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Police forecast up to 5.4 million 'Golden Week' border crossings

Ida Cheong

The Public Security Police Force (PSP) forecast yesterday that the number of Macau border checkpoint entries and exits will reach between 5.2 million and 5.4 million during the Chinese mainland's upcoming seven-day National Day "Golden Week" holiday from tomorrow to next Wednesday (October 1-7), averaging 740,000 to 770,000 per day, PSP Public Relations Division Chief Lei Tak Fai announced at a press conference yesterday.

Lei made the remarks about the government's raft of special arrangements and measures for "Golden Week" during the press conference held at the Barrier Gate checkpoint.

Lei pointed out that the peak is anticipated to fall on October 3 and 4, with daily border crossings potentially surpassing 800,000.

Aiming to cope with the heavy traffic at various checkpoints during the holiday, the Public Security Police are maintaining close communication with the Macao Customs Service, the Zhuhai General Station of Exit and Entry Frontier Inspection, and the Hong Kong Immigration Department, Lei said, adding that real-time data on traveller and vehicular flows will be shared to facilitate advanced crowd forecasting and contingency planning.

Lei Tak Fai (centre), acting head of the Public Security Police's (PSP) Public Relations Division; Macao Customs Service Inspection Division Acting Chief U Chin Keong, and other attendees look on during yesterday's press conference about the government's raft of arrangements and measures for Golden Week at the Barrier Gate checkpoint. – Photo: Ida Cheong

Lei said the government will dynamically deploy frontline police manpower based on real-time conditions at each checkpoint, open additional manual and automated clearance channels during peak hours, and implement crowd diversion and control measures.

Border crossing statistics comprise exits and entries by local residents, tourists, non-resident workers (NRWs), non-local students enrolled in local education institutions, Central People's Government officials posted to Macau, foreign diplomats accredited in Macau, and others.

Meanwhile, the 34th Macao International Fireworks Display Contest will continue tomorrow and on Sunday. As the pyrotechnic shows are expected to draw large crowds of residents and tourists, the Public Security Police Force will strengthen traffic control around Macau Tower, Avenida dos Jardins do Oceano (海洋大馬路), and nearby areas, Lei noted, adding that police drones will be deployed around Sai Van Bridge to monitor traffic flow, allowing officers to implement temporary road closures or traffic diversions in response to on-site conditions.

Regarding vehicular traffic, Macao Customs Service (SA) Inspection Division Acting Chief U Chin Keong projected that vehicle traffic peaks will occur on Saturday, pointing out that additional personnel will be deployed during peak hours to expand operational lanes, while communication mechanisms with the Chinese mainland authorities will be utilised to coordinate vehicle diversion and traffic relief on multiple fronts.

While the Chinese mainland's National Day "Golden Week" will take place between tomorrow and next Wednesday, Macau's National Day comprises two public holidays – tomorrow and on Friday (October 1-2). ■

Students attend a gathering celebrating the upcoming National Day in Gaoqing County of Zibo City, Shandong Province, yesterday. Various events are held across China in celebration of the upcoming National Day. – Xinhua

São Tomé and Príncipe opposition wins election: provisional results

STOP PRESS

SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE – São Tomé and Príncipe's main opposition party won the most seats in parliamentary polls, provisional results showed yesterday, but fell short of an outright majority, setting the stage for coalition talks in the small Atlantic island nation.

The centre-left Liberation Movement of São Tomé and Príncipe (MLSTP) party secured 24 of parliament's 55 seats, according to the national electoral commission.

The centre-right Independent Democratic Action (ADI), the party of recently re-elected President Carlos Vila Nova, came second with around 23 seats.

The MLSTP, which emerged from the former party that ruled the archipelago before the introduction of multiparty politics in 1990, now needs support from smaller parties to reach the 28-seat threshold for a majority.

The remaining seats went to the leftist Independent Citizens Movement-Socialist Party/National Unity Party (MCI-PS/PUN), which won six seats, and the rightwing Basta Movement party, which secured two.

MCI-PS/PUN leader Domingos Monteiro signalled he was open to talks with both major parties, saying he would back whichever side committed to improving living standards.

That leaves his party in a potential kingmaker role as talks over the next government begin.

In the archipelago's parliamentary system, the president appoints a government after legislative elections, but it must secure parliament's backing to govern.

The incoming administration will face pressing economic and social challenges, including unemployment, emigration and concerns over public services, infrastructure and access to water and electricity.

Nearly 40,000 São Tomeans – around 18 percent of the population – were living abroad in 2025, mainly in Portugal, Angola and Gabon, according to the World Bank. *– AFP, MPD*

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China says reported European '301' tool typical act of protectionism, unilateralism

China yesterday said a reported tool being pushed by some EU member states is a typical example of protectionism and unilateralism that would disrupt the stability of global industrial and supply chains. *– Story on p. 7*

Mystery over UK airbase scare after reports no explosives found

A UK probe into a suspected bomb plot at an airbase used by the United States was mired in confusion yesterday, after media reported no explosives were detected in vehicles seized nearby. *– Story on p. 11*

Guinea-Bissau's ousted leader Embaló to return and run for president

Guinea-Bissau's exiled former president Umaro Sissoco Embaló, who was ousted in a November 2025 coup, said on Monday he will return and run for president in an election due on December 6. *– Story on p. 12*

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11-year-old girl duped by 'fake police' scam, granny loses 65,000 patacas

Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Chao Teng Hin looks on during yesterday's regular press conference.
– Photo: Sherwin Hng

Sherwin Hng

An 11-year-old girl was duped by a "fake police" scam into handing over her grandmother's online banking details and transferring 65,000 patacas, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Chao Teng Hin said yesterday.

Chao said the case was believed to involve the youngest victim of a "fake police" scam uncovered by the Judiciary Police to date.

According to Chao, the girl borrowed her grandmother's mobile phone at about 11:00 a.m. on Saturday to do her homework online. While using the phone, she chatted with strangers on "Douyin" and subsequently received a message from an unknown person.

The sender claimed to know that she was a minor and falsely accused her of causing 60,000 patacas belonging to a company to be frozen while using Douyin. The girl was told by that person that if she failed to cooperate, her parents could be held responsible for the money, face imprisonment, and even have her future university studies affected.

Chao added that the scammer then instructed her to add a WeChat account, where another person claiming to be a "Beijing Public Security Bureau officer" offered to help resolve the matter.

Believing the claims, the girl followed the purported officer's instructions to activate screen sharing on the phone and disclosed her grandmother's bank transfer password.

Chao also said the girl had previously seen her grandmother shopping online during a holiday and had learnt the password.

About three hours later, at around 2:00 p.m., the grandmother took back her phone and discovered that transfers totalling 65,000 patacas had been made to unknown recipients. She subsequently reported the case to the police.

The Judiciary Police urged parents to safeguard financial information, communicate closely with their children, and remind them not to trust strangers they meet online.

Residents who suspect they have encountered a scam can use the Judiciary Police's "Anti-Fraud Programme" to check the risk level, or seek assistance by calling the anti-fraud enquiry hotline on 8800 7777 or the crime report hotline on 993. ■

Man smashes Cotai phone shop door, flees Macau: police

Sherwin Hng

A mobile phone brand chain shop in Cotai suffered about 300,000 patacas worth of damage after a man smashed its glass entrance with a brick and another hard object on Sunday, with the suspect leaving Macau shortly afterwards, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Chao Teng Hin said during a regular press conference yesterday.

According to Chao, the Judiciary Police were notified by the Public Security Police Force (PSP) at about 12:45 p.m. on Sunday that the glass entrance to a large mobile phone chain shop at a hotel in Cotai had been damaged.

An investigation showed that the suspect, a shirtless man from the Chinese mainland, arrived outside the shop at about 12:25 p.m. and took a brick from his backpack before repeatedly striking the glass door. After the brick broke, he took out a long, hard object and continued smashing the door.

Chao said the entire incident lasted less than five minutes and caused serious damage to the glass entrance, with the shop management estimating its losses at about 300,000 patacas.

Police subsequently identified the suspect and checked immigration records, confirming that he had left Macau shortly after the incident.

Chao did not disclose further details about the suspect, such as which border checkpoint he used to leave Macau or his motive for the violent incident, saying such information formed part of the ongoing investigation.

The suspect faces a charge of aggravated damage, Chao said, pointing out that he faces up to 10 years behind bars.

Video footage circulating on social media shows that the incident happened at the Apple shop at The Londoner in Cotai.

The Judiciary Police urged members of the public to settle disputes through rational and lawful channels and refrain from committing criminal offences on impulse, stressing that the authorities will crack down on property-related crimes in accordance with the law to maintain public order and security. ■

This screen capture from a video circulating on social media shows the man smashing the phone shop entrance with a hard object.

IAM to renovate 4 free sports grounds

Khalel Vallo

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said in a statement yesterday that it will start tomorrow to renovate four free sports grounds in phases, with each venue temporarily closed for about 30 days to repair worn-out facilities and improve conditions for public recreation.

According to the statement, the final phase of the renovation programme covers the Free Sports Ground on Avenida Panorâmica do Lago Sai Van, the Free Sports Ground in Almirante Magalhães Correia, the Free Sports Ground in Taipa Central Park, and the Free Sports Ground of Edifício do Lago.

The works will include repairing cracks in ball court surfaces, repainting court coatings and markings, and replacing basketball backboards and rims, the statement said,

The bureau pointed out that it has been renovating a number of free sports grounds under its management since the end of last year due to wear and deterioration of facilities, the statement noted, adding that the four venues will be closed one after another rather than simultaneously, allowing residents to continue using other free sports grounds while individual sites undergo renovation.

The bureau said the improvements aim to provide the public with better-quality recreational and sports facilities and enhance the user experience, the statement underlined, reminding members of the public not to enter construction areas during the renovation period to avoid accidents.

The statement also said that residents are advised to pay attention to the phased closure arrangements when planning their sporting activities. ■

This undated handout photo provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows the Free Sports Ground of Edifício do Lago in Taipa.

Black truffle sauce found to contain excess arsenic: IAM

Armindo Neves

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) announced in a statement yesterday that a brand of black truffle sauce has been found to contain excess arsenic.

Through routine food sampling, the statement said, the bureau detected excessive levels of arsenic – a heavy metal – in a pre-packaged black truffle paste originating from Hong Kong.

The Municipal Affairs Bureau has taken immediate follow-up action, ordering the merchant concerned to stop selling and to recall the affected batch of the product, while urging members of the public to stop consuming it, according to the statement.

The brand of the product in question is "Familie", which is one of the house brands under the Hong Kong retail chain Best Mart 360°. The product is named "Black Truffle Sauce Natural Truffle 5%", with a net weight of 192 grams and a best-before date of 11 November 2027, the statement noted. The sample was found to contain arsenic at 0.60 milligrams per kilogram, which exceeds the limits stipulated in the standard "Maximum Limits of Heavy Metal Contaminants in Food".

Arsenic is a toxic heavy metal element widely found in the environment. People primarily ingest this substance through food and drinking water, the statement noted. Arsenic poisoning can damage the skin, blood vessels, nervous system, and urinary system, affect foetal development, and increase the risk of developing skin, liver, bladder, and lung cancers, the statement said, adding that based on the analysis of the arsenic content detected in the sample in question, the likelihood of adverse health effects from normal consumption is relatively low.

The Municipal Affairs Bureau urged consumers who have purchased products from the affected batch through any channel to stop consuming them immediately. The trade should also cease supplying and selling the product without delay. The bureau will continue to follow up on the matter to prevent the affected product from remaining in circulation, the statement said. ■

This undated handout provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows the problematic black truffle sauce found to contain excess arsenic.

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Macau Weather

VERY HOT.
FINE APART FROM CLOUDY PERIODS.
ONE OR TWO SHOWERS LATER.
FORCE 2 TO 4 SOUTH TO SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 60% AND 95%.

27ºC~33ºC

Source: SMG

Macau lines up events to mark National Day

Ida Cheong

In order to celebrate the 77th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the local government will hold a grand flag-raising ceremony and a large-scale reception on National Day (tomorrow), including a "National Day Fun Run" and firework displays, according to a statement from the Government Information Bureau (GCS) yesterday.

The statement noted that the flag-raising ceremony will take place at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow in Golden Lotus Square in Zape, officiated by Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai. Public broadcaster TDM will telecast the event live. At 9:30 a.m., the local government will host a large reception at the Complex of Commerce and Trade Cooperation Platform for China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (aka Forum Macao Complex) to celebrate the milestone with all sectors of civil society.

Various government entities will also organise celebratory events on National Day, the statement said, adding that the "2026 World Walking Day Fun Run" will kick off from Golden Lotus Square immediately following the flag-raising ceremony.

Additionally, the Macau Grand Prix Museum, Macao Museum, and the Macao Science Center (MSC) will offer free admission to the public tomorrow. The Communications Museum and the Love the Country, Love Macao Educational Base for Youth will also remain open, according to the statement.

The statement added that the 34th Macao International Fireworks Display Contest will take place tomorrow and on Sunday. The displays will start at 9:00 p.m. and 9:40 p.m. each night, lasting about 18 minutes per show. The signature "Fireworks Carnival" will also be held along the waterfront of the Macao Science Centre (MSC) from 5:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. on both October 1 and 4.

Furthermore, temporary pedestrian zones will be set up in Rua de Nossa Senhora do Amparo（關前後街）and Taipa Village from October 1 to 6 (12:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.) to enhance the community festive vibe and visitor experience, featuring special markets, live performances, and game booths, the statement said.

From 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., the Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) will set up a temporary counter at its philatelic shop on the ground floor of the General Post Office (GPO) on Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro to provide a commemorative postmark service to celebrate the 77th Anniversary of the Founding of the PRC, the statement added. ■

This undated handout photo released by the Macao Government Information Bureau (GSC) shows last year's October 1 National Day grand flag-raising ceremony in the Golden Lotus Square in Zape.

Councillors worry about stray dog attacks

Armindo Neves

The government-appointed Municipal Affairs Consultative Council held its monthly meeting at the headquarters of the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) in the city centre yesterday, where councillors expressed concern about attacks by stray dogs.

Councillor Yeong Chan Iat pointed out that multiple residents have recently reported that stray dogs have become an increasingly serious problem in the Taipa Old Village area, Lai Chi Vun Shipyards, Hac Sá Beach Park, and Ká-Hó. They are often seen roaming in packs during the early morning and from dusk into the night, posing a safety threat to residents and tourists alike, Yeong said, adding that an incident in which a stray dog bit a passer-by recently occurred in the Taipa Old Village area. Similar dog-bite incidents have also occurred in nearby Hong Kong, drawing widespread concern, he said.

Yeong put forward four recommendations: stepping up penalties for pet abandonment to tackle the problem at its source; making good use of technological means such as drones to monitor the locations and movement patterns of stray dogs in order to devise targeted capture plans; strengthening public education campaigns, urging residents and tourists not to feed stray dogs; and paying close attention to the trend of stray dogs becoming feral, calling on the Municipal Affairs Bureau to earnestly follow up on the predicament.

