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# Sam says detailed work plan for Chi Lam Vai revamp is ready

*Armindo Neves*

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai announced during a meeting on Monday that a detailed work plan for Chi Lam Vai's revitalisation has been formulated.

According to a statement released yesterday by the Macao Government Information Bureau (GCS), Sam chaired a meeting with the "Leadership Group for the Promotion of Urban Renewal" at the Government Headquarters on Monday.

At the meeting, according to the statement, the head of the "Working Group for Urban Renewal Laws and Policies", Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak, along with the head of the "Working Group for Urban Renewal Techniques and Coordination", Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Wai Man, presented their respective work plans and the progress of each group.

According to the statement, Sam emphasised that the local government has been actively developing a series of preliminary studies and preparatory work, which includes the creation of the "Specialised Working Group for the Renewal and Revitalisation of Pátio do Espinho", and the elaboration of a concrete action plan.

*Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (centre) chairs the inaugural meeting with members of the government's "Leadership Group for the Promotion of Urban Renewal" at Government Headquarters on Monday. – Photo: GCS*

Sam added that both groups have been performing their functions effectively, in the sense of complementarity and cooperation, setting up constructive plans to coordinate and promote urban renewal works.

During the meeting, the statement said, Sam pointed out that the government's 3rd Five-Year Plan sets out, in the form of a dedicated chapter, a top-level design for "accelerating urban renewal", with a focus on promoting protective renewal and revitalisation of the area around the Ruins of St Paul's.

The 3rd Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the Macao Special Administrative Region (2026–2030) is structured around building four pillars: "Law-based Macao", "Vibrant Macao", "Cultural Macao", and "Blissful Macao". It outlines eight major development goals and 35 key performance indicators spanning economic diversification, urban renewal, and social welfare.

Sam emphasised that urban renewal is a systematic undertaking that requires clear timelines, detailed plans, and well-coordinated supporting measures, the statement said, adding that it must be grounded in Macau's actual circumstances while drawing on experience from both home and abroad, in order to explore and refine an urban renewal model based on "government guidance, market operation, district-specific measures, comprehensive utilisation, and the integration of redevelopment and revitalisation with district-wide development".

Chi Lam Vai (also known as Chi Lam Chuen – 茨林村), known in Portuguese as Pátio do Espinho ("Courtyard of the Thorn"), is a 400-year-old former walled village. It is situated just a street away from the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Na Tcha Temple - one of Macau's two temples dedicated to the tutelary deity known in Mandarin as Nezha - and close to the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St Paul's.

The area around Na Tcha Temple and the Ruins of St. Paul is a part of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Historic Centre of Macao.

According to Chi Lam Vai Concern Group Convenors Ip Tat, the village consists of 120 houses with fewer than 100 dwellers. Chi Lam Vai's main tourist attraction is a Na Tcha-themed café and souvenir shop.

Na Tcha (known in Putonghua as Nezha) is a Daoist tutelary deity particularly popular in Macau. ■

## Trump renames AI 'super intelligence', rejects int'l oversight

NEW YORK – US President Donald Trump yesterday announced that the US government would rename artificial intelligence "super intelligence" in official communications, as he firmly rejected calls for international supervision of AI, calling them a "globalist scheme" to control the new technology.

Speaking to the UN General Assembly, Trump argued the word "artificial" undersold the technology and voiced hope the rest of the world would adopt the new term.

"It sounds much better. It is much better, and it's much more accurate," he said.

"The United States totally rejects any attempt to construct a globalist scheme to control... artificial intelligence," he said.

"Every major new technology brings challenges, and superintelligence is no exception," he added.

"The very same people who said we'll all be dead in 12 years because of global warming... are now saying that AI is going to kill us all, that robots are going to attack us, and that everything is going to be a total disaster." *– AFP*

*Members of the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) delegation wave MSAR flags during the opening ceremony of the 48th WorldSkills Competition in Shanghai yesterday.(More on pages 3& 7) – Xinhua*

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## Xi sends congratulatory letter to 48th WorldSkills Competition

President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter yesterday to the 48th WorldSkills Competition. Xi noted that a new round of sce-tech revolution is exerting a profound impact on global skills development. *– Story on p. 7*

## Houthis accuse Saudi Arabia of deadly strikes as thousands flee

Yemen's Houthis accused Saudi Arabia yesterday of launching a wave of deadly strikes that killed civilians and prison inmates, as Riyadh seeks to repel an offensive that has seen the Iran-backed group seize strategic territory. *– Story on p. 10*

## A Cuban zoo, and its animals, in epic battle for survival

Every day, veterinarians and zookeepers make their way to Cuba's National Zoo by whatever means they can, determined to not abandon the nearly 1,000 animals in their care and help save species at risk of extinction. *– Story on p. 12*

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# Bolivian woman busted with 3.95 kg of liquid cocaine sewn into clothes, worth 11.8 million patacas: police

*Sherwin Hng*

A 26-year-old Bolivian woman was arrested at Macau International Airport on Sunday after Judiciary Police (PJ) officers found about 3,954.5 grams of liquid cocaine concealed in the linings of 11 items of winter clothing in her checked in luggage, PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a special press conference yesterday.

The seized cocaine was estimated to have a street value of about 11.8 million patacas, Cheong said.

According to Cheong, officers identified a suspected female passenger through intelligence and risk assessment as she arrived in Macau on a flight from Southeast Asia on Sunday night.

After the woman collected her luggage at about 10:00 p.m., PJ officers intercepted her and found six tops and five pairs of trousers with unusually heavy areas in their linings.

Further examination revealed that the 11 items of clothing had been modified to conceal a liquid substance. The drugs had been packed in transparent plastic bags, fixed to the inner layers of the clothing with glue, and the lining then sewn back into place to restore the apparel to their original appearance.

Rapid testing and subsequent laboratory examination confirmed that the substance was cocaine, Cheong said.

*The 11 items of clothing containing cocaine seized by the police are displayed in a pressroom of the PJ headquarters yesterday. – Photos: Sherwin Hng*

Cheong pointed out that this was the first case uncovered in Macau in which liquid cocaine had been concealed in the linings of clothing.

The investigation revealed that the woman had been recruited by a drug trafficking group and travelled to a South American country on September 11 to collect the drugs. She then flew through Southeast Asia before arriving in Macau.

Cheong said that, according to the ongoing investigation, the woman intended to use Macau as a transit point and wait for instructions from the drug trafficking group before transporting the drugs to a neighbouring region. She was promised US$5,000 for completing the delivery but had not yet received the payment when she was arrested.

Cheong said the Judiciary Police believe that the drugs were not destined for Macau, adding that PJ officers were continuing to investigate the case and identify other people involved.

The woman was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday for further questioning and possible arraignment on a drug trafficking charge. She faces five to 15 years behind bars, Cheong said. ■

*Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded drug trafficking suspect from Bolivia to a PJ car outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday.*

# 18 primary students contract chickenpox: SSM

*Armindo Neves*

The Health Bureau (SSM) announced in a statement yesterday that it had received a report of a cluster of chickenpox infections in the primary section of Pui Va Middle School.

According to the statement, 18 pupils – 11 boys and 7 girls – have, since September 15, developed symptoms including a rash and small blisters on the head, face, limbs, chest, and back.

All affected students have received medical treatment, and there have been no cases of severe illness or other serious complications, the statement said, adding that all of the pupils had previously received one dose of the chickenpox (varicella) vaccine.

The statement noted that some of the individuals who have been vaccinated against chickenpox may still become infected – a phenomenon known as a breakthrough infection.

However, the symptoms are usually mild and atypical, featuring fewer blisters and a shorter duration of illness. Given that this incident is a cluster event caused by breakthrough infections, the bureau dispatched staff to the site to carry out inspections, implement infection control measures – such as cleaning, disinfection, and maintaining indoor ventilation – and strictly enforce the requirement that affected students and staff stay away from school or work, according to the statement.

According to the statement, chickenpox (medically known as varicella) is a highly contagious infection caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV), a member of the herpesvirus family. It is characterised by an itchy rash that turns into fluid-filled blisters and eventually crusts over, often accompanied by fever, fatigue, headache, and loss of appetite.

The virus spreads through airborne droplets from coughing or sneezing, or through direct contact with blister fluid. It has an incubation period of 10 to 21 days and remains contagious from about 1 to 2 days before the rash appears until all blisters have crusted over, the statement underlined.

While most common in children under 10 - in whom it is usually mild - chickenpox can be more severe in adults, infants, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems, potentially leading to complications such as skin infections, pneumonia, or encephalitis. The varicella vaccine is highly effective at preventing or lessening the severity of the illness. Following recovery, the virus remains dormant in the body and can reactivate later in life as shingles (herpes zoster), the statement said. ■

*Image courtesy of amazon.in*

# Judiciary Police (PJ) foil HK$1.5 million transfer in 'fake police' scams

*Sherwin Hng*

The Judiciary Police (PJ) prevented two local residents from transferring money to fraudsters after they were suspected of falling victim to "fake police" scams, successfully blocking one of the victims from transferring HK$1.5 million, PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

According to Cheong, the PJ Anti-Fraud Coordination Centre identified the two suspected victims through intelligence analysis on September 16 and 17. The victims are a middle-aged man and a middle-aged woman.

PJ officers attempted to contact them several times by telephone and text message but were unable to reach them. Officers subsequently sent anti-fraud information through multimedia messages and social media, while also seeking assistance from the victims' family members.

The two victims eventually realised that they had been deceived after seeing the anti-fraud information and speaking with their family members, Cheong said.

In the first case, Cheong said that officers identified the male victim at about 4:30 p.m. on September 16 as a suspected victim of a "fake police" scam. Police immediately froze his bank account, but he had not yet initiated any transfer and therefore suffered no financial loss.

In the second case, officers identified the female victim at about 2:30 p.m. on September 17 and immediately froze her bank account, successfully preventing her from transferring HK$1.5 million to the scammers.

When police located the two victims, the man was hiding at his company while the woman was hiding in a hotel, according to Cheong. Both had followed the scammers' instructions to hide themselves and had activated their mobile phones' screen-sharing functions while logging into their online banking accounts, Cheong added.

*Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong looks on during yesterday's regular press conference at the PJ headquarters in Zape. – Photo: Sherwin Hng*

Cheong also said no money had been transferred from either bank account, meaning both victims avoided financial losses. ■

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**Macau Weather**

*CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS.*
*ONE OR TWO SHOWERS.*
*FORCE 2 TO 4 EASTERLY WINDS.*
*RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 65% AND 95%.*

**26ºC~30ºC**

*Source: SMG*

# One Central Macau unveils 'Moonlight Garden' for Mid-Autumn celebrations

*Khalel Vallo*

One Central Macau in Nape unveiled yesterday its "Moonlight Garden", a festive artistic showcase featuring works by local artists Vitorino Vong (黃子灃) and Amy Lam Hoi Leng, as part of its Mid-Autumn Festival and National Day Golden Week celebrations.

The Mid-Autumn Festival is a traditional harvest celebration held on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month, centred around family reunions, Moon gazing, and sharing mooncakes under the full Moon, while the National Day Golden Week is an annual seven-day national holiday in the Chinese mainland starting October 1, commemorating the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) with travel, festivities, and public celebrations.

The showcase will end on October 31 throughout the shopping mall and Waterfront Promenade, incorporating artistic installations inspired by Macau's cultural heritage and landmarks.

*This photo shows the Moonlight Lantern installation outside the mall.*

The opening ceremony was held last night and attended by more than 200 guests, including Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Acting Director Cheng Wai Tong, Hong Kong actress and singer Charlene Choi Tsoek-jin, and One Central Macau Head of Asset Management Bertram Whetherall.

The Moonlight Garden features three main installations: At the mall's Atrium, four interactive Wishing Pillars are inspired by Penha Hill, Nam Van Lake, A-Ma Temple and Lou Lim Ieoc Garden, representing wishes for love, prosperity, family and health respectively. Suspended lanterns, floating clouds and jade rabbit decorations form the surrounding setting, while visitors can activate the Wishing Pillars to create synchronised lighting effects.

On the ground floor, Moonlit Wishes allows visitors to scan a QR code and send personalised blessings, which appear on a digital screen alongside messages from other visitors. Visitors can also redeem a token for a Mid-Autumn Fortune Card dispenser.

Along the Waterfront Promenade, the Moonlight Lantern installations features illuminated lanterns carrying original acrostic poems with festive blessings and tributes to the city.

From next Monday to October 7, One Central Macau and MGM Macau will also hold Moonlit Golden Week Rewards, offering shopping privileges including rebates of up to 8.0 percent, according to a statement by One Central yesterday. The statement added that a seven-day early-bird promotion from Monday to Sunday offers rebates of up to 10 percent.

Shoppers spending 2,000 patacas or more during the promotional period can access a photo experience at the One Central Macau x Brunch Brother Korean photo booth, while purchases of 10,000 patacas or more provide a chance to enter a lucky draw for prizes including MGM Cotai accommodation packages and 999.9 fine gold bars, the statement noted. ■

*Canadian-born Hong Kong actress and singer Charlene Choi Tsoek-jin poses during yesterday's "Moonlight Garden" opening ceremony at One Central Macau in Nape. – Photos: Khalel Vallo*

*This handout photo provided by the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) yesterday shows its observation group for the 48th WorldSkills Competition posing at the local airport on Monday.*

# DSAL sends delegation to Shanghai for WorldSkills observation

*Khalel Vallo*

The Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) sent its first cross-sector delegation to Shanghai on Monday to observe the 48th WorldSkills Competition and exchange views on vocational training and skills development, as six-day event got off the ground yesterday, according to a statement by the bureau yesterday.

