credible candidate to run against Infantino at the FIFA Congress in March, with November 18 the deadline for candidates to be submitted.

Infantino confirmed earlier this month his intention to seek re-election.

— AFP



Klopp wants German team to help reclaim national pride from far-right

FRANKFURT — Jurgen Klopp said yesterday that Germany's football team can help ensure "national pride is not entrusted to the wrong people" after a recent far-right AfD election victory.

In a Frankfurt press conference announcing his first squad as Germany manager, the former Liverpool coach referenced a recent state election landslide win by the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany party.

The AfD won almost 44 percent of the vote in the former East German state of Saxony-Anhalt on September 6 and expects strong results in elections Sunday in Berlin and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

Klopp took over the Germany job in July after the four-time World Cup winners suffered a third straight early elimination at the tournament.

The 59-year-old has often spoke out about social issues during his time as manager of Liverpool, Borussia Dortmund and Mainz.

While not mentioning the AfD by name, Klopp advocated for adopting "positive patriotism", while saying: "I don't want to entrust national pride to the wrong people.

"A crazy amount of things have happened not that long ago. There was a vote which some people probably found OK, but others would have thought 'good heavens, what's going on here?'"

"From the perspective of someone in sport, I'd like to reclaim the flag for myself and for us. When we wave it, I don't want that someone thinks 'what's going on with you?'"

"I want that they think you're happy and you understand how lucky you are to be born in this wonderful country or to have moved here and live here."

Topics involving patriotism and nationalism are often sensitive in Germany, a country still at pains to atone for its dark history of Nazi rule, World War II and the Holocaust.

Speaking of national pride,

Klopp said he was "not even sure if one can — or is allowed to — use that term anymore without it being misunderstood".

"I can be proud of being German and still be open, diverse, kind and friendly."

The coach said it was more important that the country had enough doctors and caregivers, but said football can "foster a sense of community here, allowing us to truly feel the power of sport".

Yesterday, Klopp took the unusual step of naming a huge 44-man squad for four upcoming Nations League matches, despite matchday lists being restricted to 23 players.

"It's very unusual that you've got four games in two weeks with the national team," Klopp said.

"I want to get to know as many players as possible in that time."

Klopp won the Champions League and Premier League during a trophy-laden nine-year stint at Liverpool.

— AFP

China held by Uzbekistan in Asian Games women's football

NAGOYA – China drew 1-1 with Uzbekistan in the second round of the women's football group stage at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games yesterday, missing the chance to secure a place in the knockout stage with one game to spare.

China head coach Antony Milicic made eight changes to the starting lineup after his side's 5-1 win over Hong Kong, in the opening round, in which Wang Shuang scored twice and provided two assists. Wang started on the bench yesterday.

The Steel Roses dominated

possession and created numerous chances, but Uzbekistan took the lead in the 42nd minute when Kholida Dadaboeva headed home a rebound.

Wang came on after halftime, and China's attack gained momentum. In the 71st minute, Wang Yanwen headed the ball back across goal from a worked corner, allowing Zhang Linyan to head home the equalizer.

Two minutes later, Wang dribbled past several defenders outside the penalty area before striking the crossbar with a long-range effort.

China continued to press in the closing stages, but Uzbekistan defended resolutely to hold on for a draw.

China registered 24 shots, including 10 on target, compared with Uzbekistan's five attempts, three of which were on target.

"Disappointed, of course, not to win the game, but probably for us, looking on the balance of play, we created enough chances to score some goals and win the game," Milicic said at the post-match press conference.

"The best word to sum up today was a frustrating performance based on the amount of possession we had, based on the territory we had, and the amount of chances we had."

Explaining the extensive rotation, Milicic said the team needed fresh players after only two days of rest and that the tournament also provided an opportunity to give more players international experience.

"We wanted to give players some opportunities to show what they can do at this level," he said. "You have to have one eye in that department."

Milicic added that the result would not change the team's approach to its final group match against the Philippines on Monday.

"We didn't look at securing qualification into the next round. We look at playing every game to win," he said.

"We're very confident we can win the group. We believe in ourselves. Recovery is going to be important now, and then make a good preparation for the Philippines, and we expect to put on a good performance," he added. – Xinhua

China out of Asian Games women's cricket without a ball being bowled

Daniel Hicks

NAGOYA – China's women returned to Asian Games cricket for the first time in 12 years yesterday - only to be knocked out without a ball being bowled two days before the opening ceremony.

On a seemingly perfect day for T20 cricket under blue skies and sunshine at the Korogi Athletic Park in Nagoya, a sodden outfield caused by days of rain prevented any play from taking place in China's morning quarter-final against Bangladesh.

Bangladesh went through to the semi-finals by virtue of being the higher ranked side under Asian Games competition rules.