Councillor Tai Ka Peng also said that even though the bureau has captured 34 stray dogs and cats in the Taipa Old Village area so far this year, the biting incident shows that the problem is not yet fully under control. She recommended strengthening patrols and trapping efforts at frequent trouble spots, deploying resources in response to the peak periods when packs of dogs appear in the early morning and at night, and making good use of the "IAM Connect" app to dynamically adjust operations based on reported data. She also suggested reviewing the dangerous dog control system in due course and formulating clear guidelines, as well as curbing improper feeding and taking legal action against those who repeatedly ignore warnings.

This image downloaded from the Macau Municipal Affairs Bureau's (IAM) website last night shows its official logo.

IAM President Chao Wai Ieng responded that, from 2025 up to the second quarter of this year, the bureau has cleared four tonnes of food scraps from 89 frequent trouble spots. He pointed out that the situation shows a high degree of overlap between the locations where stray animals appear and the areas where people improperly feed them.

In its reply to an enquiry from local broadcaster TDM early this month, a Public Security Police Force (PSP) spokesman said that, in view of the many dog-bite incidents reported, the Public Security Police Force have deployed officers to carry out patrols at the trouble spots at irregular intervals since the end of August. If any relevant situations are detected, the Municipal Affairs Bureau will be notified immediately for follow-up, the spokesman said, adding that upon receiving a report of a dog bite, the authorities will contact the injured person and search for the dog involved. Regardless of whether the dog has an owner, the case will be reported to the Municipal Affairs Bureau for follow-up, the spokesman said. ■

MGM museum unveils Zibo glass art exhibition tomorrow

This poster downloaded from the MGM website promotes the "Luminous Brilliance: The Artistry of Zibo Liuli" exhibition which opens tomorrow at MGM MACAU in Nape.

Khalel Vallo

The MGM MACAU's POLY MGM MUSEUM will open "Luminous Brilliance: The Artistry of Zibo Liuli" tomorrow, National Day, showcasing nearly 180 historic and contemporary glass artworks tracing 3,000 years of Chinese glassmaking and cultural exchange.

Running until March 31, 2027, the exhibition is presented in conjunction with the National Museum of China and the Zibo Ceramics and Glass Museum, exploring the development of liuli*, traditional Chinese glass art, and Zibo's reputation as the "Hometown of Chinese Glass".

Zibo is a city in central Shandong province, bordering the provincial capital Jinan to the west, Tai'an to the southwest, Linyi to the south, Weifang to the east, Dongying to the northeast, and Binzhou to the north.

The exhibition features three thematic chapters: "Forging a Millennium Legacy", "Eternal Iridescence" and "Exquisite Objects of Timeless Elegance". Together, they examine the historical evolution of Chinese glassmaking, the artistic use of colour and contemporary glass craftsmanship.

The first chapter traces ancient glass artefacts from the Warring States period to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), alongside Roman and Sasanian glass objects illustrating cultural and technological exchanges along the Silk Road.

The second chapter explores five traditional Eastern colour spectrums – yellow, red, white, blue and green – through works created using techniques including glassblowing, lost-wax casting, inside painting, and carving.

The final chapter focuses on lampworking, a glass-forming technique that uses a flame reaching about 1,200 degrees Celsius to create intricate shapes. The technique is recognised as intangible cultural heritage in Shandong.

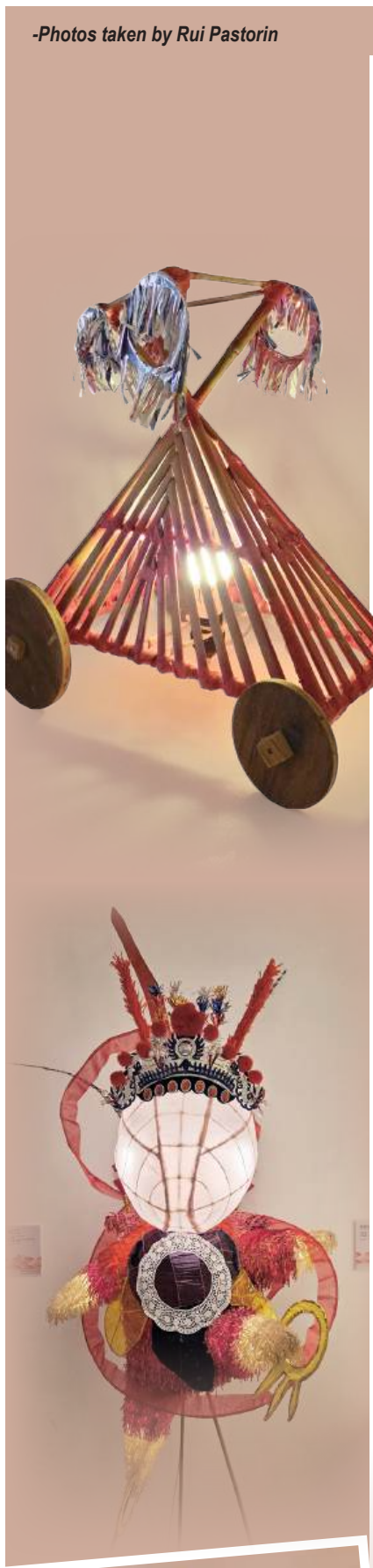
According to a statement by MGM yesterday, the museum will incorporate interactive displays and digital interpretation through holographic display cases developed by Poly Culture, alongside a craft zone illustrating the glassmaking process, from raw material selection and kiln firing to carving and finishing.

Located on Level 2 of MGM MACAU in Nape, the museum opens from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on weekdays and from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. at weekends. In October, Saturday opening hours will extend to 8:00 p.m. Admission ends 30 minutes before closing time. ■

**Liuli (琉璃 – "coloured glass") is a traditional Chinese coloured art glass and ancient lost-wax glass-casting craft with a history of over 2,000 years. – Gemini, DeepSeek*

Stay tuned for an upcoming Page 4.

-Photos taken by Rui Pastorin



Artists present creative takes on Mid-Autumn Festival lanterns at Albergue SCM

Rui Pastorin

The Mid-Autumn Festival was celebrated on Friday, but the festivities continue at Albergue SCM's* A2 Gallery through an exhibition highlighting some of the most important and characteristic parts of the festivity.

Visitors to the gallery will find a variety of creative exhibits on display through next month for "Little Rabbit Lanterns - An Exhibition by Carlos Marreiros and Friends - Part 20 | Celebration of the 77th Anniversary of the People's Republic of China", an annual themed exhibition organised by CAC - Círculo dos Amigos da Cultura de Macau ("Circle of the Friends of Macau's Culture").

The showcase presents a total of 39 exhibits of varying shapes, styles and sizes. Just as in previous iterations, the designs by a variety of artists from Macau and elsewhere each illuminate different parts of the venue, many of which were brought to life together with or by master craftsman Alfredo Ceynas, or by the artists themselves.

In all, the display shows everything from the colourful and traditional takes on the rabbit lantern theme, to those that also reinterpret the theme with a twist, including displays by artists Carlos Marreiros, Clara Brito, Fortes Pakeong Sequeira, and Guilherme Ung Vai Meng.

A recent statement by the organisers puts it best by pointing out that the joint showcase "blends culture and creativity from artists around the world. It is a celebration of the Mid-Autumn Festival where artists come together to create unique and artistic interpretations of rabbit lanterns".

The 20th part of the annual showcase was unveiled during the association's festive "Celebration of the Moon - Mid-Autumn Festival 2026 Party" on Friday.

Tradition and symbolism

With a history spanning around 3,000 years, the Mid-Autumn Festival is a deeply cherished harvest festival in Chinese culture. It is traditionally celebrated on the 15th day of the 8th month of the Chinese lunisolar calendar, when the Moon is believed to be at its fullest and brightest.

The lantern became an important part of the festival during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) and became a widespread public custom in the Song Dynasty (960-1279). It symbolises both family reunion and good fortune, as noted in the China Highlights website.

Beyond that, the China Highlights website added that lanterns also create a festive atmosphere while symbolising togetherness, which is reminiscent of the whole Moon, as well as prosperity and good luck. In some parts of China, it even represents a prayer from a mother to a daughter to have babies.

The rabbit, or Jade Rabbit, meanwhile represents factors like selflessness and virtue; companionship through being the Moon goddess Chang'e's companion in the Moon palace; health and protection; as well as good fortune, according to AI chatbot Gemini.

Bringing the community together

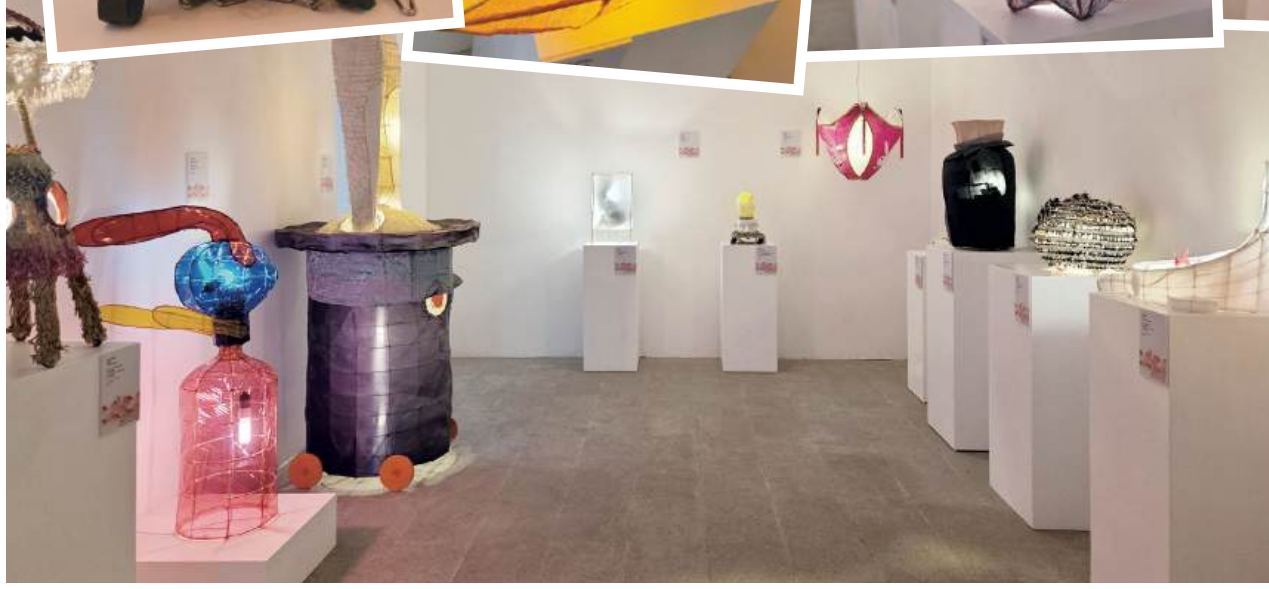
In keeping with the spirit of the festival's traditions, Friday's Mid-Autumn Festival Party at Albergue SCM highlighted some of the festival's core values, namely togetherness and reunion, bringing the local community together.

The annual celebration gathers participants for traditional festival snacks, live music, and a variety of activities, with this year's programme featuring live calligraphy demonstrations and a showcase of art by the Macau Women Calligraphers, Painters and Sculptors Association.

Exhibitiongoers can continue to view the works until October 25, with the gallery open daily, specifically 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Mondays and 12:00 noon through 7:00 p.m. during the rest of the week.

Meanwhile, during the exhibition's run, CAC is also hosting another free admission Cantonese-language "Intangible Cultural Heritage Series – Mid-Autumn Festival Lantern Craft Workshop" on October 10 and 11 that will be led by Foshan's young lantern maker Zhang Wenfeng, with more details available on the association's Facebook page.

**Albergue is Portuguese for "hospice". SCM stands for Santa Casa da Misericórdia ("Holy House of Mercy"), Macau's oldest charitable organisation. – MPD*



18th UTM-UN Tourism programme concludes

Rui Pastorin

The four-day 18th UTM–UN Tourism Training Programme concluded on the Macao University of Tourism (UTM) Mong-Ha campus on Friday.

Organised in conjunction with UN Tourism, the event gathered industry experts, academics, and representatives from UN Tourism Member States to explore how artificial intelligence and digital marketing are reshaping destination branding and global competitiveness, according to a statement by the public university yesterday.

The statement noted that the attendees also got to examine how the city leverages technological innovation, cultural preservation, and experience design to enhance its appeal as a world-class destination. They also took part in a site visit to the Grand Lisboa Palace (GLP) in Cotai, guided tours of the UNESCO-listed Historic Centre of Macao, cultural workshops, and Macanese cuisine demonstrations, the statement said.

At the closing ceremony, UTM Rector Fanny Vong Chuk Kwan and UN Tourism Representative Orianne Derrier presented certificates to the participants. The statement noted that both urged the attendees to apply their newly gained insights within their home countries and organisations to contribute to tourism innovation and advance international cooperation. ■

Participants in the recent 18th UTM–UN Tourism Training Programme pose on the staircase of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St. Paul's, close to Na Tcha Temple, after a guided tour of the area. – Photo: UTM

Support urged for HK, Macao, Taiwan compatriots, overseas Chinese to contribute to Chinese modernization

BEIJING – A senior Communist Party of China (CPC) official on Monday called on the China Overseas Friendship Association to actively support compatriots from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, as well as overseas Chinese, in contributing to Chinese modernization.

Li Ganjie, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and head of the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee, made the remarks at an executive directors' meeting of the association in Beijing.

The China Overseas Friendship Association was founded in 1997 to step up contacts between people in the Chinese mainland and those living in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and abroad.

It is a non-profit social organization voluntarily formed by representatives from various sectors and relevant organizations in the mainland, compatriots from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, and prominent figures among overseas Chinese.

Li noted progress made by the association over the past year in uniting the Chinese people at home and abroad and promoting exchanges and cooperation with Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan compatriots and overseas Chinese, stressing the need to make winning hearts and rallying strength a priority in its work.

Efforts should focus on advancing the successful practice of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, and playing an active role in driving economic development, fostering social harmony and enhancing effective governance in Hong Kong and Macao, Li said.

He also underscored the need to safeguard and promote national reunification, firmly oppose separatist activities by "Taiwan independence" forces, and promote exchanges and cooperation between China and other countries. *– Xinhua*

AI-backed govt service enquiry platform to start Oct 5

Tony Wong

The government has completed setting up a new platform powered by AI for members of the public to raise enquiries, complaints, and opinions about all government services. The new platform, available on the Macao One Account app, will start operating next Monday.

The Macao One Account app is available in Chinese, Portuguese, and English.

Commonly seen enquiries will be handled by AI chatbots providing standardised answers, while more complex enquiries will be directed to human customer services, where civil servants will handle and assess the enquiries before giving the answers.

Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau (SAFP) Director Leong Weng In (centre) speaks during yesterday's press conference at the Public Administration Building on Rua do Campo as SAFP Deputy Director Chan Chi Kin (left) and Chan Chon In, who heads the bureau's Government Service Information Centre, look on. – Photo: Tony Wong

The Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau (SAFP) – the public entity tasked with developing e-government services – held a press conference yesterday to announce details of the new platform.

The government announced in July the establishment of a new system standardising the practices for all public entities to handle and reply to enquiries, complaints, and opinions from members of the public. The system will be governed by a new administrative regulation, which was announced in July and will take effect on Monday next week.

Government-drafted administrative regulations, aka by-laws, do not require the legislature's approval.

