

Xi's US visit set to boost prospects of ties

Scholars credit head-of-state diplomacy for cooperation gains

President Xi Jinping's visit to the United States

At the invitation of US President Donald Trump, President Xi Jinping will make a state visit to the United States from Wednesday to Friday.

During the visit, Xi will have an in-depth exchange of views with Trump on major issues concerning bilateral ties and world peace and development.



CHINA-US TIES IN NUMBERS



47 years

Diplomatic relations established in 1979



50,000+

Young Americans have visited China under exchange and study programs since 2023



US\$559.75 billion

Bilateral trade in goods in 2025



50/238

pairs
Sister province-state and sister city partnerships

Sources: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China; Xinhua

With President Xi Jinping's arrival in Washington, DC, for a three-day state visit early today (Macau time), scholars from both countries expressed hope that the world's two largest economies, driven by head-of-state diplomacy, can find more areas for cooperation and shore up the prospects for improved global governance.

Counting this visit and US President Donald Trump's state visit to China in May, the two countries will reach a milestone with the exchange of state visits within half a year, officials and scholars said.

When they met in May, Xi and Trump agreed on a new vision of building a constructive China-US relationship of strategic stability. – *Courtesy of China Daily*

Airport to start 2.5-year overnight runway closure late next month

Tony Wong

Airport operator CAM said in a statement yesterday that as the airport's ongoing reclamation and expansion project advances, an overnight runway closure will be implemented between late next month and the second half of 2029, during which flight operations will be suspended daily between midnight and 8:00 a.m.

The statement did not give an exact date for the start of the temporary runway overnight closure.

Previously, the company indicated that

the temporary closure was slated to end in October 2029.

The airport's ongoing expansion project got off the ground in November 2024. The expansion project, with land reclamation covering 129 hectares (1.29 square kilometres), is scheduled to be completed in 2030, raising the airport's total area to 325 hectares.

The expansion project is reclaiming land in the coastal waters between the airport's runway and its two current taxiways to expand its apron, creating space for more aircraft stands and various other new

ancillary facilities. The project includes the construction of two new taxiways, which are expected to be completed in 2028, after which the two current taxiways will be demolished.

Yesterday's statement said that to facilitate the upcoming reclamation and expansion work, the subsequent construction of new taxiways, and runway rehabilitation and improvement works, flight operations will be suspended daily between 12:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. from late next month until the second half of 2029.

The statement underlined that CAM has

engaged in advance communication and coordination with airlines serving the airport and adjusted flight schedules to minimise the impact on operations. It added that CAM will maintain close communication with the project contractor and monitor construction progress.

The statement also said that, subject to full compliance with aviation safety standards and the availability of necessary technical conditions, CAM will assess the feasibility of temporarily shortening the duration of the daily overnight runway closure during peak holiday travel periods. ■

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The Macau Post Daily

China's higher-educated population reaches 270 million

China now has 270 million people with a higher education background, or nearly one in five of its population, according to the Ministry of Education.

– *Story on p. 7*

Milei tells the UN it is a 'useless organisation'

Argentine President Javier Milei attacked the UN in a speech to the world body yesterday, calling it a "useless organisation" filled with "arrogant parasites."

– *Story on p. 11*

Lula warns of UN credibility crisis, urges multilateralism

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has opened the general debate of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) for the 10th time, calling for multilateralism, dialogue and respect for national sovereignty amid rising geopolitical tensions and armed conflicts. – *Story on p. 12*

From the GBA to the UN: The Case for Internationalising Macau's Young Talent

Commentary by Manuel Silvério

Independent analyst on public policy and regional development

(Former public official with international experience and a longstanding involvement in public policy and sports development)

A recent ceremony in Hong Kong marking the departure of 16 young civil servants for two-year assignments with the United Nations deserves close attention in Macau.

Recommended by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC), they will serve as Chinese personnel at the UN Headquarters in New York and its offices in Geneva, Vienna, and Nairobi. This is already Hong Kong's third group under the programme: five officers took part in 2019, 12 in 2023, and now 16.

This is, therefore, no longer a one-off initiative, but a gradually developing mechanism for the continuous cultivation of talent with an international vision and practical experience.

Looking back, I recognise that when my generation was growing up and beginning its professional life, such institutional bridges were not yet in place. For most young people in Macau at the time, working in an international organisation was a distant prospect.

Today, the circumstances are different. The support of the country is opening new doors for Macau's young people, and the new generation should value and make full use of these opportunities.

In his message to the departing officers, Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu urged them to keep the country, Hong Kong, and the world in their hearts.

The same principle can apply to Macau.

We do not need to choose between the country and the world. On the contrary, through the support of the country and the opportunities created by national development, Macau can also reach further into the world.

Macau should also extend its reach

Hong Kong's experience also demonstrates that participation in international organisations is no longer confined to the

traditional diplomatic corps.

The 16 young officials come from a wide range of professional fields, including financial services, statistics, justice, civil engineering, customs, meteorology, intellectual property, land administration, policing, and anti-corruption work.

This reflects the changing nature of contemporary multilateral cooperation.

International organisations need more than diplomats. They also need lawyers, engineers, economists, researchers, health professionals, environmental specialists, and technical experts capable of working in complex international environments.

Macau does not lack such talent.

It also possesses a combination of characteristics that few cities share: a bilingual and multicultural society, a legal system with its own characteristics, a long history of interaction between cultures, and a distinctive relationship with Portuguese-speaking countries.

If these characteristics can be translated into an advantage in human capital, they can help develop professionals capable of serving Macau while also making a greater contribution to the country.

During Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai's visit to Geneva in April this year, ways of strengthening Macau's links with international organisations were also discussed. Macau has already provided young people with opportunities for internships within UN organisations and for international training.

The next step is to consider how this path can acquire greater continuity and scale.

From the Greater Bay Area to the world

As Macau advances its appropriate economic diversification and deepens its participation in the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), cultivating talent with an international vision and working experience becomes increasingly important.

National integration and internationalisation are sometimes presented as two different directions. I do not see them that way.

For the GBA to strengthen its international dimension, it needs people who understand both the development and institutional environment of the Chinese mainland and the rules, working methods, and languages of international organisations.

This is precisely where Macau can make use of one of its advantages.

Macau's young people can become genuine bridge-builders: knowledgeable about the country, rooted in Macau, and, at the same time, capable of reaching out to the world.

I believe progress can be made in three directions.

First, establish a sustained mechanism to prepare and recommend young people from Macau for international organisations. The United Nations Junior Professional Officer Programme can be one avenue, with the support and recommendation of the relevant national authorities, enabling more qualified young people from Macau to participate. Internships, training schemes, exchanges, and other talent programmes offered by international organisations should also be actively explored to create further opportunities.

Second, broaden the pool of talent with potential for international development. The public administration can naturally be an important starting point, but Macau also has talented young people in universities, scientific research, healthcare, finance, technology, environmental fields, and other professions. They should be identified earlier, better prepared in languages and international affairs, and given opportunities to build meaningful international experience.

Third, ensure that international experience genuinely returns to Macau. Spending two years working in an international organisation should not be regarded merely as another entry on an individual CV. It should be seen as a long-term investment by Macau in its future talent.

When these young people return, they will bring back more than professional knowledge. They will also bring international networks, cross-cultural working experience, and a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of

global governance.

These are valuable resources that Macau will need for its future development.

A new generation that can go further

The presence of the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Macau is an important institutional advantage in the SAR's external relations. Working in coordination with the Macao SAR Government and the relevant national authorities, it can continue to help Macau better understand and make use of the opportunities created by the country for its participation in international affairs.

As Macau seeks to align itself more actively and closely with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, advance the high-quality development of the practice of "One Country, Two Systems" with Macau characteristics, and implement the Third Five-Year Plan for the Economic and Social Development of the Macao Special Administrative Region (2026-2030), I believe this is also the right time to consider a strategy of our own for the international development of Macau's young talent.

This does not mean copying Hong Kong. Macau has its own characteristics and should build its own path from its particular strengths.

For many years, we have described Macau as a platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, an international city, and a bridge between different cultures. But ultimately, these roles need people to give them substance. They also need a more strategic and targeted approach to talent development if they are to be maintained, consolidated, and further strengthened.

Today's generation has opportunities that mine did not.

Our responsibility is to open the doors.

Then it will be for our young people to walk through them – with Macau and the country in their hearts, and with the ability to reach out to and engage with the world.

END

Macao SAR, September 23, 2026

Editor's note: italics and boldface added by the Post

Macau Weather

FINE APART FROM CLOUDY PERIODS.

FORCE 2 TO 4 EAST TO SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS.

RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 55% AND 90%.



26°C~31°C

Source: SMG

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MACAU POST

Macau karatekas clinch 1 silver, 1 bronze at Asian Games

Armindo Neves

The Sports Bureau (ID) announced in a statement yesterday that local karatekas have clinched one more silver and one bronze medal at the Asian Games.

The Macau sports delegation has so far won one gold, four silver, and two bronze medals.

In yesterday's Asian Games men's team karate final, according to a *Macau Sports Weekly* story, the Macau team of Cheang Pei Lok, Kuok Kin Hang, and Fong Man Hou faced the Kuwaiti team and ultimately lost 0-5, taking home the silver medal.

According to a story by the *Post*, the three karatekas previously won a gold medal at the 15th National Games karate competition last year.

Meanwhile, in yesterday's women's -50kg kumite event, Fong Man Wai – who was defeated by a Malaysian athlete in the round of 16 – was given a second chance in the repechage* after her opponent advanced to the final. She then

defeated a Bangladeshi athlete to enter the bronze medal match and ultimately overcame Uzbek athlete Alimardanova Gulshan 6-5 to win the bronze medal, according to *Macau Sports Weekly*.

According to the ID's statement, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam was also at the competition venue yesterday to witness the Macau athletes receiving their medals and to congratulate them on their achievements. ■

* A contest or round in a tournament or competition that gives participants who have already lost (or been eliminated) a second chance to advance to the next stage. Commonly used in Olympic sports such as wrestling, judo, rowing, fencing, and taekwondo. In these systems, competitors who lose early to a strong opponent may get a chance to compete again for a bronze medal or to re-enter the main bracket. – DeepSeek

More on the Games on pages 14 and 16



Local karateka Fong Man Hou (centre), Cheang Pei Lok (left) and Kuok Kin Hang pose with their silver medals at Toyohashi Gymnasium in Aichi yesterday.



Local karateka Fong Man Wai (right) poses during a awards ceremony held at Toyohashi Gymnasium yesterday. – Photos: GCS

Sands China selects 24 firms for Rua das Estalagens revitalisation programme

Khalel Vallo

Sands China has selected 24 enterprises to participate in its 2026 Community Revitalisation Programme for Rua das Estalagens (草堆街), with the initiative combining support for new businesses with rebranding assistance for existing merchants.

The selected firms were announced at an award presentation ceremony at The Londoner Macao in Cotai yesterday. The programme comprises the Entrepreneurship Recruitment Programme 2.0 for the neighbourhood and a newly introduced Shop Rebranding Programme.

The 24 selected projects comprise 11 entrepreneurship proposals and 13 rebranding plans, covering dine-in and takeaway businesses, retail, cultural and creative industries, fashion, travel photography, and pet grooming.

According to a statement by Sands China yesterday, the latest edition received 69 applications, bringing the total number of applications received across the two editions since 2024 to nearly 200. Following a three-round assessment by a cross-sector judging panel, the selected projects were chosen based on factors including innovation, market potential, business models, operational capabilities, and rebranding plans, the statement said.

The Entrepreneurship Recruitment Programme 2.0 requires selected applicants to invest at least 300,000 patacas in initial operating capital, the statement noted, adding that they can receive subsidies equivalent to one to two times their self-invested capital, capped at 1.0 million patacas.

For the Shop Rebranding Programme, selected merchants must invest at least 50,000 patacas and can receive subsidies equivalent to one to three times their investment, capped at 500,000 patacas, the statement underlined.

Sands China has also introduced phased funding, with 60 percent of the total funding provided as start-up capital before new businesses open or rebranding plans are implemented, the statement noted.

The company launched the first Entrepreneurship Recruitment Programme for Rua das Estalagens ("Street of Inns") in 2024, which resulted in seven new businesses being introduced to the area, the statement said, adding that together with this year's



Wilfred Wong Ying-wai, executive vice chairman of Sands China Ltd., addresses yesterday's "2026 Community Revitalisation Programme for Rua das Estalagens" awards ceremony at The Londoner Macao in Cotai. – Photos: Khalel Vallo

selected enterprises, the initiative will have supported 30 businesses.

Chan Chou Weng, representative of the Secretary for Economy and Finance and acting director of the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED), said in his opening speech that the initiative provided concrete support for SMEs (small and medium enterprises) while helping revitalise the historic district and create business opportunities.

Wilfred Wong Ying-wai, executive vice chairman of Sands China Ltd., said the revitalisation of historic districts required sustained commitment and a balance between cultural heritage and modern vitality, noting that the company would continue working with community stakeholders to support the Rua das Estalagens area and Macau's economic diversification.

Speaking to the *Post* after the ceremony, representatives of the three awarded businesses said that the programme would provide financial and practical support while allowing them to develop their businesses and contribute to the preservation of Rua das Estalagens's cultural heritage.



Lu Kwong Kee, owner of the Carimbos Gravações [Stamps and Engravings] Wan Chai, expresses his gratitude for the programme during the ceremony.

Lam Po Ki, representative of Fong's Faction, said she was "very excited" to be selected, noting that her family has roots in Macau and wanted to contribute to the city. The business plans to revive the area's history as a place for tailor shops while combining traditional tailoring with AI and 3D technology.