The delegation comprises representatives from Central People's Government offices based in Macau, Legislative Assembly members, higher education institutions, vocational training organisations, industry associations and organisations governing various competitions, the statement said, adding that during the visit, the delegation will observe the competition in person and exchange views on areas including event organisation, curriculum design, international skills standards, and industry-education integration.

The statement said that the cross-sector visit aims to bring together resources and expertise from different sectors, allowing Macau's training partners and business representatives to gain first-hand knowledge of the latest international technical trends and standards.

The delegation will also visit organisations related to technology and emerging industries in Shanghai to explore opportunities for cooperation in skills development and industry-education integration, the statement noted.

In addition to observing the competitions, the delegation will support Macau's representatives competing at the WorldSkills event, the statement underlined, adding that the experience gained during the visit would provide a reference for optimising vocational education and talent development in Macau.

The initiative is also intended to support the local government's "1+4" appropriate economic diversification strategy by helping develop skilled workers whose capabilities meet the needs of industrial transformation and economic development, the statement said.

The government said it will continue to bring together social resources to strengthen the connection between vocational training and industry needs, while promoting institutional innovation and increasing resources to provide young people with more opportunities for skills development and employment, the statement noted. ■

MyLand Culture founder and curator Pal Lok Chok (from left to right); Lisbon dancer, educator and researcher Inês Zinho Pinheiro; Macau photographer Tang Kuok Ho; and co-curator Mary Wong pose for a group photo at the recent opening ceremony of the exhibition in Lisbon.
– Photos: MyLand Culture.

# Fostering Macau, Lisbon exchanges through art

*Interview by Rui Pastorin*

MyLand Culture's "MACAO&" series made its debut last week with "Into the Radiant Darkness". The first-ever stop of the project: Lisbon.

The cultural exchange and initiative put together the works of Macau photographer Tang Kuok Ho with the kinaesthetic audio* scores of Lisbon dancer, educator and researcher Inês Zinho Pinheiro, with the exhibition held at the Portuguese capital's "Procurator.arte", a cultural association, until October 9.

This is all in a project that brings together creators, artists, and field specialists from diverse cities for meaningful dialogue and mutual friction, MyLand Culture founder and curator Pal Lok Chok told the *Post* in a recent online interview, highlighting each participant's "unique cultural context and disciplinary perspective".

"The project aims to stimulate creative energy through this two-way brainstorming process, generate new experiences and perceptions, and open up entirely new perspectives on cities and cultures for both project participants and audiences across cities", according to Lok, who, along with co-curator Mary Wong, who also joined the online interview, said they hope the project can foster exchanges while presenting art from Macau.

The exhibition comprises nearly 40 photographs of Macau and Lisbon from Tang's series "Photosynthesis", which explores the relationship between artificial light and urban dynamism, alongside two audio scores created by Pinheiro: "Light & movement, echoes & memories" and "Ways of choreoattenting ['choreographing attention']" .The former is a near 12-minute audio piece that turns Tang's series into "kinaesthetic prompts", translating sensory recollections of Macau into physical movement prompts.

The latter audio walk, meanwhile, acts as a "choreographic device", using movement instructions and sensory prompts to guide how participants navigate and view Lisbon at night. By disrupting routine movement, it changes how viewers photograph and perceive the city – turning everyday architecture and light into catalysts for new, attention-driven interactions between the body and urban space, Lok added.

Through the two works, co-curator Wong highlighted that they position "the urban landscape as an environment co-produced through two cultural perspectives and art forms, while articulating the various ideologies embedded in the everyday lives of the two cities".

Wong further explained that the project "evolves through a reciprocal exchange of perspectives". By alternating between visual and auditory impulses, the exhibition demonstrates that experiencing a city is not just passive observation, but an active physical performance shaped by light and movement, she said.

When it came down to choosing the representative artists, Wong highlighted that they looked at "Locality", meaning how the artists' practices distinctively reflect and study their local cultures; "Contrast", wherein there are different inspirational sources and outcomes despite a similar direction in topic, all eventually paving the way for joint multi-dimensional creation; and "Contemporaneity", where works focus on present-day reality in Macau and Portugal – reflecting how people actually feel and live today.

Particularly, in choosing the artist from Macau, Wong said that Tang captured all of these points, while adding: "He captures the nuanced ways humans interact with darkness and illumination under Macau's unique neon-drenched architecture, which is sustained by a synthetic glow", she said.

Through the entire project, an exchange between the two cities remains important, with Lok noting that this is best achieved through collaboration.

"We believe the key to achieving deeper and more meaningful artistic and cultural exchange lies in inviting artists and institutions from both cities to collaborate on joint creation and curation. The co-creation between the artists in this project is a prime example", she said.

Moreover, by featuring Tang's photographic social observation alongside Pinheiro's sensory and sonic discourse, Lok added that the showcase demonstrates that Macau's creative output possesses the depth and openness needed for international dialogue, while also being both multi-layered and worthy of deep exploration.

Wong added that the inaugural project, along with the partnership with Procur.arte, has also gathered people who share the same artistic values as well as the same intercultural roots, to further deepen the ongoing artistic bridge between the two cities. "These organic bonds are what we value and hope to develop in the future".

The curators are excited to expand and build on the foundation created, with Lok adding that it breaks down "barriers between different cultural and artistic fields".

Another collaboration, this time between Macau and Shenzhen artists focusing on sculpture and sound creation, is set to expand on the framework, slated to launch later this year and aiming to explore "themes related to life and existence, with exhibitions to be held in both Shenzhen and Macau", Lok added.

Meanwhile, Wong pointed out that interdisciplinarity serves as the core direction of this series and will continue to go hand in hand with inter-cultural exchanges for future editions.

**Kinaesthetic audio is sound specifically designed to make you move, feel physical sensations, or experience space through your body, rather than just passively listening with your ears. - Gemini*

# Sam vows stronger coordination between cybersecurity & national security

*Tony Wong*

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai has convened and chaired this year's annual plenary meeting of the Cybersecurity Commission, underlining the importance of strengthening coordination between the safeguarding of cybersecurity and national security.

According to a statement by the commission yesterday, the meeting was held at Government Headquarters on Monday.

The commission was established in December 2019 when Macau's Cybersecurity Law came into force.

During the closed-door meeting, Sam said that cybersecurity is a crucial component of the system for safeguarding national security and a fundamental pillar in consolidating Macau's defence line for safeguarding national security. Facing continuous and profound shifts in the international landscape, geopolitical risks have worsened, aggravating instability and uncertainty, the statement quoted him as saying.

Therefore, while advancing the implementation of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan in close alignment with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, it is imperative for the local government to effectively coordinate development and security, maintain a mindset prepared for worst-case scenarios, and adopt a proactive stance to systematically prevent and resolve major security risks, Sam said.

The Macau government announced and published the final version of the 3rd Five-Year Plan last month.

Sam noted that new information technologies – such as AI, big data, and cloud computing – have evolved rapidly, bringing emerging issues like data security, privacy protection, and technology misuse to the fore. Cyberattacks now display new features, including high intelligence and automation, posing threats to social order, the public interest, and national security.

Consequently, the local government must continuously bolster its coordination capacity for cybersecurity, firmly safeguard the security and controllability of government IT infrastructure, proactively address new risks posed by emerging technologies through a systematic approach, and formulate comprehensive, detailed, and pragmatic top-level planning and strategic action plans for cybersecurity, Sam said.

*Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai addresses Monday's meeting of the Cybersecurity Commission at Government Headquarters in Nam Van district. – Photo: GCS*

Sam said that coordinating the safeguarding of cybersecurity and fostering positive interactions between high-level security and high-quality development are key to accelerating Macau's appropriate economic diversification, deeply integrating Macau's development into the nation's overall development, and ensuring the full implementation of all government policy initiatives.

According to the statement, Sam urged all respective public entities to rigorously advance the security and controllability of government IT systems, implement cybersecurity development initiatives in an orderly manner in line with plans, and strengthen support for cybersecurity technology talent based on actual needs.

Sam also instructed the government's Cybersecurity Incident Alert and Response Centre to effectively fulfil its coordinating role and work with relevant public entities to advance initiatives in an orderly fashion, ensuring that all tasks are completed in a timely and high-quality manner.

According to the Cybersecurity Law, Macau's cybersecurity system comprises three parts: (1) the Cybersecurity Commission, (2) the Cybersecurity Incident Alert and Response Centre, and (3) various government entities supervising the operators of the city's "critical infrastructure" – officially known as Cybersecurity Supervisory Entities.

The Cybersecurity Commission, headed by the Chief Executive, is tasked with strategic planning and decision-making for Macau's cybersecurity while overseeing the operations of the Cybersecurity Incident Alert and Response Centre and the Cybersecurity Supervisory Entities.

The Cybersecurity Incident Alert and Response Centre comprises officials from the Judiciary Police (PJ), the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau (SAFP), and the Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT).

According to the Cybersecurity Law, "critical infrastructure" refers to assets, information networks, and computer systems important to the normal functioning of civil society whose disruption, destruction, data leakage, suspension of operation, or significant decrease in operational performance is likely to cause serious harm to public well-being, public safety, public order, or other important matters of public interest. ■

# 3rd Int'l Film Camp concludes, 8 outstanding short film projects chosen

*Rui Pastorin*

The third edition of the International Film Camp (IFC) concluded yesterday with a closing and awards ceremony at The Londoner Macao, where eight outstanding short film projects were chosen among the submissions from the participants from across Asia to receive HK$300,000 in production funding.

Organised by the Asian Film Awards Academy and sponsored by Sands China, this year's film camp, themed "When Strangers Meet", saw over 450 applications, from which 16 up-and-coming filmmakers from across Asia were chosen to take part in the five-day camp held at The Venetian Macao in Cotai.

To date, this brings the total number of applications to nearly 1,400 since 2024.

From the 16 in the camp, the eight participants chosen by a panel of experts to receive production funding for their respective films were: the Chinese mainland's Qu Zhizheng and Bo Hanxiong; Hongkongers Wong Ka Ki and Erica Kwok Chung Yee; Macau's Chan Chon Sin; Kyrgyzstan's Ilimbek Maksatbekov; Bangladesh's Shubha Kumar Paul; and Kazakhstan's Ainamkoz Yemzharova.

The 16 participants had received one-on-one professional mentoring that enabled them to further refine their short film concepts and pitching proposals.

*Asian Film Awards Academy Chairman Wilfred Wong Ying Wai (first row, left) and actress, writer and director Fala Chen (first row, right) pose with winners of the eight awardees of the International Film Camp (IFC). – Photo: Rui Pastorin*

The camp offered a series of masterclasses and seminars led by distinguished mentors, which, according to a statement by Sands China yesterday, covered directing, screenwriting, funding, distribution, post- production, pitching and participation in film festivals. This year's programme also introduced a new panel discussion on AI.

Sands China Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director Grant Chum Kwan Lock said in his speech via video link: "By enabling filmmakers to experience Macau from their own creative perspective, we hope to inspire industry practitioners to see the city with fresh eyes and rediscover the depth and diversity of its cultural heritage. Through the lens of cinema, they can showcase Macau's unique blend of Eastern and Western cultures to audiences worldwide, further establishing the city as a fertile ground for creative inspiration, a destination of choice for travellers, and a compelling hub for film production and storytelling".

Asian Film Awards Academy Chairman Wilfred Wong Ying-wai was quoted by the statement as saying: "Our theme this year is When Strangers Meet.' In many ways this is what filmmaking is about – bringing together people with different backgrounds, experiences and ways of seeing the world. Beyond practical support, we want to give emerging filmmakers the opportunity to develop their ideas, learn from one another, and build connections across Asia".

Wong added: "I hope they leave Macau not only with stronger projects, but also with new friends and future collaborators."

Meanwhile, prior to the closing event, actress, writer and director Fala Chen (陳法拉) and actor, writer and producer Gordon Lam Ka Tung, both from Hong Kong, also delivered a masterclass, during which they talked about their careers from their start on TVB to eventually moving onto films, along with their experiences, and advice for aspiring filmmakers, among others. ■

**Stay tuned for interviews with Fala Chen, IFC winners, and a participant from the New Art Studies in Filming – Micro Movie Support Programme.*

# Sam seeks national support for Macau's TCM & big health

*Tony Wong*

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai yesterday met with National Health Commission (NHC) Vice Minister Liu Jinfeng, who is also the director of the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (NATCM), where they exchanged views on deepening healthcare cooperation and promoting the development of Macau's traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) sector and big health industry, according to a statement by the Macao Government Information Bureau (GCS) last night.

NATCM is a deputy ministerial-level agency administered under the ministerial-level NHC.

During the meeting at the Government Headquarters, Sam welcomed Liu and his delegation to Macau for the 8th Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Conference on Inheritance, Innovation and Development of TCM. Sam expressed his gratitude to the National Health Commission and the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine for their long-standing support for Macau's healthcare sector.

The one-day TCM conference was held in Macau yesterday.

In addition to Liu, the conference was also addressed by Guangdong Province Traditional Chinese Medicine Bureau Director Qiu Yahong, Hong Kong Secretary for Health Lo Chung-mau, and Macau Health Bureau (SSM) Director Alvis Lo Iek Long.