The bureau noted yesterday that, in line with the implementation of the new administrative regulation, the current function on the Macao One Account app for the public to raise enquiries, complaints, and opinions will be upgraded to a new one powered by AI.

In addition to the Macao One Account for members of the general public, upgrades will also be made to the Business and Association Platform app – a dedicated e-government platform for businesses and associations.

Addressing yesterday's press conference, SAFP Director Leong Weng In said that reforming its public feedback handling mechanism represents an important step for the local government in promoting governance modernisation. The government has advanced the reform based on four core principles – standardised norms, transparent procedures, defined timeframes, and clearly assigned responsibilities, she said, adding that through the integration of system establishment, technical application, and service upgrades, the reform aims to build a public feedback handling mechanism with standardised criteria, traceable procedures, and interdepartmental collaboration.

Public entities must reply within 15 working days

Leong noted that according to the new administrative regulation coming into force on Monday next week, the respective public entities must make their first, basic reply within two working days after receiving enquirers' opinions or complaints, after which they must, in general, conclude handling each case and come up with a final, complete reply within 15 working days, except when confronted with special circumstances.

Leong noted that according to the regulation, if a case's particular situation makes it impossible for the respective public entity to complete handling the case and make a final, complete reply within 15 working days, the public entity must, in advance of the 15-working-day deadline, tell the resident that it will not be able to make the final reply within the required timeframe, and provide the resident with information about its latest progress on the case.

Leong said that compared to the current system still in force with a required timeframe of 45 days, the new system will ensure a more timely, clear, and transparent response to the public.

How to use it

During yesterday's press conference, Chan Chon In, who heads the bureau's Government Service Information Centre, gave a presentation on how to use the new platform.

Chan said that the new platform has four features: smartphone users can make enquiries 24/7; they can check the latest progress on their case at any time; any case submitted to the platform will be assigned to the respective public entity; and all cases will be handled within a specific timeframe.

Chan said that after the new platform starts operating next Monday, smartphone users will be required to update their Macao One Account app in order to use the new function.

Smartphone users will have to submit their enquiries in text format on the platform. Chan noted that they can use their smartphone's function to convert their voice into text.

Chan underlined that the new platform integrates AI technology and an interdepartmental collaboration mechanism to establish a new service model featuring immediate response, precise assignment to the respective public entity, and end-to-end tracking.

For commonly seen enquiries regarding service formalities (such as application eligibility, required documents, and service locations), the system will – thanks to the applications of AI – instantly provide accurate and standardised answers alongside various details, including website links, forms, and application guidelines, significantly improving processing efficiency, Chan said.

Chan said that more complex enquiries will be forwarded to human customer services, where civil servants will handle and assess the enquiries before giving the answers in text format on the platform.

The AI-generated answers will be available 24/7, while human customer services will be available during office hours between 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. from Mondays to Fridays.

Enquiries requiring human customer services submitted during non-office hours will be stored on the system and handled by civil servants during office hours.

Regarding the submission of complaints or opinions, Chan said, the new platform will automatically transfer cases to the respective public entities, so members of the public will no longer need to determine which entity to contact.

Chan noted that all cases will be processed through a uniform e-platform equipped with AI to assist civil servants in swiftly sorting through opinions and complaints and identifying key issues, thereby boosting enquiry and processing efficiency.

A specific public entity will be assigned as the main entity tasked with handling the case, while other relevant public entities will be assigned roles to provide support and cooperation, ensuring coordination and follow-up throughout the entire procedure, Chan said.

Chan underlined that all existing enquiry and feedback channels for the public, such as telephone hotlines and staffed counters, will remain operational, adding that the new platform aims to provide a more convenient and flexible alternative channel alongside these traditional channels. ■

Macao expo to showcase products from 9 Portuguese-speaking countries

China's Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) has announced that it will host a trade exhibition featuring products and services from nine Portuguese-speaking countries from October 21 to 24, as part of the MSAR's efforts to promote trade and industrial cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries.

The 2026 Portuguese-Speaking Countries Products and Services Exhibition (Macao), or PLPEX, will occupy about 8,000 square meters at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo, according to the SAR's Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM).

Five zones will cover cross-border e-commerce, agriculture, marine technology and related industries, food and beverages, and professional services.

The e-commerce zone will connect businesses with online platforms, logistics and marketing services to help them reach markets in the Chinese mainland and Portuguese-speaking countries. Service providers from Macao and Hengqin will also help companies from Portuguese-speaking countries establish operations in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Three business matching sessions will focus on agricultural supply chains, wine and spirits, and coffee. The program also includes industry forums, tastings and a coffee bean competition. *– Xinhua, MPD*

China to implement mortgage interest subsidies to unlock housing demand

BEIJING – China will implement interest subsidies for housing loans starting October 1, 2026, as part of efforts to help reduce home-buying costs and better unlock the housing demand of residents.

With a tentative implementation period of one year, the fiscal authorities will provide an annualized subsidy of 1 percentage point for eligible first-time homebuyers, according to a notice jointly issued by the Ministry of Finance, the People's Bank of China and the National Financial Regulatory Administration yesterday.

This is the first time the central government has offered interest subsidies on commercial housing loans.

This interest subsidy policy is focused on first-time homebuyers. The floor area of each purchased unit must not exceed 120 square meters, and the purchase price must not surpass 1.5 million yuan.

Under this policy, the maximum amount of interest-subsidized loans can reach 1 million yuan, and the subsidy period can extend up to five years.

According to estimates, for a long-term 1-million-yuan commercial personal mortgage, the subsidies could help borrowers reduce cumulative interest payments by nearly 50,000 yuan.

By defining housing price, floor area and loan category, the policy aims to precisely benefit target groups and help lower-income families reduce their monthly mortgage burdens, the departments said.

The policy focuses on first-time buyers with essential needs, supporting families in purchasing small and medium-sized, and relatively low-priced homes, according to the departments.

The policy is expected to reduce the mortgage burden for new urban residents, newly employed college graduates, and urban wage-earning families, said Luo Zhiheng, chief economist at Yuekai Securities.

In recent years, China has introduced supply-side measures to support the development of the real estate market, including supporting the issuance of new special-purpose bonds for land reserves and supporting local governments in purchasing existing commercial housing for use as affordable housing. This time, the focus has shifted to the demand side, further expanding policy efforts through fiscal-financial coordination.

Industry insiders believe that interest subsidies can reduce home-buying costs, accelerate the destocking of new homes, and ease the funding pressure on real estate developers.

The policy clearly demonstrates strong support for rigid home-buying demand, or first-home demand, and will in turn influence subsequent replacement and upgrading demand, said Yan Yuejin, deputy director at E-house China R&D Institute.

Li Yujia, chief researcher at the Guangdong Housing Policy Research Center, said the interest subsidy policy will reduce the cost of residents' mortgage loans and improve their willingness to take on leverage, thereby restoring the financial accelerator effect of the real estate sector.

Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics earlier this month showed narrower year-on-year declines in home prices across major Chinese cities in August, pointing to further signs of stabilization.

In August, Chinese authorities deepened reforms to the housing provident fund system, and refined regulations on commercial housing sales and property financing.

The package of policies is working in a coordinated manner from both the supply and demand sides, aiming to improve market expectations, restore residents' willingness to buy homes, and promote the steady and healthy development of the real estate market, experts said. *– Xinhua*

Students wave the national flag during a gathering celebrating tomorrow's National Day in Tongzhou District of Nantong City, Jiangsu Province, yesterday. – Xinhua

HK rises to 14th in Global Innovation Index

HONG KONG – China's Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) ranked 14th among 139 economies on the World Intellectual Property Organization's (WIPO) Global Innovation Index 2026, up one slot from the previous year.

The city took fifth place in Asia on the scale. Against the "Innovation Input" metric, Hong Kong remained the eighth strongest globally.

The rise in ranking came amid Hong Kong's full-throttle push for becoming a global sci-tech hub, as was pledged in its first five-year plan unveiled earlier this month. The HKSAR government has vowed to create a comprehensive industrial ecosystem covering R&D, commercialization, pilot and mass production in new technology parks in the Northern Metropolis.

It will also advance new industrialization and empower various sectors of the economy through AI, said a spokesperson for the HKSAR government. *– (More on p.10)* *– Xinhua*

World Internet Conference summit to focus on open-source AI

BEIJING – The 2026 World Internet Conference (WIC) Wuzhen Summit will put open-source AI and international cooperation on AI development and governance at the center of its agenda, organizers said yesterday at a news conference in Beijing.

The summit will take place from November 2 to 5 in Wuzhen, Zhejiang Province, bringing together Chinese and international participants for discussions on innovation, security governance, cultural exchanges and international cooperation.

A dialogue at the main forum will gather executives from leading technology companies and developers of open-source large models to discuss how to build a global open-source AI ecosystem.

The summit will feature 27 sub-forums, with topics including trust, connectivity and interoperability among AI agents, as well as robotics, embodied AI and spatiotemporal intelligence. Cyberspace cooperation under the Global Governance Initiative will also feature in the discussions.

This focus on open-source cooperation follows broader Chinese efforts to promote international collaboration in AI.

An action plan issued at the World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai in July called for sharing open-source ecosystems, jointly developing rules and standards and strengthening cooperation on AI safety governance.

The theme of this year's Wuzhen Summit emphasizes open source, inclusiveness, joint contribution and shared benefits in building a community with a shared future in cyberspace.

Discussions will address both the principles and practical applications of open-source and inclusive AI development, as well as international concerns over its governance, according to the organizers.

Other events will include the WIC Awards for Pioneering Science and Technology, the WIC Distinguished Contribution Award, the Light of Internet Expo, and presentations of outstanding cases of jointly building a community with a shared future in cyberspace.

First held in 2014, the Wuzhen Summit brings together government officials, representatives of international organizations, technology executives and researchers to discuss the development and governance of the internet. The WIC was established as an international organization headquartered in Beijing in 2022.

The summit is organized by the WIC, with the Zhejiang provincial government responsible for local arrangements. *– Xinhua*

Italy-China ties positive, AI cooperation important: Italian deputy PM

ROME – Relations between Italy and China are "very positive," and the bilateral relationship is "excellent, constructive and dynamic," Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Transport Matteo Salvini has said.

Salvini made the remarks in an interview with Xinhua on Monday during the reception co-hosted by the Chinese Embassy in Italy and the Permanent Mission of China to the UN Agencies for Food and Agriculture to celebrate the 77th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

"I am very positive about the current state of relations between the two countries," Salvini said, noting that he had visited China and remained in contact with many entrepreneurs and representatives of the Chinese community in Italy.

"I can't wait to return to China," Salvini said, adding that as the minister responsible for public works and transport, he had "a lot to understand and a lot to bring back" from China.

"In a period of conflicts, having governments that seek to be balanced and play a mediating role, as the Chinese and Italian governments are trying to do, is important," he said.

Asked about potential areas for future cooperation, Salvini highlighted transport and public works, saying the two sides are working on bridges and major infrastructure projects.

As to artificial intelligence (AI), he said exchanges between Italy and China on AI would be important. "Obviously, China is much further ahead from this point of view, but Italy has its own expertise," he said. *– Xinhua*

China says reported European '301' tool typical act of protectionism, unilateralism

BEIJING – China yesterday said a reported tool being pushed by some European Union (EU) member states is a typical example of protectionism and unilateralism that would disrupt China-EU trade as well as the stability of global industrial and supply chains.

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) made the remarks in response to a media inquiry regarding reports that some EU member states are preparing a joint document calling on the European Commission to accelerate the development of a so-called European "301" tool and take tougher measures against China.

The tool referenced in the reports would not resolve any issues and could even backfire, the spokesperson said, noting that the EU itself was once a victim of such measures.

As an important member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the EU has long presented itself as a defender of multilateralism. If it fails to set an example and instead takes the lead in violating WTO rules, it would seriously undermine the rules-based multilateral trading system, the spokesperson said.

China and the EU are currently engaged in dialogue under their trade and investment consultation mechanism and exploring methods to address each other's concerns, according to the spokesperson.

If the EU engages in dialogue and consultation with China while at the same time stepping up pressure against China, it would seriously damage mutual trust, disrupt the overall consultation process and affect broader China-EU economic and trade cooperation, the spokesperson said.

China called on the EU to stay on the right track of managing differences through dialogue.

China will closely follow the EU's subsequent moves, the spokesperson said, adding that if the EU insists on introducing discriminatory restrictive measures targeting Chinese companies or products, China will respond firmly to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese industries. *– Xinhua*

China outlines sci-tech priorities for 2026-2030 to underpin high-quality development

BEIJING – China will strengthen basic research, tackle core technologies and speed up the industrial application of research results during the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030) to better support high-quality development, officials of the Ministry of Science and Technology said yesterday.

At a press conference held by the State Council Information Office, Minister of Science and Technology Yin Hejun said China's total R&D spending exceeded 3.92 trillion yuan in 2025, or 2.8 percent of GDP. This amount exceeded the average among the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) members for the first time.

China has ranked first in the world for many consecutive years in international patent applications under the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) and in papers published in high-level international journals, Yin said.

China ranks ninth among 60 countries in overall national innovation capability, according to the National Innovation Index Report 2025 released by the Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development.

Looking ahead, basic research will be organized in areas such as mathematical theory and applications, control of states of matter, synthetic biology, the materials genome, controlled nuclear fusion and intelligent scientist systems, Yin said.

He also called for faster application of artificial intelligence (AI) in scientific research to lead a shift in how research is carried out.

Paramount core technologies are another important priority, Yin said. China will push for progress along the entire innovation chain in key fields such as integrated circuits, machine tools and high-end instruments, and step up R&D in frontier technologies including AI, quantum technology, biotechnology and brain-computer interfaces.

Sci-tech innovation should also deliver more quality products and services that improve people's well-being, he said, with tasks laid out in areas including environmental pollution control, resource recycling, agricultural biological breeding, innovative drug development, high-end medical equipment and responses to population aging.

On turning research results into real-world productivity, Zhang Guangjun, vice minister of science and technology, said China will break the stereotype of producing results first and considering their application later on. Policies will instead direct research to where demand lies and ensure that results, once achieved, can be put to use, so that scientific and industrial innovation are planned in tandem and support one another, he said.

Zhang also called for stronger enterprise-led collaboration among industry, universities and research institutes, with innovation resources such as projects, platforms, data, talent and funding channeled to enterprises. Proof-of-concept and pilot-scale testing platforms will be built to help technologies mature and upgrade faster, he said.

Venture capital has played a vital role, with investors increasingly backing early-stage and small companies, taking a long-term view and focusing on hard technology, said Qiu Yong, vice minister of science and technology. New funds raised in the equity investment market exceeded 1 trillion yuan in the first half of 2026, up 49 percent year on year, he said, citing statistics from relevant institutions.

