

Chi Lam Vai revamp must balance conservation, development: Tam

Armando Neves

Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Wai Man announced during a meeting that the revitalisation of the city's Chi Lam Vai walled heritage village must balance conservation and development.

The Lands and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) said in a statement that the "Specialised Working Group for the Renewal and Revitalisation of Pátio do Espinho" held a meeting yesterday to discuss the preliminary conceptual scheme for urban spatial research and community planning concerning the Chi Lam Vai revitalisation project.

The working group has been established under the "Leadership Group for the Promotion of Urban Renewal", which is chaired by Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai.

According to the statement, through the optimisation and improvement of Chi Lam Vai's environmental space and streetscape, the plan aims to make better use of its cultural and tourism resources, improve the living environment in the neighbourhood, drive community economy development, and achieve a positive interaction between cultural heritage conservation and urban renewal.

The progress of the plan and the follow-up arrangements were presented by the Lands and Urban Construction Bureau, the statement said.

Tam, who heads the group and chaired the meeting at the bureau, said that concerning the renewal and revitalisation of Chi Lam Vai, it was necessary to strike a balance between conservation and development, and to fully listen to the views of community associations and residents.



Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Wai Man (centre) chairs the meeting with members of the "Specialised Working Group for the Renewal and Revitalisation of Pátio do Espinho" yesterday. – Photo: Lands and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU)

The statement added that the aim is to ensure that the revitalisation plan meets the actual needs of the village and the expectations of the public, improves the living environment in the area, and adds more cultural and tourism attractions and vitality to Macau. Tam also instructed the working group to review the condition of environmental facilities in the village and make improvements.

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

The area around Na Tcha Temple and the



This photo taken on July 8 last year shows a café and souvenir shop dedicated to Daoist tutelary deity Na Tcha in Chi Lam Village behind the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St Paul's and one of Macau's two Na Tcha temples. – Photo: Armando Neves

St Paul's Ruins is part of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Historic Centre of Macao.

According to Chi Lam Vai Concern Group Convenor Ip Tat, the village consists of 120 houses with fewer than 100 residents.

Currently, Chi Lam Vai's main tourist attraction is a Na Tcha-themed café and souvenir shop.

Na Tcha is a Daoist tutelary deity particularly popular in Macau. ■



Tourists dance with local women of the Yao ethnic group in Longsheng County of Guilin City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, yesterday. Large numbers of visitors have flocked to rural areas across the country during the National Day holiday. (Related story on p.7) – Xinhua

Priceless book designed by surrealist Dalí stolen in France



CLERMONT-FERRAND – A book designed by Spanish surrealist painter Salvador Dalí was stolen from an art museum in central France, prosecutors said yesterday.

The "Book of the Apocalypse", featuring a cover made of bronze, was taken from the contemporary art centre in the town of Issoire, the prosecutor's office in the city of Clermont-Ferrand said, describing the piece as "highly valuable".

It is the latest in a long series of art thefts from museums around France and will add to concerns about the protection

of the country's cultural assets.

"It belongs to a private owner who had a small private contemporary art museum housing other, lesser-value works," Issoire's mayor Bertrand Barraud told AFP.

The loss is "incalculable" and "it's the work of a lifetime," he added.

He said he had spoken with the owner, who was "deeply distressed and says that it is part of France's heritage that has been stolen".

Barraud was unable to say whether the theft involved a break-in. – AFP

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EU, China to hold trade talks in Beijing this week: Brussels

EU trade chief Maros Sefcovic will travel to Beijing on Thursday for two days of high-stakes trade talks.

– Story on p. 7

US-German trio wins medicine Nobel for work on optogenetics

The Nobel medicine prize was awarded yesterday to US psychiatrist and neurologist Karl Deisseroth and German scientists Peter Hegemann and Georg Nagel for their pioneering work in the neuroscience field of optogenetics. – Story on p. 11

Brazil heads to run-off as Bolsonaro pulls off shock first place finish over Lula

Right-wing senator Flávio Bolsonaro pulled off a surprise first-place finish ahead of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Sunday's election, which heads to a run-off in three weeks as neither clinched a majority. – Story on p. 12

THE NAGOYA PUZZLE AND THE GREATER BAY AREA 2038

Commentary by Manuel Silvério
Independent Analyst on Public Policy and Regional Development
(Former public administration official with international experience and long-standing involvement in public policy and sports development)

The presence of Emperor Naruhito at the opening ceremony of the 20th Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games continued the tradition of high-level institutional recognition that has long accompanied the Games. From Beijing and Busan to Hangzhou and Aichi-Nagoya, host cities have treated Asia’s largest multi-sport event at the highest level, reflecting the stature and importance the Asian Games have built over decades.

On the night of the opening ceremony, I was seated near the VIP area waiting for the Macau, China delegation to pass. A change of route meant that the delegation left before reaching our section. It was only a small episode. In the days that followed, however, as competition got under way, organisational and logistical issues raised more significant questions.

THE PRICE OF SAVING

Faced with the rising cost of major sporting events, Aichi-Nagoya sought to make greater use of existing facilities and avoid so-called “white elephants”. There is a clear rationale behind that approach.

These Games*, however, have no conventional Athletes’ Village. Around 17,000 athletes and officials are accommodated across hotels, temporary facilities and a cruise ship. The total was around 2,000 higher than originally anticipated, placing additional pressure on accommodation, transport and other services.

On September 26, Organising Committee Secretary-General Satoshi Murate publicly apologised for problems involving accommodation and transport, acknowledging that, whatever their causes, responsibility for providing those services rested with the organisers.

Four days later, on September 30, Nagoya Mayor Ichiro Hirosawa, serving as Acting Chairman of the Organising Committee, also apologised to affected athletes and officials. He acknowledged that situations had occurred

which should not have happened, citing human error and insufficient communication with national teams, and said they required sincere reflection. Asked whether the difficulties were connected to budget reductions, he said it was not yet possible to draw a definitive conclusion. At the same time, he said he believed the Games as a whole were succeeding.

There were other incidents that prompted procedures to be reviewed. Before a men’s hockey match, the North Korean anthem was mistakenly played instead of South Korea’s, while transport errors also affected some teams.

None of this means that the principle of sustainability is wrong. Rather, it reminds us that reducing costs is not the same as reducing operational capacity. This is precisely where experienced people in organisation and management demonstrate their value.

Athletes do not need luxury. They need to sleep, eat, recover, travel and compete in good conditions. The real challenge is to find more rational ways of maintaining quality.

A CHANGING ASIAN LANDSCAPE

The Asian Games also reflect the transformation of Asia itself. Doha and Riyadh have been selected to host the next two editions, while the Olympic Council of Asia is moving towards adjusting the Asian Games cycle to align it more closely with the Olympic calendar and enable more Asian competitions to serve as Olympic qualifiers.

There is logic in this approach, but Asia has characteristics of its own. It is vast and diverse, encompassing very different sporting systems, competition calendars and cultural traditions.