Sam underlined that the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Government is committed to enhancing Macau's overall medical standards and the quality of its healthcare services through the implementation of relevant initiatives outlined by Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan, and by strengthening collaboration with medical institutions in the Chinese mainland.

*Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (right) meets with National Health Commission (NHC) Vice Minister and National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (NATCM) Director Liu Jinfeng at Government Headquarters yesterday.* *– Photo: GCS*

Sam underlined the MSAR Government's commitment to diversifying Macau's industrial structure – particularly by leveraging TCM as a key driver for the development of the big health industry.

Pointing out that Macau is home to the State Key Laboratory of Mechanism and Quality of Chinese Medicine, Sam also noted that the Macao Sub-Centre for Traditional Chinese Medicine of the Regional University-Industry Technology Transfer Centre (Greater Bay Area) was established late last year, while the Traditional Chinese Medicine and Big Health Overseas Service Centre was also established during that period. These developments have significantly strengthened Macau's research capabilities, he said.

Combined with the MSAR's policy advantages, they are effectively promoting the integration of industry, academia and research in the sector, while accelerating innovation, Sam said, adding that TCM enterprises from the Chinese mainland can leverage Macau's international platform to bring high-quality products to global markets.

Liu said during the meeting that, under Sam's leadership, Macau has made further progress in the development of TCM. The National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine has attached great importance to Macau's role in this field and will continue to thoroughly implement President Xi Jinping's important guidance on building a "Healthy China" and advancing TCM, he said.

Liu said that the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine will support Macau in aligning its development with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan in relation to the revitalisation of TCM. It will use the Traditional Chinese Medicine Science and Technology Industrial Park of Cooperation between Guangdong and Macao (located in Hengqin) as a key platform, and support Macau in enhancing the quality and efficiency of its TCM and big health industry. The two sides will work together to advance the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) as a national hub for TCM, while contributing to Macau's economic diversification and the long-term success of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, Liu said. ■

# Chinese initiative gives fresh momentum to China-US youth exchanges

*Analysis*

BEIJING – Out at sea, Chinese and US university students explored the ocean, took part in scientific and cultural activities and, at one point, sat down to negotiate a global environmental problem.

Taking on the roles of different countries and international organizations, 20 students, 10 from each country, worked on solutions to mercury pollution in the oceans. When one American student joked that they might have to leave the ship if they couldn't reach an agreement, the group erupted in laughter, recalled Zhou Xinyi, then a student representative from Tsinghua University.

Zhou and her fellow students were participating in a program aboard the China-US Youth Friendship vessel, which sailed from Hong Kong via Ningbo to Shanghai earlier this year. For them, the experience offered more than a journey across the sea – it was an opportunity to learn, work together and build friendships.

The voyage was one of many exchanges under an initiative China announced in November 2023 to invite 50,000 young Americans to China for exchange and study over five years, an effort to encourage them to learn about China as it really is and help build people-to-people ties.

Since the initiative was launched, youth exchanges between the two countries have grown in both scale and variety. Many young Americans have come to China for exchanges and study, building friendships and helping strengthen ties across the Pacific.

With efforts from various parties, the goal was reached two and a half years ahead of schedule earlier this year, with more than 50,000 young Americans from all 50 US states and Washington, D.C., visiting China.

They left footprints in all 31 provincial-level regions on the Chinese mainland, as well as Hong Kong and Macao, taking part in cultural experiences, language learning, academic programs, science and technology exchanges and sports activities, according to China's Ministry of Education.

Meredith Kime, a PhD candidate in Earth and Environmental Sciences at Columbia University, who was also aboard the China-US Youth Friendship vessel, said: "I wanted to come on this incredible journey, collaborating with students from the United States and China, enjoying friendship and our shared experience."

Kime added that the initiative to invite 50,000 young Americans to China over five years has created a bridge for youths from the two countries to connect, giving real friendships a chance to grow.

## GROWING MOMENTUM

Reaching the goal ahead of schedule reflects young Americans' strong desire to experience China firsthand and the powerful momentum for people-to-people exchanges, said Diao Daming, vice dean of the National Academy of Development and Strategy of Renmin University of China.

The initiative is more than a numerical target. It has created a long-term, stable and sustainable platform for youth exchanges between the two countries, said David Chong, founder and president of the US-China Youth and Student Exchange Association.

Many young Americans who took part in exchange programs have continued to follow developments in China after returning home and some have taken up learning Chinese, while others have continued to promote exchanges between schools, he said.

Wang Yijie, founder of Noice China, which organizes trips to China for US students, has noticed the rising enthusiasm among US students for visiting China.

"Our team is really busy because we are hosting more groups this year," she said. "Spots for a recent trip involving about 160 Harvard students sold out in less than a minute."

Wang said students who visit China often return home and encourage people around them to experience the country for themselves. The message they pass on to their friends and family is simple: "You have to go."

The growing number of youth exchange programs shows that China's rapid development, particularly in emerging technologies, has drawn greater attention from young people, driving a rising interest in the country, she noted.

More opportunities created by the initiative, along with more convenient travel policies, have made it easier for students to visit China.

Many programs are now driven less by marketing than by recommendations within close-knit student networks, she said.

## LEGACY OF PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE TIES

History has shown that time and again, individuals on both sides have reached out to one another and helped put bilateral ties back on track during challenging periods.

More than half a century ago, a small table tennis ball paved the way for the normalization of China-US relations. This year marks the 55th anniversary of Ping-Pong Diplomacy, and a series of commemorative events have been held across the Pacific to carry on the spirit.

Judy Hoarfrost, the youngest member of the US table tennis delegation to China back in April 1971, returned to China to attend a commemoration ceremony in April this year and then led a US pickleball delegation to China in May.

"Fifty-five years ago, that trip to China changed my life," said Hoarfrost, who is 70. Now, seeing young people from the two countries playing and laughing side by side on the court, she said any relationship is built on friendship and trust.

"I think it's really important to give youth those opportunities, because it's only by really meeting each other that you can understand what you have in common," Hoarfrost said.

Beyond sports activities, cultural and technological exchanges have offered other ways for young people to connect.

In January 2025, a video of the US children's choir One Voice singing a popular Chinese song at Beijing's historic Temple of Heaven drew attention on social media. Since then, the choir has been invited to visit different regions of China, performing and interacting with local children.

Some US students have not only visited the Forbidden City and the Great Wall, but have also tried traditional Chinese medicine or learned calligraphy.

After trying on a traditional Chinese costume, Tristan Rice from Western Carolina University said that no matter how vivid China may appear in streaming videos, nothing compares with seeing and experiencing it in person.

For other students, visiting technology companies, such as Baidu's technology park and Xiaomi's automobile factory, offered a more complete picture of contemporary China. As China's tech sector, particularly the robotics industry, continues to thrive, global perceptions of the country's technological capabilities are changing profoundly.

Back in 2008, Rebecca Fannin, author of "Silicon Dragon," predicted the rise of China's tech sector in her book, a forecast that was widely dismissed at the time. Today, the tide has turned.

"We're looking to China as a leader of the futuristic vision – that's a big change from the past," Fannin said during a program hosted by the National Committee on US-China Relations, a non-profit dedicated to advancing bilateral understanding.

US student Ty DeVito was impressed by China's capacity for innovation during a visit to the Beijing Daxing International Hydrogen Energy Demonstration Zone. He hoped the two countries could build on their strengths and work together to advance green development. *– Xinhua*

# Foreign leaders to attend WorldSkills Competition, Global Digital Trade Expo in China

BEIJING – Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim will attend the opening ceremonies of the WorldSkills Competition and the Global Digital Trade Expo at China's invitation, a foreign ministry spokesperson announced yesterday.

Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan, Adylbek Aleshovich Kasymaliev, will also attend the opening ceremony of the Global Digital Trade Expo, the spokesperson said.

The six-day 48th WorldSkills Competition is being held in Shanghai until Sunday, while the fifth Global Digital Trade Expo will take place in Hangzhou, the provincial capital of Zhejiang in east China, from today to Sunday.

Asked at a regular media briefing the same day about China's view of the current China-Malaysia relationship and its expectations for Anwar's upcoming visit, spokesperson Guo Jiakun said the visit reflects close and friendly relations between China and Malaysia, as well as sound cooperation in relevant fields.

Guo said China and Malaysia are good neighbors, good friends and good partners, adding that during more than 50 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations, China-Malaysia relations have maintained sound momentum of development, with progress made in cooperation across various fields.

The two countries are working together to build a high-level strategic China-Malaysia community with a shared future, Guo added.

"China looks forward to further deepening the alignment of development strategies with Malaysia, advancing high-quality Belt and Road (B&R) cooperation, strengthening communication and coordination on international and regional issues, and achieving more outcomes in building a high-level strategic China-Malaysia community with a shared future," Guo said.

*– Xinhua*

# Xi sends congratulatory letter to 48th WorldSkills Competition

***The national flag is carried by contestants from the Chinese mainland during the opening ceremony of the 48th WorldSkills Competition in Shanghai yesterday. The 48th WorldSkills Competition opened in Shanghai yesterday evening, with 1,385 competitors from 68 countries and regions vying in 64 skill events.***
***– Xinhua***

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter yesterday to the 48th WorldSkills Competition.

Xi noted that a new round of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation is advancing rapidly, exerting a profound impact on global skills development.

Closely aligned with the needs of industries, the WorldSkills Competition provides a useful platform for skilled professionals from various countries to hone their skills and learn from each other, Xi said.

Xi stressed that China will take the opportunity of hosting this year's competition to encourage and guide more workers, especially young people, to pursue a path to success through skills.

"China is willing to strengthen exchanges and cooperation with all parties, promote the development of the WorldSkills movement, and better contribute to global economic growth and the improvement of people's well-being," Xi said.

The 48th WorldSkills Competition opened in Shanghai the same day under the theme "Master Skills Change Your Future."

Hosted by WorldSkills International and jointly organized by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and the Shanghai Municipal People's Government, the competition will also feature the WorldSkills Conference and WorldSkills Expo.

*– Xinhua*

# Beijing Culture Forum opens, focusing on cultural heritage, mutual learning among civilizations

BEIJING – The 2026 Beijing Culture Forum opened in the national capital yeserday, bringing together more than 600 guests from 44 countries and regions to discuss cultural heritage protection and mutual learning among civilizations.

Li Shulei, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and head of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, attended the event and delivered a keynote speech.

Participants from China and abroad said the China-proposed Global Civilization Initiative, together with efforts to promote international cooperation in cultural heritage and to build a community with a shared future for humanity, has been of great significance to advancing cultural heritage endeavors in China and around the world.

They noted that cultural heritage is the shared asset of humanity and that preserving, passing down and making good use of cultural heritage is essential for the continuity of human civilization and sustainable global development.

Participants urged strong commitment to safeguarding humanity's cultural heritage, adhering to the principles of protection first, rational utilization and minimum intervention in heritage conservation, and protecting cultural heritage as we protect our lives.

They also called for closer exchanges of experience in cultural heritage protection, in areas such as cultural heritage surveys, legal frameworks, public participation and technological support, as well as expanded international cooperation in ancient civilization studies, joint archaeological projects, restoration of historical sites and museum exchanges.

The participants said efforts should be made to improve global governance in cultural heritage protection, expand cooperation under multilateral mechanisms and promote cultural heritage protection in the Global South.

The forum is jointly hosted by the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, the CPC Beijing Municipal Committee and the Beijing Municipal Government. Beijing, with more than 3,000 years of history as a city and more than 870 years as a capital, is home to a wealth of World Heritage sites.

The annual event comes as China continues to promote international cultural exchanges and cooperation through various platforms and initiatives. The Global Civilization Initiative, proposed by China in 2023, advocates respect for the diversity of civilizations, the common values of humanity, the importance of inheritance and innovation of civilizations, as well as robust international people-to-people exchanges and cooperation.

*– Xinhua*

# Li Qiang stresses faster development of emerging, future industries

SHANGHAI – Premier Li Qiang yesterday called for efforts to vigorously develop next-generation intelligent manufacturing, accelerate the cultivation of emerging and future industries, and continue to expand and strengthen advanced manufacturing.

Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks during an inspection tour in Shanghai.

Li called for implementing decisions made at a recent national conference on advanced manufacturing.

At a pilot test base for artificial intelligence (AI) application, Li inspected special-purpose and industrial robots, as well as their applications in complex scenarios, stressing that emerging industries such as AI are advancing rapidly, creating new space for technological innovation and brand upgrading in the manufacturing sector.

He called for combining China's strengths in manufacturing with digital and intelligent technologies, and further implementing the "AI plus manufacturing" to better empower the development of advanced manufacturing.

Li urged efforts to target common challenges in the manufacturing sector, focus on key links such as industrial design, pilot test and intelligent operation and maintenance, and build more manufacturing production and service platforms.

At a sci-tech innovation and incubation platform focused on future industries, Li inspected technological products in fields such as brain-computer interfaces and quantum computing, stressing that future industries are a potential blue ocean for advanced manufacturing.

He called for intensifying research on core technologies, consolidating support for basic research and building a first-class innovation ecosystem.

Given the long growth cycles and high market risks of future industries, Li urged vigorous development of venture capital and expansion of patient capital.

*– Xinhua*

# China ready to work with ASEAN countries to implement CAFTA 3.0: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – China is ready to work with ASEAN countries to implement the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0 (CAFTA 3.0) and build an even closer China-ASEAN community with a shared future, foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said yesterday.