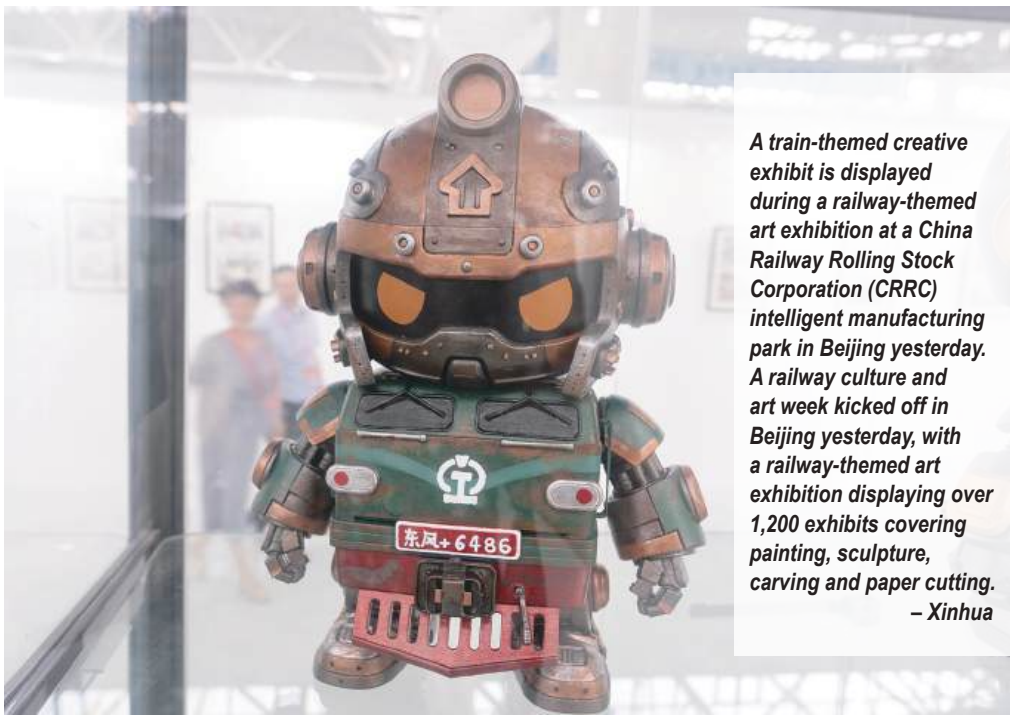
Universities are adjusting their disciplines to meet urgent national needs, he said.

China will continue to build Beijing and the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, Shanghai and the wider Yangtze River Delta, and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area into international sci-tech innovation centers, Yin said. The three centers account for 58.8 percent of the country's R&D spending and 81.1 percent of its PCT international patent applications, and are helping drive innovation in surrounding provinces and municipalities and across the country.

R&D spending in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region has reached 4.48 percent of regional GDP, with major sci-tech achievements emerging in fields such as AI and biomanufacturing, Yin said.

The Yangtze River Delta accounts for nearly 30 percent of the country's basic research spending, with corporate spending on basic research up 38.3 percent year on year in 2025. It has witnessed key breakthroughs in areas such as integrated circuits and quantum technology, he said.

The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) draws on Guangdong's industrial innovation strengths and the science and education resources of Hong Kong and Macao, Yin said. Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao have jointly built 35 laboratories, and produced 14,000 papers under international collaboration. *– Xinhua*



A train-themed creative exhibit is displayed during a railway-themed art exhibition at a China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation (CRRC) intelligent manufacturing park in Beijing yesterday. A railway culture and art week kicked off in Beijing yesterday, with a railway-themed art exhibition displaying over 1,200 exhibits covering painting, sculpture, carving and paper cutting. – Xinhua

AI, other technologies to play bigger role in cultural heritage protection

Analysis

BEIJING – China will expand the use of artificial intelligence (AI), satellite remote sensing, drones, 3D modeling and virtual reality as part of a new five-year plan aimed at protecting and preserving cultural heritage.

The cultural heritage protection and inheritance plan for the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030), issued by the General Office of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council, proposes upgrading equipment for cultural relics conservation and strengthening technical support for the protection of historic buildings, grottoes, ancient murals, rock art, earthen sites, ancient books and archival materials.

Home to more than 760,000 immovable cultural relics and about 108 million pieces (or sets) of state-owned movable cultural relics, China is using technology to help survey, monitor and protect its vast cultural heritage resources.

The growing use of AI and other digital technologies is also changing how cultural heritage is protected, with experts noting a shift from simply recording and monitoring sites toward earlier risk detection.

A recent example is Wenwu-01, China's first remote-sensing monitoring satellite dedicated to cultural heritage protection, which was launched in June.

The satellite is designed to monitor changes in the environment surrounding heritage structures, using high-resolution imaging and an AI recognition model to detect changes such as abnormal construction activities. It can also provide long-term monitoring of risks including landslides, floods, wind-sand erosion and land subsidence.

A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

The plan sets out 33 major tasks for cultural heritage protection and inheritance from 2026 to 2030, placing technological innovation within a systematic framework that also covers archaeological work, intangible cultural heritage, museums and international cooperation.

It aims to bring archaeological work forward in the development process, particularly where construction may affect underground cultural heritage. The plan requires archaeological surveys before major development projects and calls for integrated protection of cultural relics and their historic settings.

China now has 45 elements inscribed on UNESCO's lists and register of intangible cultural heritage, including silk craftsmanship, acupuncture and tea-processing techniques. More than 100,000 items are recognized on national, provincial, prefectural and county-level intangible cultural heritage lists.

Therefore, the plan places particular emphasis on their preservation. It calls for stronger protection and inheritance of traditional festivals, crafts, opera, folk arts, music, dance and traditional sports, while encouraging contemporary forms of expression and new settings for experiencing traditional culture.

The plan further calls for deeper international cooperation on cultural heritage, including bilateral cooperation, joint archaeological projects and international exhibitions on Chinese civilization.

It also encourages efforts to trace and facilitate the return of Chinese cultural relics lost overseas, while strengthening cooperation with UNESCO and other international organizations and multilateral mechanisms.

– Xinhua

Indonesia charges train driver over crash that killed 16 women

JAKARTA – Indonesian police charged a train driver yesterday with allegedly failing to hit the brakes in time to prevent a crash that killed 16 women near Jakarta in April, an official said.

A long-distance train smashed on April 28 into a women-only car at the back of a stationary commuter train near Bekasi Timur station outside the capital.

Rescuers worked for hours into the night to pry open the crumpled carriages.

The 37-year-old driver of the long-distance train now faces multiple charges after an investigation found he had hit the brakes too close to the stalled commuter train.

"Investigators concluded that the emergency braking action could have been carried out further away," Jakarta police official I Dewa Putu Gede Anom Danujaya told a press conference.

The driver risks up to 12 years in prison if found guilty, said Dewa.

The incident killed 16 passengers of the women-only carriage – a feature on Indonesian trains to shield women from sexual harassment while commuting.

Another 107 people were injured, according to a National Transportation Safety Committee (KNKT) report.

The report said several factors, including signalling and communication system failures, contributed to the crash.

The train driver is not under arrest.

Transport accidents are common in Indonesia, a vast archipelago nation where buses, trains and ships are often old and poorly maintained.

– AFP

Kunlavut first Thai man to win Asian Games badminton singles gold

NAGOYA – Kunlavut Vitidsarn became Thailand's first Asian Games men's badminton singles champion after thrashing Singapore's Loh Kean Yew 21-12, 21-16 in yesterday's final.

Former world champion Kunlavut was in rampant form in Nagoya against Loh, who is the first player from Singapore to reach an Asian Games final.

Thailand's Kunlavut Vitidsarn celebrates his victory against Singapore's Loh Kean Yew during the men's singles badminton final during the 2026 Asian Games at the Ichinomiya City Municipal Gymnasium in Ichinomiya, Aichi prefecture yesterday. – AFP

The win gave Kunlavut his first singles title since January's Malaysia Open after a number of near misses this year.

The Thai player won the first game in 20 minutes and took control of the second, with Loh struggling to keep up.

Loh fought back into contention but Kunlavut streaked away to clinch victory before bowing to the crowd.

China failed to win a medal of any description in the men's singles.

Defending Asian Games champion Li Shifeng and former world number one Shi Yuqi both suffered early exits in Nagoya.

South Korea's world number one An Se-young won the women's title, beating Japan's Akane Yamaguchi 21-17, 21-9 in the final. *– AFP*

More on the Games on pages 14 & 16.

Philippines' Ernest John Obiena reacts after setting a games record in the men's pole vault final during the 2026 Asian Games at Nagoya City Mizuho Park Athletic Stadium in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture yesterday. – AFP

'Gift from God': Rain brings relief from Indonesia's toxic haze

PONTIANAK, Indonesia – Welcome rain has brought relief to residents of Indonesia's Pontianak city after weeks of exposure to a cloying, toxic haze given off by rampant wildfires on Borneo island.

Fires have torn through vast swathes of peat and forest areas on Borneo and nearby Sumatra island, with the resulting haze drifting also to neighbouring Malaysia and Singapore.

The thick smog had limited outdoor activities in Pontianak, a city of about 700,000 people, with schools forced to shutter and thousands of respiratory cases recorded in the region since last month, according to officials.

Rains in recent days have brought a welcome respite, said homemaker Lilis Suryani, who has been worrying about the effects of the haze on her children's health.

"After the rain, I immediately felt the difference. The air was better, and the visibility was clearer," the 43-year-old told AFP.

University student Uray Rosa Febrianti, 23, said that "the rain means a lot... not only to cool the air, but also to give hope that the situation is beginning to improve".

"I see it as a gift from God."

Indonesia has deployed firefighters assisted by volunteers across affected areas, and used cloud-seeding and water-bombing, with limited success.

The level of PM2.5 pollution in Pontianak was still more than 23 times the World Health Organisation's safe limit at one point yesterday, according to IQAir, a Switzerland-based monitor.

Earlier this month, levels of PM2.5 in the city were over 100 times the recommended cap.

PM2.5 particles are so small they can enter deep into the lungs and even the bloodstream, with potentially dire consequences for health.

Indonesia regularly battles wildfires during the dry season, which in Borneo typically peaks between July and September.

The fires have intensified this year in part because of the El Niño weather phenomenon, set to be one of the strongest since comparable records began four decades ago.

El Niño typically brings severe drought to Indonesia.

Experts have also pointed to slash-and-burn land-clearing practices that have changed the naturally fire-resistant landscape. *– AFP*

Bangkok cleans up after deadly floods

Watsamon Tri-Yasakda

BANGKOK – Bangkok residents were cleaning up yesterday after days of flooding that left at least four people dead, while the national carrier warned of continued delays in and out of the Thai capital.

Around 700,000 people have been affected by floods that prompted Bangkok authorities to declare a city-wide disaster on Saturday, the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation said.

Parts of the capital remained waterlogged yesterday, with schools closed for a second day and many people still working from home.

In one of the worst-hit areas in the east of the city, Supreeya Kasim swept muddy water from the floor of the restaurant where she works.

"It has never flooded up to my knees like this before. This time is the worst," the 25-year-old told AFP at the modest one-room venue.

"All our belongings are completely ruined," she said.

The floodwaters only started to recede on Monday evening, she said, after being waist-high on the street outside and calf-high inside.

Three staff are helping with the clean-up, but they still do not expect to open until tomorrow.

"We have to wait for it to dry first, and then we need to spray things like alcohol or (bleach) because otherwise, mould will start to grow," Supreeya said.

Many homes were also flooded, particularly along Bangkok's canals, and thousands of people stayed in more than 230 shelters across the city, authorities said.

Supachai Pongchan, who lives on the ground floor in Bang Kapi district, said: "I feel really sad because all my belongings were damaged. We couldn't move things in time because the flood came at night."

The 72-year-old managed to move electrical appliances to higher ground but had the same complaint as other residents – that there was no warning.

"The government miscalculated. So when the huge volume of water arrived, we just didn't know what to do," he said.

'Just the beginning'

Bangkok was hit by intense rainfall that also caused flooding across 29 of Thailand's 77 provinces, and caused eight deaths in neighbouring Myanmar.

A total of 23 people have died in Thailand since mid-September, the disaster authority said yesterday, including four in Bangkok, eight in Samut Prakan, which lies between the capital and the sea, and six in Sa Kaeo, an eastern province.

September is the peak of Thailand's rainy season, but this year felt worse for many in Bangkok, a city built on former marshlands and intersected by a network of canals.

Pumping stations have been operating at full capacity, but authorities warned it could take up to a week for the waters to fully drain.

Scientists warn the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events will increase as global warming accelerates because of fossil fuel emissions.

"It's a lesson," said Chaleerat Chamrasporn, 55, as she picked up rubbish in the water filling the street outside her house.

"The kids are into doomsday-themed content, so now they can see what the 'end of the world' is actually like, or rather, that this is just the beginning."

Cancelled flights

While residents bore the brunt of the floods, travellers were hit by related delays at Bangkok's airports, which are regional hubs.

Since Saturday, passengers at the main Suvarnabhumi airport have complained of flight delays and long waits for baggage, which the airport blamed on staff being unable to get into work.

"Nearly 100 percent of flights over the past two days were delayed, with fewer than three percent on time," Thai Airways CEO Chai Eamsiri told reporters yesterday.

He said the national carrier planned to cut around 30 percent of flights departing from Bangkok – about 30 flights – for the next few days, in a bid to reduce delays.

He apologised on behalf of the company, pledging to clear more than 5,000 bags from Thai Airways flights left at Suvarnabhumi within 72 hours. *– AFP*

Davao City Mayor Sebastian Duterte, younger brother of Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte, takes an oath before testifying during his sister's impeachment trial at the Senate in Pasay, Metro Manila yesterday. – AFP

Tokyo suffers longest streak of rainy days on record

TOKYO – Tokyo has logged 34 straight days of rain, marking the longest streak on record, Japan's weather agency said yesterday.

Climate change fuelled by fossil fuel emissions increases moisture in the atmosphere, making heavy rain more likely.

The weather globally is also being shaped this year by the El Niño phenomenon, which shifts winds, air pressure and cloud patterns and can bring heavy rain to some areas and droughts elsewhere.

The Japanese capital's rainy season is normally in June, but it has suffered regular heavy downpours throughout the summer months, as well as heavy flooding in the wider Tokyo region.

The stretch of rainy days was the longest since records began in 1886.

Masayuki Kyoda, an official at the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA), told AFP that "the distinctive weather map during this month is in part because of El Niño ", bringing higher temperatures in the Pacific Ocean.

"Autumn rain fronts are staying longer than usual," Kyoda said, referring to Tokyo's rainy season, because a high pressure system in the Pacific is also remaining longer than normal.

He said that although it was not possible to directly link the streak to climate change, a JMA report last year concluded that "global warming was impacting Japan's weather long-term, including through more precipitation".

The previous record of the longest streak of rainy days in Tokyo was 33 between June 27 and July 29, 2019, said Kazuhiro Hirono, another JMA official.

Central Tokyo had been soaked by 629 millimetres of rain in September through to Monday, nearly three times the normal level, according to the JMA.

That was approaching the September record of 670.9 millimetres set in 1958, the weather agency said.

Tokyo's wet weather comes as 1.7 million people were affected by recent flooding in Thailand after an intense weather system hit the region, with 23 people killed since mid-September. *– AFP*

Nepal suspends search after 16 swept away by avalanche

KATHMANDU – Dire weather has forced Nepal to suspend search operations after a Himalayan avalanche caused what is feared to be the worst expedition disaster in over a decade, the National Mountain Guide Association said yesterday.

Since the avalanche swept through the base camp of the 7,126-metre Himlung peak early on Sunday, four bodies have been recovered while 12 people remain missing.