Closer alignment with the international Olympic movement is important, but the Asian Games should not be designed solely around the Olympic Games. Sports such as wushu, kabaddi and sepak takraw are themselves part of the distinctive Asian identity of the Games.

FROM RESULTS TO SYSTEMS

Modern high-performance sport is profoundly international. Athletes train and compete abroad, while teams increasingly rely on the international exchange of coaches, knowledge and training methods.

During these Games, a comment heard in the Chinese mainland offered food for

thought: Chinese basketball does not need a “narrative of hard work”.

Effort is indispensable and deserves respect. At the highest level, however, effort alone does not constitute a result.

Likewise, a single medal does not demonstrate the quality of an entire sporting system. The more important question is: what remains after the result?

Macau has again demonstrated its ability to compete at a high Asian level in sports such as wushu and karate. More important than a temporary position in the medal table is what lies behind those results: technical tradition, development within individual sports, continuity, systematic preparation and international exchange.

This reflection, however, should not focus on Macau alone. Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau possess different resources, experience and capabilities. The question is how these complementary strengths can be transformed into a stronger regional platform for sports development.

GREATER BAY AREA 2038

The competition for 2038 has already begun. Ahmedabad, India, has formally put itself forward.

I am not arguing today that the Greater Bay Area (GBA) should bid for the 2038 Asian Games. I am arguing that the possibility deserves serious study.

The Greater Bay Area already possesses many of the assets that a conventional host city would otherwise spend years developing: sports facilities, hotels, airports, high-speed rail, extensive transport networks and experience in staging major international events.

Guangdong offers scale and infrastructure. Hong Kong has strong international connections. Macau has substantial hotel capacity, extensive experience in tourism and major events, and distinctive conditions for connecting different cultures and markets.

The modern sports industry also encompasses broadcasting, digital production, technology, data, marketing, tourism, entertainment and management. Thinking of the Greater Bay Area as a whole could open the way to a new model for organising a major regional multi-sport event.

Ahmedabad has already moved. If the Greater Bay Area believes it has the conditions and ambition to host the Games,

the time to study that possibility should not be after the hosting rights for 2038 have already been decided.

Naturally, an idea of this scale would require rigorous study of costs, governance, transport, cross-border arrangements, venues and the division of responsibilities. Studying a bid is not the same as making one. It means first establishing whether it makes sense.

Having seen models based on enormous investment, and now an Aichi-Nagoya edition characterised by more visible cost restraint, perhaps there is a third path: pursuing excellence with rationality.

PRESERVING THE STANDARD

As I write, the Asian Games are still under way. It would therefore be unfair to make a definitive assessment of Aichi-Nagoya.

Indeed, while acknowledging the problems on 30 September, Hirosawa also said that he believed the Games overall were succeeding. That balance matters. Recognising shortcomings does not mean dismissing everything that works, just as appreciating financial restraint does not require us to ignore the difficulties it may involve.

At this stage, however, Nagoya offers at least two points for reflection: saving money does not necessarily mean being efficient; making an effort does not necessarily mean making progress.

Asia has spent decades raising the standard of the Asian Games. The future does not require ever-increasing expenditure, nor a competition over who can build the most. Sustainability, financial rationality and organisational quality can coexist.

If the Greater Bay Area one day enters this discussion, perhaps that is precisely the balance it should seek: Games of high quality, financially rational, technologically advanced and genuinely Asian in character.

For the future of the Asian Games, the true measure will remain quality.

2038 is still some distance away. But perhaps it is no longer too early to start studying.

End Item

**Editor’s note: The author wrote the article when the Games, which concluded on Sunday, were still going on.*
N.B. Related story on next page

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2nd phase of Taipa Houses ecological trail revamp to start Thursday

Khalel Vallo

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) will begin the second phase of renovation works at the Taipa Houses Museum’s ecological trail this Thursday, with the affected section around the northern ecological pond fully closed for about 60 days, according to a statement by the bureau yesterday.

The renovation is part of a five-phase project to address deterioration and mould damage that has developed along the ecological trail after years of use, the statement said, adding that the revamp includes replacing ageing trail structures and wooden panels to improve durability while preserving the natural appearance of the wetland.

The first phase, which began in mid-August, focused on a

section on the southern side of the Taipa Houses, near Avenida de Nossa Senhora da Esperança, the statement said, noting that the second phase will focus on the trail surrounding the ecological pond on the northern side of the Taipa Houses. The affected section will be completely enclosed throughout the works and will reopen after completion, the statement added.

The remaining third to fifth phases are scheduled to be carried out in stages next year, the statement said, adding that the actual completion date of the second phase will depend on weather conditions.

The public is advised to follow on-site notices and avoid entering enclosed areas during construction. For enquiries, residents may contact the bureau’s hotline at 2833 7676. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows the Taipa Houses Museum’s ecological trail.

Sharing session promotes spirit of never giving up

Interviews by **Armando Neves**

With the closing ceremony of the 20th Asian Games on Sunday in Japan's Aichi-Nagoya prefecture, the Macao Sports Delegation returned home in triumph with a historic haul of one gold, four silver, and one bronze medal.

Yesterday, Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) invited the local Asian Games Women's Changquan silver medallist Sou Cho Man to share her experiences with the students.

Sou, an alumna of Hou Kong Middle School, has also clinched two gold, two silver, and one bronze medal at a previous Taolu World Cup; two gold, two silver, and two bronze at the World Wushu Championships; one silver at the World Combat Games; as well as one gold, one silver, and one bronze at the Asian Wushu Championships—totalling 18 medals in her career path.

Speaking to the *Post* on the campus on Rua de Afonso de Albuquerque, Sou said that during her preparations she had sustained injuries to her ribs and lower back. However, Sou was quick to add, she persisted with her training and, with the assistance of the local team doctor, recovered to win a medal.

Sou, born in July 1997, encouraged the primary students in Hou Kong to adopt the spirit of “indomitable resilience and an unyielding spirit”, emphasising that results are not always immediately visible – noting that she had persevered for 10 to 20 years before seeing her main achievements.

She suggested setting small goals, such as mastering a specific technical move, and overcoming challenges step by step. She also advised students to communicate closely with teammates and teachers, balance physical and mental training, and never give up.

Sou's mother, who attended the sharing session, told the *Post* that her daughter's achievements exceeded all expectations. She pointed out that she was also a Hou Kong Middle School graduate and a former member



Local martial artist Sou Cho Man (centre, left) attends yesterday's sharing session held at Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) on Rua de Afonso de Albuquerque. – Photos courtesy of Hou Kong Middle School

of the school wushu team who competed in the Asian Games' first wushu event in 1990. Although she did not win a medal, she was proud to have witnessed the local development of wushu over the years.

Sou's mother also mentioned that when Sou was younger, she had to juggle full-time training with her studies – revising past 11:00 o'clock each night, training in athletics from just after 6:00 a.m., and even reading on the bus. She praised her daughter's diligence and perseverance, and encouraged parents to let their children participate in more sports to

build up their fitness and maintain good health.