Guo made the remarks at a regular press briefing in response to a query on China-ASEAN cooperation, following the successful conclusion of the 23rd China-ASEAN Expo on Monday and the official opening of the Pinglu Canal to navigation last week.

"The China-ASEAN Expo is a shining brand of China-ASEAN cooperation," Guo said.

Over the past 23 years, the Expo witnessed China-ASEAN cooperation leaping through the "Golden Decade" to the "Diamond Decade" and the upgrade to the CAFTA 3.0, according to the spokesperson.

Guo said that this year, for the very first time, the Expo designated an area tailored to ASEAN countries' demand and released an ASEAN countries' demand list aimed at precision matchmaking between what ASEAN needs and what China can provide.

Guo said the expo also designated a Pinglu Canal exhibition area. The canal's opening to navigation will significantly reduce the maritime shipping distance from southwest China to ASEAN countries, opening up a new route for bilateral trade, he added.

*– Xinhua*

# Cambodia showcases scams crackdown with global conference

*Suy Se with Alice Ritchie in Bangkok*

PHNOM PENH – Cambodia showed off a shuttered scam compound complete with counterfeit cash and a fake police station this week ahead of a global conference intended to burnish its anti-fraud credentials.

Around 20 countries including the US and China will be represented at the meeting today and tomorrow, held amid international pressure on Phnom Penh to do more to tackle the multi-billion-dollar online scam industry.

Southeast Asia has emerged as a hub for crime syndicates running centres filled with scammers – some willing, some trafficked – who defraud internet users through fake romantic relationships or cryptocurrency investment schemes.

Cambodia stands accused of having allowed scams to thrive, with some estimates suggesting it has generated the equivalent of as much as half the country's formal GDP in recent years.

Phnom Penh began a high-profile crackdown in 2025 under pressure from its key ally China - where scams have caused widespread public anger - as well as the United States, Britain and others.

But analysts say the industry has adapted, dispersing to smaller, lower-profile locations, while in many cases centres were given advance warning of raids, giving them time to evacuate.

A senior FBI official and China's vice minister of public security are listed on the agenda for the conference alongside junior ministers and law enforcement officials.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet is hosting the talks aimed at boosting "collective efforts" against scams.

But analysts expect few concrete outcomes – and express scepticism about the lasting impact of Cambodia's crackdown despite hundreds of scam centres being shuttered.

"They could come back tomorrow," transnational crime analyst Jacob Sims told AFP.

He said it was "undeniable" the government had acted but warned: "The elite protection networks, the buildings themselves, the financial institutions, the corporate institutions are all completely in place."

Closing remarks at the conference are due to be delivered by Deputy Prime Minister Neth Savoeun, named by two US congressmen last week among individuals they want sanctioned over alleged connections to scam centres.

## 'Getting rich overnight'

Cambodian authorities on Monday showed off a sprawling scam centre on a 120-hectare site near the Vietnamese border they said had last year employed about 20,000 scammers.

*Major General Bun Sosekha, deputy commissioner in charge of the Security Unit Commissariat of Phnom Penh, shows fake law enforcement items confiscated from online scam operation centres to members of the media at the Phnom Penh Municipal Police Commissariat yesterday. – AFP*

In one room, AFP reporters saw rows of soundproofed phone booths and counterfeit US$100 notes scattered on the floor.

On the walls were motivational slogans in Chinese, from "Give it your all" to "Getting rich overnight".

A fake Singapore police station was used as a backdrop for scammers making videocalls posing as officers.

Officials said the centre was jointly run by Prince Group's Chen Zhi and Huione Group's Li Xiong – both of whom were extradited to China this year.

Hay Makara, an official from Cambodia's anti-scam commission, said authorities had so far closed 663 scam sites, including 86 large compounds, and frozen US$300 million in scam-related accounts.

"As of now, there are no more scam compounds," he told reporters.

However, he conceded that "the criminals are adapting... working from rented homes, rented rooms, hotels, even in cars".

## Bare minimum

The syndicates initially focused on Chinese speakers before broadening their targets to other languages.

The US estimates that in 2025 alone, transnational criminal organisations in Southeast Asia defrauded Americans out of at least US$18.2 billion through cyber-enabled scams.

The industry is also concentrated in war-torn Myanmar, with other centres in Laos.

Cambodian authorities said last month they had arrested nearly 30,000 suspects, including 15 high-ranking officials and law enforcement officers.

But Lindsey Kennedy, an expert in organised crime, said there had been no effort to properly investigate the sites closed, nor interview those involved.

"They did the bare minimum," she told AFP.

"There's been no interest in gathering evidence in stopping these groups from moving abroad, from actually dismantling networks."

Several governments have sanctioned individuals and organisations over alleged scamming.

The US on Monday announced new visa restrictions on 32 unnamed individuals, the majority affiliated with the Prince Group, a conglomerate sanctioned by the US, UK and South Korea.

Visiting Phnom Penh in July, FBI Director Kash Patel said online scams were a "top priority", urging "increased efforts to hold high-level scam bosses accountable", and more information sharing on "complicit officials".

China, meanwhile, "consistently keeps up pressure", but does it more quietly, Kennedy said.

"They don't put out sanctions. You only really hear about it when someone gets arrested." *– AFP*

# Respiratory problems climb past 170,000 cases in haze-hit Indonesia

JAKARTA – More than 170,000 respiratory cases were recorded in regions affected by haze in Indonesia, a health ministry official said yesterday, as the country battles for weeks to control fires that caused the toxic smog.

Blazes in Borneo, Sumatra and Papua have blanketed parts of the vast archipelago of more than 280 million people, as well as neighbouring Malaysia and Singapore, sending air quality indices plummeting.

The toxic smog contains pollutants including PM 2.5, a fine particulate matter smaller than a human hair that could carry health risk such as respiratory infections, health ministry official Then Suyanti told a news conference.

"There were 174,694 cases of acute respiratory infections between August and September 21 in areas affected by forest and land fires," she said.

More than 40,000 of the recorded respiratory cases affected toddlers, she said.

The overall figure, reported in seven haze-affected provinces across Indonesia, was up from over 113,000 cases reported as of September 9.

The health ministry had mobilised aid including oxygen concentrators, face masks and oxygen canisters to the affected regions, Then said.

"We advise (the public) to reduce outdoor activities when air quality worsens, use a mask and maintain hydration," she said.

Indonesia regularly battles wildfires during the dry season, which typically runs from July to October.

But the blazes are more intense this year, coinciding with what is expected to be the strongest El Niño climate phenomenon since comparable records began four decades ago.

Experts also blame climate change, decades of forest degradation and slash-and-burn land-clearing practises that have changed the naturally fire-resistant landscape. *– AFP*

# Typhoon Dujuan leaves 4 dead in Japan, 45,000 houses without power

TOKYO – Typhoon Dujuan left at least four people dead and 22 injured in Japan, while thousands of houses near Tokyo were without power after the storm swept through the region, authorities said yesterday.

The typhoon moved away from Japan's coast and out into the Pacific by morning, allowing authorities to lift or downgrade most heavy rain and landslide warnings.

Dujuan had already led to the early closure in the capital of the one of the world's biggest video game trade fairs.

Japan often sees strong typhoons in the late summer and early autumn, with other storms this season disrupting some events at the Asian Games being held in the country.

The Fire and Disaster Management Agency said three people died in Chiba prefecture and one in Kanagawa region, both near Tokyo.

Search operations were continuing for six people missing after landslides triggered by torrential rain, the agency said.

More than 45,000 households in Chiba near Tokyo were still without electricity yesterday afternoon, while over 460 houses were damaged.

Although Dujuan weakened as it moved northeast, it dumped record rainfall in parts of the Tokyo area.

Oshima, an island about 120 kilometres south of central Tokyo, recorded 832 millimetres of rain over 48 hours, more than double its average rainfall for the whole of September, public broadcaster NHK reported.

Rainfall in Tokyo's Edogawa Ward reached a record 282.5 millimetres over 24 hours.

Scientists say human-driven climate change is intensifying the risk posed by heavy rains because a warmer atmosphere holds more water. *– AFP*

# Philippine bus lines press Marcos for rate hike as fuel prices soar

MANILA – Philippine bus operators pressed President Ferdinand Marcos yesterday to let them raise ticket prices, arguing that soaring fuel costs from the Middle East war threatened to make operations "impossible".

The cost of diesel, which powers most of the Southeast Asian country's buses, has effectively doubled since the first US-Israeli strikes on Iran in February triggered the conflict.

The Philippine transport board approved a fare hike in March, only for Marcos to quash the move a day later.

Ticket prices have remained static ever since.

Yesterday, the per-litre price of diesel jumped another 8.82 pesos (about 14 US cents).

"This is a notice that operations may soon become impossible," a group of companies representing bus lines across the country of 116 million said in a statement.

"Fuel prices have reached levels that our operations can no longer afford," it read.

"We are not asking the Government for ayuda," the statement added, using a Filipino term meaning handout.

"We are asking for a fair and sustainable fare that reflects the real cost of operating public transportation."

Millions of Filipinos use buses to get to and from work each day, with prices for a ride ranging from 13 to 15 pesos for the first five kilometres, then jumping about three pesos for each subsequent kilometre.

Contacted by AFP, the transportation department pointed to a Saturday statement saying it "hoped to arrive at a positive decision" on a rate hike in coming days.

The import-dependent Philippines declared a national energy emergency in March and has been forced to cast an ever-wider net for fuel, including purchases of oil from Russia.

Unlike neighbours including Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, fuel prices in the Philippines are unregulated, leaving local transport firms to deal with market fluctuations.

The Marcos administration gave bus operators a one-off subsidy in March of 10,000 pesos for each of their vehicles.

Separate handouts have been given to transport workers including drivers of taxis and the country's ubiquitous jeepneys.

Yesterday, the energy department said the country had a 57-day reserve of diesel and enough petrol for 56 days.

*– AFP*

# 2 policemen killed in attack on polio vaccination team in SW Pakistan

ISLAMABAD – Two policemen providing security to a polio vaccination team were killed in a terror attack in Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province, police said yesterday.

The incident occurred in the Kali Jamalabad area of Nushki district, where the attackers targeted the policemen deployed to protect the polio team, according to the local police.

Police cordoned off the area and launched a search operation to track down the assailants.

Balochistan Special Assistant for Home Affairs Babar Yousafzai said the terrorists are enemies of peace in Balochistan and the future of its children.

"Those who target polio teams are, in fact, seeking to deprive the children of Balochistan of their right to health and a secure future," he said.

Pakistan launched a nationwide polio vaccination campaign on Monday, which will continue to Sunday, as part of efforts to protect children from the crippling disease. *– Xinhua*

# Kim hails 'new-type weapon' days after missile launch

SEOUL – North Korean leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the test of a "new-type weapon" system, touting it as evidence of the country's advancing military technology, state media reported yesterday.

The announcement came two days after South Korea and Japan said Pyongyang launched two short-range ballistic missiles into waters off its east coast, which the countries condemned as threats to regional peace and security.

North Korea has legally enshrined its status as a nuclear-armed state, with its leadership repeatedly declaring the country's atomic arsenal permanent and irreversible.

The nuclear-armed country's missile bureau "successfully tested a new type of weapon" Sunday in the presence of its leader Kim Jong Un, Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

Pyongyang did not specify what the weapon system entailed, but said Kim praised the launch as an "undoubtedly a striking demonstration of ultra-modern defence technology".

The North Korean leader warned that the advances would give adversaries "an incurable headache and a very cruel and unavoidable blow", KCNA said.

The Sunday launches came eight days after North Korea fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles towards the East Sea – also known as the Sea of Japan – as part of what it later described as a joint firepower drill.

That exercise involved long-range artillery and missiles, with the weapons "hitting the targets with 100 percent accuracy", state media reported.

In yesterday's KCNA report, Kim linked the Sunday test to the country's military preparedness, saying "to acquire such a technology is of weighty significance in the state's readiness for war and the future development of the armed forces".

Seoul condemned the launches as a violation of UN Security Council resolutions and urged Pyongyang to halt its ballistic missile activities.

Japan lodged a "stern protest" with North Korea over the launches, calling them as a threat to regional peace and security.

Last week, Pyongyang rejected a resolution adopted at the International Atomic Energy Agency demanding it halt its nuclear activities, saying its nuclear weapons status was "irreversibly and permanently fixed" by its laws.

North Korea's foreign ministry spokesperson said the IAEA resolution "has no effect on the DPRK's position as a nuclear weapons state", using the acronym for North Korea's official name.

Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, recently said the country's nuclear-armed status was "absolute" and called those hoping for its denuclearisation "idiots". *– AFP*

*Afghan health workers administer polio vaccine drops to children during a door-to-door campaign in Kajpaz village of Afghanistan's Zabul province yesterday. – AFP*

# Sri Lanka convicts 14 over Easter Sunday massacre

***Amal Jayasinghe***

COLOMBO – Sri Lanka's High Court convicted yesterday 14 of the 24 men accused of being directly involved in the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings, which killed 279 people.

The three-judge bench found that 14 of the accused were guilty on all charges, which included murder, conspiracy to commit terrorism and possessing firearms and explosives under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

A 15th defendant was found guilty of only some of the charges, while nine others were acquitted.

The presiding judge told a packed courtroom that sentencing would take place later yesterday. Dozens of police commandos provided security outside as the verdicts were read.