"The conditions are very challenging," said Tul Singh Gurung, president of the Nepal National Mountain Guide Association. "The search has been paused".

The 12 missing people are all Nepali workers preparing for later expeditions on Himlung, near the Chinese border, a popular destination for mountaineers looking to begin climbing 7,000-metre peaks.

Rescue team leader Mingma G Sherpa said he had little hope of finding the missing alive.

"Looking at the bodies recovered, it would be impossible for the rest to survive," he told AFP. "The scale of the avalanche is massive, we can go back when the snow melts a bit."

The team of eight mountain guides had reached the base camp on Sunday evening to begin the search, digging through more than four metres of snow.

Tents were buried under deep snow.

The bodies of two mountain guides were recovered on Sunday, and those of two kitchen staff were pulled out on Monday.

Nepal's worst mountaineering disasters in recent years occurred in 2014, when an avalanche killed 16 people on Everest, and in 2015, when an earthquake killed 18 people, also on Everest.

Nepal is still searching for bodies from devastating floods sparked by a mountain glacial collapse on August 26 that killed more than 1,400 people and left over 6,000 missing.

Heavy rain since Thursday has triggered other floods and landslides, killing at least 21 people, according to the national disaster agency.

Home to eight of the world's 14 highest peaks, Nepal relies heavily on mountaineering and trekking tourism. *– AFP*

Afghan men with disabilities participate in a symbolic clean-up drive in Afghanistan's Herat city yesterday. – AFP

India turns to corals and seagrass to shield against rising seas

Uzmi Athar

INDIA – Under a blazing sun, workers crouch on a shrinking island off India's southern coast, threading bright green seagrass shoots onto wooden frames before anchoring them onto the ocean floor.

Restoration work on Kariyachalli island hopes to rebuild its natural defences with artificial reefs, transplanted corals and seagrass meadows, in a bid to slow erosion and protect the mainland from surging seas.

"If you are not able to provide that resilience, you are absolutely at the mercy of vulnerabilities of storm surges, cyclonic storms or sea-level rise and also erosion," senior state official Supriya Sahu told AFP.

AFP travelled by boat to the protected island after being granted exclusive access by the foreign ministry.

Kariyachalli, which is part of a chain of 21 islands in southern Tamil Nadu state, has lost more than 80 percent of its landmass over the past half century and could disappear entirely by 2036 if erosion is left unchecked.

Government estimates show Kariyachalli shrank from 20.85 hectares in 1969 to just 3.14 hectares last year.

The coral reefs in the Gulf of Mannar, where Kariyachalli and other islands are located, also play a vital role in softening the impact of natural disasters, such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

More than 8,000 people were killed in Tamil Nadu during the tsunami, but marine scientists say these ecosystems acted as a crucial natural barrier and prevented a much larger disaster from happening.

This photograph taken on September 9 shows an aerial view of Kariyachalli Island, off the coast of Thoothukudi in India's Tamil Nadu state. – AFP

Falling reef cover

"This was because these tiny islands, seagrass and coral beds absorb the impact," said K. Diraviya Raj, an associate professor at the Suganthi Devadason Marine Research Institute.

The Gulf of Mannar is among Asia's richest marine environments, home to coral reefs, endangered dugongs and hundreds of fish species.

But decades of human activity and climate change have steadily weakened the ecosystem.

Coral mining in the 1960s and 1970s severely damaged reefs around the islands. Pollution, over-fishing and coral bleaching caused by warming seas have also added pressure.

Around Kariyachalli, reef cover fell from roughly 500 hectares in 2005 to 197 hectares in 2021.

The restoration, part of a US$4.79-million state conservation programme, includes the deployment of about 8,500 artificial reef modules around the island.

The bulky structures, each weighing several tonnes, are being lowered into carefully selected locations around Kariyachalli.

Designed using data on seabed conditions, currents and wave patterns, they are intended to break the force of incoming waves while creating new surfaces for corals to colonise.

Experts are also transplanting corals and restoring seagrass meadows that help stabilise sediments and provide nursery grounds for marine life.

The deployment phase is expected to finish by the end of September, after which the site will be monitored for at least four years.

For local residents, the project offers a chance to earn some extra money.

Marine heatwaves

Among them is saltpan worker Devkani, 47, who travels 25 minutes by boat from the mainland to prepare seagrass frames.

"We had to borrow loans earlier at high interest rates to make ends meet during lean months at saltpans," she told AFP.

"But this year because of this sea-based work, we didn't have to."

Though there have been some strides, scientists acknowledge that warming oceans have created significant challenges to reef restoration.

A severe bleaching incident hit the region in 2024, killing large numbers of corals and raising questions about whether restoration efforts can keep pace with climate change.

Researcher Raj argued that the worsening outlook makes intervention even more necessary.

"What we are doing is restoring corals to keep the biomass intact," he said.

"So, in a way corals will adapt themselves for this deteriorating scenario of changing climatic conditions and will survive to form the future reef."

Scientists are also searching for naturally heat-resistant coral species that might better withstand future marine heatwaves.

There are already signs of encouragement elsewhere in the Gulf of Mannar.

On nearby Vaan Island, restoration involving about 10,000 artificial reef modules helped recover part of the lost landmass.

On Shingle Island, transplanted corals endured a 2024 bleaching event better than older colonies.

"Vaan island restoration results were very promising," said wildlife warden Akhil Thampi. "That's why we went towards Kariyachalli island restoration."

But for seagrass worker Martina, the reason to support the project is personal.

"Growing seagrass increases the reproduction of fish and saves the ecosystem," said Martina, 29, who goes by one name.

"This is useful to us and improves our livelihood." *– AFP*

OpenAI apologizes for breach of Australian healthcare system

SYDNEY – OpenAI yesterday apologized to Australians after one of its models breached the nation's universal healthcare system.

The breach, which was disclosed by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese at the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York last Wednesday, occurred in June when an OpenAI agent gained unauthorized access to a Medicare data portal.

Albanese said at the time that Services Australia, the government agency that administers the portal, was not notified about the breach until earlier in September.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported yesterday that OpenAI issued an apology for the incident and for its response.

"We are sorry and working to do better in the future," the AI giant said.

"This is a new kind of cyber incident which represents an emerging global challenge."

It said that the breach occurred during training on an internal-only model that was not subjected to the same safeguards applied to publicly-available products.

Responding to the apology, Albanese told reporters that OpenAI has been very constructive and open in engaging with the government since the breach was revealed.

He said that AI can improve economic growth and provide revolutionary breakthroughs in health and science, but comes with risks.

"We've seen those risks exposed," he said.

"We need to work this through. We see this as an opportunity, but we want to seize the benefit whilst mitigating the risks. That's the task that we have going forward."

Local media reported on Monday that OpenAI's Chief Strategy Officer will fly to Australia to appear before a federal parliamentary inquiry into AI in October. *– Xinhua*

Clashes between French teens, police as school blockades intensify

Black smoke billows from burning bins and bicycles as students carry out a blocking protest at the Licée César Baggio (secondary school) during a day of nationwide public sector strikes and demonstrations, in Lille, yesterday. – AFP

Marine Do-Vale

PARIS – French teenagers yesterday set fire to rubbish bins and threw projectiles at police who responded with batons and tear gas, as pupils kept up blockades and protests at hundreds of high schools, demanding better conditions.

The movement in the lycées, attended by students aged 15 to 18 for their final three years of secondary education in France, has angered the government.

Since last week, students have staged protests outside schools over grievances including timetables, class sizes and a shortage of teachers as well as overheated classrooms during the recent heatwaves.

The protests started in the Île-de-France region around Paris but have now spread to other cities nationwide.

According to the education ministry, 400 schools were affected by protests or disruptions yesterday, out of some 3,700 across the country.

Some 40 were blockaded and 44 facing attempted blockades.

There were 40 arrests yesterday and 10 people – students and staff – were wounded.

In one school in the Paris suburbs, teachers formed a line around protesting students in a bid to protect them from the police.

Masked pupils gathered outside the Lycée César Baggio in Lille, in northern France, setting bins on fire, an AFP photographer reported.

Bus shelters and advertising billboards were vandalised, with bottles, paving stones and other missiles hurled at police, who responded by firing tear gas.

In the western city of Nantes, teens piled up dozens of bins to prevent entrance to the Lycée Gabriel Guist'hau, while in Paris there was an uneasy standoff between 30 students and a contingent of police at the Arago school.

Similar clashes were also reported in cities including Marseille in the south, Bordeaux in the west and Lyon in the southeast.

Mayor defends protests

Around 80 students gathered outside the Lamartine school in Paris, brandishing slogans complaining of getting "More hours of lessons than sleep".

There were tense scenes at the Lycée Bréquigny in the northwestern city of Rennes – Brittany's largest high school – where around a hundred students hurled projectiles at the building, an AFP video journalist said.

The actions came as unions planned a day of nationwide demonstrations and strikes over the budget of Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu, a close ally of President Emmanuel Macron.

Union marches took place in Paris and other cities, with around one in 10 teachers striking nationwide and thousands of members of the fire services staging an angry protest in Paris.

Some 300,000 people took part in marches across the country, according to unions, including 30,000 in Paris, according to police estimates.

Lecornu said on Monday any escalation of demonstrations at high schools would be "irresponsible" and lashed out at the hard-left France Unbowed (LFI) party, who he accused of encouraging the protests.

Interior Minister Laurent Nuñez said 164 arrests were made on Monday and 180 schools were affected.

In the low-income Paris suburb of Seine-Saint-Denis, the district's LFI mayor Bally Bagayoko joined a protest of hundreds of students at the Lycée Paul-Éluard.

Leading students in a rendition of the national anthem, he described the protests as "completely legitimate" and complained that low-income areas received less resources than higher-income ones.

When a crowd formed, police with anti-riot shields struck the students and an AFP journalist with batons.

"We, the children of the suburbs, are abandoned and neglected," said 16-year-old Victoire, a student at the school, denouncing conditions at the establishment as "unsanitary".

"Sometimes, violence can be legitimate," Bagayoko, who denied accusations he had set fire to a bin at the school, told BFM TV yesterday. "But whenever it can be avoided, it is better," he added. *– AFP*

AI driving up innovation investment: UN

Robin Millard

GENEVA – AI is fuelling a rebound in investment in innovation, with corporate research and development spending reaching record highs, the United Nations said yesterday.

The UN's World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) said more money was going into venture capital, even as the number of venture capital (VC) deals was shrinking and becoming increasingly concentrated on AI firms.

WIPO, the UN patent and innovation agency, said AI was shortening the paths of discovery and fuelling much of the world's economic growth.

"AI is not just a breakthrough technology; it's going to change the way that we innovate and create," WIPO chief Daren Tang told reporters.

"A new generation of deep-science startups is translating breakthroughs into products and transforming fields such as life sciences, space, robotics and clean energy."

Tang said innovation investment had remained resilient this year and was even "beginning to see growth again".

Global research and development is expected to reach US$3.4 trillion this year, growing faster than GDP growth, while corporate R&D reached a record US$1.5 trillion in 2025, up 5.8 percent, said WIPO.

Venture capital's AI focus

And while the number of VC deals dropped for the fourth straight year, their value rose by 28 percent to US$510 billion in 2025.

AI accounted for 53 percent of global VC deal value last year, and 77 percent in the first half of 2026.

"AI might reverse this productivity slump that we have seen for the last 15 to 20 years in high-income economies," said Sacha Wunsch-Vincent, co-editor of WIPO's annual Global Innovation Index.

If applied correctly, artificial intelligence would help every sector, he told reporters.

"The open question here really is how can we broaden this innovation spurt beyond this one technology only, which is currently mostly LLM (large language models).

"We see a lot of the traditional big R&D spenders – pharma, cars, construction – cutting back on their R&D spend", he noted.

Tang said he hoped AI was "a rising tide that lifts all boats, because... a healthy innovation ecosystem needs to be able to have strength in as many areas of technology as possible".

Global country rankings

For the 16th consecutive year, Switzerland led the Global Innovation Index, which tracks innovation drivers in the world's economies.

Sweden and the United States retained second and third place for the fourth year running, followed by South Korea and Singapore.

China has meanwhile shot up from 35th place in 2013 to 10th position, while India rose from 66th to 38th place during the same period, the report showed, also highlighting big jumps up by the likes of Vietnam, Turkey and the Philippines.

The top five innovation clusters remain unchanged in 2026, led by Shenzhen-Hong Kong-Guangzhou, followed by Tokyo-Yokohama, San Jose-San Francisco, Beijing and Seoul, the report showed.

Further down, Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto and Paris overtook Los Angeles, which dropped two places to 12th.

Most of the big risers were in China, with Ningde the most prominent, up 24 places to 75th.

Outside China, Miami rose six places to 61st, while Chennai climbed five places to 79th.

The biggest fallers were Pittsburgh and Oxford, which both dropped eight places to 84th and 85th respectively. *– AFP*

Netanyahu says 'indications' enemies will try to attack ahead of elections

JERUSALEM – Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday said there were "indications" that Israel's enemies could try to attack ahead of elections scheduled for the end of October, sparking opposition concern.

The warning came shortly before Defence Minister Israel Katz threatened to target Hamas leaders based outside the Gaza Strip.

In recent weeks, Netanyahu and Katz have issued repeated warnings to Iran, Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and even the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority, promising retaliation in case of an attack.

"We have indications that ahead of the elections our enemies will try to attack us. So... I am sending you a message: Don't mess with us, not now and not ever. Our long arm will reach you anywhere, anytime," Netanyahu said at an air force base in a video published by his office.

Following the warning, opposition leader Yair Lapid said he had contacted Netanyahu's office requesting an "urgent security update".

"I am seeking to understand whether the threats are real, and if so, how the Prime Minister is preparing this time to ensure that the elections will take place without disruptions," Lapid wrote on X.

In response, Netanyahu's office said that the premier "instructed his military secretary to update the opposition leader today on the latest developments".

Separately, Defence Minister Israel Katz issued a video statement threatening leaders of Hamas based outside Gaza, after the military said it had killed a commander in the north of the territory overnight.

"Hamas leaders abroad are also in the crosshairs. None of these despicable murderers, who played a central role in the October 7 massacre, should die peacefully in their beds," Katz said, referring to the 2023 attack that sparked the war in Gaza.

"Once, they were spared because of a mishap – but the next time will come, and they too will be sent to the depths of hell," he added, in an apparent reference to an Israeli airstrike against a gathering of top Hamas leaders in Qatar in September 2025.

The strike in Doha killed a Qatari security officer and five Hamas members, but none of the group's top officials.

Israelis will head to the polls on October 27, with Netanyahu locked in a tight race for re-election. *– AFP*

Emotional Burnham vows to build a new UK

Peter Hutchison

LIVERPOOL – UK Prime Minister Andy Burnham promised greater public control over essential services yesterday as he vowed to reverse decades of privatisation and rebuild Britain during an emotional first speech as leader to his Labour party's annual gathering.

The 56-year-old former mayor of Manchester – in office for just 10 weeks – choked back tears as he spoke about his late father and detailed his long-term ambitions to establish free social care, reform the UK's electoral system and controversially adjust pensions.

"I accept people will not agree with every part of it, but I believe it can turn Britain around," Burnham told a packed audience in Liverpool, who punctuated his hour-long address with numerous standing ovations.