Lam said that financial support was particularly important because the project would require investment in renovating her family's traditional tailor shop, creating a space for visitors and developing its AI and 3D elements. Lam also revealed a personal connection to tailoring, saying her elder sister had previously worked as a tailor but stopped after injuring her hand while using a sewing machine.

"Now that I have this opportunity, I can't say no to my mother. I will definitely learn it this time," she said, adding that she hoped to introduce the culture of tailoring to visitors, residents and the next generation.

Meanwhile, Li Yulan, representative of Gengfu Chenpi Queen Wellness Centre, said she was "very excited" to be selected and hoped to work with Sands China to introduce the culture and health-related uses of dried

tangerine peel to a wider audience.

Li said there was a common impression that dried tangerine peel mainly appeals to middle-aged and older people, but her observations of the historic district showed that younger visitors are also interested in traditional culture and old streets. The business plans to offer dried tangerine peel in different forms, including tea, food, related products and gift boxes. Li said the programme could help encourage visitors to spend more time in the district rather than simply passing through.

Li added that the programme's benefits extend beyond financial support, as participating businesses could establish connections with other enterprises and exchange experiences.

"Together, they are like a community where they can help each other when they face any difficulties," she said.

Moreover, Lu Kwong Kee, owner of local stamp and stationery shop "Carimbos Gravações ["Stamps and Engravings"] Wan Chai" rebranding project, said he was grateful to Sands China and the local government for the opportunity, describing the programme as a chance for the long-established business to move forward.

Markko Chan, director of project operations at YC Culture Media Limited, which is handling Lu's project operations, said the rebranding would focus on preserving the shop's traditional techniques and cultural history while introducing new elements.

Chan said many long-established shops and historic businesses face challenges as Macau's economic and commercial environment changes, and that rebranding could provide a way for traditional businesses to adapt while retaining their identity. "We hope to deepen the cultural history of their brand," Chan said, underlining that the shop's history could be incorporated into products, services and its spatial design.

Lu said the shop's long history meant some of its products and presentation had become outdated, making renovation necessary. Chan added that preserving traditional techniques while combining them with new ideas was important for the business to continue operating.

Sands China is one of Macau's six integrated resort operators. ■

Global timber forum inks int'l & local cooperation deals

Ida Cheong

The Global Legal & Sustainable Timber Forum (GLSTF 2026) concluded yesterday at the Galaxy International Convention Centre in Cotai, advancing industry agreements anchored by the "Action Framework 2026 for Promoting Legal and Sustainable Timber Supply Chains" and the rollout of new price indices on the Global Timber Index (GTI) platform.

The two-day forum, themed "Innovation and Transformation – Pursuing Avenues for Resilient and Sustainable Global Timber Industries," drew more than 800 participants from 49 countries, including leading entrepreneurs, policymakers, and experts from the global timber and wood products community.

Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) Director Elaine Wong Yee Lam noted in a speech yesterday that during the forum, several major initiatives and achievements were unveiled to chart a sustainable course for the industry. These included the release of the "Action Framework 2026 for Promoting Legal and Sustainable Timber Supply Chains"; the upgrading of the Global Timber Index (GTI)

platform to include a new price index; the official application and operation of the Blockchain-based Timber Traceability System-Trading Platform (BTTS-TP) in Macau; and the establishment of the Global Timber Association Network (GTAN).

Meanwhile, the inauguration of the "International Supply Chain Green Transformation Cooperation Innovation Centre" also created new conditions to foster green supply chain cooperation between the Chinese mainland, Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) partner nations, and ASEAN members, Wong said.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) consists of 11 member states: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR (Laos), Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste (East Timor), and Vietnam.

Wong added that these achievements provide innovative directions for the sustainable development of global timber supply chains, assist the industry's upgrade and transformation, and further reinforce Macau's role as an international platform



Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) Director Elaine Wong Yee Lam (left) and other representatives pose during yesterday's press conference for the Global Legal & Sustainable Timber Forum (GLSTF 2026) at the Galaxy International Convention Centre in Cotai. – Photo: Ida Cheong

for industry announcements, professional exchanges, and cooperative transformation.

Wong pointed out that the forum hosted its inaugural "Macau International Sustainable Development Financial and Investment Project Matching Meeting". Focusing on green transformation and digital innovation, the session connected forestry, timber processing, biomass energy,

and digital technology enterprises with financial institutions and industrial investors to explore cross-border financing and market opportunities.

Wong added that several local organisations initiated the compilation of the "Standard for Biomass Aviation Fuel" and the construction of the "Macau Green Standard Management System." ■

ABOUT The Young Post

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

Exhibition aims to promote kids' literature creation

Macao Children's Literature Association President and UM Assistant Professor Elizabeth Hsiang Tien Ping poses at the UM Faculty of Education (FED) Main Lobby yesterday.



Student Jin Hunmong poses with her father at the UM Faculty of Education (FED) Main Lobby yesterday.



Student Ng Teng Pan poses with his mother at the UM Faculty of Education (FED) Main Lobby yesterday.



Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) students pose with their parents and teachers, as well as representatives from the University of Macau (UM) at the Faculty of Education (FED) Main Lobby yesterday. – Photos: Armindo Neves



教育學院
Faculdade de Educação
Faculty of Education



Armindo Neves

The University of Macau (UM) Faculty of Education (FED) Centre for Language and Literacy Education (CLLE) is co-hosting a “Children’s Literature Creation Joint Exhibition” with the Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) to promote the creation of children’s literature.

The three-day exhibition held its opening ceremony yesterday at the FED Main Lobby.

Macao Children’s Literature Association President and UM Assistant Professor Elizabeth Hsiang Tien Ping told reporters on the sidelines of the ceremony that when evaluating Hou Kong students’ work, she values genuine emotion and authentic life experience most – specifically whether the work reveals a childlike spirit appropriate to the author’s age – while also considering aesthetic form. She noted that from preparation through to viewing, those young creators enhance their reading and writing literacy and abilities by thinking, writing, interacting with teachers and their peers, and appreciating others’ works, making the students themselves the greatest beneficiaries.

Two students whose works were selected for the exhibition expressed their joy and honour. Student Jin Hunmong, whose piece titled “Planting Flowers in the Heart” likened parental love to a gardener, drew inspiration from a speech delivered under the national flag. She said her greatest gain was an improvement in writing skills and expressed hope to try writing poetry in the future.

Student Ng Teng Pan drew on flowers and nature

encountered during travels. Ng enjoys describing the scent and appearance of flowers to immerse readers in the scene, noting that observing others’ works helped expand his writing knowledge. He looks forward to continuing to write and exhibit his work.

Both students’ parents expressed delight over their children’s selection. Jin’s father said that his daughter adapted quickly after moving to Macau from the mainland, emphasising the importance of parent-child companionship, putting aside mobile phones to read together, and providing encouragement while allowing her to create freely. Ng’s mother similarly allows her son to think freely and give full rein to his imagination without imposing opinions. She observed that her son was both nervous and happy at the exhibition, noting that his vocabulary and choice of words had become noticeably more refined. Both parents praised the event as meaningful and expressed hope for more similar activities to encourage children to deepen their creative efforts.

Chinese subject teacher Mai Wenji said the main challenge when guiding young writers is that children either do not know what to write about or strive too hard for perfection. She guides students to first express their ideas and observations aloud before transforming them into text. She added that displaying their work physically gives students a strong sense of achievement and boosts their interest in writing. Mai particularly praised a piece by a Primary 4 student titled “A Turtle’s Life,” inspired by observing a turtle’s daily habits, which reflected a child’s ability to notice small details in daily life and translate them

into genuine reflections on slowing down and enjoying life.

Rebecca Choi Keng Man, director of Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section), said the school creates learning contexts through festive events such as the Mid-Autumn Festival, National Day, and the Lantern Festival, guiding students to write, deliver speeches, and compose poetry and prose in the past decades.

Students’ outstanding works are published in local newspapers and compiled into books to give students a sense of accomplishment. Choi highlighted that the school builds a solid foundation from primary levels through to comprehensive secondary training, with several graduates having gone on to become professional writers or journalists. Looking ahead, themed creative writing competitions will be organised for each year level, student works will be published as small books, and campus exhibitions will be followed by exchange activities with universities in Macau and mainland China.

Hsiang added that the joint exhibition requires a year of preparation and that university and primary school teachers are already discussing next year’s theme. They are also exploring ways to guide parents in giving children creative freedom to prevent works from becoming overly adult-orientated. Regarding artificial intelligence (AI), Hsiang maintains an open attitude but stressed that ethical principles must be observed – including disclosing AI contributions – and that educators and students should collaborate in using AI responsibly across different grade levels.

Young woman lured into SE Asia by ‘free trip’ offer: police

Sherwin Hng

The Judiciary Police (PJ) announced yesterday details about a young local woman who was lured to Southeast Asia by a “free trip” offer before being held against her will by a criminal organisation, PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a special press conference.

According to Cheong, the woman met a man on the Chinese mainland’s online video platform ‘Douyin’ earlier this month who presented himself as a wealthy and attractive young man. He invited her to attend a party overseas, offering to cover her accommodation, meals, and travel expenses.

She left Macau via Guangzhou Airport for Southeast Asia on September 12. Her father lost contact with her the following day and reported the matter to the Judiciary Police on September 13.

Cheong said the investigation discovered that after arriving in Southeast Asia, she followed instructions to travel to a designated location, where she was subsequently held against her will. A gang member threatened to send her to a scam centre.

Cheong declined to disclose the victim’s age, personal details, or the location where the crime took place.

The Judiciary Police coordinated its investigation with the Macau

Interpol Sub-Bureau, the National Anti-Fraud Centre, and the FRONTIER+ cross-border anti-fraud platform. With assistance from local police, the woman was rescued on September 13. She was not injured in the rescue operation, Cheong underlined.

Cheong said the victim returned safely to Macau on Saturday, adding that several details of the case were still under investigation and, consequently, could not be disclosed.

The Judiciary Police urged residents to remain vigilant when communicating with strangers online and not to be lured by offers of “free overseas trips” or high-

paying jobs abroad.

Cheong noted that similar cases have involved victims being recruited for overseas jobs, lured abroad to participate in fraudulent activities, or deceived by people posing as law-enforcement officers. Once controlled by a criminal organisation, a person’s physical safety is threatened, and they may be forced to participate in fraudulent activities, Cheong added.

Suspected cases of fraud should be reported immediately to the Judiciary Police’s Anti-Fraud Enquiry hotline on 8800 7777 or the crime reporting hotline on 993 for assistance. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong looks on during yesterday’s special press conference at the PJ headquarters in Zape.

— Photo: Sherwin Hng

Police bust 118 million-pataca ‘buying agent’ fraud, arrest trio

Sherwin Hng

The Judiciary Police (PJ) have arrested three suspects involved in a “buying agent” scam syndicate that defrauded victims of about 118 million patacas, PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a special press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the three suspects as Tan, a 45-year-old mainland woman and former supermarket owner who claimed to be jobless; Iek, a 35-year-old local driver; and Ip, a 55-year-old local woman who also claimed to be unemployed.

According to Cheong, the Judiciary Police received reports from 11 victims between May and September, including 10 local residents and one non-resident worker (NRW). Their reported losses ranging from 136,000 patacas to 92 million patacas.

Cheong noted that the investigation found Tan had allegedly been involved in the scam since 2019. She had previously run a supermarket in the northern district and used products including ginseng, cordyceps (冬蟲夏草)*, and mooncakes to attract customers.

In the largest fraud case, the victim ordered 20,000 to 30,000 jars of cordyceps worth 92 million patacas, Cheong said.

Cheong said Tan provided small purported “profits” and delivered goods to build victims’ trust before employing several schemes. These included staging fake large-volume orders in WeChat groups with Ip, claiming that victims could make high returns through joint investments with friends and

relatives, and offering goods at low prices to persuade victims to place additional orders.

The suspects would subsequently delay or refuse to deliver the goods or issue refunds, defrauding supermarkets, retailers, and buying-agent businesses.

The investigation showed that the proceeds were deposited into eight Macau bank accounts before being transferred elsewhere. Nearly 50 million patacas were allegedly used by Tan for personal spending, while some of the money was transferred to unidentified mainland accounts with Iek’s assistance.

Police apprehended Tan and Ip at the Barrier Gate checkpoint on Monday and Tuesday respectively, and summoned Iek for questioning on Tuesday. Officers seized four smartphones during the investigation.

The suspects were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, each facing charges of fraud involving a considerable amount, money laundering, and organised crime membership.

Cheong added that the Judiciary Police will continue to trace the remaining criminal proceeds. ■

**Cordyceps is a prestigious tonic herb in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) used to tonify the kidney and lung meridians, boost vital energy (Qi), and restore overall stamina. Highly valued and expensive, it is prized for its health-boosting and immune-enhancing properties, making it both a popular luxury gift and a high-value commodity. - Gemini*



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the three hooded suspects, facing fraud, money laundering and organised crime charges, to a police van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday.