The 24 men were accused of aiding and abetting the suicide bombers who struck three luxury hotels and three churches on April 21, 2019, killing 279 people, including 45 foreigners.

Local media has said some could face the death penalty, although Sri Lanka has not carried out an execution since 1976 and capital punishment is typically commuted to life imprisonment.

Sri Lanka's Roman Catholic Church welcomed the convictions.

"Finally, we have justice," Catholic priest Jude Fernando told AFP. "It has taken a long time to get to this point."

Teresa Fernando, a survivor who suffered head injuries, said no one should have to endure what she had gone through.

"We came here today as victims of this attack to receive justice," she said.

"Whatever the court says... we will bow our heads and accept it."

It was the first criminal prosecution directly linked to the coordinated bombings, though a former police chief and an ex-security chief were sentenced to death in July for criminal negligence after failing to prevent the attacks despite prior intelligence warnings.

*Police personnel escort the two of the accused involved in Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday attacks of 2019 during the verdict in the trial at the Colombo High Court in Colombo, Sri Lanka yesterday. – AFP*

All of the accused are from Sri Lanka's minority Muslim community. Twenty-five men were originally charged, but one defendant died in custody.

Investigators blamed the attack on a homegrown Islamist extremist group.

The trial had already made Sri Lankan legal history, with prosecutors filing 23,270 charges, the most ever brought in a single case. The suspects were prosecuted under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Among those convicted on all charges was Mohamed Naufar, whom prosecutors identified as the ringleader who provided support to the eight-member suicide squad that carried out the bombings.

## 'Mastermind' spy boss

Three of the defendants were also charged by US authorities with terrorism-related offences linked to the bombings in December 2020.

Five Americans were among those killed, including a US Commerce Department employee who was in Colombo on official business.

Other foreigners killed include citizens of Australia, Bangladesh, China, Denmark, India, Japan, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK.

The trial has unfolded against the backdrop of a separate and highly sensitive investigation into allegations that elements within the Sri Lankan state may have had links to those responsible for the attacks.

Former intelligence chief Suresh Sallay is in custody facing accusations that he had been the "mastermind" who orchestrated the bombings, allegations he denies.

Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala told parliament in June that investigators believed he had worked with Islamist extremists before the bombings were carried out.

Investigators said the network was cultivated to manufacture a security threat that would in turn bolster political support for the Rajapaksa family, which returned to power several months after the attack with Gotabaya Rajapaksa's election as president.

According to court filings, investigators believed the objective was to create chaos and present Rajapaksa, a former defence chief, as the leader best placed to restore security.

Rajapaksa was credited by supporters with crushing Tamil separatist rebels in 2009 after a decades-long civil war.

The Rajapaksa family dominated Sri Lankan politics for nearly two decades, but its camp has rejected allegations of state involvement. *– AFP*

# S Korea's leader urges nuclear freeze, eased sanctions on North

SEOUL – Washington should seek a freeze, rather than the immediate elimination, of North Korea's nuclear programme and offer sanctions relief in return, South Korea's leader said in a *New York Times* interview.

President Lee Jae Myung has reversed the stance of his hawkish predecessor Yoon Suk Yeol since taking power in June 2025, offering nuclear-armed Pyongyang talks without preconditions.

North Korea's leadership has yet to respond to any of his offers.

Despite long-running UN sanctions, North Korea has enshrined its status as a nuclear-armed state in law, with its leaders repeatedly declaring its atomic arsenal permanent and irreversible.

At the same time, Pyongyang has secured critical backing from Russia alongside its traditional ally China, leaving it with less to gain from renewed diplomacy with US President Donald Trump.

"I believe there is significant value in a trade-off between sanctions – which are not particularly effective anyway – and a stop to the development of additional nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missile technology," Lee was quoted as saying in an interview published Monday.

"Aiming for denuclearisation under the current circumstances," Lee told the US paper, "guarantees that nothing will be accomplished."

The South Korean president previously said that freezing Pyongyang's nuclear capabilities at current levels by suspending new production and preventing nuclear materials being imported would itself be "a gain".

Critics say such an approach risks tacitly accepting North Korea as a nuclear-armed state while allowing Pyongyang to secure sanctions relief without ultimately giving up its arsenal.

Trump met Kim three times during his first term, but their diplomacy ultimately stalled after their 2019 summit in Hanoi failed to produce an agreement on sanctions relief and what Pyongyang would offer in return for denuclearisation. *– AFP*

# Houthis accuse Saudi Arabia of deadly strikes as thousands flee

SANAA – Yemen's Houthis accused Saudi Arabia yesterday of launching a wave of deadly strikes that killed civilians and prison inmates, as Riyadh seeks to repel an offensive that has seen the Iran-backed group seize strategic territory.

The recent Houthi takeover of Yemen's Red Sea coast has left hundreds dead and heightened fears over global trade and shipping through the vital Bab al-Mandab strait.

It has also forced thousands to flee, with the United Nations yesterday forecasting the number of displaced could swell from over 130,000 today to more than 230,000 in the coming months.

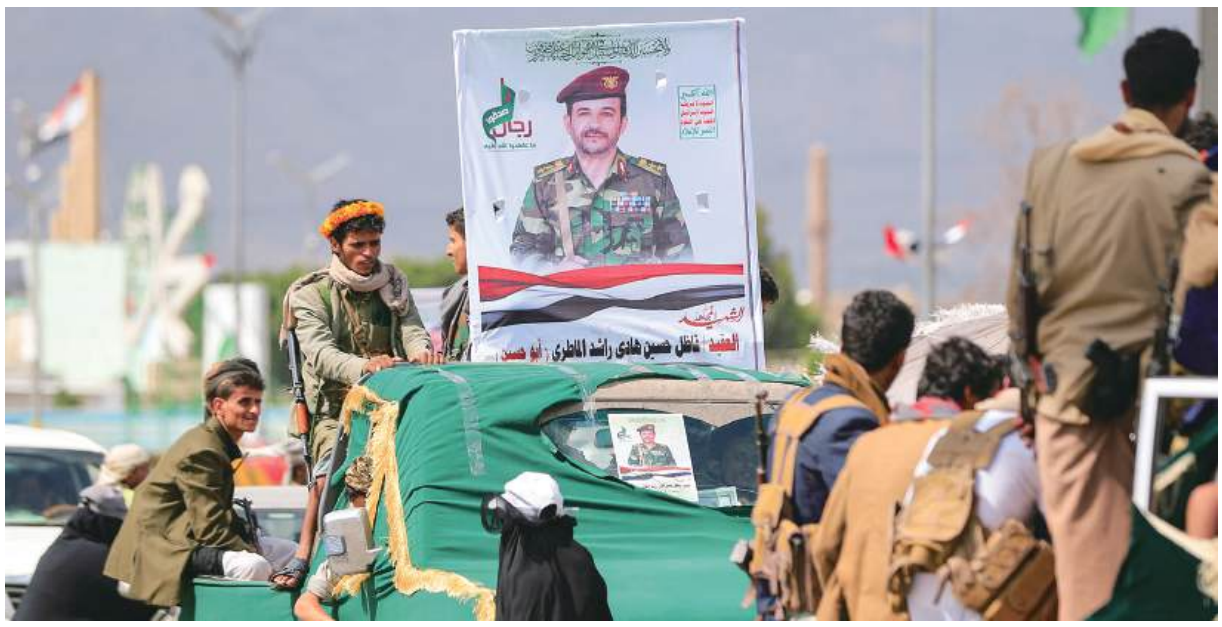
The gains made by the Houthis have cemented the hold of Iran and its regional allies over two key waterways in the Middle East – and the straits of Bab al-Mandab and Hormuz – which are major shipping arteries for global flows of energy.

Saudi Arabia, which backs Yemen's internationally-recognised government, has sought to contain the Houthi advance with airstrikes.

The Houthis have retaliated with attacks on Saudi territory, including a strike targeting the capital Riyadh for the first time in years.

The strike came days after Saudi Arabia accused the Houthis of targeting the holy city of Mecca, though the fighters denied the claim.

In a rare statement, Saudi King Salman praised the armed forces and security services for defending the country, and condemned the alleged attempt to target Mecca, calling it "a provocation to Muslims around the world", and branded the Houthis a "terrorist militia".



*A pickup truck with a portrait of a fighter loyal to the Houthi authorities drives past during his funeral after he was killed in recent fighting, in Yemen's capital Sanaa last Thursday. – AFP*

In Yemen, the Houthis said a strike on a prison killed nine detainees, while they also accused the Saudis of killing six civilians including two children in the port city of Mocha.

Two more civilians were killed by strikes in Yemen's Al-Jawf province, the Houthis added.

"A mother and child were killed, while her husband and two of her other children were wounded in strikes carried out by the Saudi enemy" in the Al-Batin area, Houthi media said, citing the Houthi health ministry.

## 'Humiliation'

As violence has escalated, thousands of families have been forced from their homes, many for a second or third time.

"I hope I can find a house to live in with my children. We're exhausted by the heat, the dust and the humiliation," Arwa, a mother of four children, told AFP at a camp for displaced people near Aden.

The Middle East war began in February with US-Israeli strikes on Iran, which prompted the Islamic republic to retaliate with attacks around the region and by mobilising its allies.

While the Yemen civil war predates the broader regional conflict, it has become its most active front in recent days.

Fighting between the Houthis and Saudi-backed Yemeni forces has in the past two days killed 154 people, military sources from both sides told AFP.

"The death toll from Saudi airstrikes, clashes and artillery fire in the governorates of Taiz, Al-Jawf, Marib and Saada stands at 118," Houthi military sources said, while government sources reported 36 killed in their ranks.

Saudi Arabia's civil defence agency yesterday issued a warning of potential danger in the country's south near the Yemen border, the first alert since the Houthis launched their attack on Riyadh over the weekend.

The alert, which asked people to remain indoors and avoid open areas, was lifted a short while later.

## G7 support

G7 leaders representing Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States called on the Houthis to "immediately cease all military actions".

They also demanded the Houthis end "all threats and attacks against civilian shipping, and to return to the political process in good faith", while urging Tehran "to end its arming of and support for the Houthis".

Britain has agreed to provide some military support to Saudi Arabia, defence minister Luke Pollard said, while France also pledged to help secure Saudi energy infrastructure, a diplomatic source told AFP.

But "this in no way involves taking part in the conflict with the Houthis", the French source said.

The Houthis have carried out attacks against facilities belonging to Saudi oil giant Aramco in the Red Sea port city of Yanbu.

Yemen's government and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman have reportedly requested help from US President Donald Trump in fighting the Houthis. – *AFP*

# Nigerian elites siphoned hundreds of millions from govt, bought US properties: study

LAGOS – Dozens of Nigerian political elites siphoned hundreds of millions of US dollars from the government purse over three decades and laundered it through buying 284 properties in the United States, an investigative NGO report has established.

Corruption is endemic in Nigeria, one of Africa's largest economies and its top oil producer.

The report's findings thrust graft back into the spotlight months before January's presidential election which economic hardships and growing insecurity are expected to define.

Since coming to office in 2023, President Bola Tinubu, who will seek re-election, declared war on graft, but high-profile corruption trials grind slowly through the courts.

In the report published yesterday, the Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa (PPLAAF) lists "284 United States properties" collectively worth around US$271 million and "linked to 61 current and former high-level Nigerian officials".

The investigation which examined properties acquired since the end of military rule in 1999, also claimed that the war against jihadists continues to enrich the "military elites".

More than half of the properties were bought by the officials during tenure: "at precisely the moment when their access to state resources and influence was greatest".

The report examined 61 individuals with 39 of them already "publicly accused, indicted, or sentenced for corruption", said the non-profit organisation which specialises in protecting whistleblowers in Africa.

## 'Tip of the iceberg'

Most of the properties were bought without mortgage financing raising "red flags for money laundering" but international cooperation that should enable seizure of such assets "remains limited", said PPLAAF.

Nigeria is Washington's second-largest African trading partner, after South Africa, and Nigerians in the United States form the largest African diaspora.

Among the officials PPLAAF identified were lawmakers and officials from state governments and security agencies.

The largest number of properties were found to have been bought by officials from the security sector.

"The scale of defence and security spending has created continued opportunities for opaque contracting," it said.

"The fight against Boko Haram has...generated enormous security and defence expenditures, creating opportunities for opaque procurement practices".

The report names several senior officials already facing charges, including one accused of buying around 20 US properties.

"The properties identified in this report are just the tip of the iceberg and represent more than financial wrongdoing. They represent schools not built, hospitals not staffed, and a power grid that cannot keep the lights on – the daily, material cost of corruption borne for decades by ordinary Nigerians".

Nether the country's ani-graft agency EFCC nor the presidential spokesmen responded to AFP's requests for comment.

The report "Dirty Deeds: How Top Nigerian Officials Bought a Piece of America", showed that the "US has emerged as an attractive destination for Nigerian real estate investments linked" to politically-exposed persons, it said. – *AFP*

# S Sudan president offers new cars to MPs amid election law change

JUBA – South Sudan lawmakers will receive a brand-new car from President Salva Kiir, the speaker has told reporters, after they passed a law permitting him to remain in power through an election transition period.

The world's youngest country is gearing up for its first-ever elections on December 22, despite the government failing to implement almost any of the conditions set out under a 2018 peace agreement, including a constitution or the registration of voters.

As well as chronic insecurity, more than 70 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, according to the World Bank, and Transparency International ranks it the most corrupt country in the world.