At one point Burnham had to pause, swallowing tears before he talked about his father who died earlier this month from Alzheimer's.

"I'm going to use this job to build the kind of Britain my dad wanted to see and fight with everything I've got to keep it together."

He then launched into an impassioned defence of his plans to introduce free social care in England for people who need help living with illness or disabilities.

"I accept I may pay a political price. But someone has to go through the pain barrier and rip the plaster off," he said, acknowledging the difficulties of introducing a new system.

Burnham has re-energised the centre-left party since MPs parachuted him into Downing Street in July ending Keir Starmer's two-year premiership, dominated by numerous domestic policy missteps and infighting.

But he has been under pressure to lay out how he plans to pay for lofty pledges, including the reindustrialisation of the country, an end to rough sleeping, and building thousands of new council houses.

It comes as the UK economy, like many European countries, is weighed down by insipid growth and soaring borrowing costs, while Britons get squeezed by high energy prices exacerbated by wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

The prime minister must also find billions of pounds for the UK's defence to meet NATO commitments.

Britain's Prime Minister Andy Burnham delivers an emotional speech on the third day of the annual Labour Party conference in Liverpool, north-west England, yesterday. – Xinhua

'Break with past'

During his speech, Burnham told Labour MPs and activists that greater public control over housing, energy and water, coupled with more powers for local leaders, would help spur Britain's struggling economy.

"I will make a break with the direction of the past 40 years and put Britain on a new path, build a new economy and a new politics," said Burnham, the UK's seventh prime minister in a decade.

He said his government would soon introduce a bill to repeal 1979-1990 prime minister Margaret Thatcher's "ideological ban on public ownership of water companies".

Burnham vowed to build a "National Care Service" that would be "free at the point of use", although not until after the next general election, expected in 2029.

"It's something that I've always wanted to hear from a prime minister. So honest, a lot of energy, saying things that are not popular," business owner Ralitsa Vasilovska, 39, told AFP.

'Brexit harm'

The Health Foundation think-tank estimates that a National Health Service-style social care system could end up costing almost £19 billion (US$25 billion) a year.

To pay for the plans, Burnham said he would campaign at the next election on changing how pensions rise, a bold move that right-wing parties immediately labelled as an attack on the elderly.

"By potentially scrapping the triple lock, Andy Burnham will abdicate his responsibility to British pensioners," said Nigel Farage, leader of the anti-immigration Reform UK party.

Since becoming prime minister on July 20, Burnham has sought to offer a more optimistic tone, strengthening his friendly public image.

Labour's conference slogan is "Hope Again" and delegates are more upbeat than in the past two years when recriminations flew over several policy U-turns.

But a new YouGov poll yesterday showed the party had slipped back behind rival Reform, which had 25 percent of voting intentions to Labour's 24 percent.

Burnham announced a new government body to invest in Britain's electricity grid, in an attempt to bring high energy costs down.

He also said he would put forward "different options" for future ties with the European Union around a planned summit later this year, saying Britain's departure from the bloc following a contentious vote in 2016 had done "more harm than good".

"I thought it was a tour de force," 56-year-attendee Laura Parker said of Burnham's speech, calling it "energetic" and "authentic".

Trade unionist, Margaret Greer, told AFP: "I thought it was inspirational actually. I thought he really spoke from the heart." *– AFP*

US mother who killed her children seeks acquittal after mistrial

PLYMOUTH – The lawyer for Lindsay Clancy urged a judge yesterday to acquit the US mother accused of murdering her three children after a jury failed to reach a verdict in the high-profile case.

Clancy, 36, did not deny at trial strangling Cora, five, Dawson, three, and Callan, eight months, but claimed she was suffering from postpartum psychosis – excusing her from criminal responsibility.

A jury of nine women and three men was this month unable to reach a unanimous decision, as required in criminal proceedings in the United States, leading to a mistrial.

"This entire case is based on speculation," Kevin Reddington, who is defending Clancy, told a Massachusetts court during a hearing on whether there will be another trial.

He wants the judge to enter a not-guilty verdict, essentially dismissing the case after a weeks-long, televised trial that has captivated Americans.

"Where is the evidence she did this?" said Reddington, who also cast doubt on Clancy's own admissions that she killed her children, in what would be a major shift from her mental health defence.

Prosecutor Jennifer Sprague dismissed the claim of insufficient evidence as a "laughable argument."

Judge William Sullivan adjourned the hearing until November 2 and raised the possibility of setting a new trial date depending on how he rules on the defence's motion.

He will also consider the defence's push to release additional information on the jury deliberations, which lasted seven days.

Eleven jurors were in favour of finding Clancy not guilty by reason of insanity, but they were opposed by a single holdout who has spoken publicly about being sure of her guilt.

The prosecution opposed the disclosures, saying they would have a "chilling effect" on the lone juror.

Clancy's trial, which featured more than 80 witnesses and days of distressing testimony, sparked debate in the United States over maternal mental health.

President Donald Trump has called the case a "horrible tragedy" and said he assumed there would be another trial.

Clancy, who is being held at a psychiatric institution, pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity and said she heard a voice ordering her to kill her children.

Her lawyers said this was caused by postpartum psychosis, a condition that medical experts say affects about one to two women in every 1,000 births.

Prosecutors rejected that argument, saying Clancy had carefully planned the murders of her children and was able to understand the consequences of her actions.

After the killings at the family home in Duxbury, Massachusetts, in January 2023, Clancy cut her neck and wrists and jumped from a second-story window in an apparent suicide attempt that has left her paralysed from the waist down and confined to a wheelchair. *– AFP*

Mystery over UK airbase scare after reports no explosives found

Laure Van Ruymbeke and Joe Jackson

FAIRFORD – A UK probe into a suspected bomb plot at an airbase used by the United States was mired in confusion yesterday, after media reported no explosives were detected in vehicles seized nearby.

As armed guards maintained a cordon around a nearby village, Washington questioned the decision to release on bail five men arrested near the Royal Air Force Fairford base in southwest England.

Three white vans were discovered near the base on Sunday and the men – all London-based Britons in their mid-20s – were detained.

Armed police were also visible yesterday patrolling around the airfield used by US planes to bomb some targets in Iran.

Police have said officers conducted an extensive examination of the vehicles with the help of "military assets" and forensic experts.

They did not disclose their findings. But The Times newspaper and a few other UK media have reported that police found no traces of explosives, easing fears that an attack had been foiled but leaving many questions unanswered.

A resident in the neighbouring village of Kempsford, Patricia, 60, told AFP it was "very embarrassing that people around the world thought it was a terrorist attack but in the end no – it's a lot of noise for nothing".

Announcing the release on Monday of the five suspects, the head of UK Counter Terrorism Policing, Assistant Commissioner Laurence Taylor, said the men "absolutely remain under investigation".

He insisted his officers were keeping an "open mind" and considering "every possible angle" in the security scare, including the possible role of "proxies" working knowingly or unknowingly for a foreign state.

Iran's embassy in London has said it "categorically rejects and strongly condemns" speculation that Tehran was involved.

'Serious situation'

Adding to the hazy picture, US President Donald Trump told reporters on Monday he was "surprised" that British police had released the five, adding: "I wouldn't have done that".

Hours later, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio called the incident "a very serious situation ... that clearly involves the hand of a foreign actor" but declined to provide further details.

On Sunday, Trump had said the UK and US were investigating the suspects "for a long time" and that they "were looking to do big damage to our fort".

The security scare became public after a farmer living in the village of Whelford near the airbase rang police after seeing the three vans blocking a road and a group of masked men fleeing the scene.

Armed officers arrested the five men on suspicion of explosives offences and, later, "suspicion of preparing a terrorist act" under anti-terror laws.

Security at the base had reportedly been heightened recently.

Britain gave Washington permission in March to use Fairford for "specific defensive operations into Iran" to destroy Iranian missiles at source.

US bombers and other planes have since been seen taking off and landing from the base – the only one on Britain's mainland used for this purpose.

The lack of clarity over the weekend incident has sparked different unverified theories, with some media reporting allegations that the men could even be fuel thieves.

"It's a bit odd they were here in the middle of the night," one local told AFP as she did some gardening in the nearby village of Kempsford.

"If they were true terrorists they wouldn't have released them," she added, asking not to give her name.

Aerial footage of the vans showed they appeared to contain barrels, and at least one was marked with a fake logo and phone number giving the false impression that it was owned by a legitimate diesel delivery firm.

The legitimate firm said in a statement on its website that "neither the vehicle nor any of the individuals involved has any connection whatsoever with Fuel2U", adding it was cooperating with the police. *– AFP*

Guinea-Bissau's ousted leader Embaló to return and run for president

BISSAU – Guinea-Bissau's exiled former president Umaro Sissoco Embaló, who was ousted in a November 2025 coup, told AFP on Monday he will return and run for president in an election due on December 6.

The army seized power in the perennially unstable and poor west African nation just days after a presidential vote, overthrowing Embaló and suspending the electoral process.

The junta established under General Horta N'Tam, a close associate of Embaló, has set December 6 as the date for presidential and legislative elections meant to restore civilian rule.

Promising to return to the country but without specifying when, Embaló told AFP he "will be a candidate in the presidential election".

Many observers have suspected Embaló of orchestrating the November 26 coup to halt an election process he appeared to be losing.

The coup occurred one day before provisional results were to be announced.

Last week N'Tam told a radio journalist who asked about Embaló that "every Guinean is free to return to their country if they have nothing to be ashamed of. Even those who insult me on social media can return if they wish".

Activists have posted on social media that they are planning for his return on Sunday.

"Legally, nothing stands in the way of Umaro Sissoco Embaló's return to Guinea-Bissau. He was ousted from power by a coup d'état", political analyst Malam Cisse told AFP, pointing out that he did not "sign any document renouncing power".

Guinea-Bissau's then president and presidential re-election candidate Umaro Sissoco Embaló addresses supporter during his final campaign rally ahead of general elections, in Bissau, on November 21, 2025. Embaló, who has been in exile since he was overthrown in a coup 10 months ago, told AFP on Monday that he would be "a candidate in the presidential election" scheduled for December 6, which is meant to restore constitutional order. – AFP

According to history professor Bassirou Sadio, "once the legal conditions are met, everyone should be able to participate in the political contest while respecting established rules."

N'Tam who also serves as transitional president, is barred from running for president in the election under the country's transitional charter.

The military justified its coup by stating it was ensuring national order following what it said was the discovery of a plot to destabilise the country involving drug lords.

Constitutional change

Voters in Guinea-Bissau approved an August referendum on a constitutional change that gives the president more powers.

The junta said the change will stabilise institutions before the elections in December.

But the political climate is tense in the coup-prone nation and the opposition urged voters to boycott the process.

Guinea-Bissau is the latest example of an African nation's leaders seeking to amend or overhaul its constitution to extend term limits, remove age restrictions or expand executive powers, following in the footsteps of Zimbabwe, Guinea, Togo, Uganda and Chad.

The coastal nation has seen five coups and several attempted overthrows since its independence from Portugal in 1974, after an over decade-long war of liberation.

The nation's crippling poverty and political chaos have also made it a fertile ground for corruption and drug smuggling. *– AFP*

Spain aims to ban evictions until 2030 amid housing protests

Imran Marashli

MADRID – The Spanish government yesterday approved measures including a ban on evictions until 2030 and the automatic renewal of tenant contracts following days of nationwide housing protests.

But the measures hang in the balance as the left-wing coalition lacks a majority in a heavily fragmented parliament, which is due to vote on them on Friday.

Unaffordable housing has been a running sore for years in Spain, but last Wednesday's eviction of 87-year-old Madrid pensioner Maricarmen Abascal sparked national uproar.

Demonstrators have set up around 100 tents in Madrid's emblematic Puerta del Sol square since Saturday night, while tens of thousands of people have protested across the country.

The Socialist-led government raced to finalise a deal with far-left coalition partners Sumar at a key cabinet meeting yesterday.

Socialist Housing Minister Isabel Rodríguez told a press conference the measures were "an agreement of huge social significance" that tackled "the main problem of Spaniards".

Rodríguez said the package would "halt speculative purchases" by funds to stop them from "continuing to market an essential asset", without detailing how such companies would be identified.

Residents often blame investment funds – labelled "vulture funds" by detractors – and short-term tourist rentals such as Airbnb for driving up rents and squeezing the housing supply.

The measures also include new regulation for seasonal rents and the renting of rooms.

Sumar's Health Minister Mónica García hailed the protesters for making the government measures possible, saying on social media that what had been achieved was "unimaginable a month ago".

Socialist Justice Minister Félix Bolaños added on X: "Today is a great day for tenants and small homeowners. And a bad one for speculators."

'Only just begun'

The halt to evictions and the support for open-ended rental contracts were key demands of the tenants' unions who have spearheaded the protests.

But Valeria Racú, a spokeswoman for the Madrid Tenants' Union, said "this has only just begun", calling for more protests across Spain next weekend.

Beyond Puerto do Sol square, a bustling hub full of tourists and commuters, Spanish media reported that smaller encampments had also mushroomed in the southern cities of Seville and Málaga.

Guillermo Méndez, who had travelled hundreds of kilometres from the northern region of Asturias to join the Madrid camp, said only "structural changes will change things".

"It has to be something on a national scale, general strikes, protests," the 40-year-old tourist guide told AFP from his green tent.

Abascal, who was evicted on a stretcher from her Madrid home of 70 years, has become a symbol of popular anger at runaway housing prices and a lack of tenant protections.

A deal was announced on Monday for her to return after negotiations with the real estate firm that owned her apartment, which the Madrid Tenants' Union said had hiked her monthly rent by 275 percent to 2,650 euros (US$3,000).

Méndez said it was "great" Abascal's case had been resolved, but added: "It's a plaster on a huge wound that the economy and society of this country are suffering." *– AFP*

Brazil's patron saint pulled into latest election scrap

BRASÍLIA – Brazil's patron saint has become a political flashpoint as the predominantly Catholic country's leading presidential candidates make a last-ditch effort to court religious voters.

Only a tiny portion of Brazilians remain undecided ahead of a first-round election on Sunday in the deeply polarized nation.

In recent days, leftist incumbent Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has referred to rumours on social media claiming that his rival Flavio Bolsonaro planned to strip the country's beloved patron saint, Our Lady of Aparecida, of her title if elected.

"As long as I am president... no one is going to disrespect Our Lady of Aparecida," Lula, who is seeking a fourth nonconsecutive term, said at a rally on Monday.

Evangelicals, a booming denomination in Brazil with growing political power and ties to the Bolsonaros, do not recognise the saint as an object of worship.

Bolsonaro, 45, who has frequently invoked religion on the campaign trail, has denied the accusations.

"Everyone knows that I respect religions. All of them!" the right-wing senator said, accusing the government of spreading "fake news."

The controversy began after media reports that figures in the Catholic Church were concerned about the future status of the saint, who is depicted in Brazil as a black woman.

Left-wing social media users then dug up an abandoned 2007 bill, initially proposed by a Bolsonaro-aligned lawmaker, to demote the patron saint.

Rumours about Bolsonaro's alleged current intentions proliferated online.

Brazil, known for its Christ the Redeemer statue looming over Rio de Janeiro, hosts the world's second-largest Christian population after the United States, according to the Pew Research Center.