Three wushu students coached by Sou shared their thoughts. Long Hio In told the *Post* she was thrilled that her coach had won silver, describing her as approachable and friendly. She recalled that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Sou strained her shoulder while training at home but still persisted, eventually winning gold in competition. Long vowed to learn from her never-give-up spirit.

Lian Iok Long said Sou was gentler than other coaches, adding that he was most impressed by the story of her becoming a flag

bearer at a young age. Lian, who has won a Tai Chi award, expressed his gratitude to Sou for her guidance and expressed his desire to continue competing in the future.

Lian Iok Ieng noted that her coach was her senior schoolmate and that she felt honoured to attend the same school. She admires how Sou juggles athletics, wushu, and dance without fear of hardship, adding that she looks up to her as a role model in overcoming difficulties and hopes to win awards in international competitions.

The school's deputy director, Wang Shize, told the *Post* that inviting alumna Sou to share her life experiences was intended to help students understand the importance of perseverance from a young age so they can shine on various stages in life. He highlighted that the school's physical education curriculum emphasises cultivating “portable” skills and resilient character.

Being an athlete and postgraduate student juggling her studies and training, Sou serves as an exemplary role model for students, Wang said. He mentioned that Hou Kong has invited her to serve as a wushu coach as the school expands its programme from basic classes to a talent development squad, allowing interested students to receive professional training. In the future, the school will continue to invite different athletes to share their journeys and inspire students. ■



Local martial arts practitioner Sou Cho Man (centre) holds her 20th Asian Games Women's Changquan silver medal, poses for a group photo flanked by her mother (sitting next to her, wearing a black T-shirt), Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) teachers and students on the school campus yesterday.

Police nab drunk driver after bus crash, hit-and-run

Sherwin Hng

The Public Security Police Force (PSP) apprehended a local man last Wednesday for driving under the influence of alcohol, making three wrong-way driving manoeuvres before crashing into a bus and fleeing the scene, PSP spokesman Sou Tak Sen said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Sou identified the suspect as an insurance agent in his 30s surnamed Chio.



Public Security Police (PSP) spokesman Sou Tak Sen looks on during yesterday's regular press conference. – Photo: Armando Neves

According to Sou, PSP officers received a report at about 12:20 a.m. last Wednesday that a private car had collided with a bus in Avenida do Dr. Rodrigo Rodrigues (羅理基博士大馬路). The bus was preparing to leave a bus stop when the private car struck its right side, causing a female passenger to fall and sustain minor injuries.

The driver of the private car failed to stop and drove away from the scene. Police subsequently traced the vehicle through their surveillance system and intercepted Chio in the Rua de Pequim area in Zape.

Officers noticed that Chio smelled strongly of alcohol. A breathalyser test showed that his blood alcohol concentration was 2.1 grams per litre, indicating that he had been driving under the influence of alcohol.

Further investigation and a review of surveillance footage revealed that Chio had driven in the wrong direction three times in the Nape area before the collision.

The injured passenger was a local woman in her 50s who suffered minor injuries to her waist; she was not in serious condition after receiving initial treatment.

Chio has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing charges of drunk driving, dangerous driving, negligent bodily harm, and evading responsibility. ■

CTT to provide commemorative postmark service for int'l lion dance championship

Khalel Vallo

The Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) said in a statement yesterday that it will set up a temporary post counter at Largo do Pagode da Barra this weekend to provide a commemorative postmark cancellation service for the 13th International Lion Dance Championship 2026 – MGM Cup.

The championship will return to Largo do Pagode da Barra this weekend, featuring a record 25 lion dance teams and more than 280 athletes from 14 countries and regions, making it the largest edition in the event's history, according to a press conference at MGM COTAI last month.

The championship will feature 36 matches across youth, junior and adult divisions, with Canada making its debut alongside teams from Singapore, Malaysia and other countries and regions. The growing participation also highlights the development of lion dance among young people in Macau through school outreach, training and international competition, the press conference pointed out.

The temporary post counter will operate from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday and from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sunday, the CTT statement said, adding that the service is being provided to commemorate the championship and will allow residents and visitors to obtain

the event's commemorative postmark.

Commemorative postcards featuring the event will also be available for 20 patacas each, the statement noted, adding that various local philatelic products will be on sale at the ad hoc counter.

The bureau welcomed members of the public to visit the counter and collect commemorative stamps and related philatelic products during the event, the statement said. ■



This image provided by the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) yesterday shows the commemorative postmark of “The 13th International Lion Dance Championship 2026 – MGM Cup”.

Bamboo Pagoda kicks off week-long run at Sai Van Lake

Interview by Rui Pastorin

In the midst of the noise and fast paced life of Macau, the creators behind the “Bamboo Pagoda” installation on the shore of Sai Van* Lake are hoping that the space can act as a temporary refuge to slow down, find peace, and reflect, all the while spotlighting sustainable practices.

A week-long installation organised by Ephemera Public Space Cooperative, which has utilising and bringing back meaning to spaces that might be overlooked, vacant or underused as among its aims, the 13-metre site specific installation can be found suspended over the water in front of the Military Club’s tennis courts on Avenida da República (民國大馬路).

The installation was created entirely out of bamboo, celebrating the traditional craft of bamboo scaffolding, while aiming to achieve the concept that started it all: creating a place where people can pause and enjoy the city, while also aiming for a space to have a peace of mind.

Each part of the pagoda also highlights points of sustainability, with Rita Machado**, who is a design consultant for the project together with João Ó, telling the *Post* during an interview prior to the ceremony that the bamboos used for the project were actually from previous construction sites, giving it a second life.

The floor within the pagoda also utilises tea waste, while solar panels are used to power up the installation’s spotlights. “It’s very environmentally friendly”, Machado said, pointing out that sustainable architecture is important for the group.

Machado said that through the structure, which took around a week to build, the organisers hope that people can reconnect with the waterfront, noting Macau’s “very strong connection” with water given its history. Its overall shape, an octagon, also proves significant, with Machado pointing out that it is related to balance, nature, and even Daoism.

From the significance of the shape to the local techniques and the location, Machado noted that the organisers also hope to share “very local knowledge” with others while also bringing the community together.