On Monday, parliament passed a contentious bill altering an election law to allow Kiir to remain in power during the election, while removing all five vice-presidents appointed under the peace deal.

At the same time, the MPs were offered free cars although the speaker said it was not yet decided if they were on loan or a gift.

"The president had earlier given the green light for vehicles to be purchased for the members of parliament," legislative assembly spokesperson Oliver Mori told reporters in Juba on Monday.

He said high-ranking MPs would get high-end vehicles, such as "V6s" – referring to powerful engines – while ordinary MPs would get a "Toyota five-door".

"It is a bribe," Michael Wani, an analyst and former member of the constitution drafting committee, told AFP's Nairobi office.

"What happened was that there was a bargain discussion and the president promised them vehicles as a token of appreciation."

Political activist Edmund Yakani called the move "ridiculous" and "disturbing".

"Why should this take place in the face of citizens having no adequate services, no proper infrastructure, no payment of civil servant salaries?" he told AFP.

A United Nations report last year found that South Sudan's leaders had siphoned off billions of US dollars in oil revenue while leaving practically nothing for public services.

Some 80 percent of its healthcare is covered by foreign donors and NGOs and its education spending ranks among the lowest in the world, with fewer than 40 percent of children enrolled in primary school. – *AFP*

# Trump says deciding between deal or driving Iran 'into hell'

NEW YORK – US President Donald Trump told the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) yesterday that he had to choose whether to "annihilate" Iran if it fails to make a deal to end the Middle East war.

"I have a big decision to make – will a deal be made with Iran that lets them rebuild and create a far greater country than it ever was before, maybe one of the greatest in the Middle East or even the world?" Trump said.

"Or do I annihilate the Islamic Republic and do it quickly, never giving them a chance to kill and destroy people and countries again? Do I drive them into hell with no chance of survival and no hope of future greatness or generations?"

But Trump reiterated that he thought an agreement was possible before US midterm elections in November – in which his Republican party faces losing control of Congress at least partly due to high fuel prices caused by the war.

"I believe we'll make a deal right after the election because it doesn't make sense for them not to," Trump said.

"They're waiting to see how I do in the midterm election. What they don't realize is that I'm not running. I did that already, and won in a landslide."

*– AFP*

# Cuba slams Trump 'falsehoods' after US leader says island 'will fall'

HAVANA – Cuba's foreign minister yesterday reacted furiously to "falsehoods" spread by US President Donald Trump, who told the United Nations the island "will fall."

Cuban delegates left the room during Trump's speech at the UN General Assembly in New York, at a moment of exceptionally strained Washington-Havana relations.

His administration imposed an energy blockade on the island in January, piling on more measures since then, and he has openly mused about seizing control of the territory.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez asserted his country's sovereignty after Trump said Cuba "will fall," without elaborating how.

"The US government is incapable of accepting that Cuba is and has the right to be a full sovereign and independent country," Rodríguez wrote on X, adding that "none of the falsehoods by the US President at the UN can deny that fact."

"We are a country of peace and we deserve peace," said Rodríguez, who is heading the Cuban delegation to New York.

President Miguel Díaz-Canel also denounced Trump's bellicose rhetoric.

"Unable to justify the punishment against the people of Cuba and their genocidal economic war, the President of the United States repeats at the UN that Cuba represents a threat," he posted on X.

"The lie is the resource of those who refuse to accept the right to self-determination of the Cuban people," he said.

Trump has claimed that the island located 150 kilometres off Florida's coast represents an "extraordinary threat" to US national security.

*– AFP*

# Trump at UN calls for all countries to quit ICC

NEW YORK – US President Donald Trump called yesterday for all nations that are part of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to quit the body, calling it "out of control."

"The United States is equally opposed to the out-of-control institution known as the International Criminal Court," he said at the United Nations.

"I call on all nations that are members of the ICC to officially resign from this rogue institution immediately," he added.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has vowed to dismantle the ICC "brick by brick," describing the court as an "intolerable threat to US sovereignty."

The body tries individuals for the world's worst crimes.

Washington has imposed a series of sanctions on ICC officials, furious at the court's issuance of an arrest warrant for Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – a close US ally.

On Tuesday, Trump said Washington would "never allow US service members or anyone else to be investigated or given show-trials by an anti-American tribunal with no jurisdiction over us."

The United States is not an ICC member and has never ratified the Rome Statute that established the court. Israel, Russia, and China are not members either.

*– AFP*

# UN chief says 'Big Oil' treats atmosphere as open sewer

NEW YORK – Major global oil companies are treating the atmosphere like an "open sewer," outgoing United Nations chief António Guterres said yesterday in a withering attack on the energy industry at the UN's high-level meeting.

"We know that fossil fuel interests won't step aside on their own. For decades, Big Oil has treated the atmosphere as an open sewer – and cashed in on the consequences," Guterres said.

He continued: "Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, five major Western oil companies have pocketed nearly half a trillion [US] dollars in profits," comparing the amount with the just US$34 billion in financing that has been mobilised to help developing countries adapt to a warming world.

"Meanwhile, everyday people are paying more for energy, food and insurance," he said, comparing the "abuse of power" by the fossil fuel industry to the actions of Big Tobacco.

"Those who polluted the most – and profited the most – must do far more to repair the damage they caused," he urged.

The former Portuguese prime minister's speech came after records were smashed across the world for the northern hemisphere summer and Nepal suffered devastating flooding triggered by glacial collapse.

Meanwhile the UN has said the world will at least temporarily breach the Paris agreement goal of limiting warming to 1.5C relative to pre-industrial times.

"The dangers are real, but so is the hope," said Guterres, pointing to the global solar and wind energy boom, with renewables now the cheapest source of energy in most of the world.

Climate change has long been a defining focus for Guterres, who will have a final crack at the issue today when he hosts a climate summit in the run-up to the COP31 talks in Antalya in November.

Observers will watch for signs – especially from co-hosts Turkey and Australia, both heavily dependent on fossil fuels – of heightened ambition, that would indicate the talks can deliver.

*– AFP*

# Trump signs security deal with Greenland, Denmark at UN

***(From left to right) US President Donald Trump, Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and Greenland's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen pose with the trilateral security agreement they signed on the sidelines of the 81st United Nations General Assembly in New York yesterday.*** ***– AFP***

NEW YORK – US President Donald Trump yesterday signed a security deal with the leaders of Greenland and Denmark, in a ceremony taking place on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

"It's going to be a long-term, fantastic relationship," Trump said at the event in New York.

Trump previously said that the arrangement would give America "permanent control" over security for Greenland, an autonomous Danish territory in the Arctic that he has long coveted.

"Mr. President, you have been very clear. You don't want adversaries to come too close," said Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen ahead of the signing.

"I fully agree, and with this deal, they are not," she added, noting that adversaries will not be allowed to get control or significant influence in the territory.

Greenland's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen added that Greenland matters for North American security and for transatlantic security.

"This agreement reflects that we understand our responsibility and act accordingly," he added.

Since returning to the presidency in January 2025, Trump has repeatedly insisted that the United States needs to control Greenland for strategic reasons.

This has alarmed NATO ally Denmark and sparked fierce pushback from the alliance.

According to the deal, Greenland must abide by the US security deal and remain in NATO, even if it gains independence from Denmark. The agreement bars non-NATO and non-EU countries from the island's "strategic sectors".

*– AFP*

# Flávio Bolsonaro turns scandal into poll gains

*David Salazar*

SÃO PAULO – Despite being caught up in a financial scandal that has dominated Brazil's election campaign, candidate Flávio Bolsonaro has gained ground with less than two weeks to go before the vote.

After months trailing leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in the polls, the 45-year-old senator is nipping at his heels in what is shaping up to be a knife-edge race.

A survey published on Monday by the Quaest pollster showed the right-wing candidate would secure 42 percent of voter support in a hypothetical October 25 runoff vote, compared to 41 percent for Lula.

This gap falls within the poll's margin of error.

Flávio Bolsonaro, son of jailed far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro, is under investigation for suspected corruption and money laundering over the financing of a film about his father.

The biopic was bankrolled by Daniel Vorcaro, a jailed banker who is accused of orchestrating one of Brazil's largest financial fraud cases.

*A supporter of Brazil's Senator and presidential candidate Flávio Bolsonaro holds a flag during a campaign rally in Gama, a suburb of Brasília, on Saturday. The slogan on the flag reads: "Trust me, Brazil is going to thrive". Brazil will hold a presidential election by popular vote on October 4. – AFP*

However, it is another one of Vorcaro's many allegedly dubious relationships revealed by investigations that has eclipsed the accusations against Bolsonaro and hurt Lula's campaign.

A police report showed numerous conversations in which Vorcaro sought help in the fraud probe against him from a phone number which investigators linked to powerful Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes.

Moraes, who led the trial which saw Jair Bolsonaro convicted for an attempted coup after his narrow election loss in 2022, is a hated figure among the right.

"Flávio comes out of this scandal in better shape than Lula," political analyst Andre Rosa told AFP.

He said the Bolsonarists had managed to get "the somewhat undecided voter to end up associating Lula's image with that of Moraes. This gives Flavio Bolsonaro some breathing room right now."

## 'Swamp of corruption'

"Voting for Lula means voting for Moraes," Flávio Bolsonaro said last week.

Lula has repeatedly stated that if the judge is "guilty, he must pay."

However, he maintains that "Alexandre de Moraes has done an extraordinary job safeguarding democracy."

A study by the data analytics firm Datrix showed that social media mentions regarding Moraes and the crisis in the Supreme Federal Court (STF) had overtaken those referring to Banco Master and Flavio Bolsonaro.

Senator Rogerio Marinho, Flávio Bolsonaro's campaign manager, branded Moraes a "pop star of the left."

"Moraes and Lula are two sides of the same coin, and that is the Brazilian population's perception," he told a group of journalists.

Analysts say the crisis at the nation's top court has reinforced distrust of institutions, which has hit Lula's campaign harder.

"The general image reaching the public is: politics is a swamp of corruption... nobody does anything," said Geraldo Monteiro, an expert at the State University of Rio de Janeiro.

In addition, he said Lula's campaign had been "a bit lacklustre."

"The STF crisis is not our crisis. They are trying to pin it on us," Marco Aurélio de Carvalho, one of Lula's campaign coordinators, told AFP.

Lula last week drew criticism for announcing an increase in benefits under the government's social welfare programme so close to the October 4 first round of voting.

He also announced free GLP-1 weight-loss drugs under the public healthcare system, which one columnist on the UOL news site said was a bid to "fatten his popularity."

Laércio Barbosa, a 70-year-old chemistry teacher who plans to vote for Lula, is worried.

He told AFP at a campaign rally that the president "needs to realise that today, unfortunately, anti-establishment rhetoric is in the hands of the right." *– AFP*

# A Cuban zoo, and its animals, in epic battle for survival

*Lisandra Cots*

HAVANA – Every day, veterinarians and zookeepers make their way to Cuba's National Zoo by whatever means they can, determined to not abandon the nearly 1,000 animals in their care and help save species at risk of extinction.

Their dedication and food donations are vital to keeping alive an array of rhinos, jaguars and tigers – including an extremely rare white tiger – in the midst of a severe crisis that has left many Cubans struggling to feed themselves.

Just getting to the reserve situated 20 kilometers from central Havana is a headache for staff, as public transportation has come to a near standstill nine months into a US fuel blockade.

"The workers come by bicycle, pedal scooter or electric motorbike to ensure the animals have food and water every day," said Yoel Machado, the zoo's animal welfare manager.

Their efforts are about more than keeping the animals fed.

The 345-hectare park serves as a genetic reserve of international conservation importance, housing breeding populations of vulnerable or endangered species, including black and white rhinos, hippos and jaguars.

Yet the same crisis that has left workers scrambling to source meat, medicine and water has forced the zoo to curb reproduction programmes and increasingly rely on handouts to sustain its animals.

During a recent visit by AFP, two Bengal tiger cubs, one an extremely rare white specimen,

*A white tiger cub plays with a sibling at the struggling National Zoo in Havana last Tuesday. – AFP*

*A worker feeds dromedaries at the food-starved National Zoo of Havana last Tuesday. – AFP*

frolicked in their enclosure beneath the watchful gaze of their mother, oblivious to the strenuous efforts made to keep them alive.

AFP did not see any animals that appeared malnourished or ill, but Ángel Cordero, the veterinarian in charge of big cats, said the tiger cubs "could be in better shape."

He revealed he needed to ration their food to prevent it from running out.

"It's no use giving them plenty if it only lasts three days," he said.

Big cats need about seven kilogrammes of meat per day per adult, but such quantities are hard to come by.

Even when it is available, recurring blackouts of up to 30 hours at a stretch make it difficult to preserve the meat.

With fuel extremely scarce, there's also the issue of how to distribute food in a nature reserve the size of New York's Central Park.

## 23 days without power

For now, private donors have come to the rescue for the zoo's various needs.

Every Monday, Ana Fernández, a Cuban-American woman born in Tennessee who has been living in Cuba for nine years, donates meat.

"The animals shouldn't have to suffer," the 50-year-old said, though she added that "some days it's not enough for all of them."

Recently, the reserve went 23 days without electricity, which meant it also lacked running water.

The staff "didn't just sit around waiting for things to fall from the sky," the zoo's director Juan Carlos Corella said.

"We looked for solutions, water trucks were brought in, and we found food for the animals almost daily," he said, while admitting that keeping the park open has become "very difficult."