— Photo: Sherwin Hng

Weather expected to remain clear for Mid-Autumn Festival: SMG

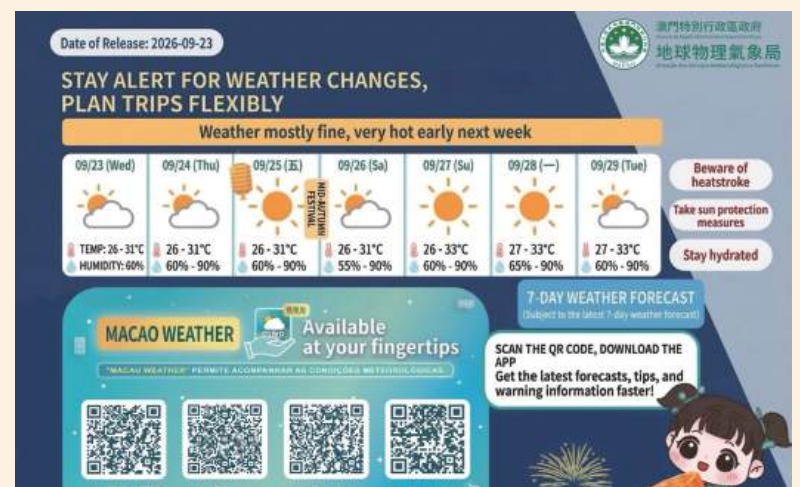
Khalet Vallo

Macau is expected to experience generally clear weather over the coming days, with relatively low cloud cover and good visibility on the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival tomorrow, according to a statement by the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) yesterday.

The local observatory said that the weather would remain generally fine from the coming days through the weekend under the influence of a high-pressure system aloft, with abundant sunshine and hot daytime temperatures, the statement said, adding that cloud cover was expected to be relatively low during the Mid-Autumn Festival, while skies at night should remain clear with good visibility, making conditions suitable for Moon viewing and watching the 34th Macau International Fireworks Display Contest.

The Mid-Autumn Festival in 2026 takes place tomorrow.

The statement reminded residents and visitors planning outdoor activities to take precautions against the heat, including using sun protection and drinking enough water, the statement noted.



This infographic provided by the local observatory yesterday shows its 7-Day Weather Forecast; translation from Chinese arranged by the Post.

Meanwhile, a tropical cyclone is developing over waters east of the Philippines and expected to gradually move towards waters near China’s Taiwan region early next week, the statement said.

According to forecasts from conventional numerical models and AI models, the system is more likely to turn northeast over waters east of Taiwan. However, its projected track remains uncertain, with some forecast scenarios indicating that the system could

move into the South China Sea around the National Day period, the statement noted.

The Chinese mainland’s National Day holiday period in 2026 runs from October 1 to October 7, forming the annual seven-day “Golden Week”.

Residents and visitors planning trips during the Mid-Autumn Festival and National Day holiday period are advised to monitor the bureau’s latest weather information and adjust their plans accordingly. ■

Govt launches 5,500 5-year car quotas for HK travel

Ida Cheong

The local government has launched 5,500 five-year regular quotas for private vehicles travelling between Macau and Hong Kong starting today until 6:00 p.m. on October 23 for applications by the general public, comprising 4,950 individual quotas and 550 corporate quotas, according to a statement from the Transport Bureau (DSAT) yesterday.

This application cycle features a fully digitised process and introduces a monthly batch-review, allocation, and notification system to enhance administrative efficiency, the statement said.

The statement noted that, aiming to streamline the application process and improve administrative efficiency, submissions and document resubmissions will be handled entirely through the “Macao One Account” platform for individual quotas and

the “Business and Associations Platform” for corporate quotas.

In support of this regular quota application process, the Hong Kong authorities will provide an online payment system for licensing fees, which are set at HK\$744 (766 patacas), eliminating the need for applicants to issue a cheque, the statement added.

The statement said that Hong Kong authorities will notify applicants on how to settle the licensing fees online according to application progress, adding that the Hong Kong authorities urge applicants to pay close attention to official notices and to submit documents and fees on schedule.

Interested individuals can submit their applications and pay the lucky draw participation fee (500 patacas) via “Macao One Account” and the “Business and Associations Platform” starting

today until 6:00 p.m. on October 23, the statement said. All lucky draw and quota fees are strictly non-refundable once paid.

The statement underscored that no changes to information provided by the applicants will be accepted once an expression of interest is submitted, and any missing or incorrect data entered by the applicant may result in disqualification from the lucky draw and quota allocation.

The lucky draw results will be announced on October 30. The quotas are valid for five years, with a fee of 1,500 patacas per quota. Successful applicants must comply with all relevant regulations, failing which their quotas may be suspended or revoked. Full details regarding application qualifications and procedures can be found on the Transport Bureau’s website at https://www.dsat.gov.mo/hzmb/car_cross.aspx. ■

Fala Chen stresses truth, says honesty is very important

Rui Pastorin

Fala Chen (陳法拉) is a name that is heard both in Asia and internationally.

In Hong Kong, Chengdu-born Chen has acted in a variety of TVB shows as well as films. In the US, she played recurring characters Jolene McCall in the 2020 HBO miniseries “The Undoing”, and Cynthia Keng in the comedy drama “Irma Vep” in 2022.

Her US film debut came in 2021 with the Marvel Cinematic Universe’s (MCU) “Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings”, where she portrayed Ying Li, a guardian of the mystical realm Ta Lo and the titular character’s mother. More recently, she played Dao Ming in the 2025 Netflix film “Ballad of a Small Player”, which is set in Macau, opposite Irish Actor Colin Farrell and Scottish actress Tilda Swinton.

Beyond acting, Chen, 44, has also directed and written two short films: “Passinger” in 2018 and this year’s “Bloodline”, which was part of the official selection of the Toronto International Film Festival.

Given her experiences acting, writing, and directing, Chen talked to the *Post* about some of the lessons she has learnt during an interview with Macau’s English-language media at The Londoner Macao on Tuesday, which marked the closing and awards ceremony of the Sands China-sponsored International Film Camp* (IFC), an initiative organised by the Asian Film Awards Academy that aims to nurture and empower the next generation of Asian filmmakers.

Chen, an IFC ambassador, noted that among the lessons she’s learnt as an actress, writer, and especially as a director, is honesty – with herself, decision making, and her own instincts.

“Sometimes people think the truth is hard to hear”, she said. “I find it the opposite. I think truth is the most transparent and the softest language that you can speak to someone. I think, as a director especially, I feel like honesty is very important”.

In terms of directing, Chen highlighted the value of being bold, which also extends to asking for help. “You need a lot of resources to direct and to make a film. And to really take that initiative and ask for help, you’ll be surprised how many people are willing to help you”.

When asked about the differences in how projects develop in Asia versus internationally, Chen noted that every film originates differently – whether from a spark of inspiration or collaborative discussions - so there is no single way to begin.

The key, she said, is to write down new ideas immediately and embrace multitasking rather than fixating on a single story. “It never hurts to put new



Actress, writer and director Fala Chen, who is also an ambassador for the Macau-based International Film Camp (IFC), poses beside the event banner after Tuesday’s interview at The Londoner Macao. – Photo: Rui Pastorin

ideas down,” she said. Developing multiple projects simultaneously allows filmmakers to remain open to fresh inspiration and ensures that if one concept stalls, it can mature over time while other ideas move forward.

Concluding her remarks, Chen said that several projects are in the works, among which are expanding her short film “Bloodline” into a feature film.

Moreover, on Macau and its role in creativity, she told the interviewers that she hopes there would be more international projects, film festivals, events like the IFC, and educational programmes in the city.

“I think Macau has so many advantages and resources in building the community, hopefully together with Hong Kong as a film centre of Asia. I really hope that I can be part of that change and evolution”.

*More about the IFC winners in an article tomorrow. Read more about the film camp on <https://www.macaupostdaily.com/news/29459>.

UTM DBA candidate wins Int’l wine tourism research grant

Rui Pastorin

The Macao University of Tourism (UTM) announced in a statement yesterday that Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) candidate Renita Huang Rongrong has garnered the 2026-2027 Great Wine Capitals (GWC) International Research Grant, which will provide funding for her research execution and final presentation at its annual conference.

The statement pointed out that Huang is one of two global recipients this academic year and was jointly mentored by Newcastle University’s Prof. Marianna Sigala, and DBA supervisor, UTM Prof. Eve Ren Lianping.

The statement said that the Great Wine Capitals Global Network is an international association uniting world-renowned

wine-producing regions, including Adelaide (Australia), Bordeaux (France), Florence (Italy) and Napa Valley (USA) with the grant annually presented to “foster cutting-edge research that bridges theoretical excellence with practical solutions for the global wine and tourism industries”.

The selection committee praised Huang’s proposal for its “exceptional originality, methodological rigour, and strategic alignment with the network’s global priorities”.

The funded project studies changing market dynamics among Chinese outbound wine tourists visiting GWC destinations, analysing who these consumers are and their behavioural shifts, the statement added.

The public university also congratulated Huang in the statement for her achievement. ■



This photo provided by the Macao University of Tourism (UTM) yesterday shows Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) candidate Renita Huang Rongrong (right) posing with her DBA supervisor, UTM Prof. Eve Ren Lianping.

François’ langur at Seac Pai Van Park dies at 22

Tony Wong

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) announced in a statement last night that a female François’ langur (黑葉猴 – “black leaf monkey”)* at Seac Pai Van Park recently passed away at the age of 22, following a natural decline in body functions due to advanced age, despite full efforts by the medical team to treat her.

The statement did not reveal the exact date of the monkey’s death.

Last night’s announcement came after the public display of the primate was suspended late last month after she became unwell.

Last night’s statement noted that the average lifespan of a François’ langur in the wild and in captivity is about 15 to 18 years, making this individual an exceptionally elderly specimen.

She was born in Flora Garden in 2004, relocated to the Primate Pavilion at Seac Pai Van Park following its opening in 2014, and moved to the park’s Pavilion of Rare Animals in 2025, the statement noted.

The statement said that the care team detected symptoms of respiratory and urogenital tract infections last month. They immediately initiated emergency medical procedures, placing her in a dedicated care area for round-the-clock monitoring, symptomatic treatment, and palliative care. Throughout this period, the medical team closely monitored her vital signs and did everything possible to provide the best care and treatment. However, owing to her advanced age and continuous organ failure, she ultimately passed away.

The statement said that the bureau deeply regrets the loss of this elderly François’ langur. Moving forward, the bureau will continue to advance rare wildlife conservation, strengthen species care and medical support systems, promote public science education on ecological protection, raise awareness of ecological conservation, and deliver professional, comprehensive, and high-quality care for all animals in the park.

The bureau said late last month that the female langur’s age of 22 was equivalent

to over 80 human years.

The bureau said at that time that the primate showed signs of decreased appetite and reduced activity. Following an examination by veterinary staff, the animal was provisionally diagnosed with respiratory and urinary tract infections, and was taking prescribed medication under an active treatment plan.

The bureau said late last month that with the aim of providing a quiet, comfortable environment for recovery and allowing closer monitoring by the care team, the bureau decided to temporarily move the monkey to the veterinary enclosure and remove her from public view.

The bureau noted that the species is listed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List and is a national Grade I key protected wild animal in China. ■

* The François’ langur is native to the limestone karst forests of southwestern China and northern Vietnam. Threatened by habitat fragmentation and poaching, wild populations are estimated at fewer than 2,000 individuals. – Gemini



This undated file photo downloaded from the website of the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows the now deceased François’ langur at Seac Pai Van Park.

China's higher-educated population reaches 270 million as universities expand enrollment, adjust programs

BEIJING — China now has 270 million people with a higher education background, or nearly one in five of its population, as the country expands higher education while adjusting its university system to changing demographics and evolving demand for talent, according to the Ministry of Education.

China's gross enrollment rate in higher education reached 61.3 percent in 2025, with total enrollment standing at 48.73 million, said Guo Peng, head of the Ministry of Education's development planning department, at a press conference.

According to official data, the number of people in the age group for higher education is expected to peak in 2032, underscoring the need to expand the overall supply of higher education resources and increase the supply of high-quality educational resources.

Against that backdrop, universities under China's "Double First-Class" initiative will expand undergraduate enrollment by 76,000 places from 2027 to 2030, Guo said. The initiative supports a select group of universities and academic disciplines with the goal of achieving world-class status.

The expansion will involve more than simply increasing enrollment, Guo said. Universities will adjust academic programs and improve the structure and quality of higher education to better

match the needs of national and regional socioeconomic development, as well as industry demand.

The country's outline plan for the development of the education sector during the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030) calls for expanding quality undergraduate enrollment and graduate training, with a focus on science, engineering, agriculture and medicine, while increasing the proportion of graduate-level education.

Guo said the government will provide greater support to emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, integrated circuits, biomedicine and new energy.

The government will also use central government funding and ultra-long special treasury bonds to support "Double First-Class" universities in building new campuses and upgrading basic facilities, including dormitories, cafeterias, sports facilities and laboratories, Guo said.

Despite a decline in the working-age population, China's total effective human resources are expected to remain at a high level over the next 10 to 15 years, initially rising slightly before edging down, said He Dan, head of the China Population and Development Research Center.

She said the trend highlights the advantages in human-resource quality brought by improvements in education and health sectors. — *Xinhua*

Motorcyclist, 37, dies after crashing into roadside barriers in Zone A



This photo shows the motorcycle at the accident scene next to a fire engine in Zone A in the early hours of yesterday. — Photo courtesy of TDM

Tony Wong

A 37-year-old male motorcyclist died in hospital yesterday after losing control of his vehicle and crashing into the roadside barriers in the Zone A new urban area, the Public Security Police (PSP) said in a statement.

Zone A, a new land reclamation area primarily being developed for public housing projects, is located between the peninsula's northeastern coast and the man-made island where the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) Macau checkpoint is located.

According to the PSP statement, the police received a report at 2:38 a.m. yesterday about the crash, which occurred on Avenida da Ponte Macau (澳門大橋大馬路). The motorcyclist, a local resident, lost control and crashed into the roadside barriers when he was travelling southbound in the direction of the Macau-Taipa Macao Bridge.