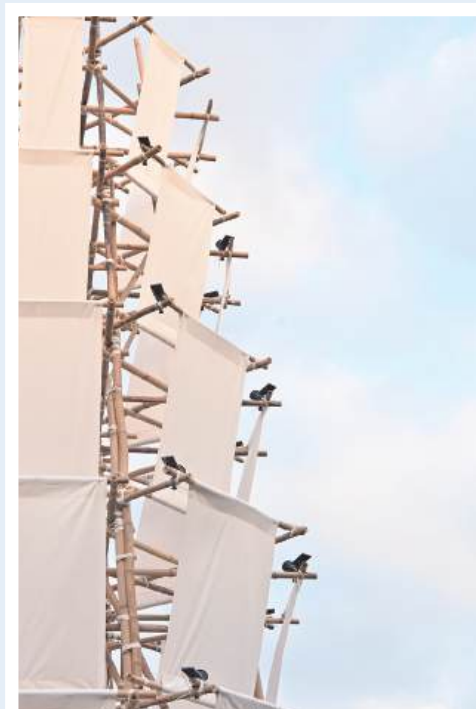
Throughout its run, the organisers expect people to use the area to rest and enjoy a peace of mind. And despite only being put up for a week, Machado pointed out: “We want to give this place to people to keep it in their memory. It’s like a legacy. It’s ephemeral, it’s not going to last long, but at the same time, it will always last in your memory”.

Moreover, during his speech at the opening ceremony, Ó also reinforced the sustainability aspect of the piece, noting that careful environmental choices were made in designing the installation, with the project being “an opportunity to promote sustainable architecture in Macau”. And with the project’s entirety, Ó added that it all reflects the group’s aim of “reducing the project’s environmental impact while exploring how local materials, resources, and knowledge can contribute to a more sustainable architecture.”

Members of the public may visit the installation from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. through October 11.

*Sai Van is Cantonese for “West Bay”

**Both Machado and Ó are the principal architects and founders of *Impromptu Projects*, a multidisciplinary architecture and design studio, the design consultancy of the installation. Seng Kei Pang Chong provided the bamboo scaffolding.



Design consultants to the Bamboo Pagoda installation João Ó (left) and Rita Machado address the opening of the installation yesterday in front of the Military Club’s tennis courts on Avenida da República (民國大馬路). – Photos taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin



Govt chooses winners for 14 taxi-operating company licences, top bid at 6.03 million patacas

Tony Wong

The government has chosen the winners of its public tender for the granting of 14 new eight-year company licences, each of which will be allowed to operate up to 50 common taxis. The prices offered by the 14 winners range between 5.1 million patacas and 6.03 million patacas.

The granting of the 14 new company licences will enable up to 700 new taxis to serve the city.

The Transport Bureau (DSAT) launched the tender for the 14 company licences on June 3. The tender drew 47 bids, which were unsealed by DSAT officials on July 9. After assessing the validity and eligibility of the 47 bids, the bureau accepted 46 of them and rejected one.

Common taxis—as opposed to special radio taxis—are colloquially known as “black taxis” (“hak dik” in Cantonese), as the colour of common taxis is black.

The prices offered by the 46 accepted bids ranged between 2.5 million patacas and 6.23 million patacas. The government set the minimum bid at 2.5 million patacas.

The 46 accepted bids were assessed based on three criteria: the proposed price accounted for 60 percent of the score, the proposed selection of vehicles purchased for the fleet of taxis accounted for 34 percent, and the proposed percentage of local residents employed in relation to the total number of employees accounted for six percent of the total score.

The bureau chose the 14 winners after completing its assessments of the 46 accepted bids. The bureau uploaded the results to its website yesterday, according to which the



A taxi turns into Rua de S. Domingos from Travessa do Bispo in the city centre yesterday. — Photo: Tony Wong

prices offered by the 14 winners ranged between 5.1 million patacas and 6.03 million patacas.

Currently, the city's common taxis are operated either by licensed individuals or by companies.

According to the current law regulating the city's taxi sector, which took effect in June 2019, only companies are allowed to bid for a licence to operate common taxis. Before the current taxi law came into force, common taxi-vehicle licences were granted to individuals.

According to the current taxi law, a single company is allowed to hold up to 300 taxi-vehicle licences. A company must have a minimum capital of five million patacas to bid for a licence to operate common taxis. Only locally registered companies are allowed to bid for the licences.

The tender for the 14 company licences, which was launched in early June, was the second one since the current taxi law took effect in 2019.

The government indicated earlier this year that it expected the 700 new taxis to gradually hit the roads in the second and third quarters of next year.

The 14 winning companies must use hybrid vehicles (powered by a combination of an internal combustion engine and an electric motor) or new energy vehicles (NEVs), such as electric vehicles (EVs), with a seating capacity of six or more passengers.

Moreover, all the new taxis must accept e-payments.

At least two of each winning company's 50 new taxis must be wheelchair-accessible.

Following a public tender process in 2023, the government granted 10 company licences in 2024 to operate common taxis, valid for eight years, with each company operating 50 vehicles. The 500 common taxis gradually came into service after late 2024. This tender was the first launched since the current taxi law took effect in 2019.

In the 2023 tender, the prices offered by the 10 winners ranged between 2.803 million patacas and 3.8 million patacas.

According to the latest data on the DSAT website, at the end of the second quarter of this year, there were 1,503 taxis in service in the city, comprising 1,303 “common” taxis and 200 “special” taxis. ■

Lamp repairer falls from 6-metre height outside airport terminal

Tony Wong

A local worker was injured after falling from a height of six metres while repairing lighting equipment at the airport's terminal building yesterday, according to statements from the Public Security Police Force (PSP) and the Fire Services Bureau (CB).

Airport operator CAM confirmed in a statement yesterday that the accident occurred near the public bus stop outside the terminal building in the early hours of yesterday.

According to the PSP and CB statements, the worker, a 42-year-old local man, suffered a fracture in his right arm. He was not in a life-threatening condition following emergency treatment at the hospital.

The CAM statement said that the worker, an employee of an outsourced service contractor, accidentally fell while repairing equipment.

Yesterday evening's CAM statement said that the worker was in stable condition at the hospital.

The statement said that although the worker is not a CAM employee, the airport operator has always regarded operational safety as the top priority of its operational management. After the accident, CAM immediately contacted the relevant outsourced service contractor to gain a full understanding of the incident and requested the contractor to thoroughly identify and eliminate safety hazards at the workplace.

CAM has ordered the contractor to suspend all similar maintenance and repair work, strengthen safety training for frontline workers, review existing safety protection mechanisms, and strictly implement improvement measures, the statement underlined. ■



This undated handout photo released by local airport operator CAM yesterday shows travellers in the airport's departure hall.

15 photographers present over 40 works at H2H gallery



This photo downloaded from the Hold On To Hope Project Facebook page shows attendees of Saturday's opening ceremony for the exhibition “Small Format 26”-Unexpected Macau” looking at some of the exhibits on display at the H2H Gallery in Ka Ho.

Rui Pastorin

The “Small Format 26” Exhibition – Unexpected Macau” is taking place at the H2H (Hold on to Hope) gallery at Ka Ho in Coloane, having kicked off on Saturday and concluding its run on October 25.

A total of 15 photographers are showcasing their works in this edition, with over 40 works on display at the free-admission exhibition.

The exhibition is held by the Half-tone – Macau Photographic Association in conjunction with the Association of Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers of Macau (ARTM). According to a statement by the Hold On To Hope Project, this edition “celebrates the beauty

of small-scale photography while supporting a philanthropic cause”, all the while continuing the “small-format” concept introduced in 2024 and 2025.