There they will meet Pakistan,

whose last-eight match against Thailand later in the day was reduced to 11 overs per side after the start was delayed by 90 minutes as groundstaff worked to dry the outfield.

Thailand, anchored by wicket-keeper Nannapat Koncharoenkai's 49, posted a competitive 91-4 in their 11 overs.

Pakistan lost wickets at regular intervals before avoiding an upset by reaching 92-7 with two balls to go.

Record rainfall a week ago caused flooding in Nagoya and caused some Asian Games athletes to be evacuated from their accommodation.

Parts of the Korogi Park outfield had still clearly not recovered from the deluge in time to stage both of

yesterday's matches.

"We knew it was going to be tough to get a game given the weather in the last week here and all the challenges there have been," said China's Australian coach Alan Newington.

"We're grateful to the ground staff for trying their best, but we thought it was going to be tough to get a game.

"But we're very disappointed. We were hoping the world could see the China women play for the first time in a big tournament. But we'll reset and we'll try again."

The Nagoya-Aichi Games officially begin with an opening ceremony tomorrow. – AFP

Indonesia, Philippines, Japan bag opening wins in women's basketball



Afril Bernardino (centre) of the Philippines shoots the ball during the Group B match against Kazakhstan at 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Nagoya, Japan, yesterday. – Xinhua

NAGOYA – The women's basketball competition of the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games tipped off yesterday, with Indonesia, the Philippines, and host Japan all securing comfortable victories in their group-stage openers.

The 11-team tournament features three groups, where the top two teams from each group, along with the two best third-placed sides, will advance to the knockout stage.

In the tournament opener, Indonesia dominated the glass with a 50-36 rebounding advantage to overcome Thailand 61-52 in Group A, which also includes powerhouse China.

China will begin its campaign tomorrow against Thailand. "We

don't expect to win. We are here at these Asian Games because we want the young generation to get a chance to play with such high-level players. That way, they can get the chance to become better and challenge themselves to see how hard they can push to be a good player," said Thailand captain Supavadee Kunchuan.

In Group B, the Philippines cruised past Kazakhstan 86-58, while host Japan overwhelmed Hong Kong 114-37. Japan mounted a fierce 11-0 opening run and held its opponent to just six points in the second quarter and seven in the third, stretching the lead to 65 points by the end of the third period to put the game out of reach.

– Xinhua



Photo taken at Hisaya-odori Park shows the official mascot "Honohon" for the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Nagoya, Japan, yesterday. – Xinhua

Thailand leads 8 teams into women's volleyball quarters

NAGOYA – Thailand swept Kyrgyzstan 3-0 in just 52 minutes here yesterday to lead eight teams into the women's volleyball quarterfinals of the 2026 Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games.

The newly crowned Asian champions overwhelmed Kyrgyzstan 25-13, 25-7, 25-7 for their second straight win in Group C.

Kyrgyzstan struggled to convert its attacks, scoring just 18 kills from 78 attempts. Thailand, by contrast,

converted 41 of 69 attacks into kills.

In the other match of Group C, Chinese Taipei swept Mongolia 3-0. Sharing a 2-0 win-loss record, Thailand and Chinese Taipei have both secured top two finishes from Group C and their berths in the quarterfinals.

Middle blocker Tatyana Nikitina had 19 points to lead Kazakhstan to a 27-29, 26-24, 25-23 and 25-19 come-from-behind victory over the Philippines in Group B.

"In the first set, we struggled

to connect with each other, but we analyzed the Philippines' game throughout the set and adjusted," Kazakhstan setter Irina Kuznetsova said. "We listened to our coach and tried to do everything he said, and in the second set, we were much more connected on the court."

The 35-year-old made her Asian Games debut in 2010 at Guangzhou, helping Kazakhstan win a bronze medal. Now a mother of two, she is back for another Asian Games campaign.

"It's different, but I feel very

confident because I have so much experience. At this Asian Games, I hope for an even better result than in 2010," she said.

Kazakhstan and China, who had beaten the Philippines 3-0 on Wednesday, have both secured quarterfinal berths with the two teams to vie for the top place of Group B today.

In Group D, Vietnam swept Hong Kong, 3-0 for a second win in two tries and eliminated the team with one round remaining after its 3-0 loss to South Korea the previous day.

"Even though we lost, we felt good about the match overall. We did pretty well in terms of executing our tactics, and it was much better than yesterday's match," said middle blocker Leung Nga Yee of Hong Kong.

In Group D's other action, South Korea beat Qatar 3-0 to join Vietnam in the quarterfinals.

Indonesia and Japan have also booked their tickets to the quarterfinals following Indonesia's 3-0 win over Nepal, who had dropped both its matches in Group A. – Xinhua

‘Being Heumann’ captures joy in fight for disability rights

Paula Ramon

TORONTO – Sian Heder’s new film “Being Heumann” profiles an American activist fighting for the rights of people with disabilities, with the Oscar-winning director saying its message of inclusivity has renewed importance in today’s society.