No other vehicles were involved in the accident.

The city's fourth sea-crossing bridge linking the Macau peninsula and Taipa has two entrances on the peninsula side — Zone A and the HZMB man-made island.

The Fire Services Bureau (CB) said yesterday that upon arrival at the scene, paramedics were unable to detect the rider's heartbeat, and he was not breathing. He suffered fractures of his right leg, lacerations on his right arm, and abrasions on his face. He was rushed to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre for emergency treatment.

The PSP statement said that the rider was pronounced dead at 3:03 a.m. after life-saving efforts failed.

The statement said that the police have completed gathering evidence at the accident scene and launched an investigation into the exact cause of the crash.

The police are urging witnesses to the accident to contact their Traffic Department on 2837 4214. ■

Americans' firsthand encounters offer fresh perspectives on China

Analysis by Yang Shilong, Vivien Liu

NEW YORK — Russell Craig Targove can start singing a Chinese song in New York and expect people around him to join in.

Nearly three decades ago and thousands of miles away in Serbia, Sanja Vasic encountered Chinese culture for the first time when a high school teacher wrote Chinese characters on a blackboard.

For both, seemingly casual encounters developed into lasting connections with China.

MUSIC OPENS A DOOR

In the early 1990s, Targove, a New York entertainer, began hosting karaoke nights at a Chinese restaurant owned by a businessman from China's Hong Kong. He soon started learning Chinese pop songs, marking the start of a decades-long connection with New York's Chinese community.

The Chinese songs opened a door beyond music. Through performances at community events and weddings, he became familiar with traditions ranging from tea ceremonies to wedding toasts.

One song that stayed with him was "The Moon Represents My Heart."

"Everybody knows it," he said. "I can start it, and then everybody joins me."

For Targove, music can create connections even when listeners do not share the same language.

"It's a beautiful thing to see people respect each other's culture," he said. "I am always an advocate for bringing those cultures together."

Chinese music has also reached broader audiences at major New York cultural venues, including Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center. Performances there have featured traditional instruments such as the erhu, pipa and guzheng.

At an August discussion hosted by the National Committee on US-China Relations on the growing visibility of Chinese cultural influence in the United States, Michael Berry, director of the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, said cultural influence does not necessarily follow a single, top-down path.

"The way it manifests is sometimes unpredictable," Berry said.

"When you touch something that maybe reminds you of your parents — 'Oh, my father used to love this song' — it has a bridge," Targove said.

FROM LANGUAGE TO LIVED EXPERIENCE

For Vasic, born in Serbia and now a US citizen, language was the doorway.

As a high school student in Serbia, she watched her English teacher write Chinese characters on the blackboard.

"Something clicked in me," she recalled in a recent interview with Xinhua. "I said, although I don't understand it, I'm going to learn it. I'm going to understand it."

Learning the language led her deeper into Chinese history and philosophy, including Confucian thought and Taoism.

"I think it became an integral part of who I am," she said.

Vasic also traveled extensively across China. Looking back, she said one of the most fascinating aspects of the country was "how it balanced between modernization and continuity."

When she first arrived in 1998, she remembers streets filled with bicycles and small private businesses alongside state-run stores. Mobile phones and digital technology had yet to become fixtures of everyday life.

"The most impressive thing is the transformation, and the scale and the speed," she said.

More recent American visitors have encountered that transformation from a different starting point.

Before New York photographer Delaney Masal first traveled to China, she expected the country she had long seen portrayed in American headlines — crowded, less developed and unwelcoming.

Instead, the experience "floored" her.

Traveling through east China's Zhejiang Province, Masal was surprised by the scale and bustle of Hangzhou and later by the coexistence of advanced technology with centuries-old towns and landscapes.

Joshua Cuppek, another first-time American visitor, arrived with a different expectation.

"I'd always imagined China would be busy and fast-paced, but everything about it — the culture, the landscapes — was calming, almost meditative in its own way," he said.

Such firsthand encounters have become more common as China has expanded visa-free travel. In the first half of 2026, foreign nationals made 17.82 million visa-free entries into China, up 30.6 percent year on year, according to China's National Immigration Administration.

For Vasic, such direct exposure matters.

Learning Chinese, she said, "really enriches your life in ways that people cannot imagine" and "really opens your eyes to the rest of the world."

A DIFFERENT IMAGE OF MODERN CHINA

Technology has created another point of contact.

Speaking at the same National Committee discussion, Shaoyu Yuan, a visiting assistant professor at New York University's Center for Global Affairs, said some young Americans are paying attention to aspects of everyday life in China that received relatively little attention in the United States in the past.

"Everything is about how fast the public transport is, how clean it is, and how developed the electric vehicles are, the mobile payments, the robotics. And China in that case becomes a comparison point," Yuan said.

Vasic has watched another part of that transformation over nearly three decades: Chinese companies moving from producing goods designed elsewhere toward developing their own technologies and products.

That change is also registering in American public opinion. Electric vehicles, batteries, drones, robotics, mobile payments and high-speed rail have become not only technology stories but also windows through which some Americans encounter contemporary China.

A 2026 survey by the Committee of 100 and NORC at the University of Chicago found that 59 percent of Americans favored increased cooperation between the United States and China.

For Vasic, the value of encountering another culture is ultimately more personal.

"We may all speak different languages. We may all have different cultures and different backgrounds," she said. "But we all care for the same things, like our family, our children, our meaningful job, health and hope for a better future."

"I fell in love with the language and the culture, and I never regretted the decision," she said. "I'm still learning." — *Xinhua*

Philippine Senate lowers threshold to oust VP Duterte

MANILA – The Philippine Senate approved yesterday a lower threshold of votes needed to find Vice President Sara Duterte guilty at her impeachment trial, potentially making it easier to execute her ouster.

Senators voted 13-1, with six Duterte allies abstaining, that the constitutionally required two-thirds guilty verdict by “all members of the Senate” refers only to those “capable of participating”.

At least four senators loyal to the vice president, including two now in jail, are now absent from the impeachment proceedings.

Yesterday, presiding judge Senator Francis Escudero said the decision, which effectively lowers the number of guilty votes needed from 16 to 14, would be treated as the “controlling ruling” going forward.

“While the chair takes exception to this decision, the chair nonetheless accepts it as a judgment of this court and is bound to give it effect,” said Escudero, who was the sole “no” vote.

Duterte’s lawyers can still appeal the lower threshold at the Supreme Court.

“We accept the decision without waiving our right to go up to the Supreme Court.... From today until the (verdict), many things can still happen,” said Duterte defence counsel Michael Poa.

Vice presidential spokesperson Paolo Panelo called yesterday’s vote an attempt at “changing the constitution”.

“Their aim is to manufacture a conviction. They cannot get 16, so they want to lower (it) to convict VP Sara,” he said.

The House of Representatives impeached Duterte on May 11 on allegations of graft, corruption, bribery and an alleged assassination plot against one-time ally President Ferdinand Marcos.

Should the Senate find her guilty, she will be stripped of the vice presidency and permanently barred from elected office.

Two of Duterte’s allies are currently in prison on corruption charges and another is hiding while sought on an International Criminal Court warrant.

A fourth, who is out of the country seeking medical treatment, is under investigation.

But they are not alone. Five other senators in the Duterte camp are currently the subject of government probes.

Cleve Arguelles of pollster WR Numero told AFP ahead of the vote that “given the pressure Malacañang (the presidential palace) appears to be exerting on Duterte allies in the Senate, the working expectation is that the administration will continue trying to secure 16 votes”.

Arguelles added he believed there was a “strong likelihood” that number could be reached even if the lowered threshold made it unnecessary.

Marcos has repeatedly denied having any influence on the impeachment process. – AFP



Philippines' Alexandra Eala attends a meet-and-greet session with fans ahead of the WTA Singapore Tennis Open in Singapore yesterday. – AFP

Malaysia furore after Najib wins conditional house arrest

Isaac Chong

KUALA LUMPUR – A conditional royal pardon letting former prime minister Najib Razak serve the rest of his jail sentence under house arrest has ignited a new row surrounding the US\$4.5-billion 1MDB scandal.

Critics say Najib should remain behind bars, while supporters have rallied around the former leader and launched a campaign to help him pay a fine tied to his transfer to house arrest.

Najib, 73, was jailed in 2022 for his role in one of the largest-ever global plunders of a sovereign wealth fund, the now-defunct 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB).

On Friday, King Sultan Ibrahim granted Najib’s request to complete the remainder of his six-year sentence under house arrest – provided he pays a 50-million-ringgit (US\$12 million) fine.

Najib is also appealing a separate 15-year prison term in another 1MDB-related case.

Prosecutors say about US\$4.5 billion was siphoned from the state fund in the 2010s, triggering investigations from Malaysia to the United States.

The scandal helped bring down the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), ending the party’s six-decade grip on power in 2018.

Yet Najib remains a popular figure among his base and UMNO’s grassroots supporters.

‘Mockery of the law’

“How can a convicted felon with more cases awaiting trial be allowed house arrest?” said James Chow, a 49-year-old entrepreneur.

“It’s a waste of time and money and a mockery of the law,” he told AFP.

Shyam Priah, 52, chief executive of a non-profit organisation, said she respected the king’s “constitutional prerogative to grant a pardon”.

But she questioned efforts to raise money for Najib’s fine.

“Seeing ordinary Malaysians being mobilised to contribute 10 ringgit towards a 50 million ringgit fine for a former prime

minister raises a bigger question for me about our priorities as a society,” she told AFP.

“Ten ringgit can mean a meal for someone who is struggling,” she said.

But Najib’s supporters welcomed the king’s decision.

“The supporters who love Najib have been looking forward to the moment he would be granted house arrest,” Radiaa Rashid, 68, told AFP.

“We miss Najib Razak. Even though he can’t be released, at least he’ll be at home with his family, with his grandchildren and children,” said supporter Suzzalina Anura, 43.

Local media reported donations topped one million ringgit by Monday after the campaign was launched, although some critics responded by contributing as little as one sen (0.01 ringgit) in protest.

‘Difficult position’

The episode has also highlighted UMNO’s ongoing struggle to balance loyalty to its former leader with efforts to move beyond the scandal before the next general elections due by February 2028.

Bridget Welsh, an expert on Malaysian politics at the University of Nottingham Malaysia says UMNO’s fundraising initiative has put the party in a “difficult position”.

On one hand, the party must show support for Najib and reassure traditional supporters. On the other, it must appeal to younger voters who tend to have a far harsher view of corruption.

“The house arrest serves to build party unity, but it comes at the cost of outreach for the party, as it speaks to the legacy baggage the party still carries,” she told AFP.

She said fundraising “within some traditional supporters... is seen as important given that Najib’s accounts are believed to be frozen”.

Yet the campaign risked pushing away younger voters and those in the political centre.

“With younger voters and those in the middle ground, this is alienating, seen as a party not willing to admit mistakes,” Welsh said. – AFP

Meta acts against 3.7 million scammers’ accounts with Singapore police help

SINGAPORE – Meta has disrupted more than 3.7 million scam-linked accounts, pages and other content this year based on information provided by the Singapore police, the company said yesterday.

The social media giant said the Singapore Police Force (SPF) has been helping Meta’s investigators “identify and dismantle entire ecosystems of scammers” through an information-sharing collaboration in place over the past two years.

Between January and June, Meta removed more than 113,000 entities and pages related to fraud and scams on Facebook and Instagram, company executives said at a media briefing.

In June, Meta said it disrupted more than 33,600 entities and pages linked to scammers who were trying to take advantage the upcoming

school holidays when families are rushing to look at travel websites for good deals.

And in July, Meta took action against more than 3.6 million entities and pages, the big majority of which were “shell pages”, or those that have no content and are not in active use, but could still be acquired by scammers for their future activities.

Meta did not provide comparative figures.

As scammers operate across different platforms and in varying countries, Meta alone does not have a full view of the problem.

“Scammers count on the fact that no single organisation sees the full picture. What we have built with the Singapore Police Force changes that,” said Daryl Poon, director of law enforcement outreach for the Asia Pacific at Meta.

Information given by the police “helps us identify the threats we might not see on our own,” he said.

“Our ability to act at scale means these networks can be dismantled before they reach more people,” he said.

The collaboration with SPF is a “model which we want to keep building on here and across the region,” he added.

Clara Koh, director of public policy for Southeast Asia, said scammers are now operating at an industrial scale and are using artificial intelligence “to mass produce fake profiles”, fabricate imagery and generate offensive malicious code.

Meta “is continuing to invest in building the defences across our platforms and getting to violating scam content quickly, especially before anyone sees them”, she said.

– AFP

Myanmar’s leader says ‘lenient’ on Suu Kyi: report

YANGON – Myanmar’s President Min Aung Hlaing said in an interview published yesterday he has been “extremely lenient” on Aung San Suu Kyi, who he ousted and jailed in 2021.

Min Aung Hlaing ordered the military putsch that toppled the Nobel Peace Prize laureate’s democratic government, claiming she won power through massive voter fraud in elections the previous year.

Suu Kyi remains detained on charges rights groups say were confected to return power to the military, which has historically ruled Myanmar since independence.

“I have been extremely lenient toward her,” Min Aung Hlaing said, according to an interview with US magazine *Time*.

“We made every possible

effort to prevent the situation from reaching this point.”

Min Aung Hlaing retired as military chief to become civilian president in April.

He has since been on a diplomatic push to end Myanmar’s international pariah status, but many nations remain concerned about the 81-year-old Suu Kyi.

Analysts say Min Aung Hlaing is using the prospect of loosening her detention to entice countries into engaging.