The “H2H Project” is an ARTM initiative created to help ARTM residents before they get reinstated into society.

The works on display reflect each photographer's “creative interpretations of an unexpected Macau, offering fresh perspectives on familiar places and urban forms, inviting new ways of seeing and understanding the city and its livelihood”, the statement said. Meanwhile, a portion of the proceeds from the sale of works will be donated to ARTM, supporting the association's work. ■

THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY
Hong Kong Branch

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O Lam vows review of children's care home management after abuse case

Sherwin Hng

Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam said yesterday that the government will conduct a comprehensive review of the management and operation of children's care homes, following a case in which a male warden was arrested for sexually assaulting a boy and surreptitiously filming him and four other boys.

According to a statement by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS), O Lam made the remarks during a meeting held at the bureau by relevant government entities with representatives from the social service sector and operators of children's care homes.

O Lam, who convened and chaired the meeting, said the government needed to take the incident seriously and work with children's care homes and relevant organisations to identify shortcomings in existing management and operational arrangements.

O Lam also said the meeting aimed to explore measures to improve the management of children's care homes and create a safer and healthier environment for children. The measures would also be extended to other residential care services for vulnerable groups to set up a comprehensive protection network across social service institutions.



Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam (centre) chairs a meeting with representatives from the social service sector and social welfare government officials to review the management mechanisms of children's care homes at the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) yesterday. — Photo: GCS

Representatives at the meeting proposed measures including improving risk assessment and management systems for different types of care homes, strengthening staff recruitment and background checks, enhancing daily supervision and inspection, promoting children's self-protection awareness, and improving staff training, professional ethics, and accreditation.

According to the statement, the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) will take the suggestions into consideration and improve relevant mechanisms, including strengthening supervision of care

institutions, enhancing recruitment requirements and training, and optimising night-time patrol arrangements.

The government said it would maintain close communication with relevant organisations, implement the improvement measures in an orderly manner, and release progress reports to the public in a timely manner.

The warden was transferred by the Judiciary Police (PJ) to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on Friday for further questioning and possible arraignment on child abuse and related charges. ■

UN official highlights GDI's role in advancing sustainable development

Interview by Ada Zhang

UNITED NATIONS – Five years after China proposed the Global Development Initiative (GDI), its focus is shifting increasingly towards practical cooperation that addresses the priorities of developing countries, a senior UN official has said.

"Five years on, the Global Development Initiative is showing how shared ambition can translate into practical support for development," Dima Al-Khatib, director of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), told Xinhua in a written interview.

The initiative, she said, has "provided a platform for mobilizing partnerships, knowledge and resources in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

According to a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) China publication, more than 600 projects under the Global Development Project Pool had been implemented or were in progress by the end of 2024. The associated Global Development Capital Pool had mobilized US\$14 billion in financing commitments as of March 2025.

"These mechanisms illustrate how cooperation under the GDI is supporting development financing and implementation," Al-Khatib said.

Al-Khatib pointed to China's longstanding cooperation with UNOSSC, which spans more than two decades.

"The strength of South-South cooperation lies in helping countries turn each other's experience into solutions that work for their own communities," she said.

One example is the Global South-South Development Center Project, which entered its second phase in 2025 under the China-United Nations Global South-South Development Facility.

Working with the China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges, the project aims to strengthen a network of more than 60 technical institutions to facilitate cooperation among developing countries.

In West Africa, a rice initiative involving the World Food Programme, the African Union (AU) and other partners combines technology and training to improve agricultural productivity, reduce post-harvest losses and support rural livelihoods.

She also highlighted cooperation on digital development, including e-commerce training that reached participants from more than 90 countries, followed by field studies in China for policymakers from 22 developing countries.

With just four years left to meet the 2030 deadline, Al-Khatib said the GDI can support accelerated Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) implementation by connecting nationally identified priorities with

technologies, technical expertise, financing and capacity development.

In September 2025, China and the United Nations announced the China-UN Global South-South Development Facility, with 10 million dollars in budget support for the 2025-2030 period.

Established under the United Nations Fund for South-South Cooperation, the facility supports cooperation under the GDI in areas, including agriculture, technology and digital development, according to UNOSSC.

Al-Khatib said the facility's first call for proposals, which concluded in August, attracted 107 proposals from 16 UN agencies and entities, covering 115 countries across the Global South.

"The next phase may prioritize country ownership, measurable results and the adaptation and scaling of solutions suited to local circumstances," she said.

Looking ahead, Al-Khatib emphasized the importance of aligning cooperation with the SDGs, UN social and environmental standards, and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

"The objective is to enable developing countries to adapt, co-create and sustain solutions, and share their experience across the Global South, guided by the commitment to leave no one behind," she said. — Xinhua

Global businesses eye opportunities as China import expo nears

Analysis

SHANGHAI – With one month to go before the 9th China International Import Expo (CIIE), companies from around the world are preparing to gather in Shanghai in east China, bringing products ranging from advanced manufacturing equipment and medical technologies to African coffee and Syrian soap.

The annual expo, the world's first national-level exhibition dedicated to imports, has become a major platform for foreign companies seeking access to the vast consumer and industrial markets of the world's second-largest economy.

Since its launch in 2018, the CIIE has drawn participants from more than 180 countries, regions and international organizations. Overseas exhibitors have made about 27,000 appearances at its business exhibitions, with over 3,400 new products, technologies and services making their debuts.

This year's event, scheduled from Nov. 5 to 10, comes as China begins its 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030) with a renewed push for high-standard opening up and stronger domestic demand.

For some companies, this year's CIIE will be their first.

Austria's WFL Millturn Technologies, a machine tool manufacturer that entered the Chinese market more than 20 years ago, shipped its exhibits from the industrial city of Linz in August.

WFL Managing Director Stefan Hackl said the company decided to join the CIIE given China's role at the heart of the global manufacturing chain, and hopes to use the expo to expand further in the Chinese and Asia-Pacific markets.

"I don't see any good reason why we will not be successful in China in the upcoming decades," Hackl said.

Singapore-based Perennial Holdings Private Limited is another newcomer.

The company has established China's first wholly foreign-owned tertiary general hospital in Tianjin in northern China. Since opening, the hospital has received patients from more than 40 countries and regions, while the company is pursuing further healthcare investments in more Chinese cities.

"When you invest in China, you are investing in the most competitive market in the world," said Pua Seck Guan, executive chairman and CEO of Perennial Holdings.

Pua added that China's opening up of its healthcare sector could create more opportunities for foreign investors.

The newcomers arrive as China continues to widen market access

for foreign businesses. In 2025, the country registered 70,392 newly established foreign-invested firms, a record high and up 19.1 percent year on year. In the first half of 2026, the number rose 5.3 percent from a year earlier, with foreign direct investment in actual use reaching 402.14 billion yuan.