The film, starring Ruth Madeley and Mark Ruffalo, opened the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) last week.

“It’s a time where people need to fight again and need to come together in collective action and take a stand,” Heder told AFP in an interview.

“A lot of the rights that activists fought for and put their bodies on the line for in the 1970s are being rolled back completely,” she said.

“Being Heumann” brings to screen a 1977 protest led by activist Judy Heumann, known as the “mother of the disability rights movement.”

Heumann, together with a group of people with different disabilities, occupied a government building in California for weeks, demanding the implementation of regulations to expand accessibility.

“This is a movie about a time when protest really mattered, and invisible people were refusing to be

invisible, and I think we’re at that place right now,” Heder said.

The film doesn’t show only conflict. Heder also wanted to highlight the joy in protest.

“The protesters are fun. The building is joyful, so activism doesn’t need to be only painful. It can be about community as well,” she said.

The director conducted 35 interviews and immersed herself in archive material to write the script along with Rebekah Taussig.

‘Intimacy’

The AppleTV film offers the perspective of people with disabilities and shows the challenges of everyday tasks such as getting out of bed or going to the bathroom.

It also portrays the close relationships that people with disabilities can develop with caregivers.

“Judy slept with eight different pillows under her legs and part of that was she couldn’t move herself until the morning,” Heder said.

“So until her attendant came in the morning, she was going to be stuck in whatever position she was left in.”

“The details and that intimacy was really important to me,” said Heder, who won an Oscar for the screenplay of “CODA,” which centres on a

family with deaf parents.

“Being Heumann” shows its title character with all her complexities and vulnerabilities.

Madeley said she felt the pressure of embodying a woman who devoted decades to activism and served in the administrations of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama.

“It made me nervous in the best possible way,” Madeley told AFP.

“Judy is such an iconic figure, and I wanted to do her justice, but I also wanted to do disabled creatives justice who have been waiting for to see themselves in a lead role in Hollywood,” said the British actress who has spina bifida, a spine condition that requires her to use a wheelchair.

“This was a real milestone, not just in my personal career, but in the industry and seeing disability cast authentically,” she said.

Madeley, who entered the industry as a writer before turning to acting, said the sector has changed considerably since she started.

She recalled feeling panicked about asking for help for fear of being seen as a burden.

“If there’s no accessible bathroom on set, don’t worry about it. No, no problem. There’s no ramp. Don’t worry, it’s fine. I don’t need

ramp,” she said.

While filming “Being Heumann,” Madeley said she noticed the same fear in some actors.

“It was so healing and rewarding for me to be able to say ‘You can ask for that, that’s fine,’” she said.

TIFF ends this Sunday. – AFP



Sian Heder (left) and Ruth Madeley of ‘Being Heumann’ pose in the Getty Images Portrait Studio presented by IMDb and IMDbPro at InterContinental Toronto Centre on Sunday in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. – AFP

‘Resident Evil’ film brings video game’s ethos to the big screen

Paula Ramon

LOS ANGELES – US director Zach Cregger is a huge fan of the “Resident Evil” video game franchise, so when he was tapped to direct its new film adaptation, he gave himself one objective: “Be authentic to the spirit of the games.”

The “Weapons” and “Barbarian” filmmaker did so by leaning into the visual language of video games, shooting the film from the perspective of the protagonist, played by Austin Abrams.

Cregger decided it was more important to match the vibe of playing “Resident Evil” than using the characters or plot from the series.

“It’s a new character, but the story should feel like the gameplay feels,” he told AFP in a recent interview.

The new film, which hits US cinemas today, follows Bryan (Abrams), a courier who takes on a late-night delivery job from a hospital that quickly devolves into a nightmare.

By placing the camera behind Abrams so it was “swinging around to look at what he’s looking at,” he choreographed it such that it “feels video game-like” from that first-person perspective.

Another way he adapted the game was in the progression of weaponry available for the hero.

“You start with a pistol, and then you get a shotgun, then you get a machine gun,” Cregger explained.

“I feel like people who play the games...are gonna recognize many aspects of the games in this movie.”



US comedian, actor and filmmaker Zach Cregger poses on the sidelines of the premiere of Columbia Pictures’ “Resident Evil” at the United Theater on Broadway in Los Angeles on Tuesday. – AFP

‘Sense of dread’

While previous movie adaptations of “Resident Evil” – such as those starring Milla Jovovich – were more action movies, Cregger went all-in on horror for the latest edition.

“I wanted to really lean into the horror, and that slow sense of dread that the games have done so well across all of them,” Cregger said.