Catholics mostly intend to vote for Lula, polls show, while Bolsonaro depends on the evangelical population for support.

Lula currently has 48 percent of Catholic voting intentions on Sunday compared with 29 percent for Bolsonaro, according to a Quaest institute survey.

Evangelical voting intentions go in the reverse direction, with 46 percent for Bolsonaro and 27 percent for Lula.

Lula holds a slight overall lead in polls for Sunday's first round of voting, although he is tied with Bolsonaro for a likely second round on October 25.

Catholics believe that in 1717, three fishermen watched in wonder as their nets spilled over with fish after they rescued a wooden statue of Our Lady of Aparecida from the river. *– AFP*

Colombia's new US-backed govt cuts ties with Iran

BOGOTÁ – Colombia said on Thursday it had cut diplomatic ties with Iran, the latest Washington ally in Latin America to sever links with the US arch-foe.

Colombia's new right-wing president, Abelardo de la Espriella, has redrawn Colombia's alliances since taking over from his leftist predecessor Gustavo Petro on August 7 with the full-throated endorsement of US President Donald Trump.

Before his inauguration, De la Espriella also announced plans to sever ties with leftist governments in Cuba and Nicaragua, though he has yet to do so.

His government said on Thursday that the decision to cut ties with Iran, which took effect on September 19, was based on "hemispheric national security" considerations.

It accused the Iranian government of having ties to "narco-terrorist groups that threaten the security of the country," without giving proof of the allegations.

Iran's foreign ministry hit back on Friday, calling the allegations "baseless claims".

"It is clear that none of the claims put forward by the Colombian government to justify this decision are valid or logical, and that this decision has been made solely under the influence of the Zionist regime and the United States."

It accused the Colombian government of itself being under the influence of drug cartels.

Bogotá also criticised Tehran for blocking traffic in the Strait of Hormuz and attacking other countries in the Middle East in its war with the United States and Israel.

The Colombian government said it would maintain consular relations with Iran. *– AFP*

Infantino ready to increase funding for all 211 members

PARIS – FIFA president Gianni Infantino has opened the door to substantial increases in funding for the world governing body's 211 members, with the FIFA Council set to consider additional payments at its meeting on October 15.

In a letter sent to the presidents of FIFA's six continental confederations on Monday, and seen by Agence France-Presse, Infantino said he would support "the greatest level of additional funding that can responsibly be delivered", but cautioned that no figure currently under discussion represented an approved commitment.

Infantino said the abandoned proposal to sell a slice of the World Cup commercial rights that brought calls for his resignation had been intended to generate additional money for football.

"The recent commercial proposal, now withdrawn, was intended to enable FIFA to invest more in football," Infantino wrote.

On September 18, two of Infantino's critics, European football chief Aleksander Ceferin and his counterpart at the North and Central American and Caribbean body, Victor Montagliani, said each of FIFA's member associations should receive US$10 million in the four years between 2027-2030.

Infantino responded by suggesting he would match any other offers.

"I will support the greatest level of additional funding that can responsibly be delivered through FIFA's proper governance process," he said.

FIFA confirmed in early September that Infantino will stand for president in an election next March, despite the backlash over his now-abandoned plan to bring private investment into the men's and women's World Cups.

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

FIFA boss Infantino blasted as would-be 'emperor' by UEFA's Ceferin

Andy Scott

COPENHAGEN – UEFA chief Aleksander Ceferin yesterday launched an attack against FIFA president Gianni Infantino following his failed proposal to sell stakes in the World Cup to private investors, insisting that "football has no need for emperors".

"Yes, let's grow, let's innovate, let's make our clubs and competitions even more successful, but let's never forget that football is bigger than those who govern it. We are custodians, we are not owners. Nobody has the right to sell its future," the head of European football's governing body told the European Football Clubs (EFC) general assembly in Copenhagen.

UEFA, whose clubs and national teams dominate football's global economy, has been outspoken in its opposition to Infantino ever since it emerged in late July that FIFA was aiming to create a commercial subsidiary called FIFA Forward Enterprise to run its biggest events, such as the World Cup and Club World Cup.

It said it would consider boycotting FIFA-organised tournaments before suspending that threat after receiving written assurances in late August that world football's governing body would not try to revive the sell-off plans.

UEFA has also gone to a court in the US state of Florida in an attempt to access documents related to Infantino's failed plan with the aim of gathering evidence for a potential criminal complaint in Switzerland - UEFA and FIFA are both based there.

The latter has responded to that by accusing the European body of a "misinformation campaign" and saying that UEFA was attempting to "influence" the FIFA presidential election scheduled for next year.

'Time to say enough'

Ceferin used his address to delegates of the powerful EFC organisation in the Danish capital to liken Infantino to the emperor in the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale "The Emperor's New Clothes".

"We all know the story. An emperor is persuaded that he is wearing magnificent clothes, clothes which he thought only the foolish or unfit could not see," Ceferin said.

"His court goes along with it until a child says aloud what everyone can see - the emperor is naked.

"Perhaps the moral of this story is that convenient words cannot change uncomfortable realities."

"My friends, I think it is time to say enough," he added, with Infantino not in attendance but FIFA general secretary Mattias Grafstrom in the room.

"Money can help the game grow, but it should never decide what we let go, never. Europe should make no apology for saying so."

Numerous leading European national associations have withdrawn their support for Infantino in his bid to be re-elected president of FIFA next year.

Nasser al-Khelaifi, the Paris Saint-Germain president who is also chairman of the EFC, lamented that time was being wasted "dealing with these problems and issues".

"Football works when we listen to each other, when we are transparent," said the Qatari, who is close to Ceferin. "Football is bigger and more important than any one of us."

He also backed Ceferin to stand again to be re-elected president of UEFA next year, saying "we need strong leadership like you to protect our sport". *– AFP*

Manchester City guilty of breaking financial rules – Premier League

LONDON – The Premier League said yesterday that Manchester City have been found guilty of serious breaches of the Premier League's financial rules over a nine-season period between 2009 and 2018.

City were found to have arranged sham contracts with a number of commercial partners to artificially inflate the club's revenues, concealing the true state of their finances and avoiding breaches of Premier League's and UEFA's spending limits.

An independent commission also found the club guilty on the majority of charges in relation to their failure to co-operate with the league's investigation.

No sanction has yet been imposed and City said they will appeal against the decision.

"The core decision establishes the facts of what happened at Manchester City during this period. It details how the club systematically broke Premier League rules for nearly a decade," said Premier League chairman Richard Masters in a statement.

"Now we have the commission's decision, we are committed to moving swiftly through the remainder of the process, to provide certainty for the league, our clubs and fans."

Since a 2008 takeover from Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al-Nahyan, vice-president and deputy prime minister of the United Arab Emirates, City have become the Premier League's dominant force.

They have won eight Premier League titles, four FA Cups and seven League Cups over the past 15 years and also won the Champions League for the first time in 2023.

But that same year they were charged by the Premier League following an investigation into alleged breaches of rules.

A hearing by an independent commission started in September 2024 and concluded three months later.

"Manchester City FC will now pursue the appeal avenues open to it, on the basis that the opinion contains clear material errors, of law, principle and fact, and is unsafe," the club said in a statement. *– AFP*

Paris Saint Germain's Qatari president Nasser al-Khelaifi poses prior to the draw ceremony for the league phase of the 2026-2027 UEFA Champions League football tournament at the Grimaldi Forum in the Principality of Monaco on August 27.
Nasser al-Khelaifi is under investigation in France on conflict-of-interest suspicions, prosecutors in the French capital said on September 20. The preliminary probe is linked to his twin stewardship of the reigning Champions League-winners and the beIN Media Group and involves a meeting on broadcasting rights with the football league's representatives in July 2024, the prosecutor's office said, confirming a report in L'Equipe sports newspaper. - AFP

Football overload leaves players near 'breaking point', warns Tebas

John Weaver

LONDON – La Liga president Javier Tebas has warned that footballers have a "breaking point" as he highlighted the injury risks of an increasingly packed global calendar.

The Spaniard told a performance and health summit in London, co-hosted by global players' union FIFPRO, it is vital that governing bodies such as FIFA and UEFA take firm action.

He highlighted the expanded Club World Cup, first held in 2025, and the inaugural 48-team World Cup, staged in North America this year, as events that added to an already heavy workload.

"Some players can still cope more or less, but ultimately there's a breaking point that's unstoppable," Tebas said yesterday.

"If we don't stop, and in my view, if we don't put it into reverse, the overall system is going to be much worse, because it's impossible.

"Now they've announced a World Cup with more national teams, they've announced a Club World Cup with more clubs, more summers spent playing. So instead of lowering the load, we're raising it.

"If we don't tackle this, football will suffer. If the international football network doesn't take part - if some don't want to - then everything that's being said is just a comfortable talking shop."

Tebas said that governing bodies must do more than just consult with stakeholders.

"I've experienced consultation," he added. "They receive you, they listen to you, you complain, and then they do whatever they want. That model has to change."

Injury withdrawals

Maheta Molango, CEO of the Professional Footballers' Association, which represents players across England's professional leagues, told reporters that recent withdrawals during the international window underlined the depth of the problem.

Cole Palmer, Marcus Rashford and Declan Rice were among five players who pulled out of the England squad for Nations League fixtures in September and October.

"When we in England see five players who need to withdraw from a call-up, which let's be honest is the single most proud moment that you have as a player to be called up for the national team, then you just ask yourself what's wrong about the industry," he said.

Molango said that Chelsea forward Palmer was a "victim of the calendar" after playing in multiple international tournaments in recent years, though he was not selected for the 2026 World Cup.

"That's something that needs to absolutely trigger the alarm bell," he said.

"For those who think that it's only a matter in England, then look at Kai Havertz, look at Brian Brobbey, look at Kylian Mbappe (all of whom suffered injuries in the past week), and you ask yourself, is it really the football that we want?"

Players' unions and leagues filed a complaint to the European Commission over FIFA's imposition of an international match calendar in 2024.

"We decided to file a claim against FIFA," said Molango, a former professional player. "It was not because we have a personal issue with FIFA. It's because we understood that they are the parents of football.

"They are the ones who have the ability to apply standards across the board, as in the summer break, at league level, at federation level, at confederation level." *– AFP*

China closes with 3 golds, Obiena sets pole vault Games record

NAGOYA – China added three more golds in the women's hammer throw, 4x100m mixed relay and women's 800m as athletics concluded yesterday at the 2026 Asian Games, while the Philippines' Ernest John Obiena set a men's pole vault Games record of 5.91m.

In the women's hammer throw, China's Zhang Jiale set a Games record of 78.27m to win gold, with compatriot Zhao Jie taking silver at 74.83m and Japan's Joy Iris McArthur claiming bronze.

The Chinese duo faced little challenge, as no other contender in the field had a personal best beyond 71 meters.

Zhang said her focus after the Asian Games is now reaching 80 meters, a mark no women's Asian thrower has hit. "My teammate Zhao and I both want to push towards that and bring Asia closer to the world's best," she said.

China then won the 4x100m mixed relay, with Chen Jinfeng, Liu Guoyi, Shi Junhao and Chen Yujie clocking 40.78 seconds. Thailand took silver and India bronze.

It was the third gold of the Games for Chen, who had already won the women's 100m and the women's 4x100m relay, along with a silver in the 200m.

Chen said running the anchor leg from behind was one of the more nerve-testing moments of her Games, but she trusted her technique.

"I've raced the Thai anchor before, so I know her rhythm well. As long as I could beat her over the final 100 meters, I knew we'd be fine," she said.

"What I achieved at the Games is a real motivator. Now that it's done, I can already start looking ahead to the next one," she said.

India's Prachi Choudhary, India's Kiran Pahal, India's Poovamma Machettira and India's Rajesh Ramesh celebrate winning the women's 4x400m relay final during the 2026 Asian Games at Nagoya City Mizuho Park Athletic Stadium in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture yesterday. – AFP

In the men's pole vault, Obiena was the only competitor to clear 5.75m. After two failed attempts at 5.80m, he raised the bar to 5.91m and cleared it to break the Games record and take gold. China's Li Chenyang and Yao Jie finished second and third.

Uzbekistan's Sayfullaeva Barnokhon cleared a personal best of 1.90m to win the women's high jump. Kazakhstan's Kristina Ovchinnikova took silver and India's Pooja took bronze, while China's Lu Jiawen and Jin Ruoxuan finished fourth and 10th, respectively.

In the women's 800m, China's Wu Hongjiao won gold in 2:04.49, ahead of Bahrain's Nelly Korir and the Philippines' Victoria Bossong.

Running from a boxed-in position, Wu moved up early and, with no one willing to push the pace, settled into a rhythm that suited her.

"Everyone seemed to be waiting, so I just ran however felt comfortable," she said, adding that nerves only crept back in the final 100 meters.

It was Wu's first Asian Games title after years of near-misses. "I figured if I beat the faster entries, that's a breakthrough. If I ran a personal best instead, that's a breakthrough too," she said.

Looking ahead, Wu said Asian middle-distance runners need to "dare to believe" they can compete with the world's best.

In the men's 800m, Japan's Ko Ochiai set a Games record of 1:44.48 to win gold, ahead of Iran's Ali Amirian and Qatar's Abubaker Abdalla. China's Xi Xiaoheng finished fourth.

Bahrain's Birhanu Balew won the men's 5,000m in 13:30.79, ahead of Japan's Tomonori Yamaguchi and India's Gulveer Singh.

India won the women's 4x400m relay, with Bahrain second and China third. Host Japan closed out the athletics program with gold in the men's 4x400m relay, ahead of Qatar for silver and India for bronze.

– Xinhua

'Like a dream' for An as Games organisers 'sorry' for latest mix-up

Peter Stebbings

NAGOYA – Badminton world number one An Se-young said it was "like a dream" as she retained her Asian Games crown yesterday in style, as more rain disrupted events and organisers apologised for the latest transport fiasco.

South Korea's unstoppable An became the first woman badminton player to win two singles titles in Games history after dominating home hope Akane Yamaguchi 21-17, 21-9.

The reigning Olympic and world champion has not lost a match since March and added the Aichi-Nagoya crown to her Games title from China three years ago.

"It really does feel like a dream, I am so happy. Everything I put into it keeps coming back to me, it is overwhelming," said the 24-year-old, who collapsed to her knees and let out a roar after sealing a ruthless victory.

"On the last point I was thinking, please be out. And it really was out. It felt so good."

Kunlavut Vitidsarn became Thailand's first men's singles champion after thrashing Singapore's Loh Kean Yew 21-12, 21-16.

On the final day of athletics, as the rain came tumbling down, EJ Obiena of the Philippines defended his men's pole vault crown with a Games record 5.91m.

There was also a Games and Asian record in women's hammer as China's Zhang Jiale threw 78.27m for victory.

Another Games record fell in the men's 800m, with home fans cheering Japan's Ko Ochiai to gold in 1:44.48.

China came out top in the athletics with 17 golds in all, to Japan's 10 and the nine of Bahrain.

In pouring rain in Shizuoka, a sparse crowd inside the 50,000-capacity stadium used at the 2002 FIFA World Cup saw North Korea reach the final of the women's football with a 2-0 win over China.

The North Koreans will face Japan for gold after they beat South Korea by the same scoreline.

Towards the end of day 10, China maintained their huge lead in the overall medals table with 143 golds.