An exodus of vets has added to the zoo's woes.

More than a third have left for better-paying jobs elsewhere, mostly in Cuba's burgeoning private sector.

Some wait tables in cafés while others work for private veterinary clinics.

## Limiting breeding programmes

The zoo is home to the only breeding group of black rhinos outside of Africa, as well as a large population of white rhinos, the largest herd of Grant's zebras in the Americas and hippos that regularly bear calves.

"Here we have a high genetic value, and one of immense international importance," Machado, the animal welfare manager, explained.

However, the crisis has forced the park to slow down its breeding programs.

The reason is simple: each new offspring requires more food, medicine, and staff.

"We can't keep increasing the number of animals," Machado said, adding that he preferred to ensure the current population was "as well cared for as possible."

And yet life keeps renewing itself, regardless.

In recent months the zoo has welcomed baby tigers, hyenas, jackals, and a black dromedary named Esperanza ("Hope"), the first of its kind born in Cuba in three decades. *– AFP*

# La Liga president hits out at Real Madrid refereeing 'conspiracy' claims

MADRID – La Liga president Javier Tebas hit out yesterday at what he deemed accusations of a refereeing "conspiracy" by Real Madrid following their derby loss to Atletico Madrid.

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho brought two printed screen-shots of what he thought were red-card tackles committed by Atletico players to his post-match press conference following Sunday's 2-1 defeat.

Tebas responded to a pro-Real article on social media with a lengthy riposte to allegations of a "conspiracy" against the 15-time European champions.

"Here they go again, the mouthpieces and the regime's television, building the same old narrative - the permanent conspiracy," said Tebas, who has often been at odds with Real Madrid and the club's outspoken president Florentino Perez.

"This article goes further - it claims that referees harm 'The business that feeds them'.

"What exactly is it asking for? Refereeing based on revenue, viewership, or the badge? What a way to understand equality in the competition.

"Real Madrid are crucial to La Liga. But claiming that 'La Liga is worth nothing' without them reveals the disdain for the other clubs, their fans, and their history. The competition belongs to no one."

Madrid have made a stuttering start to the season and already sit six points behind reigning champions and early leaders Barcelona in the La Liga table.

"Claiming that referees are directed against Real Madrid is living in another galaxy," added Tebas.

"That narrative serves as an excuse to cover up other shortcomings that are plain to see in these first matches of the season.

"It's more comfortable to point to a conspiracy than to explain what's happening on the pitch."

Madrid responded to Tebas's comments later yesterday, calling them "intolerable".

"Our club considers it intolerable that the president of La Liga uses his institutional position to continue discrediting and attacking Real Madrid in the manner he does in each of his public interventions," the club said in a statement.

"Given this inappropriate behaviour, which has persisted over time, we believe that professional football in Spain urgently needs a leader capable of managing it and developing its full potential with the fundamental duty of neutrality."

Mourinho returned for a second spell in charge at the Santiago Bernabeu in the close-season, tasked with ending a two-year spell without a major trophy.

*– AFP*

*Belgium's forwards Kevin De Bruyne (left) and Youri Tielemans (centre) take part in a training session as part of the team's preparation for the upcoming UEFA Nations League football matches in Tubize yesterday.* – AFP

# Star coaches make their bows as Nations League returns

*Neil Fulton*

PARIS – The 2026/27 Nations League kicks off tomorrow but all eyes will be on the touchlines as a starry cast of new coaches, including Zinedine Zidane and Jurgen Klopp, prepare to make their debuts in international football.

The end of World Cup cycles usually herald in a host of new faces, however, the 2026 vintage is particularly bountiful, with no fewer than 10 European nations having appointed a new coach since this summer's tournament in North America.

Most notable are 1998 World Cup winner and France legend Zidane, who succeeds Didier Deschamps as Les Bleus boss, and former Liverpool manager Klopp, who takes over his native Germany.

When Deschamps announced the 2026 World Cup would signal the end of his 14-year reign as France boss, only one name was on the lips of football fans in the country: 'Zizou'.

They got their wish when it was announced in July that the three-time Champions League-winning coach was replacing his old team-mate and captain at the helm of Les Bleus.

"It's like a film, but it's amazing. It's real," current France skipper Kylian Mbappe told Spanish daily *AS* on Monday.

Finally, the 54-year-old will oversee his first matches as coach away to Turkey on Friday and in Belgium three days later, before making his touchline bow at the Stade de France on October 2 against Italy.

A second meeting against the Belgians in Paris the following Monday will bring the curtain down on Zidane's opening salvo in international management.

"The France job was the only one I wanted," former Real Madrid coach Zidane said in July.

"I've had offers over these four or five years to take charge of a club and I turned them all down for the French national team.

"I'm ready for the challenge, that's what drives me."

*France's head coach Zinedine Zidane (left), goalkeeping coach Fabien Barthez and assistant coach Hamidou Msaidie (right) take part in a training session four days ahead of France's UEFA Nations League football match against Turkey in Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines outside Paris on Monday.*
*The gathering is the first of the French national team under its new coach Zinedine Zidane, appointed on July 28 on a four-year contract. The Nations League, which France won in 2021, will dominate Zidane's attention in the coming months before the draw for the Euro 2028 qualifying tournament takes place in early December.*
*– AFP*

## 'The high point'

If Zidane's appointment marks the long-awaited return of an iconic figure to the national team in France, Klopp's has been greeted with no less excitement in Germany, even if it is the former Mainz defender's first taste of the Nationalmannschaft.

Uncapped as a player, Klopp made his name in football as a coach. After legendary spells at Borussia Dortmund and Liverpool, and a period away from the touchline as Red Bull's global sports director, Klopp will begin an adventure many in Germany thought would never happen.

"This is ideally the high point of my career, of my life, my professional life. I will give it everything I have," Klopp said at his unveiling after Julian Nagelsmann departed following Germany's disastrous World Cup.

The charismatic 59-year-old Klopp has already shown he will do things his way by calling up 44 players, divided into two squads, for his first matches in charge.

Those games will be against the Netherlands in Amsterdam tomorrow and at home to Greece three days later, before a meeting with Serbia in Munich on October 1 and a trip to Greece on October 4.

Other arrivals for this opening round of Nations League matches include Jorge Jesus, who will make his Portugal debut when the competition's reigning champions welcome Wales tomorrow.

Ex-Barcelona metronome and 2010 World Cup winner Xavi Hernandez replaces Ronald Koeman as Netherlands coach.

Roberto Mancini, who masterminded Italy's Euro 2020 victory, returns to try and right the course of the floundering Azzurri.

Former Bayern Munich and Netherlands midfielder Mark van Bommel will oversee his first Belgium match against Italy and Slaven Bilic takes over the Croatia reins for a second time, following a successful six-year spell in charge of the Vatreni between 2006 and 2012.

Spain's World Cup and European Championship-winning coach Luis de la Fuente is staying put. He was on Monday rewarded with a contract extension until 2032.

His world champions will begin their tilt at a second Nations League title with an eye-catching clash against Thomas Tuchel's England at Wembley on Saturday. *– AFP*

# Infantino proposes consulting federations to reform FIFA

PARIS – FIFA president Gianni Infantino on Monday suggested a "consultation" with the member federations to reform the world football governing body's decision-making processes, in a letter addressed to the 211 member associations, and seen by AFP.

"I will propose that the Council establish a direct, structured and time-limited consultation with confederations, Member Associations and relevant stakeholders on how FIFA's decision-making can be further strengthened," Infantino wrote.

The 56-year-old Swiss has come under fire since his now-abandoned plan to bring private investment into the men's and women's World Cups.

"The consultation would invite specific proposals on earlier institutional involvement, the respective roles of the President, the Bureau, the Council and the Congress, and practical ways to strengthen transparency, participation and accountability in major strategic initiatives," the letter continued.

Infantino asked for the initial proposals to be considered at the council meeting scheduled for October 15.

Infantino replaced Sepp Blatter as president of FIFA in 2016. He has come under severe pressure since the announcement in late July of proposals to create a commercial subsidiary to run its biggest events, such as the World Cup and Club World Cup.

The plan would have allowed private investors to acquire stakes in a company created under the FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE) initiative. The backlash that followed led to the proposals being quickly shelved.

European football's governing body UEFA threatened to boycott FIFA competitions. It later suspended that threat, but has urged Infantino to resign and has been preparing possible legal action against him for alleged "criminal mismanagement".

Infantino addressed FFE in his letter on Monday and wrote that "FIFA's democratic processes, independence and sporting authority were never for sale".

The plan also "did not involve relinquishing FIFA's control or authority over sporting decisions", he insisted.

## 'Clear and trusted'

He further lamented the fact that the scheme "entered the public domain before FIFA's planned institutional process had been completed and before it could be presented in full to the Council and the Member Associations".

"I recognise that, without the full context, this caused concern and created the impression that decisions had already been taken. They had not," Infantino added.

"Major ideas must be developed, tested and communicated through clear and trusted institutions. That is a responsibility I take seriously."

UEFA, alongside North American body CONCACAF and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), issued a no-holds-barred joint letter against Infantino in August.

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

However, Infantino is not without friends – 2034 World Cup hosts Saudi Arabia came out in support last month, with African football's governing body CAF and South America's CONMEBOL also supportive.

FIFA confirmed earlier in September that Infantino will stand for re-election as president next March.

At this stage, he is the only candidate. However, CONCACAF president Victor Montagliani is widely seen as a likely challenger.

Candidate nominations for next year's election must be submitted by November 18.

*– AFP*

# Chinese marksman Sheng takes 3rd gold, China lifts title in women's volleyball

*Li Jia*

NAGOYA – Chinese shooter Sheng Lihao claimed his third gold medal at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games yesterday, setting two world records with his teammate, while the Chinese women's volleyball team lifted the title with a commanding 3-0 victory over Japan.

The triumph marked China's 10th women's volleyball gold medal at the Asian Games and a rematch of the Hangzhou Games final between the two sides.

Earlier in the day, Sheng, a two-time Olympic champion, and teammate Wang Zifei won the 10m air rifle mixed team title, setting world records in both qualification and the final. The 19-year-old Sheng has now won three golds in the games, having notched the men's 10m air rifle individual and team titles already.

"I didn't expect to shoot that well. The score was much higher than what I usually get in training, so I think I was a little lucky," Sheng said.

China continued to dominate in the pool. Peng Xuwei defended her women's 200m backstroke title in 2:05.77, breaking the previous Asian record set in 2010.

China's Zhang Zhanshuo, 19, won the men's 1,500m freestyle in 14:42.42 for his second title of the Games. He had anchored China's men's 4x200m freestyle relay victory on Monday. Japan's Tabuchi Kaito and Imafuku Kazushi took silver and bronze respectively.

Li Bingjie retained her women's 400m freestyle title, while China won the men's 4x100m medley relay. Xu Jiayu, Dong Zhihao, Xu Fang and Pan Zhanle clocked 3:27.89 for the title.

*Sheng Lihao of team China competes during the 10m air rifle mixed team final of shooting at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Toyota of Aichi Prefecture, Japan, yesterday. More photos on page 16 .* *– Xinhua*

With the relay gold, Xu and Pan both had collected three gold medals.

Siobhan Haughey from Hong Kong defended the women's 100m freestyle title in 52.45 seconds, with China's Yu Yiting and Cheng Yujie taking silver and bronze. Japan's Yumeiki Kojima won the men's 400m individual medley in 4:07.02, ahead of teammate Tomoyuki Matsushita, while China's Wang Shun took bronze.

In gymnastics, Japan ended China's run of 13 consecutive Asian Games titles in the women's all-around. Aiko Sugihara claimed the gold medal with 55.599, while China's Ke Qinqin took silver, finishing 0.4 points behind.

"This is my first Asian Games. I hope to work hard and have the chance to compete at the Asian Games again in the future, and stand on the higher step of the podium in this event," said Ke.

China's Guo Li collected women's cycling road race gold after completing the 90.4-kilometer race in two hours, 50 minutes and five seconds, edging Afghanistan's Fariba Hashimi in a sprint finish. Hashimi took silver while Leung Wing Yee of Hong Kong finished third.

China swept Thailand 3-0 in the women's team quarterfinals of badminton, while the men's team edged South Korea 3-2 to advance to the semifinals. China also secured places in both table tennis team semifinals, with the men's team beating Thailand 3-1 and the women's team easing past Uzbekistan 3-0.

After three days of competition, China led the medal table with 32 gold, 13 silver and eight bronze medals. Japan was second with 11 gold, 16 silver and 19 bronze medals, followed by South Korea with six gold, four silver and 17 bronze medals.

*– Xinhua*

## Medal table

20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026

| | | | | | ToTal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | China | 32 | 13 | 8 | 53 |
| 2 | Japan | 11 | 16 | 19 | 46 |
| 3 | Republic of Korea | 6 | 4 | 17 | 27 |
| 4 | Kazakhstan | 6 | 1 | 5 | 12 |
| 5 | Thailand | 4 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| 6 | Hong Kong, China | 3 | 5 | 4 | 12 |
| 7 | Tajikistan | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| 8 | India | 1 | 4 | 2 | 7 |
| 9 | Uzbekistan | 1 | 4 | 1 | 6 |
| 10 | Chinese Taipei | 1 | 3 | 5 | 9 |
| 11 | Islamic Republic of Iran | 1 | 3 | 1 | 5 |
| 12 | Singapore | 1 | 3 | 1 | 5 |
| 13 | Macao, China | 1 | 3 | 0 | 4 |

# India's cricketers win in style as Afghan savours 'special' Games silver

*Peter Stebbings*

NAGOYA – India's dominant women retained their Asian Games cricket crown in style yesterday as an Afghan cyclist who once disguised herself as a man won a "special" silver.