Just days before he made a landmark trip to Thailand in August, his office released rare photos showing Suu Kyi meeting with a senior Red Cross official.

The possibility of an amnesty for Suu Kyi “depends on her”, the president told *Time*, but hinted the

situation may change if “grounds for reconsideration emerge on our part”.

Min Aung Hlaing personally ordered Suu Kyi be moved from jail to house arrest in the capital Naypyidaw in April, as he prepared to make his push for international recognition.

The December-January election installing Min Aung Hlaing was tightly controlled by his junta, sidelined Suu Kyi’s party and punished dissenters with prison time.

“There are various forms of democracy,” Min Aung Hlaing said in the *Time* interview.

“There is American democracy, there is European democracy. I will ensure that Myanmar achieves a democratic system that truly aligns with our own culture, customs, and traditions.” – AFP/MPD

Cambodia's ex-leader Hun Sen complains of 'constant' money demands

PHNOM PENH – Cambodia's former leader Hun Sen, who in his nearly four decades in power cultivated an ever-widening system of patronage, has complained about receiving "constant" requests online for money and assistance.

"I find myself unhappy. This is because I have received nearly 20 messages via Telegram and WhatsApp" in a single day, he wrote in a social media post on Tuesday.

"Some requests are for in-person meetings, while others detail family hardships and specifically ask for money to buy houses (or) motorcycles (sometimes two at a time).

"Some requests are phrased vaguely – asking for 'transportation' – but clearly imply a car, as the requester already owns a motorcycle."

Hun Sen stepped down as prime minister in 2023, handing power to his son Hun Manet after nearly 40 years leading the Southeast Asian country, during which he created a class of loyal elites, according to researchers and rights watchdogs.

In his social media post, he noted that four individuals requested "tens of thousands of dollars" on Tuesday alone for houses, vehicles and tuition for their children.

These costs "far exceed what I paid when my own children studied abroad", he said.

Hun Sen, who has been pictured in recent years wearing luxury Swiss watches, is still president of the Senate and remains an influential figure in national politics.

But he appeared to head off any suggestion he could influence his son, saying he had "very little contact" with Hun Manet, who as prime minister was "extremely busy".

The former leader said it was not just the financial requests that irked him, but the "constant intrusion on my time".

Hun Sen was Asia's longest serving leader when he stepped down, after crushing virtually all opposition – a strategy continued by his son, monitors say.

– AFP



Prime Minister of Bhutan Tshering Tobgay speaks during the 81st session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly at UN Headquarters on Tuesday in New York City. World leaders have gathered in New York for the annual session of the United Nations General Assembly, with this year's global issues ranging from the threat of artificial intelligence to the continued wars in Ukraine and Gaza.

– AFP

6 drown in river during immersion ritual at tribal festival in India's Jharkhand

NEW DELHI - At least six people drowned in two separate incidents during an immersion ritual at a tribal festival in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand, local media reports said yesterday.

The incidents took place in Palamu district, about 176 km northwest of Ranchi, the capital city of Jharkhand.

"Six people, including four minors, drowned in two separate incidents in Koel river in Palamu district on Wednesday during the ceremonial immersion of tree branches worshipped at the tribal

festival Karam," a local newspaper quoting a police official said. "Five of the deaths were reported in Bokaya village and the other in Nani Jharia hamlet."

Karam is one of the biggest tribal festivals celebrated in Jharkhand. Karam Dali immersion marks the final ritual of the Karam festival, a major harvest and nature festival celebrated by tribal and farming communities.

The festival is also celebrated in parts of Odisha, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Assam, and Bihar.

– Xinhua

Cambodia no 'safe haven' for cyberscams, PM says

PHNOM PENH – Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet told an anti-fraud summit yesterday that his country would never be a "safe haven" for cyberscams, as international partners touted law enforcement successes but warned more must be done.

Southeast Asia, especially Cambodia and war-torn Myanmar, 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 will never be a safe haven for online scams," Hun Manet told a conference against online scams organised by his government in the capital Phnom Penh.

He said Cambodian authorities had "completely dismantled all light-scale scam compounds" in a high-profile crackdown launched last year.

He denied the move was a "public relations campaign",

saying it was focused on "permanently eradicating criminal networks and preventing their re-emergence".

Cambodia acted under pressure from key ally China as well as the United States, after years of accusations that it allowed scam centres to thrive, generating billions of dollars in illicit profits annually.

But researchers say scammers have dispersed to smaller, lower-profile locations, while in many cases centres were given advance warning of raids.

Multi-billion-dollar industry

Delphine Schantz, regional representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), hailed Cambodia's efforts but said "more can be done and needs to be done" at national, regional and international levels.

Yang Weilin, Chinese vice minister of public security, also praised Cambodia's cooperation with Beijing, saying "no country

can stay immune, or tackle the problem single-handedly".

Yet "we must be sober-minded that the breeding ground for telecom fraud has not been fully rooted out", he told the conference.

FBI official Stephen Flores said law enforcement partnerships needed to be based on "trust and shared sacrifice".

The United States 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.

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".

Analysts say elite protection networks and the financial and physical infrastructure of the scam industry remains intact, raising concerns that operators can regroup.

– AFP

Sri Lanka hands 220-year jail terms to 15 convicted of Easter bombings

Amal Jayasinghe

COLOMBO – Sri Lanka's High Court on Tuesday handed 220-year jail terms to 15 men convicted of direct involvement 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, including 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, but all were each handed 220-year sentences. Nine others were acquitted.

The court also ordered that all property and other assets of the convicts be confiscated.

The men had been accused of aiding and abetting the suicide bombers who struck three luxury hotels and three churches on April 21, 2019. It was the worst terror attack against civilians in the history of the South Asian nation.

Local media had speculated that the convicts 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, which came at the end of the five-year trial.

"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.

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.

The dead included 45 foreigners, including citizens of Australia, Bangladesh, Britain,

China, Denmark, India, Japan, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States.

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 has dominated Sri Lankan politics for nearly two decades, but its camp has rejected allegations of state involvement in the bombings.

– AFP

Iranian airlines cancel flights as US sanctions hit

TEHRAN — Iranian airlines were forced to cancel some international flights yesterday after the US tightened sanctions on Iran's aviation industry in a new effort to cripple its economy.

Georgia and Azerbaijan have officially confirmed suspending flights, and a travel agent in Tehran told AFP that flights to Baghdad, Muscat and Qatar were also halted, though routes to other destinations remained available, including China.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent announced the new measures on Monday as part of an earlier threat to impose "economic D-Day" on Iran, an attempt to force it into submission following nearly seven months of war.

But Iran's aviation sector has already been a target of sanctions

for years, and it remains to be seen which other countries will comply.

Yesterday, the head of Iran's top national security body threatened reciprocal action against those that do.

Even after the new sanctions took effect on Wednesday, a flight from Tehran operated by Mahan Air, one of Iran's biggest carriers, landed in Guangzhou, according to tracking data from FlightRadar24.

China said on Tuesday that it opposed the US sanctions, calling them illegal. A flight to Shanghai was also due to depart yesterday, according to Tehran's international airport.

Some flights to Istanbul were also scheduled, though others had been cancelled, the travel agent in Tehran told AFP.

"The situation is unstable and we are no longer selling tickets

for the time being for fear of cancellations," the agent said, requesting anonymity.

A Mahan flight from Kabul was also expected to arrive in Tehran. According to the website for Tehran's international airport, other connections to Turkey and Armenia remained possible using smaller Iranian airlines, including Vareshe.

Flights to Najaf in Iraq and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were also scheduled.

Bessent had vowed on Monday to "shut down" Iranian carriers, saying anyone doing business with them "will be knocked out of the dollar system".

Mohsen Rezaei, the head of Iran's supreme national security council, warned neighbouring countries not to comply.

"If a country cooperates with or

embarks on adventures with the United States, its airports will no longer be able to operate flights" to Iran, he said in an interview with state TV.

Pilgrims

Iranian media also reported cancellations, with the Tasnim news agency on Tuesday citing a civil aviation spokesman as saying that Baghdad and Muscat airports "will no longer accept" Iranian flights.

The agency added that "other international flights, including Istanbul, will operate as scheduled".

According to Tasnim, Iran's aviation authorities were in talks to reroute Baghdad flights to Najaf, a major destination for Iranian pilgrims.

Yesterday, the agency said its correspondent in Najaf had reported Iranian flights to the city were

running as normal.

It quoted a source at the airport as saying no order had been received from Iraqi authorities to halt flights.

While the Iraqi government has not announced plans to enforce the ban, several sources including a senior government official told AFP that Baghdad would comply with the US measures.

The prospect of a suspension of flights between the two countries has sparked concerns among some Iraqi travel agents, with one in Najaf, Haidar Shamaa, saying "most travel companies in the city depend on booking flights" to Iranian airports.

Several travel agencies said panicked clients were calling for updates and were considering switching to land routes, which would mean much longer journeys. — AFP

Golan will remain Syrian, vows President al-Sharaa at UN

Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa insisted at the United Nations yesterday that the Golan Heights is Syrian land, dismissing Colombia's recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the strategic plateau.

Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria in the Six Day War of 1967 and annexed the territory in 1981.

The United States had been the only country to recognize this annexation until Colombia's new hard-right, US-aligned government in August recognized Israel's claim over the Golan.

The United Nations maintains that the plateau is Syrian territory under Israeli military occupation.

"Any attempts that violate our sovereignty, violate international

law, will be stopped. Golan will remain Syrian territories," al-Sharaa said at the UN General Assembly in New York.

In July UN Secretary-General António Guterres reiterated that the Golan Heights were part of Syria, describing Israeli occupation as "totally unacceptable."

Israel's ambassador Danny Danon said yesterday "this is what a speech translated from Turkish looks like. But no speech will change reality... the Golan Heights will always be part of Israel."

Al-Sharaa also used his second turn at the UN rostrum to denounce repeated Israeli strikes on his country since the fall of the dictator Bashar al-Assad.

"Israel is launching attacks against Syria. There have been

500 air strikes, more than 1,200 incursions, and 300 detentions. This is at odds with the orientation we're seeing at global level," he said.

"It is reminiscent of an era that we thought was long gone."

But he held out hope that despite repeated "aggressions" by Israel, "the opportunity for peace and security is available to those who wish to live in peace — a just peace that maintains the rights of all."

During a discussion at the Atlantic Council on Tuesday, al-Sharaa said Syria wanted a peaceful solution with Israel and that negotiations between the two countries had resolved nearly 90 percent of the outstanding issues needed for a security agreement. — AFP



A man dressed as a joker performs for children on the first day of the start of their school year at the Latin Patriarchate School built inside the premises of the Holy Family Church in the Zeitoun neighbourhood of Gaza City on Tuesday. — AFP

Israeli election committee moves to disqualify Arab party, candidates

JERUSALEM — Israel's electoral committee voted yesterday to disqualify a party representing Palestinians in Israel that could play a kingmaking role after next month's elections, as well as two candidates.

The decisions are not final and will have to be approved by the Supreme Court, which in the past has overturned most such disqualifications.

Responding to a request from members of the ruling coalition, the Central Elections Committee said it would not allow on the ballot the United Arab List, which in 2021 joined a short-lived coalition that removed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from power.

The Arab group recently took the unprecedented step of recruiting a Jewish candidate, Yoav Segalovitz, who during the 2021-22 government was credited with improving safety in Arab-Israeli areas.

Arab Israelis, descendants of Palestinians who stayed after the State of Israel's creation in 1948, make up about 20 percent

of the population.

Until the 2021 election, they had stayed out of government coalitions.

Israel's Central Elections Committee is made up of lawmakers with seats attributed based on the share of the general electoral vote each party holds.

The committee also voted to disqualify sitting member of parliament Ofer Cassif and Sami Abu Shehadeh, who leads the left-wing Palestinian Balad party and served in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, from 2019 to 2022.

The committee said in a statement that it had based its decision to disqualify Abu Shehadeh's candidacy on two grounds: "Denying the existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, and supporting the armed struggle of an enemy state or terrorist organisation against the State of Israel."

The request to disqualify Abu Shehadeh was submitted by far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, who criticised his response to the October 7,

2023 attack by Hamas, the deadliest ever on Israel.

In a video statement reacting to the decision, Abu Shehadeh said he would not back down.

"This development will not scare us," he said.

"Racists are afraid of equality, and Ben Gvir and Netanyahu are afraid of the Arab vote in this electoral battle."

Adalah, a legal group that represents Israel's Arab minority and represents Cassif and Abu Shehadeh, said there was "no legal basis" for the decisions to disqualify them.

The general elections will be held on October 27, with polls showing Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister, in a tight race to stay in power.

In previous elections, the Supreme Court invalidated most attempts at disqualifications, but in 2019 it barred far-right candidate Michael Ben-Ari from running, overturning the Central Elections Committee's decision to approve his candidacy for the first time. — AFP

US-backed Board of Peace unveils US\$2.5 billion Gaza recovery plan

NEW YORK — US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace proposed a US\$2.45 billion Gaza recovery plan yesterday at a meeting of its members and stakeholders, in an effort meant to span over six months.

But the presentation in New York comes as world leaders like French President Emmanuel Macron and Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan have taken aim at the humanitarian situation in Gaza this week, calling for action to end the conflict with Israel.

Top officials are gathered in the city this week for the UN General Assembly.

Hamas militants launched a deadly attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, triggering a massive response. Since then, the Palestinian territory has been devastated by Israeli airstrikes.

Nickolay Mladenov, the high representative for Gaza of the Board of Peace, urged for backing of its plan.

But he acknowledged that discussions with Israel are not easy ahead of elections in the country, noting that conditions are "more politically sensitive."