That is not to say the new film lacks action sequences, and leading man Abrams said he had to get in shape to shoot the movie – though he did not want to look like he was playing a superhero.

“A part of the challenge was...I wanted the character to not be someone that looked like they could do this,” Abrams told AFP.

“I feel like the more in-shape he is, the more you feel like, ‘okay,

man, maybe you can do this.’”

The 30-year-old actor admitted he had never played “Resident Evil” until he landed the film’s lead role, but he is now familiar with the challenge – and he does not think he would make it through the ordeal his character Bryan has to survive.

Cregger said he knows the “Resident Evil” fan base might not be totally satisfied with the lack of characters or details from the games themselves, but he stayed true to his vision.

“I’m sorry that’s not what this movie is, but I feel like if I had done that, I would have screwed it up,” Cregger said.

“To me, the best thing to do is to tell an original story that celebrates everything that I love about the games.” – AFP

Ireland to boycott Eurovision 2027 over Gaza

DUBLIN – Ireland will not participate in or broadcast next year’s Eurovision Song Contest, public broadcaster RTE said yesterday, citing the “ongoing loss of lives in Gaza”.

The country, which also snubbed the 2026 competition over Israel’s participation, will join the Netherlands in skipping the world’s biggest live televised music event, which has been hit by a string of boycotts and controversies in recent years.

“RTE will not participate in the 2027 Eurovision Song Contest, nor will RTE broadcast the competition,” said the broadcaster, which manages Ireland’s selection and participation in the contest.

“RTE feels that Ireland’s participation cannot be justified given the appalling and ongoing loss of lives in Gaza and the humanitarian crisis there which continues to put the lives of so many civilians at risk,” the statement said.

Earlier this month, Eurovision organisers said they were excluding any country involved in an armed conflict from hosting the competition.

Israel, which has been at war in Gaza since 2023, came close to winning the competition in both 2025 and 2026, ultimately finishing second on each occasion.

However, the Dutch broadcaster said the exclusion of countries in conflict was not “sufficient”, adding that Eurovision could “no longer be considered neutral” given the divisions over the Gaza conflict.

Since its launch in 1955, Eurovision has become the ultimate pop platform, catapulting Swedish icons ABBA to worldwide fame and boosting the likes of Celine Dion, Cliff Richard and Olivia Newton-John.

This year’s competition was watched by 131 million viewers, down by 35 million from the year before, after five countries boycotted it over Israel’s participation.

The Netherlands, Iceland, Spain, Ireland and Slovenia all pulled out of the 2026 contest, with the latter three refusing to broadcast the show at all.

Next year’s event will take place on May 15 in Bulgaria’s Black Sea city of Burgas.

– AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 17°C~30°C	Manila 23°C~31°C	New York 16°C~29°C	Lisbon 17°C~28°C
Shanghai 22°C~31°C	Bangkok 25°C~33°C	London 16°C~20°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~23°C
Hong Kong 23°C~29°C	Tokyo 19°C~24°C	Frankfurt 10°C~22°C	Luanda 18°C~23°C
Taipei 20°C~30°C	Singapore 26°C~33°C	Vancouver 12°C~20°C	Maputo 18°C~26°C
Guangzhou 22°C~33°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~34°C	Paris 12°C~22°C	Dili 21°C~32°C
Nanjing 20°C~28°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 9°C~18°C	São Tomé 23°C~27°C
Guilin 21°C~33°C	Seoul 17°C~29°C	Las Vegas 21°C~35°C	Praia 24°C~33°C
Xi'an 15°C~22°C	Sydney 13°C~23°C	Monte Carlo 19°C~26°C	Bissau 25°C~32°C



Celebrating K9s

A vehicle decorated with a large German Shepherd dog head drives during the Independence Day military parade in Mexico City's Zocalo square on Wednesday. — AFP



Your roots are showing!

Visitors look at an art installation during the ArtRio 2026 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Wednesday. The five-day fair kicked off here on Wednesday, showcasing contemporary artworks such as paintings, sculptures and art installations from around the world. — Xinhua

Robotic Ganesha

Devotees offer prayers in front of a robotic-themed idol of the elephant-headed Hindu deity Ganesha during the ongoing 'Ganesh Chaturthi' festival in Hyderabad, India yesterday. — AFP



Free me!

A Bengal tiger (Panthera tigris) bares its teeth at the National Zoo of Havana in Havana, Cuba on Tuesday. — AFP

Must be lots of guns around!

A craftsman creates leather arms holsters at a leathercraft workshop in the Shawaka district of central Baghdad, Iraq on Wednesday. — AFP



Interesting idea!

This photo taken on Wednesday shows a bouquet made with lotus pods, lotus roots and lotus flowers at a lotus root innovation base in Honghu City, Hubei Province. Honghu lotus root is a signature product of Hubei Province. — Xinhua