China is also seeking to expand imports as it works to boost domestic consumption and pursue more balanced trade. In August, imports increased by 21.7 percent, with growth exceeding that of exports for a sixth successive month.

The opportunities offered by the CIIE extend beyond large multinational companies. Nearly 13,000 overseas micro, small and medium-sized enterprises have participated in the first eight editions.

Syrian businessman Muhannad Shakally is preparing for his 9th CIIE. When he brought traditional Syrian soap to the inaugural expo in 2018, he was testing the Chinese market.

Today, monthly orders exceed five tonnes, equivalent to around 20,000 bars. "They sell almost as soon as they arrive. I don't even keep inventory," he said.

This year, he plans to introduce aromatherapy products and Syrian herbal teas, hoping to bring more products from his country to Chinese consumers.

For years, the CIIE has provided free booths to exhibitors from the world's least developed countries. This year, organizers will upgrade a dedicated section for Asian and African products, with measures to help African businesses tap opportunities created by China's zero-tariff policy.

Since May 1, China has applied zero-tariff treatment to imports from all 53 African countries with which it has diplomatic relations, while expanding market access through measures including upgraded "green channels" for products such as dried chilies, coffee beans, cashews and wild aquatic items.

An official delegation from Côte d'Ivoire will make its first appearance at the CIIE's business exhibition, showcasing cocoa, coffee, cashews and kola nuts.

"We are very happy to participate for the first time. This will be a good opportunity to showcase Cote d'Ivoire to the world," said Rami Koné, an official with the country's export agency.

Einar Tangen, a senior fellow at the Center for International Governance Innovation, said small and medium-sized enterprises from the Global South, particularly those in Africa, were once on the margins of global trade. China, he said, has provided them with opportunities to share in the benefits of its opening up and development. — Xinhua

EU, China to hold trade talks in Beijing this week: Brussels

BRUSSELS/BEIJING – EU trade chief Maros Sefcovic will travel to Beijing on Thursday for two days of high-stakes trade talks.

The trip comes as Brussels has toughened its stance towards Beijing to defend businesses against what it claims is unfair competition in sectors ranging from cars to industrial goods.

Increasingly, European leaders warn of a “China Shock 2.0”, used to describe Chinese firms’ expansion into more advanced industries.

Policymakers argue the trend could threaten many traditional EU sectors, echoing the impact of a wave of low-cost Chinese imports in the early 2000s.

EU and Chinese officials have been negotiating since June over Brussels’ concerns about the growing trade imbalance between the two economies.

At the same time, the bloc is preparing additional trade-defence measures, while Beijing has warned it could retaliate.

French President Emmanuel Macron and

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz have urged the EU to strengthen its legal tools to respond more quickly to trade disputes with China, according to a letter seen by AFP on Monday, including the ability to cut off access to the European market if necessary.

Sefcovic raised expectations earlier this year when he warned the EU wanted “tangible results by October”. Analysts, however, are cautious.

“There may be a few crumbs, but I would not expect any kind of major breakthrough,” said Penny Naas, of the German Marshall Fund.

Zhu Tian, economics professor at Shanghai’s China Europe International Business School, said the talks could yield agreements “on some specific issues.”

Brussels appears to share that assessment. The European Commission is continuing work on new instruments designed to protect key industries, with proposals expected to be presented to EU leaders in December.

According to EU figures, the deficit with China reached about 360 billion euros (US\$400 billion) in 2025. Chinese figures place the imbalance lower, at around US\$292 billion.

The EU’s trade enforcement chief, Denis Redonnet, told the European Parliament last week that machinery, textiles, metals and chemicals were among the sectors experiencing “sustained and abnormal” import increases.

He said there were “potentially worrying trends” affecting almost a quarter of all EU imports, driven largely by Chinese products.

Sefcovic has identified three priorities: addressing surging imports in strategically important sectors, increasing European exports to China, and improving access to critical raw materials.

Brussels is also seeking clearer export-licensing arrangements for rare earths and other materials after Beijing introduced restrictions last year.

Brussels hopes to manage Chinese

exports through voluntary limits, for example on hybrid cars shipped to the bloc. Beijing, though, firmly opposes import

With expectations for major concessions low, an EU official speaking on condition of anonymity said work was continuing on new trade instruments.

Several member states, including France, have advocated a European version of Section 301, the US mechanism used to investigate alleged discriminatory foreign trade practices and impose retaliatory measures.

Responding to reports last week about such a tool, Beijing warned it would respond strongly to “discriminatory restrictive measures”.

The warning carries weight. Beijing has previously responded to EU trade-defence actions with duties on European cognac and investigations into pork and dairy imports.

Germany, whose largest trading partner is China, has been especially cautious.

– AFP, MPD

Longer trips, richer experiences: China’s National Day holiday reveals shifting tourism trends

Analysis

BEIJING – Five days into China’s week-long National Day holiday, millions were still immersed in the sights, sounds and flavors of the season – traveling, dining, exploring and enjoying the break. Yet this year, the scenes are subtly different.

Travelers have ventured farther as the Mid-Autumn Festival holiday fell just three days before the National Day holiday, while family trips and experience-oriented travel are on the rise, according to travel agencies.

“It points to a fundamental shift in the logic of tourism consumption, as travelers focus more on the quality of time and the richness of their experiences,” said Bu Xiting, a researcher with the Communication University of China.

LONGER BREAKS, RICHER CHOICES

Data from Chinese online travel platform Tuniu shows that tours of 10 days or more are particularly popular during this holiday period, accounting for 26 percent of bookings.

Yuan You, an internet company employee, spent three days of her 13-day break in Jiuzhaigou, Sichuan Province, before heading to the provincial capital Chengdu for woodworking classes.

“The holiday is rich while maintaining a relaxed pace,” she said.

Authorities across the country have rolled out a wide range of activities, consumer vouchers and subsidies to spur holiday spending. Shanghai, for example, has launched about 200 major consumption events, backed by consumer vouchers worth roughly 100 million yuan.

The offerings range from watching films and dining to purchasing digital products and cars, encouraging consumers to explore a broader spectrum of spending experiences.

Cultural institutions, too, are broadening the ways people can experience and consume culture. The Sichuan Museum extended its holiday hours and launched a themed night tour, while Beijing’s Zhongshan Park brought museums, cultural institutions and innovative brands together to create a market street featuring culture-inspired products.

As more new energy vehicles hit the roads during the holiday, authorities have taken measures to ensure adequate charging facilities and convenient services.

During last year’s eight-day Mid-Autumn Festival and National Day holiday period,



Tourists drive all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in Yueqing, Zhejiang Province, yesterday. Large numbers of visitors have flocked to rural areas across the country during the National Day holiday, which ends tomorrow.

– Xinhua

Chinese travelers made 888 million domestic trips and spent a combined 809 billion yuan, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

This year, data shows that foot traffic and revenue at 78 major shopping streets and commercial districts monitored by the Ministry of Commerce rose 3.4 percent and 5.3 percent year on year, respectively, from Oct. 1 to 3.