"Given the complexity of what we're dealing with, I think we're making, slowly and steadily, progress," he insisted.

Also present at yesterday's gathering were Trump's roving envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner.

The proposal involves 66 projects, covering temporary housing, debris recovery and infrastructure like public transport, amid other efforts towards economic recovery.

The plan also envisions demilitarisation in Gaza, meaning for Hamas to give up its weapons, and military pullback on the Israeli front.

Despite a US-brokered ceasefire in October 2025, Israel has continued its airstrikes and restricted entry of equipment that international groups say is required for the territory's reconstruction to begin.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently said it controls 60 percent of the Gaza Strip.

Trump is the chairman of the Board of Peace, which was initially designed to oversee a Gaza truce and the territory's reconstruction following the war between Hamas and Israel.

UN figures show that by October 2025, Israeli strikes had left 84 percent of all structures damaged or destroyed.

Israel has insisted that it must eliminate threats from Hamas, which led the unprecedented attack.

The board yesterday noted that damage across Gaza is estimated at US\$35.2 billion, with its recovery plan calling for some US\$71.4 billion. — AFP

Dutch to resume Eurovision with new broadcaster

Richard Carter

THE HAGUE – The Netherlands will participate in next year's Eurovision Song Contest after all, as its public broadcaster said yesterday it would step in to replace a company that had pulled out over the Gaza conflict.

"The Dutch public broadcaster will once again take part in the Eurovision Song Contest from 2027 onwards with a Dutch participant. An independent team of experts will carefully guide the process surrounding the act," said the NPO (National Public Broadcaster).

In August, the AVROTROS broadcaster, which selected the Dutch entry and broadcast the show, had pulled out, saying the event can "no longer be considered neutral" given divisions over the Gaza war.

"The EBU [European Broadcasting Union that runs Eurovision] has since taken significant steps regarding the rules of the Eurovision Song Contest," said the NPO.

Acknowledging the contest provokes "mixed feelings" in the Netherlands, NPO said it had "explicitly asked the EBU to once again make the unifying character of the festival an important part of the event."

Jurre Bosman, NPO's director of media, said in a statement: "It is important that, as a public broadcaster, we remain part of this unifying European event at this moment in particular."

The contest has recently been hit by a wave of boycotts over Israel's participation, in protest at the country's deadly offensive in Gaza, which was sparked by Hamas militant attacks in 2023.

In August, organisers announced they were excluding any country involved in an armed conflict from

hosting the competition.

But when it pulled out, AVROTROS had said those changes did "not provide sufficient confidence that the independent and neutral character of the Eurovision Song Contest has been restored".

'Bangaranga'

Next year's contest, the world's biggest live televised music event, will take place on May 15 in Bulgaria's Black Sea city of Burgas.

It will be the first time the Balkan nation has hosted the contest, coming after Bulgarian singer Darina Yotova, known as Dara, won this year's contest in the Austrian capital Vienna with the catchy floor-filler "Bangaranga".

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

The 2026 competition was watched by 131 million viewers, down by 35 million on the year before after five countries boycotted it over Israel's participation.

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

The Dutch took part in the very first Eurovision Song Contest back in 1956, and have won on five occasions.

Their most recent winner was Duncan Laurence, whose song Arcade won the contest in 2019, going on to top charts globally.

It became the first Eurovision entry to reach one billion streams on Spotify, according to the Eurovision website. –AFP

New documents revive suspicions over Hitler's role in niece's death: report

BERLIN – Newly unearthed records in a Munich archive have cast doubt on Adolf Hitler's whereabouts at the time of his niece's suspicious 1931 death, according to magazine *Der Spiegel*.

Hitler's unusually close and controlling relationship with his niece, Geli Raubal, has long been the subject of speculation and rumour, and newspaper reports at the time suggested that Hitler may have played a role in her death.

Raubal died from a gunshot wound to the chest from a pistol belonging to Hitler, in what was officially determined to be a suicide.

According to the official account, Hitler's personal servant, Georg Winter, discovered the 23-year-old Raubal's body on the floor inside her locked room in Hitler's apartment in Munich on September 19, 1931, a Saturday.

Hitler, who at the time was a prominent far-right extremist

but had not yet seized power in Germany, was away in the city of Nuremberg that day, giving him what appeared to be a strong alibi.

But according to an article in *Der Spiegel*, historian Harald Sander recently discovered documents in archives in Munich casting doubt on that account – and raising questions about whether Nazi sympathisers in the police may have falsified records to protect Hitler.

Two death notices and an entry in an official local death registry all put the date of the discovery of Raubal's body to September 18, a full day earlier, when Hitler was known to still have been in Munich.

Strange relationship

Hitler's relationship with Raubal, the daughter of his half-sister Angela Raubal, was the subject of intense speculation. Some contemporaries believed that Hitler had been abusive or had pursued a

sexual relationship with his relative.

Hitler reportedly strictly controlled nearly every aspect of Raubal's life after she moved to Munich in 1927.

She reportedly quarrelled intensely with Hitler just before her death after Hitler refused to allow her to move to Vienna.

Sander told the magazine that the discrepancy in the documents over the date of Raubal's death may point towards a cover-up by the police, though there is no decisive proof.

Days after Raubal's death, a left-wing Munich newspaper reported that Hitler had been in a heated argument with his niece, that injuries had been found on her body and that Nazi officials held crisis meetings regarding how to present the matter to the public.

Other newspapers suggested that Hitler might have had Raubal killed – or killed her himself – though the Nazi leader publicly denied those allegations in a statement. –AFP

Milei tells the UN it is a 'useless organisation'

NEW YORK – Argentine President Javier Milei attacked the UN in a speech to the world body yesterday, calling it a "useless organisation" filled with "arrogant parasites."

The firebrand Milei, one of US President Donald Trump's closest Latin American allies, has repeatedly used the UN platform to criticise global governance and its "woke" agenda.

He accused the United Nations yesterday of having failed in its duty to guarantee collective security and human rights, saying it had instead allowed "chaos, violence and international terrorism" to flourish.

The UN, he said, "has become a useless organisation, serving only to feed a caste of fatally arrogant parasites disguised as well-intentioned bureaucrats."

He accused the organisation of "looking the other way" on Argentina's claim to the Falkland Islands, a British overseas territory which Argentines



Argentina's President Javier Milei addresses the 81st United Nations General Assembly at the United Nations Headquarters in New York yesterday.

–AFP

refer to as Las Malvinas and claim as part of their land.

Argentina has accused Britain of flouting a UN resolution ordering both parties to desist from unilateral action in the islands, over which the

two countries fought a war in 1982.

"Those who follow the rules receive no reward for doing so, while those who break them face no repercussions whatsoever," Milei said. –AFP

OSCE says monitors not invited to US elections for first time

VIENNA – European security body OSCE said yesterday its monitors have not been invited to the US midterm elections in November and called the unprecedented decision "regrettable".

"These will be the first US federal elections since the OSCE began observing in the country for which the OSCE has not received an invitation," the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights said in a press release.

It said the decision was "not in line with the commitments undertaken by all OSCE participating states". The US is an OSCE member.

"After more than two decades in which the United States has welcomed OSCE observers to its federal elections, this decision

represents a significant departure from an established democratic practice," the OSCE parliamentary assembly president Pere Joan Pons said.

"I deeply regret the decision," he added.

Since 2002, the OSCE has observed 12 federal elections in the United States, including six midterm elections.

Founded in 1975 to ease tensions between the East and the West during the Cold War, the Vienna-based OSCE counts 57 members from Europe, central Asia and North America.

It observes elections and has dispatched monitoring missions to conflict zones.

US President Donald Trump's administration, critical of how the OSCE handles its mission, has urged the OSCE to downsize its budget. –AFP

Germany sets out plan to abandon fossil fuels by 2045

FRANKFURT AM MAIN – Germany yesterday unveiled a roadmap for abandoning fossil fuels by 2045, making Europe's largest economy only the third country to have done so after France and the Netherlands.

Though almost 200 countries pledged at COP28 climate negotiations in 2023 to wean off fossil fuels, few have presented concrete plans, Germany's environment ministry said.

Germany's measures include building up renewable power, greater reliance on electric cars and the application of European Union carbon trading schemes to drive

industrial polluters away from fossil fuels, the ministry statement added.

German Environment Minister Carsten Schneider told the UN General Assembly that the Middle East war showed why fossil fuels should be dumped.

"It is not just extreme weather events around the world that demonstrate how urgently we need to do more to protect the climate," he said.

"If the situation in the Strait of Hormuz determines whether people can still afford their daily commute to work, that is not a good state of affairs," he added.

Fentje Jacobsen, a climate policy advisor at the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), said the roadmap largely restated existing initiatives without adding "new ideas or additional ambitions".

"The current government is meanwhile planning to rely less on renewables and more on gas," she added.

Energy Minister Katherina Reiche favours building new gas-fired power plants to help stabilise the electricity grid and help offset the intermittency of renewable sources like wind and solar. –AFP

Lula warns of UN credibility crisis, urges multilateralism

NEW YORK – Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on Tuesday opened the general debate of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) for the 10th time, calling for multilateralism, dialogue and respect for national sovereignty amid rising geopolitical tensions and armed conflicts.

“The UN is failing in one of its most important missions: to rid humanity of the scourge of war. Its credibility has never been lower. Its ability to protect the most vulnerable, those who have no army or arsenals, has never been so weak,” Lula said in his opening speech at the 81st session of the UNGA.

Calling the current situation “the most critical moment for the United Nations,” Lula said geopolitical tensions threaten to transform regional conflicts into “a conflagration of global proportions.”

“We are all held hostage by the inaction of the Security Council for failing to fulfill its role,” he said. “I’m no stranger to the realities of power, but concessions to the law of the stronger have surpassed all limits.”

“War is not the continuation of politics by other means. It’s the complete breakdown of politics in an interdependent world,” he said, adding that leadership means reconciling national interests with those of humanity.

Lula said the international community faces choices between “multilateralism or unilateralism, democracy or extremism, sovereignty or subordination”.

On the Ukraine crisis, the Brazilian president called for a diplomatic solution, saying that “there will be no winners on the battlefield.” “Diplomacy is the only option,” he said.

The Group of Friends for Peace, an initiative launched by China and Brazil, shows that “there are forces in the international community willing



Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva speaks during the 81st United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on Tuesday. – AFP

to work towards dialogue,” Lula said.

Turning to Latin America and the Caribbean, Lula called for respect for the sovereignty of countries in the region and opposed dividing the world into spheres of influence.

“Brazil does not fit in anyone’s backyard,” he said. “We need partners with a positive agenda that fosters development. Ideological differences should not hinder greater integration among neighbours.”

Lula said the Venezuelan people “deserve to define their own destiny”. He also called for political participation by the opposition in Nicaragua. On Cuba, Lula said the economic and energy embargo on the country is a “collective punishment” imposed on 10 million people.

On the situation in the Middle East, Lula reiterated support for a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, saying that illegal settlements in the West Bank are making such a solution increasingly unviable.

He also said that the Strait of Hormuz “has become a battleground, when it should have remained a vital passage for international trade,” warning that families are paying for the rising prices for fuel, fertilizers and food around the world.

Lula also called for strengthened international cooperation in fighting organised crime, addressing climate change and managing emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI).

On climate change, he said Brazil will continue to reduce deforestation and advance the decarbonisation of its economy, while stressing that the country’s natural resources should benefit the Brazilian people.

“Our natural wealth belongs to the Brazilian people, and it is for their benefit that it will be exploited,” Lula said.

He also called for regulation of Big Tech and AI, warning against the development of technologies without rules, transparency or ethical boundaries.

– AFP

Trump met with Venezuela’s interim leader at UN

NEW YORK – US President Donald Trump and Venezuela’s interim leader Delcy Rodríguez met in person for the first time on Tuesday and discussed topics like energy and security, she said.

Rodríguez is the first Venezuelan head of state to visit since deposed president Nicolás Maduro was captured in a US military raid in January.

Rodríguez described the meeting on the sidelines of the assembly in the US as “historic” in a message on X, posted alongside a photo of the two leaders smiling.

She said they discussed “strengthening the bilateral relationship between our countries and moving forward with a cooperation agenda in strategic areas such as energy, mining, and security.”

Several US officials attended the meeting in addition to Trump including top advisor Stephen Miller, chief of staff Susie Wiles, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, a White House official said.

Rodríguez was Venezuela’s vice president under Maduro, but has so far cooperated with Washington’s demands, including granting US access to Venezuela’s vast oil reserves, the largest in the world.

Trump mentioned Venezuela during his address at the UN on Tuesday, saying: “When you add the United States and Venezuela together, we have more than 60 percent of the oil in the world.”

“To the victor belong the spoils,” he added.

– AFP



This handout photo released by the Venezuelan Presidency press office shows Venezuela’s interim President Delcy Rodríguez and US President Donald Trump posing during a meeting in New York on Tuesday. Rodríguez, described her meeting with Trump in New York as “historic”. – AFP

Sánchez says Morocco border control ‘failed’ in Ceuta

MADRID – Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez on Tuesday blamed a failure of Moroccan border controls for a recent migrant crisis in Spain’s North African territory of Ceuta.

More than 70,000 migrants entered Ceuta on July 30 and 31 in an unprecedented and deadly rush.

Most returned to Morocco in the following hours. Several thousand, however, have remained in the Spanish enclave, where the situation has since deteriorated, leading to episodes of violence and almost daily demonstrations by local residents.

“We are investigating what happened in those days back in July but at the same time we have asked Morocco for actions and also for answers because it is also clear that its border control failed,” Sánchez said in English during an interview with CNN in New York.