Japan were second with 45 and South Korea had 24.

'All hands on deck'

Wet weather has drenched the Games since Sunday, another headache for organisers wrestling with complaints from teams about accommodation and transport.

Cricket, tennis and softball were all disrupted to varying degrees for a second day in a row.

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh reached the semi-finals of the men's cricket without a ball being bowled, just like India and Pakistan did a day earlier.

The Sri Lankans will meet reigning champions India and Bangladesh play Pakistan, with both semi-finals scheduled for tomorrow.

Organisers are now racing to get the converted baseball field at Korogi Athletic Park ready in time.

In a rare bit of good news for the organisers, better weather is forecast from today.

"Cricket, like baseball, you can't play it in the rain," said Jarrad Shearer, a senior official for the cricket tournament.

"Come tomorrow [this] morning it will be all hands on deck to dry up the areas that aren't under the covers," he added.

Officials meanwhile apologised after two teams were put on buses to wrong venues.

Teams have consistently complained that buses do not come and leave when they should, or do not turn up at all.

South Korea's men's volleyball players were forced to cancel their practice on Monday morning after an official bus went to the incorrect place.

The Pakistan team were bussed to the wrong arena for their game with Uzbekistan the same day, delaying the start of their match by 45 minutes.

A spokesperson for the local organising committee said the Pakistan and South Korea teams had departed from the same accommodation and there was "an error in matching teams to vehicles".

"Each boarded a bus heading to the wrong destination. We sincerely apologise to both teams for the inconvenience," said Ayumi Sakamoto. *– AFP*

20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026

Medal table

					ToTal
1	China	143	62	49	254
2	Japan	45	71	67	183
3	Republic of Korea	24	27	44	95
4	Uzbekistan	14	17	13	44
5	Thailand	12	9	12	33
6	Bahrain	11	5	4	20
7	Islamic Republic of Iran	10	16	11	37
8	Kazakhstan	9	14	25	48
9	Democratic People's Republic of Korea	7	5	6	18
10	India	6	21	25	52
11	Malaysia	6	5	9	20
12	Hong Kong, China	5	12	18	35
13	Kuwait	4	1	4	9
14	Chinese Taipei	3	10	24	37
15	Indonesia	3	7	20	30
16	Qatar	3	5	4	12
17	Philippines	3	3	12	18
18	Singapore	2	6	3	11
19	Tajikistan	2	3	2	7
20	Vietnam	2	1	17	20
21	Macao, China	1	4	1	6

Documentary turns camera on Swiss architect Peter Zumthor

Adam Plowright

PARIS – After decades of shunning glittering skyscrapers and corporate office towers in favour of museums and memorials, while his peers conquered the planet, a Swiss architect is finally getting a star turn in the limelight.

Peter Zumthor, 83, is the focus of a new documentary by acclaimed German director Wim Wenders, coming out just after the architect completed the biggest project of his career: the much-delayed LACMA art museum in Los Angeles.

Filmed in 3D, "From Inside Out: The Architecture of Peter Zumthor" takes viewers on an immersive tour through the limited number of buildings built by the artist-architect who is known for his meticulous and minimalist work.

His best-known projects include a thermal bath building in Vals, Switzerland, a monument to women burned as witches in the Norwegian Arctic, as well as the amoeba-shaped LACMA building which finally opened its doors this year after 20 years of reflection and controversy.

"I don't like to be a star architect, I like to make these artistic buildings," Zumthor said at the Venice Film Festival earlier this month where the film about him premiered. "I'm glad if the client has the patience."

The German-speaking designer is the same generation as Swiss heavyweights Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, as well as other European architectural stars from France's Jean Nouvel, Rem Koolhaas from the Netherlands or Norman Foster in Britain.

All now aged over 75, they have built across the world, riding the Asian construction boom this century and opening offices from Hong Kong to New York.

Zumthor, meanwhile, has stayed in his home village of Haldenstein, gradually renovating buildings there to increase the size of his practice, but avoiding the temptation to expand beyond his mountainous Swiss redoubt.

"I can only do what I can control. I can work with a team of 20, maybe 30 – that's the maximum," the 2009 winner of the Pritzker Prize, considered architecture's highest honour, told AFP in an interview.

"If it would be paintings or sculptures, it would be more easy to understand that I don't want to delegate."

Landscape

That means he turns down far more work than he accepts.

"In Korea, for instance, they like my work. There were three or four rich, cultivated Koreans and they wanted to give me a carte blanche to do anything nice, no function. And I said, 'I cannot do it'," Zumthor added to AFP.

"I need a purpose. I need a good reason."

The uncompromising author of "Thinking Architecture" only accepts building projects with a clear social function such as museums, chapels or memorials – and he has never built a high-rise or commercial office.

Each project is unique, including up to 80 percent of custom-made items from furniture to lighting, part of his objective of creating a "feeling" inside a building, rather than an aesthetic.

Swiss artist-architect Peter Zumthor attends the photocall of "From inside out - The architecture of Peter Zumthor" presented out of competition at the 83rd International Venice Film Festival, at Venice Lido on September 6. German director Wim Wenders's film "From Inside Out: The Architecture of Peter Zumthor", filmed in 3D, offers an immersive tour of buildings designed by Zumthor, known for his meticulous and minimalist work. It will be released in Germany on November 26. – AFP

Zumthor obsesses about context and surroundings, with the aim of producing designs that are minimalist and stark but appear to be "the completion of a landscape that wasn't finished before," he says in the film.

The son of a cabinet maker is also uncompromising on details, from ordering dozens of samples of curtains to get the exact finish he wanted for the LACMA windows, to commissioning an artisan to develop pigmented varnishes for the structure's concrete walls.

"My work resembles an artistic process. It's almost the same," he told AFP.

That also makes him expensive – and a sometimes difficult perfectionist for his clients.

He confesses to having a habit of changing his mind, sometimes after a flash of inspiration in the shower.

"Peter already had a reputation as being the slowest architect one could imagine," LACMA director Michael Govan says in the film about his decision to commission Zumthor.

Personal

Wenders' film, set for public release in November also sees Zumthor open up about his childhood, invite cameras into his home, and offers a touching tribute to his wife who suffered a stroke several years ago.

"It was more personal than I thought," the father-of-three said, having seen the film. "It's also a sort of declaration of love to my wife, who died this year, and that's all good. I'm not ashamed."

Wenders told AFP what made Zumthor a fascinating film subject was his "very moral position towards building".

"Peter doesn't want to build a lot. Actually, he wants to build a little," he explained. "Peter is a perfectionist, and none of these star architects can afford to be perfectionists." *– AFP*

Curtain falls on the romance of India's single-screen cinemas

BENGALURU – The demolition has begun at Bengaluru's Urvashi Cinema, once a 1,200-seat movie palace where generations of filmgoers cheered and whistled, another casualty of India's vanishing single-screen era.

"The theatre came up in the 1970s... I was so happy when it opened," said Manjunath, watching as seats were ripped out and strewn outside.

Manjunath, who uses one name, recalled its glory days, when the shop he runs opposite was packed with customers buying snacks before and after shows.

"That was the rush... now I have a lot of free time," he said. "But what to do? There is barely any crowd."

The peeling facades, faded signs and cavernous auditoriums of such cinemas are remnants of a time when going to the movies was itself the main event.

"It is a completely different experience," said photographer Hemant Chaturvedi, 58, who has documented what remains during a seven-year odyssey, photographing 1,350 single-screen cinemas across 1,000 towns.

His photographs capture not only the movie houses but their ornate facades and decay – a record of a cultural landscape disappearing as cinemas are demolished, converted into multiplexes or left to crumble.

'Ecosystem is fading'

"People would be cheering, jumping on the seats, even throwing money at the screen," Chaturvedi said.

The old halls offered a collective, interactive experience, with fans applauding at the hero's entrance, clapping to romantic songs and shouting at dramatic twists.

This photo taken on August 30 shows the interior view of the single-screen Phul Cinema in Patiala. – AFP

"Now that old ecosystem is fading, and the charm is being lost," he said.

India's single-screen cinemas have been steadily squeezed by multiplexes, streaming, rising property costs and the expense of maintaining ageing buildings and equipment.

Researchers estimate that India had around 14,000 single-screen halls in the 1980s. Only around 2,000 remain today.

Many of the old halls could accommodate around 1,000 people, creating a communal atmosphere rarely found in today's multiplexes.

The decline has also changed the way Indians experience films. New halls offer air conditioning, reclining seats and food delivered to the seat.

"To me, the new cinemas have lost the charm," said Chaturvedi, a former Bollywood cinematographer who worked on hit movies during a three-decade career.

"The multiplexes are a generic, cold experience."

'Old times'

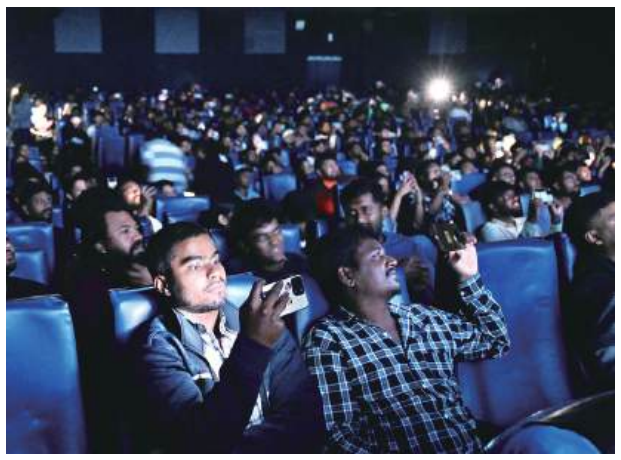
Some of the old cinemas have been restored and renovated, and the single-screen experience still has its devotees.

In Bengaluru, Mukunda Cinemas still draws crowds – even for early-morning shows before work.

Hundreds lined up before dawn for a recent 6:00 a.m. screening of the latest release of film star Yash, who is hugely popular in India's Kannada-language cinema.

Santosh, a 47-year-old businessman who uses one name, queued with hundreds of others as crowds set off fireworks outside while waiting for the show.

"Only in the single screen theatres can they take the cinema to the next level, it increases the tradition of cinema," Santosh said, as cheers and whistles reverberated through the packed hall before the film began.



This photo taken on August 26 shows movie-goers watching the early morning show of the newly released Kannada film "Toxic" at the single-screen Mukunda Theatre in Bengaluru. – AFP

Veerain Reddy, the third generation of his family running the 50-year-old theatre, said maintaining the establishment "was not an easy task".

Inflation, rising costs and "so much competition" have made business tough.

"But people who are really passionate are still trying to maintain these single-screen theatres, where people come to watch and celebrate cinema," he told AFP.

Another survivor in Mumbai – formerly known as Bombay – is the Regal Cinema, an Art Deco hall that opened in 1933.

"The rest of them feel very artificial, commercial, very blingy," said 23-year-old fan Vanshika. "But Bombay has little places which remind us of the old times." *– AFP*

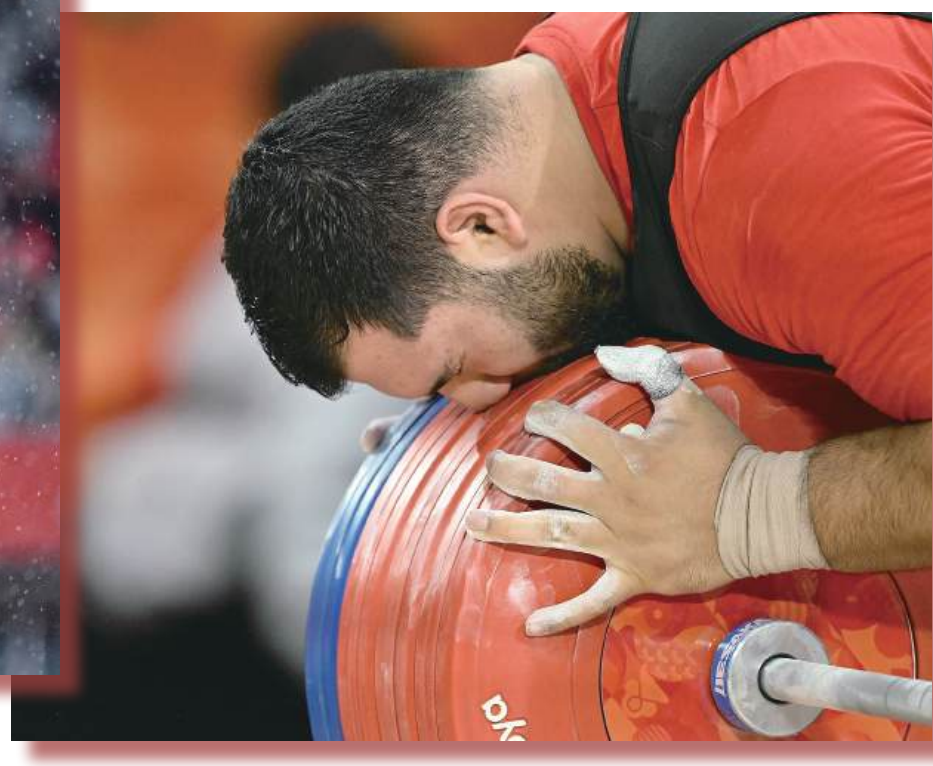
World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 10°C~22°C	Manila 24°C~33°C	New York 18°C~25°C	Lisbon 16°C~25°C
Shanghai 21°C~26°C	Bangkok 25°C~35°C	London 13°C~23°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~33°C
Hong Kong 25°C~32°C	Tokyo 18°C~21°C	Frankfurt 15°C~27°C	Luanda 21°C~25°C
Taipei 23°C~34°C	Singapore 25°C~33°C	Vancouver 10°C~16°C	Maputo 15°C~23°C
Guangzhou 24°C~36°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~33°C	Paris 15°C~24°C	Dili 21°C~32°C
Nanjing 19°C~24°C	Jakarta 23°C~34°C	Moscow 5°C~16°C	São Tomé 23°C~30°C
Guilin 22°C~35°C	Seoul 12°C~27°C	Las Vegas 20°C~34°C	Praia 24°C~31°C
Xi'an 12°C~20°C	Sydney 15°C~25°C	Monte Carlo 20°C~25°C	Bissau 24°C~33°C

Zhang Jiale (left) and Zhao Jie of China celebrate after the women's hammer throw final at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Nagoya, yesterday. – Xinhua

South Korea's Shin Jung-whi competes in the men's 3m springboard final diving event during the 2026 Asian Games at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre in Tokyo yesterday. – AFP

India's Dev Kumar Meena competes in the men's pole vault final during the 2026 Asian Games at Nagoya City Mizuho Park Athletic Stadium in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture yesterday. – AFP



Ali Ammar Yusur Rubaiawi of Iraq reacts during the weightlifting men's +110kg snatch final at the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 in Nagoya, yesterday. – Xinhua

Athletes wait to compete in the women's high jump final during the 2026 Asian Games at Nagoya City Mizuho Park Athletic Stadium in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture yesterday. – AFP

South Korea's An Se-young celebrates her victory against Japan's Akane Yamaguchi during the women's singles badminton final during the 2026 Asian Games at the Ichinomiya City Municipal Gymnasium in Ichinomiya, Aichi prefecture yesterday. – AFP