RED TOURISM, ROBOTS AND RURAL EXPERIENCES

As China marks the 90th anniversary of the victory of the Long March, former revolutionary base areas have drawn renewed interest from holidaymakers, with visits offering travelers a chance to learn about the country’s revolutionary history and reflect on the difficult years that helped shape modern China.

In Yan’an, Shaanxi Province, a street has staged special activities including performances of songs from the revolutionary years and a large-scale bonfire gathering. Visitor numbers on the first day of the holiday rose about 20 percent year on year.

The holiday has also turned some of China’s newest robots into part of the consumer experience, putting embodied intelligence to work alongside traditional culture in tourist attractions, shopping districts and ancient towns.

At a cultural district in Chengdu, robots

performed dances inspired by local opera’s face-changing art and used digital technology to recreate tanghua, a traditional form of sugar painting.

On Chunxi Road, a humanoid robot has gone beyond entertainment to take on the role of a store manager, greeting customers and recommending products rather than simply performing for them.

China’s growing network of robot training bases is preparing more machines for roles beyond the factory floor – and beyond the country’s borders. In the first half of 2026, Chinese manufacturers accounted for 97 percent of humanoid robot shipments worldwide, according to a report released at the 2026 World Robot Conference.

Years of efforts to restore the environment and revitalize rural areas are also paying off. On a ridge overlooking the Miyun Reservoir in Beijing, visitors can hike to a viewing platform and enjoy outdoor concerts amid the pine trees.

With roads, infrastructure and public services extending deeper into the countryside, some once-remote villages are emerging as new destinations for holidaymakers.

Caijiagou, a former impoverished hillside village in Shandong Province, has transformed into an art-themed destination, with murals adorning residential walls.

Village official Liang Yunhui said the village has repurposed idle rural homes into

cultural spaces such as an art gallery and a musical instrument museum, while hosting events featuring traditional crafts, cultural fairs and folk music. “In total, we have received more than 500,000 visits over the years,” he said.

On travel platform Fliggy, the number of users purchasing travel products featuring natural scenery and villages surged by nearly 50 percent from the same holiday period last year.

“More travelers are seeking immersive experiences, from sampling local cuisine and making intangible cultural heritage crafts to watching distinctive performances, allowing them to gain a deeper appreciation of local culture,” said a manager with Tuniu.

CHINA HAUL

While many Chinese tourists are venturing farther around the world, more international travelers are flocking to China to experience the country for themselves, riding a rising wave of global fascination with everything from the scenery and culture to its lifestyles and, more recently, Chinese brands and design.

Tennis star Novak Djokovic, in Beijing for the China Open, was seen trying his hand at Chinese calligraphy at the Summer Palace, a former imperial garden. After a match, he used a traditional Chinese seal to put his mark on fans’ keepsakes instead of signing autographs.

Huaqiangbei, a sprawling electronics marketplace in the nation’s tech hub Shenzhen, has become a magnet for foreign shoppers looking to experience China’s tech scene firsthand.

Bryan Lamothe-Arice from the United States was browsing smart devices. “I’m particularly interested in the electric bikes and all kinds of flying devices here. I’m going to tell my friends to come here. There are tech products everywhere.”

China’s border crossings are expected to see about 2.15 million passenger trips a day on average during the National Day holiday, according to the National Immigration Administration.

That growing international interest is also showing up in spending. Overseas visitors spent 263.6 billion yuan in China in the first seven months of 2026, up 27.8 percent year on year, according to the commerce ministry.

The National Day holiday ends tomorrow.

– Xinhua

Japan's leader voices outrage over alleged murder by US Marine

TOKYO – A woman's murder allegedly committed by a US Marine in Okinawa is a "heinous crime", Japan's premier said yesterday, as the new accusation of violence involving American forces sparked public outrage.

Crimes including rapes, assaults, hit-and-run and drunk-driving incidents by US personnel have long sparked protests on the island, which bears a disproportionate burden of hosting about 70 percent of US military facilities in Japan.

The new case involves a US Marine stationed on Okinawa who was arrested on suspicion of killing a 39-year-old woman at a hotel in the city of Naha and stealing her wallet, police said on Sunday.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi told lawmakers that the government has lodged a strong protest with the United States, urging their "full cooperation with the investigation" and "strict discipline among US military personnel".

"The occurrence of such a heinous crime is extremely regrettable," Takaichi said.

Around 100 people participated in a rally in Naha on Sunday, holding up placards stating their "strong protest" against the murder, Japanese media reported.

Okinawa native Sorane Sakihama, 24, who organised a similar rally in Tokyo on Sunday, said she cried upon learning about the woman's death.



Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi delivers a speech during a plenary session of the House of Representatives at the National Diet in Tokyo yesterday.

– AFP

"We couldn't protect her. That made me so angry and sad," the university student told AFP, adding that she was planning to organise another protest in front of the US embassy on this evening.

"I want to ask them – what are these soldiers stationed here for? They might say they are here to protect lives or boost security. But how can they say that when a

life was taken by their own?"

'Extreme disappointment'

Chief cabinet secretary Minoru Kihara told reporters yesterday that "the government will work with the United States to thoroughly make sure there will be no recurrence, and reduce burdens on local residents".

News of the Marine's arrest immediately

prompted Japan's foreign affairs and defence ministers to summon senior US officials to convey their "extreme disappointment" and "lodge strong protests", Kihara said.

The incident came just a few weeks after Okinawa elected Genta Koja as its new governor, ending the eight-year rule of his predecessor who had long pushed for a major US military base to be moved off the island.

Koja, 42, accepts a central government plan to keep the US Marine Corps' Futenma air base on Okinawa's main island, but to move it to a less populated location.

Calling the murder-robbery "extremely malicious in nature", Koja told reporters on Sunday it had "hugely shocked residents here who are forced to live side-by-side with the bases, and instilled new fear in them".

"I am infuriated," Koja said.

He said the incident showed US efforts to "educate soldiers and improve their behaviour have not been functioning at all".

Koja said he will travel to Tokyo "soon" to lodge a protest with top government officials, including Takaichi.

A Japanese court sentenced a US Marine accused of choking and attempting to rape a woman in her 20s to seven years in prison last year.

In 2017, a former US Marine and civilian military base worker was sentenced to life in prison for the rape and murder of a local woman in Okinawa.

– AFP

S Korean probe concludes Pyongyang planted DMZ mines

SEOUL – South Korean and UN investigators have concluded that two landmines that exploded inside the Demilitarised Zone last month and injured three soldiers had been planted by North Korea, Seoul's military said yesterday.

The findings by the military and the US-led United Nations Command were consistent with a preliminary probe that indicated North Korean troops had crossed the Military Demarcation Line – an accusation Pyongyang denies.