Speaking in parliament on September 3, Sánchez said Madrid needed to ask the Moroccan authorities for “explanations and changes” to avoid a repeat of the migrant influx into Ceuta, while stressing there was no “solid proof” that Morocco had orchestrated it.

A Spanish police report seen by AFP said the number of Moroccan police officers around the border crossing was “clearly smaller than usual” and that officers “made no serious attempt” to stem the surge.

The report was based on satellite images, open-source videos and testimonies from migrants.

The Spanish government has since had to identify the thousands of migrants who remain in Ceuta to determine whether they are entitled to asylum. Unaccompanied children cannot be summarily deported.

– AFP

Panama’s Catholic Church reports dozens of clerical abuse cases

PANAMA CITY – The Catholic Church in Panama has recorded dozens of complaints alleging sexual abuse of minors and other vulnerable people by priests, according to a report released on Tuesday.

Prepared by two Catholic universities at the request of the church, the report found 37 complaints for sexual abuse were filed against clergy members between 2001 and 2025.

The Archbishop of Panama City, José Domingo Ulloa, said in a presentation of the report that it sought to determine how the church had managed “this entire

reality of sexual abuse against minors.”

He repeated an apology he made in 2023 to the victims and said five clergy members were defrocked after being convicted of sexual abuse.

Around the world, the Catholic Church has been tainted by scandals involving decades of child sexual abuse by paedophile priests.

The Panama report found no evidence of a deliberate policy of concealment of abuse by the church in the Central American country, but did flag problems in how the complaints were handled.

The report was compiled by Spain’s Villanueva University with the University of Notre Dame in the United States.

María José Valero, one of the authors, noted that the number of complaints made did not necessarily reflect the scale of the abuse, given the reluctance of some victims to come forward.

A 2019 report by the Child Rights International Network showed that while Latin America was the world’s most Catholic continent it had the lowest rates of reporting of clerical sexual abuse.

– AFP

World Cup 'not enough' as Spain begin next chapter



MADRID - Spain coach Luis de la Fuente will not allow the World Cup winners to rest on their laurels as they get back into action this week for the first time since their triumph.

La Roja may have conquered Europe in 2024 and then the world this summer, but when they face England in the Nations League on Saturday, they will be seeking to improve.

De la Fuente said in the aftermath of the World Cup final victory over Argentina in New Jersey in July, he was already looking to the future.

The 65-year-old signed a contract extension, keeping him with the team until 2032, earlier this week.

"In the heat of the moment, two or three minutes later, a player came up to me and said, 'What do we still have to win?' Well, the match against England on September 26th" said De la Fuente.

"This team never stops. The World Cup isn't enough - we have to be better. What we've achieved isn't enough to win the next match."

Spain's next major target will be the 2028 European championships, where they have a chance to emulate the La Roja side that won Euro 2008, World Cup 2010 and Euro 2012.

De la Fuente admitted that repeating that feat would be tricky.

"In life it's very hard to win, and many more (teams) lose than win," he said.

"Repeating past successes in terms of titles... we're going to try to be in a position to compete to win.

"Now we're the team to beat. That's an added motivation."

New faces

Thomas Tuchel's England, who lost to Spain in the Euro 2024 final, offer an immediate reminder of the level Spain will be expected to maintain as world champions.

De la Fuente picked a similar squad to his World Cup team for the upcoming Nations League games against England, Croatia twice, and the Czech Republic.

Teenage star Lamine Yamal, having returned to form with Barcelona, and captain Rodri remain the key figures, and are both in the running to win the Ballon d'Or, although there have been a few changes elsewhere.

Barcelona midfielder Fermin Lopez returned, after missing the World Cup with a foot injury, while Real Madrid defender Dean Huijsen has been recalled too.

Goalkeeper Joan Garcia's injury opened the door to Inter stopper Josep Martinez, in-form Espanyol striker Roberto Fernandez could make his first appearance for La Roja and Ivan Fresneda earned a late call-up in place of hurt Tottenham defender Pedro Porro.

"How could there not be continuity with players who have won everything?" said De la Fuente. "But that doesn't mean we won't give a chance to those who are knocking on the door."

Mikel Oyarzabal led the line for Spain through most of the World Cup, while Ferran Torres scored the winner in the final, but Fernandez can stake his claim after he was chosen over Real Madrid's Carlos Espi.

That position in the team, among a few others, will be disputed during the Nations League and the build-up to Euro 2028, which is ideal for De la Fuente.

The coach's message is clear, with Spain looking to progress despite the trophies they have already won, and strong competition can help foster the right environment for evolution.

— AFP

Man City hold Bayern to start Women's Champions League, Arsenal win late



PARIS - Manchester City fought from two goals down to grab a 2-2 draw at Bayern Munich on Tuesday to start their Women's Champions League season, while Mariona Caldentey was the hero as Arsenal left it late in their opener.

Bayern raced into a 2-0 lead thanks to Giulia Gwinn's early strike and a Kerstin Casparij own goal inside the first 30 minutes.

Beth Mead halved the deficit for the Women's Super League champions on the stroke of half-time.

City looked set to begin the league phase with a loss, as Khadija Shaw was denied from the spot by Bayern goalkeeper Ena Mahmutovic in the second period.

But German forward Carlotta Wamser popped up with four minutes remaining to ensure the spoils were shared in Bavaria.

"It was a game of two halves, I think. (The first half) was probably not good enough for our standards," Mead told UEFA.

"But again we showed what the team is about, showed our character."

Arsenal, the 2025 Champions League winners, made a faltering start to their bid to recover the continent's premier club title.

Renee Slegers's side needed an injury-time penalty from Spain international Caldentey to nab a 1-0 win at home to Danes HB Koge.

The Gunners looked certain to be heading for a goalless stalemate until

new signing Selina Cerci went down in the box under Yukina Sakabe's 92nd-minute challenge.

A Sakina Karchaoui penalty inside the final 20 minutes ensured Paris Saint-Germain left the Estadio Alfredo Di Stefano with a 1-1 draw after Felicia Schroeder's second-minute opener for Real Madrid.

Inter Milan got the better of Swedish side Hacken 1-0 - Haley Bugeja's fifth-

minute goal was enough to give the home side three points.

A brace either side of half-time by Marit Bratberg Lund gave Benfica a 2-1 win at Juventus, despite the hosts scoring late through Alba Redondo.

Defending champions Barcelona began Champions League life in the post-Alexia Putellas era today, at 3:00 a.m. Macau time, when they hosted Paris FC.

— AFP



Arsenal's Scottish midfielder Kim Little (front) and HB Koge's Afghan-born Danish striker Nadia Nadim fight for the ball during the UEFA Women's Champions League, League Phase football match between Arsenal and HB Koge at Meadow Park in Borehamwood, north of London on Tuesday.

— AFP



Saka says England still have 'scar' from World Cup semi-final loss

LONDON - Bukayo Saka believes the England squad still have a "scar in us" following their agonising World Cup semi-final defeat.

England begin their Nations League campaign against world champions Spain at Wembley on Saturday just nine weeks after they conceded two late goals in a painful last-four loss to Lionel Messi's Argentina in Atlanta.

Saka scored a hat-trick as England beat France 6-4 to finish third at the World Cup.

But the 25-year-old Arsenal winger made it clear that the pain of failing to win England's first major men's international football title since a 1966 World Cup triumph on home soil ran deep.

"Obviously, there's still a scar in us," Saka told the BBC yesterday.

"When you believed, and everyone was so united and so confident we could do it, not just us, but the whole country.

"We're trying to draw a line under it now and focus on the new international season and what we have coming up now.

"You try to move on as soon as possible, but you know, a scar is a scar (and) decides to heal when it heals itself.

"But like I said, we've come here to a new international season, and we've got four massive, difficult group games to try to qualify us in the Nations League, which we're fully focused on."

Saka, managing an Achilles injury throughout the World Cup in North America, remained on the bench during the semi-final defeat to Argentina as England manager Tuchel opted for defensive substitutes in what proved to

be an unsuccessful bid to hold on to a 1-0 lead.

Tuchel faced fierce criticism for his tactics as England sat on their advantage against Argentina before his side's late collapse in Atlanta.

"We have had critical reviews that will stay, of course, behind closed doors," said Tuchel when unveiling his Nations League squad last week as he looks to guide England to Euro 2028 glory.

"I am the biggest critic of myself, and reflection is sometimes necessary to get better, and experience is a crucial part of coaching," the 53-year-old German added.

Euro 2028 will be co-hosted by England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.

— AFP

'Never a friendly game' for Brazil, says Ancelotti ahead of India match

Football

NEW DELHI - Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti said the five-time world champions take their friendly against India next week very seriously, insisting there is "never a friendly game" for them, according to media reports yesterday.

Brazil, ranked fifth in the world and boasting stars including Vinicius Junior, will face India in Kolkata on October 3 - their first senior men's international in the country where football enjoys a passionate following despite cricket's overwhelming popularity.

The visit will offer a rare opportunity

for local fans to see one of football's most celebrated teams in action.

"Brazil has supporters in every corner of the world," Ancelotti was quoted as saying by daily *The Times of India*.

"It's a pleasure for us to play in India, not just for the Brazilian supporters, but also those in India."

Although the match is officially a friendly, the veteran Italian manager said Brazil would approach it with full seriousness.

"It's a preparatory game, a friendly, but for us, there is never a friendly game," Ancelotti, 67, said.

India, ranked 138th by FIFA, have never

qualified for a World Cup but football remains hugely popular, especially in Kolkata and the southern city of Kochi.

Ancelotti said the fixture would also offer Brazil a chance to experience a new football culture.

"We have to see other nations, other cultures. We are used to playing friendlies with different styles," said the coach who took charge last year.

"India will be exciting. It's true that India does not have a good experience (of playing world-class opponents), but it's important for us to know how they play. I've never been to India. I am very excited to come to Kolkata."

Next week's match will be the first

appearance by a full-strength Brazilian men's national team in India.

Brazilian legend Pele visited India in 1977 and 2015.

The Brazilians will arrive in India after playing two friendlies in Australia.

One of the most decorated managers in the game's history, Ancelotti has won a record five Champions League titles as a coach.

Brazil are seeking to end a lengthy World Cup drought, having last lifted football's biggest prize in 2002.

Their most recent World Cup campaign saw them bow out in the round-of-16. — AFP

Ageless ‘Chuso’ vaults into her 7th Asian Games – & won’t stop there

Cao Yibo, Ji Jiadong, Yue Chenxing

NAGOYA – “Chuso” is old enough to be the mother of most of her rivals.

At Nagoya City General Gymnasium, where artistic gymnastics is under way at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games, a familiar figure lined up at the end of the vault runway.

When the announcer called her name, several spectators in the stands did a double-take: the woman preparing to sprint down the

runway and launch herself over the vaulting table was 51 years old.

Oksana Chusovitina, the Uzbek gymnastics legend, was competing at her seventh Asian Games, a run of continental competition stretching back 32 years to Hiroshima 1994. Along the way, she has collected eight Asian Games medals: two golds, four silvers and two bronzes.

On Tuesday, she added another chapter to

that remarkable career, qualifying fourth for the vault final with a score of 13.266.

But medals tell only part of Chusovitina’s story. Her longevity in gymnastics has been shaped by two enduring forces: devotion to her son and love for the sport itself.

A MOTHER’S BARGAIN

Chusovitina won Olympic team gold as a 17-year-old at Barcelona 1992, competing for the Unified Team. At the time, it appeared to be the high point of a promising career.

Then, in 2002, her three-year-old son Alisher was diagnosed with leukemia. Facing medical bills she could not otherwise cover, Chusovitina turned gymnastics into a lifeline, competing wherever prize money and support were available. In search of better treatment for her son, she switched allegiance to Germany.

At the Beijing 2008 Olympics, competing for her adopted country at the age of 33, she won silver on vault. Before she had even left Beijing, she received the news she had been hoping for over six years: her son was cancer-free.

For many athletes, that might have marked the natural end of the journey. Chusovitina kept going.

STILL RUNNING, STILL VAULTING

She competed at Tokyo 2020, her eighth Olympics, at the age of 46. A lower-leg injury forced her out of Paris 2024, and many assumed her career was finally over.

In February 2025, at 50, she announced she was not done. A month later, she underlined the point by winning vault gold at a World Cup stop in Baku with a score of 13.516.

On September 18, she posted on social media: “My seventh Asian Games. I’m here.”

In Nagoya on Tuesday, with her fingernails painted in the blue, white, and green of the Uzbek flag, Chuso walked into the mixed zone afterward, beaming.

Asked when she planned to retire - a question she inevitably gets - she shot back with a grin: “What, don’t you want to see me anymore?”

What keeps her coming back, she says, is not the crowd or the competition - it’s the fight with herself.

She said overcoming herself gives her a huge sense of satisfaction, adding, “If what I do can inspire others, that makes me happy too. Doing what I want to do matters a great deal to me.”

NO FINISH LINE IN SIGHT

In 2017, Chusovitina was inducted into the International Gymnastics Hall of Fame and remains the only inductee still actively competing.

By the time Los Angeles hosts the Olympics in 2028, Chuso will be 53, and she is not ruling out a ninth appearance.

“I will try to qualify for 2028,” she said at the ongoing Asian Games, repeating: “It’s sport, it’s gymnastics. If it’s possible, I will try to compete at LA28.”

Over 32 years, her rivals have changed generation after generation. She now shares the competition floor with gymnasts born in the 2000s and 2010s. But age, to her, is not the obstacle many assume it to be.