China were streaking away in the medals table ahead of hosts Japan towards the end of the third full day of action in Aichi-Nagoya.

India won their first gold of this 20th edition of Asia's biggest sporting spectacle, with Smriti Mandhana the hero.

Her whirlwind 79 helped them crush Sri Lanka by 147 runs and win a second consecutive women's cricket title.

India smashed 216-3 off their 20 overs, the highest women's total in Games history, with 18 fours and 13 sixes.

Sri Lanka were never a threat as they were skittled for 69 in 15.4 overs and had to settle for silver.

"It's a good thing to win the first gold medal for India," opening batter Mandhana told AFP.

"It feels amazing. We've seen other athletes win gold on TV."

The men's cricket competition begins tomorrow, with India favourites to win that too.

China extended their dominance in swimming, which is taking place in Tokyo.

They have won 15 of the 20 golds in the pool so far.

But they did not have it all their own way on the night, as 17-year-old Yumeki Kojima won the 400m individual medley in an Asian Games record time of 4min 07.02sec for a Japan one-two.

Watched by Leon Marchand, the teenager now has the French superstar in his sights before the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics.

"Right now, Marchand is the highest target that I'm aiming for," said Kojima.

"I want to keep getting closer to him, even if it's little by little, and eventually surpass him."

### 'Really overwhelmed'

An Afghan cyclist who disguised herself as a man to pursue her sporting dreams hopes her silver will inspire women in a country where their freedoms have been sharply curtailed.

Fariba Hashimi powered home second in the women's road race, calling the triumph "something special".

"I can't explain my feelings now," said the 23-year-old, who fled Afghanistan after Taliban authorities returned to power in 2021.

She reflected on how she was attacked with stones and trained dressed as a man when she started out in the sport as a teenager along with sister Yulduz, who is also now a pro cyclist.

"I was born inside a country where the women who dream are getting attacked, and I'm really happy that I have fought against that," said Hashimi, who is now based in Italy.

Mixed martial arts, or MMA, is making its Asian Games debut as it makes an audacious play to one day be on the Olympic stage.

One of the first champions in Games history was Teo Hui Hoon as the Singaporean clinched gold in the women's traditional -60kg class.

"I was really overwhelmed when I knew that I had won the match. I've never cried before after a fight," she said.

China top the medals table with 32 golds, with Japan a distant second on 11 and South Korea third with six gold towards the end of yesterday.

Games organisers meanwhile came out fighting, blaming teams for "confusion" and delays in boarding the cruise ship housing thousands of athletes.

More than 4,000 people are staying on the Costa Serena in Nagoya's port, but some had complained of long delays to get on last week. *– AFP*

# Afghan cyclist who disguised herself as man wins Asian Games silver

NAGOYA – An Afghan cyclist who disguised herself as a man to pursue her sporting dreams won an Asian Games silver medal yesterday, hoping it inspires other women in a country where Taliban authorities have sharply curtailed their freedoms.

Italy-based Fariba Hashimi powered home second in the women's road race near Nagoya in Japan, calling the triumph "something special".

"I can't explain my feelings now," said the 23-year-old, before reflecting on how she was attacked with stones and trained disguised as a man when she started out in the sport as a teenager along with sister Yulduz, who is also now a pro cyclist.

"I was born inside a country where the women who dream are getting attacked, and I'm really happy that I have fought against that," she said.

"I hope that the next generation will come here and represent their country without any fear."

The Taliban authorities returned to power in 2021 and have since imposed a series of rules limiting women's access to education and public life, including sport.

"They took away our freedom, they took away everything from us," said Hashimi, who hails from Faryab province in northern Afghanistan and left the country after the Taliban authorities took over.

"This silver medal can show a lot of resilience from Afghan women, and I'm really happy.

"I'm not alone, I know that behind me millions of women, from many countries, have the same dream and they are standing with me."

After fleeing Afghanistan with the help of Italian former world champion Alessandra Cappellotto, Hashimi relocated to Italy, where she now lives and trains.

She and her sister competed at the Paris Olympics two years ago, and the 2028 Los Angeles Games are now looming into view.

"I never want to give up and hopefully we can see (what can happen) again in Los Angeles," she said.

Hashimi reserved a special thanks for the Japanese team for playing a part in her silver medal.

"I'm here without a mechanic, without any preparation. We brought one guy with us from the national federation, and he just drove the car," she said.

"We were fixing the bike ourselves. I was the mechanic for myself. I was washing the bike myself.

"Thank you to the Japanese team. They were really, really nice to me, fixed my bike." (*Photo on page 16*) *– AFP*

# Bardot auction in Paris fetches nearly US$1.1 million

PARIS – An auction of French screen legend Brigitte Bardot's personal items fetched nearly one million euros (US$1.1 million) in Paris on Monday, almost 20 times the estimate, the Millon auction house told AFP.

A total of 285 objects ranging from straw hats, sunglasses, nightgowns to tableware and furniture from La Madrague and La Garrigue, Bardot's homes in Saint-Tropez in southeastern France, and her Paris apartment generated tremendous enthusiasm, an AFP journalist said.

Bardot died in December aged 91. The proceeds will go to Bardot's animal welfare foundation and to Nicolas-Jacques Charrier, her only child.

Founded by the actress in 1986, the Brigitte Bardot Foundation says it has taken in 13,000 animals through four shelters and 150 partner facilities, supports 350 groups in France and operates in 70 countries.

Some 3,000 French and international bidders had registered for the auction.

"Brigitte Bardot has once again proved to be a remarkable alchemist: she transformed about 50,000 euros in estimates into nearly a million euros including fees," said auctioneer Alexandre Millon.

Two dog collars, with an ID tag bearing Bardot's name and the telephone number for La Madrague, estimated at 30 euros for the pair, were sold for 9,400 euros to a Russian buyer.

A self-portrait fetched nearly 40,000 euros, while the typewriter she used to write an autobiography sold for 4,634 euros.

Estimated at between 300 and 500 euros, two of her guitars soared to 8,600 and 11,900 euros while three stuffed toys representing baby seals sold for nearly 2,200 euros.

"This sale is the logical continuation of the one she herself organised in 1987 with her most precious belongings to create her foundation. Today, her fight continues through this auction," Ghyslaine Calmels, managing director of the Bardot Foundation, told AFP after the sale.

Two days before the auction, Bernard d'Ormale, Brigitte Bardot's last husband, slammed it as a "joke".

"These are personal items. Why hold this sale? For the animals? It's a joke," Bernard d'Ormale told AFP, adding it amounted to a "disrespect to Brigitte's memory".

Her belongings should have been preserved as part of her legacy rather than sold to raise funds for the foundation she created, d'Ormale argued, adding that Bardot "would not have agreed to this sale".

The Brigitte Bardot Foundation rejected the criticism, saying the auction was approved by the board in June, including Bardot's widower, who was then its president.

*This photograph shows details of a preview exhibition of personal belongings once owned by late French actress Brigitte Bardot at Hotel Drouot in Paris last Tuesday, ahead of Monday's auction of her memorabilia and clothing. – AFP*

However, d'Ormale said he had not understood the auction would involve such personal items.

The dispute came days after he was removed as head of the foundation, a role he had held since the star's death.

*– AFP*

# Head of Spanish broadcaster backs new Eurovision boycott

MADRID – The head of Spain's public broadcaster said yesterday he supported boycotting Eurovision again over Israel's participation, potentially adding to the countries snubbing the world's biggest live televised music event.

Spain joined the Netherlands, Iceland, Ireland and Slovenia in pulling out of this year's contest in Austria in protest over Israel's presence amid the war in Gaza, triggered by Hamas's 2023 attacks on Israel.

Ireland and the Netherlands have also announced their boycott of the 2027 showpiece in Bulgaria, with Irish broadcaster RTE citing "the appalling and ongoing loss of lives in Gaza and the humanitarian crisis there".

Israeli strikes have killed more than 1,300 people in the devastated Palestinian territory since an October 2025 ceasefire, according to the Gaza health ministry, whose figures are considered generally reliable by the United Nations.

José Pablo López, president of Spanish broadcaster RTVE, told a Senate committee yesterday that it was "deeply painful" that Israel's public broadcaster would continue to participate in Eurovision "despite everything, and given this situation that is still being experienced in Gaza".

In August, Eurovision organisers said they were excluding any country involved in an armed conflict from hosting the competition.

The winner usually earns the right to host the following edition, and Israel came close to taking home the trophy in 2025 and 2026.

López said there had been "technical progress, but there is also clearly unfinished business on the ethical front".

"For this reason, I announce that I will propose to the RTVE board that we maintain the suspension of our participation in Eurovision," López said.

Spanish media have reported the board's next meeting will be held by mid-October.

Spain is one of the so-called "big five" nations that make the biggest financial contributions to the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), the organiser of Eurovision, that automatically qualify for the final of the contest.

The Palestinian cause enjoys widespread support in Spain. Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has been one of Israel's most virulent critics, labelling its actions in Gaza a genocide. *– AFP*

## World Weather

| CHINA | ASIA-PACIFIC | WORLD | LUSOPHONE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Beijing 19°C~33°C | Manila 24°C~32°C | New York 13°C~21°C | Lisbon 18°C~32°C |
| Shanghai 21°C~30°C | Bangkok 25°C~34°C | London 10°C~23°C | Rio de Janeiro 19°C~21°C |
| Hong Kong 24°C~30°C | Tokyo 19°C~24°C | Frankfurt 11°C~21°C | Luanda 19°C~23°C |
| Taipei 21°C~31°C | Singapore 25°C~32°C | Vancouver 10°C~16°C | Maputo 17°C~29°C |
| Guangzhou 23°C~32°C | Kuala Lumpur 25°C~32°C | Paris 12°C~25°C | Dili 22°C~32°C |
| Nanjing 21°C~28°C | Jakarta 24°C~33°C | Moscow 14°C~18°C | São Tomé 24°C~31°C |
| Guilin 22°C~33°C | Seoul 17°C~29°C | Las Vegas 22°C~34°C | Praia 25°C~32°C |
| Xi'an 18°C~25°C | Sydney 16°C~22°C | Monte Carlo 18°C~25°C | Bissau 24°C~29°C |

# Amanda Lear accuses Miley Cyrus of plagiarism

*This combination of file pictures shows French actress, singer, TV host and painter Amanda Lear (left) posing for a photocall at the 22nd Fashion Dinner against AIDS ("Dinner de la Mode") charity event at the Pavillon Vendôme, on the sidelines of Paris Fashion Week, in Paris on January 30, 2025, and US singer-songwriter Miley Cyrus arriving for the 2025 Met Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on May 5, 2025, in New York. – AFP*

PARIS – French disco diva Amanda Lear publicly accused American singer Miley Cyrus on Monday of plagiarising one of her songs from the 1970s.

Lear, a model-turned-singer who was a muse to surrealist painter Salvador Dali and a lover of Rolling Stones guitarist Brian Jones, took Cyrus to task over apparent similarities between her song "The Sphinx" and the American's new track "Redlights".

Cyrus released her tenth album "Bass Persuades" last Friday, a 10-track dance pop opus including the ballad "Redlights" which invites comparisons to the slower, gravelly voiced song by Lear from 1978.

"Thank you, Miley, for copying my song 'The Sphinx'! I'm flattered!" Lear wrote on social media on Sunday with the hashtags "ripoff" and "copycat".

"I've never been litigious, but my record label, Universal, and the publishers of the track, for which I wrote the lyrics, want acknowledgment of the plagiarism," Amanda Lear told AFP on Monday.

"I simply pointed out the situation by thanking Miley Cyrus and adding that I was flattered. I never threatened a lawsuit or retaliation," she added.

Lear is a prolific composer and singer who has produced more than 20 albums.

The Rolling Stones are believed to have written a song about her "Miss Amanda Jones" dating to her time as a prominent figure during the Swinging Sixties in London.

*– AFP*

Kaveesha Dilhari Walikonthagei (right) of Sri Lanka competes during the women's cricket gold medal match between India and Sri Lanka at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Nisshin, Aichi Prefecture, Japan, yesterday. – Xinhua

Guo Li (right) of China and Fariba Hashimi of Afghanistan sprint to the finish line during the women's road race final of cycling road at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Shinshiro of Aichi Prefecture, Japan, yesterday. – Xinhua

Adeola Fay Robert (right) of Malaysia competes with Fatemehzahra Saeidabadi of Iran during the women's kumite -55kg final of Karate at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Toyohashi, Japan, yesterday. – Xinhua

Mirzobek Umarov of Tajikistan (right) competes against Firdavs Atamuratov of Uzbekistan during the men's modern -60kg final of mixed martial arts at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Nagoya of Aichi Prefecture, Japan, yesterday. – Xinhua

Kanjutha Phattaraboonsorn (left) of Thailand competes against Diana Pogosian of Bahrain during the women's modern -54kg final of mixed martial arts at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Nagoya of Aichi Prefecture, Japan, yesterday. – Xinhua

Xu Jie (left) reacts during the men's foil individual round of 16 match against Radmir Semeneev of Uzbekistan at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Tokoname, Aichi Prefecture, Japan, yesterday. – Xinhua