“I feel like I get smarter every year,” she said. “I’m feeling great, and it’s great to perform here when we have so many fans and so much support from the spectators, and I will perform as long as I can. I’m not competing against anyone else - I’m just enjoying the process.”

— Xinhua



Oksana Chusovitina of Uzbekistan competes during the women's vault qualification of Artistic Gymnastics at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Nagoya, on Tuesday. — Xinhua

China prodigy wins 3rd Games gold as N Korea’s weightlifters roar

Peter Stebbings

NAGOYA – China’s 13-year-old swimming prodigy Yu Zidi sealed a hat-trick of Asian Games titles yesterday, as North Korea won their first two golds thanks to their powerhouse women weightlifters.

Towards the end of the fourth full day of action in Aichi-Nagoya, China were easily top of the medals table with 48 golds.

Second were the hosts Japan on 15, with South Korea third with eight.

The schoolgirl Yu will be remembered as one of the faces of the Games after her eye-popping exploits in the pool.

If she maintains her current trajectory the teenager will be a major medal threat at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics.

Yu, who turns 14 next month, powered to a dominant victory in the women’s 400m individual medley in a Games-record 4min 28.56sec.

It gave her a clean sweep from her three individual events, following victories in the 200m butterfly and 200m individual medley, also in Games-record times.

It was a reflection of China’s dominance in the pool this week, winning 21 of the 28 golds so far.

But for all her success, Yu says there is still room for improvement.

“I gained a lot from these Asian Games but there were also some

regrets,” she said after the race.

The teenager stood in wide-eyed amazement when a reporter suggested she had made it look easy.

“Definitely not,” she replied.

Tears of joy

North Korean weightlifter Ri Song Gum gave her country their first gold of the Games, and in style, setting three world records in the women’s 49kg class.

Kang Hyon Gyong made it a golden double for North Korea’s women weightlifters by winning the 53kg class in equally dominant fashion.

Ri, who stands a mere 140cm tall, joined an elite club of four weightlifters who have won three Asian Games golds.

The 28-year-old was emotional as her country’s anthem was played at the medal ceremony.

Ri’s exceptional achievement was cheered to the rafters in a lively atmosphere, made all the more raucous by a large number of Japanese North Korean fans waving flags.

Ri hauled 94kg above her head in the opening snatch discipline, one kilogram more than the previous world standard of 93kg.

She then smashed the clean and jerk world mark of 115kg twice by hoisting 116kg and then 121kg. Her total of 215kg also obliterated the world mark by 7kg.

“The reason I got this gold is for

the feelings of my home country, the people had huge expectations for me,” Ri told reporters.

“I wanted to lift my country up on these two small shoulders.”

‘Powering to gold’

Athletics began with the men’s and women’s half-marathon race walks.

China’s Shi Shengji won the men’s and compatriot Yang Liuqing triumphed in the women’s.

“My name means ‘power’, so here I walked with power,” said Yang.

Asked about her country winning both the men’s and women’s disciplines, she replied: “I think it’s normal for us to sweep the (gold) medals.”

In badminton, world number one An Se-young won her match but South Korea lost 3-1 to Japan in the women’s team event semi-finals.

An, the reigning world and Olympic champion, was not best pleased by her father in the crowd.

“Parents usually cannot bear to watch their own children compete, but my dad seems to watch perfectly happily, which is a bit much,” she said.

“I am out there running myself into the ground and he is just cheering away in comfort.”

China won the men’s team event in gymnastics, ahead of Japan.

“Second place. The most honest feeling is that it is very frustrating,” said Japan’s Daiki Hashimoto. — AFP

20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026							
Medal table							ToTal
1		China	48	20	10	78	
2		Japan	15	25	27	67	
3		Republic of Korea	8	8	25	41	
4		Kazakhstan	7	4	8	19	
5		Thailand	5	3	4	12	
6		Hong Kong, China	3	6	7	16	
7		Islamic Republic of Iran	3	3	2	8	
8		Malaysia	3	1	5	9	
9		Democratic People's Republic of Korea	2	1	3	6	
10		Kuwait	2	1	2	5	
11		Qatar	2	1	1	4	
11		Tajikistan	2	1	1	4	
13		India	1	5	6	12	
14		Uzbekistan	1	4	5	10	
15		Macao, China	1	4	1	6	
16		Chinese Taipei	1	3	10	14	

Brad Pitt says working with dog co-star was ‘really moving’

SAN SEBASTIÁN, Spain – Hollywood star Brad Pitt said yesterday that co-starring with a dog in his latest film, survival thriller “Heart of the Beast”, was “a really moving experience”.

Directed by David Ayer, the

film explores the deep bond between a military officer and his combat dog, Odin, who survive an air crash and become trapped in the wilderness of Alaska.

Four dogs, all from the same family, were used to portray Odin,

but the bulk of the performance was delivered by a German shepherd named Uber.

“I did have a really moving experience with Uber who plays Odin, who our dog whisperer found in New Zealand, and we bonded quickly,” Pitt told a news conference at Spain’s San Sebastian Film Festival, where the movie is screening out of competition.

“There were times he would do things that were just amazing, that were not in the script that you see in the film, and his expressions, they really moved me with him in the close-up,” the 62-year-old Oscar winner added.

San Sebastián, the highest-profile film festival in the Spanish-speaking world, wraps up tomorrow.

A total of 17 films are vying for the top awards in the official section, with a jury presided over by US director Ira Sachs.

– AFP



US actor Brad Pitt poses during a photocall to promote the film “Heart of the Beast” during the 74th San Sebastian International Film Festival in the northern Spanish Basque city of San Sebastián yesterday.

– AFP

Kenneth Branagh embraces action hero role – to get in shape

Paula Ramon

TORONTO – For Kenneth Branagh, starring as an action hero in the Cold War comedy “Mayday” was a chance to surprise the audience – and get in shape.

The British actor, best known to audiences for heavyweight Shakespearean roles like Henry V, appears in the Apple TV film as a former KGB agent capable of taking on his most ruthless enemies armed with nothing more than a pen.

In his quest to help a US pilot (Canadian-US actor Ryan Reynolds) who has crashed in Soviet territory during the Cold War, Nikolai Ustinov (Branagh) battles anyone who stands in his way, leaving a trail of carnage behind him.

“There was some movie magic there for sure, but there was no question that I learned everything,” he told AFP on the sidelines of the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), which concluded on Sunday.

“I tried to do it absolutely the best I could and the quickest I could, and not hurt myself and not hurt anybody else.”

To prepare, the actor practiced yoga for hours and trained methodically to master the fight choreography.

“It was a great chance to get a little fitter,” the 65-year-old laughed.

Above all, the action sequences were a chance to show off his versatility.

The running, jumping and fighting “was part of telling the audience who Nikolai was and surprising them.”

“I was surprised reading it, and I knew that I wanted to help surprise the audience by just letting them know that they maybe



British actor Kenneth Branagh poses upon arrival for the premiere of “Atonement” during the 2026 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) at Roy Thomson Hall last Tuesday in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

– AFP

had underestimated this funny, eccentric Russian character.”

Branagh said he had been delighted with the script by Jonathan Goldstein and John Francis Daley, who also directed the film, and had loved working with people who had such a clear vision.

Bonding over football

Much of the success of the film hinges on the easy chemistry between Branagh and co-star Reynolds.

This unfolds on a perilous journey to Moscow, during which both men discover something about the other’s country.

Ustinov, who is obsessed with American culture, and specifically with “Top Gun” (the 1986 hit starring Tom Cruise), shows Navy pilot Troy Kelly (Reynolds) that not all Russians are the emotionless drones that Washington’s political leaders claim they are.

Meanwhile, Kelly reveals that not all Americans are good-natured heroes.

The on-screen bond developed very quickly from the first meeting between the actors, Branagh said.

“When we had our very first conversation, they just called ‘action’ on a costume test for him.

“He walked off the set, or I walked to him actually, so we shook hands in front of the camera, and we just started a conversation which hasn’t really stopped. We just got on.”

The pair have seen each other frequently since wrapping while promoting the film and always pick up right where they left off.

“When we meet at work or you know promoting the film, it just carries on,” he said.

“Wherever we see each other, basically we talk about football. It just always was very easy.”

– AFP

U2 at 50: Irish rockers reveal anniversary album

Peter Murphy with Adam Plowright

DUBLIN, Ireland – Irish superstars U2 revealed the name of their new album yesterday Carnival de Luz – days ahead of the 50th anniversary of their first encounter as schoolboys in a Dublin kitchen in 1976.

Speaking on a podcast, lead singer Bono confirmed long-standing rumours that they were preparing to release their 15th album, thrilling fans who are set to attend commemorative events this weekend in the Irish capital.

“I can’t say it. I’m going to say it,” Bono teased on an *Irish Times* podcast which looked back on their career.

“The new album is called Carnival de Luz [“Carnival of Light”] ... it’s strong stuff,” Bono added while reminiscing about the four-piece band’s formation in the kitchen of drummer Larry Mullen.

That seminal moment in rock history on September 25, 1976, is set to be celebrated during a U250 event organised by fans in Dublin this weekend, as well as with a new 2 euro coin issued by the Central Bank of Ireland today.

The new album and the half-century anniversary underline the longevity of one of Ireland’s biggest musical exports.

The landmark also begs questions about the secret of their success which has seen the band outlast their peers, avoid messy break-ups, and continue to fill stadiums.

Reinvention

While they could barely play their instruments at their first teenage rehearsal and nearly lost their record contract after a disappointing reception for second album “October”, they went on to produce some of the biggest hits of the 1980s and 90s.

In total, they are estimated to have sold 175 million albums and count more than 23 million monthly listeners on Spotify today.

“Every album, they keep pushing creative boundaries,” Alex Conyngham, owner of Slane Castle in Ireland, where the band have performed and recorded at several times over their career, told AFP.

“That’s always been in their DNA. They’ve never been a band that have just rested on the hits.”

The new album – the first since 2017’s “Songs of Experience” – follows the release of new music this year including “Street of Dreams” in July.

Aidan Alcock, director of Dublin’s famous Windmill Lane recording studios, where U2 recorded their debut album “Boy” and its two successors, also paid tribute to their ability to keep moving.

“They’re always full of surprises. And I think that’s what keeps them going as well,” he told AFP.

Bono told the *Irish Times* that a drive for perfection served as his motivation, as well as the pleasure of hanging out with the band.

“I suppose it’s always the thought that just around the corner lies the perfect song or the perfect performance ... it’s mad to say but that’s still the drug of choice in our band,” he told the newspaper.

‘Soft power’

Composed of Bono, The Edge, Adam Clayton, and Larry Mullen, U2 have become symbols of Ireland’s rich musical culture and history, but also some of the best-known faces of the country overseas.

At an exhibition celebrating their 50 years together in Paris on Tuesday, the Irish ambassador to France, Alison Milton, paid tribute to them as “part of our reputation, our ‘soft power’ in international relations.”

Exhibition curator Clement Mathieu, a journalist at *Paris Match* celebrity magazine, put U2’s broad international appeal down to a hit-making record which rivals Michael Jackson or Madonna.

But also their character.

“There’s something of the Irish soul in them: there’s passion, there’s love, there’s anger. U2’s music isn’t particularly marked by an Irish sound, it’s more marked by the Irish soul and the Irish heart,” he told AFP.

With a new album, U2 will almost certainly hit the road again for a string of stadium concerts, another key part of their enduring appeal.

“They’re one of the great performing bands,” Conyngham told AFP.

“If you go to a U2 gig, you’re never going to be disappointed in terms of the energy and commitment that they show up with. They’re really hardworking.”

– AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 17°C~25°C	Manila 23°C~32°C	New York 13°C~21°C	Lisbon 17°C~32°C
Shanghai 22°C~30°C	Bangkok 24°C~32°C	London 11°C~22°C	Rio de Janeiro 18°C~21°C
Hong Kong 23°C~30°C	Tokyo 20°C~28°C	Frankfurt 6°C~20°C	Luanda 20°C~23°C
Taipei 22°C~32°C	Singapore 25°C~32°C	Vancouver 12°C~16°C	Maputo 19°C~29°C
Guangzhou 23°C~32°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~31°C	Paris 12°C~25°C	Dili 22°C~32°C
Nanjing 20°C~28°C	Jakarta 24°C~34°C	Moscow 9°C~22°C	São Tomé 25°C~32°C
Guilin 21°C~33°C	Seoul 18°C~28°C	Las Vegas 21°C~35°C	Praia 25°C~32°C
Xi’an 18°C~23°C	Sydney 14°C~23°C	Monte Carlo 20°C~26°C	Bissau 23°C~29°C



Shi Shengji (second right) and Li Chenjie (first right) of China, Yamanishi Toshikazu (first left) and Yoshikawa Kento of Japan compete during the Men's Half Marathon Race Walk Final of Athletics at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Nagoya, yesterday. – Xinhua

Qiu Qiyuan of China competes during the balance beam competition of the women's team final of Artistic Gymnastics at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Nagoya, yesterday. – Xinhua



Thailand's Isarapa Imprasertsuk competes in the women's skeet final during the 2026 Asian Games at the Aichi Prefectural General Shooting Gallery in Toyota yesterday. – AFP

Goalkeeper Li Hao (second right, front) of China reacts after being fouled during the group B football match against the United Arab Emirates at 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Toyota of Aichi Prefecture, yesterday. – Xinhua



Abdulazizi Ahmed M A Al-Muhammadi of Qatar competes during the eventing team of equestrian at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Tokyo, yesterday. – Xinhua

Kang Hyon Gyong of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) [North Korea] competes during the women's 53kg final of weightlifting at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Nagoya, yesterday. – Xinhua