The DMZ, one of the world's most heavily fortified and mined frontiers, has divided the Korean Peninsula since the 1953 armistice. Landmine incidents have previously heightened tensions between the two Koreas, which remain technically at war.

"Given the significance of the incident, the National Forensic Service conducted several rounds of

forensic analysis," Kwon Dae-won, vice chairman of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at a briefing to present the findings.

"The first and second rounds of testing detected TNT, brown foreign material and thermosetting resin components, identifying the device as a North Korean-made plastic anti-personnel mine," he said.

Fragments from last month's blast were also compared with previously recovered North Korean landmines, Kwon said, adding that "forensic analysis reconfirmed that they were identical".

Three South Korean officers were severely injured in the September 21 explosion, including one who lost his foot.

The investigation also found a third, unexploded landmine near the site of the incident, Kwon said, leading the South Korean military and UN Command to determine that

the incident "constituted a violation of the Armistice Agreement".

The mines were assessed to have been planted about a year ago, he said.

Kwon said South Korean forces would continue mine-clearance operations south of the Military Demarcation Line, which runs through the middle of the DMZ.

The senior military official urged the North to "immediately remove the mines it had laid in violation of the Armistice Agreement".

"Our military strongly urges North Korea to offer a sincere apology."

Pyongyang has denied responsibility for the blasts, with Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of the North Korean leader, calling Seoul "despicable" after an earlier demand for an apology.

South and North Korea technically remain at war as the 1950-53 Korean War ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty. – AFP

Myanmar says 10,000 migrants returned from Malaysia this year

YANGON – Myanmar has repatriated nearly 10,000 migrants from Malaysia this year, state media said yesterday, a day after a flotilla returning almost 1,500 of its citizens docked in the country.

The United Nations (UN) has sharply criticised Malaysia's push to return migrants to Myanmar under an opaque scheme it says cannot guarantee safe homecomings to the war-torn nation.

A group of 1,476 returnees arrived by ship outside Yangon on Sunday, the first of 5,000 that Kuala Lumpur says Myanmar agreed to take back amid a wave of anti-migrant sentiment in Malaysia.

Rights monitors have raised concerns that members of the Rohingya minority may be sent back to Myanmar, where they have faced violent persecution, but Malaysia has not commented on the ethnicities of returnees.

Myanmar revealed yesterday that a parallel and larger repatriation push has also been taking place by plane.

Between January and August this year, "8,041 citizens were repatriated by air", state newspaper The Global New Light of Myanmar said.

While the ship returns have been highly publicised in Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur has not commented on the returns Myanmar says it organised by weekly flights.

The total number of migrants Myanmar has said returned by plane and ship this year is 9,517.

Malaysia insists returnees under its scheme agreed to voluntary repatriation from detention centres, where Myanmar says they had "faced difficulties" after serving sentences for immigration offences.

But rights groups report dire conditions in the facilities, and the UN refugee agency says staff were not allowed to verify that decisions to return were "were genuinely free and informed".

More than 100,000 people are estimated to have been killed in Myanmar since a military coup in 2021 unleashed civil war, according to monitor organisation ACLED.

The Rohingya started fleeing the country en masse to Malaysia before that, escaping a military crackdown starting in 2017 deemed a genocide by rights groups – a charge the armed forces have always denied.

The Rohingya make up two-thirds of the 190,000 Myanmar refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia, according to UN data, and have been the focus of recent anti-migrant sentiment.

After the ships carrying the 1,476 migrants docked Sunday in Thanlyin, just south of Yangon, AFP journalists saw dozens moved to a monastery holding centre for ID and health checks.

"Necessary arrangements are continuing to facilitate their swift reunion with relatives and family members, ensuring their safe return to their respective hometowns," The Global New Light of Myanmar said. – AFP

Vietnam busts cat-stealing ring that took 2,700 pets for food

HANOI – Vietnamese police have arrested 12 men accused of stealing nearly 2,700 cats during night raids into residential neighbourhoods, taking the pets to be slaughtered for food, police and state media said yesterday.

Fur removal machines, cat traps and measuring scales were among items confiscated during investigations into the alleged cat-stealing ring in Ho Chi Minh City.

Consumption of dogs and cats is legal in Vietnam, where many restaurants openly advertise the

meat, but vendors are required to obtain certificates showing the origin of the animals.

Media reports have said that stolen cats can be sold at restaurants for at least 70,000 dong (US\$2.70) per kilogram.

The 12 men were arrested on allegations of property theft and admitted "to stealing and trafficking approximately 2,700 cats of various types", police said in a statement.

Criminal proceedings began on Sunday, but it was not clear when the men were detained.

The suspects pounced between 11:00 pm and 04:00 am, roaming residential areas on motorbikes in small groups to steal local cats, state media said.

The network was first discovered in July, with police seizing 50 live cats alongside 55 cat traps, two scales and two fur removal machines.

Each team was estimated to have stolen between four and 10 cats per night.

Police in Ho Chi Minh City arrested 18 people earlier this year accused of being part of two separate cat-stealing rings. – AFP

Myanmar issues El Niño power outage warning

Yangon, Myanmar

YANGON – Myanmar warned citizens to expect scheduled power outages starting yesterday, saying the electrical grid is being strained by an unseasonable heatwave it blamed on the El Niño weather phenomenon.

Homes and businesses in war-struck Myanmar are regularly plunged into blackouts, some spontaneous and others set on a timetable to ease the burden on the fragile power infrastructure.

Many richer residents use generators or back-up batteries, while the poorer citizens of the tropical nation are left to swelter without fans or air conditioning.

“Due to the effects of severe El Niño conditions, temperatures across the country have risen significantly, resulting in increased electricity consumption,” the energy ministry said.

“To balance electricity consumption with available generation capacity during this period, load management and rotational power distribution will

be implemented” starting yesterday, said a statement in state media.

El Niño is a natural phenomenon recurring every two to seven years owing to the warming of sea surfaces – bringing worldwide changes in winds, pressure and rainfall patterns.

Global forecasters predict this year’s event will peak at an intensity never observed in the modern era, compounding the effects of manmade climate change which drives extreme weather patterns.

Myanmar weather officials have

warned the country to expect “abnormal rainfalls and storms, drought, extreme heat, drinking water shortage and extreme weather conditions” as a result of the “Super El Niño”.

Late last month the southernmost Tanintharyi Region was lashed by rains which caused widespread flooding and killed at least nine people in a landslide.

Myanmar is currently coming to the end of its wet season, when reservoirs feeding the hydropower plants making up the nation’s largest

source of electricity generation are filled by plentiful monsoon rains.

The energy ministry said it was “anticipating more significant depletion of water levels in reservoirs at hydropower plants during the coming dry season” which usually runs from October to May.

In a normal year the coming months are generally some of the coolest of the year in Myanmar, seeing a drop in power demand as citizens turn off fans and air conditioners.

– AFP

IMF clears way for Sri Lanka to draw US\$345 million

COLOMBO – The International Monetary Fund said yesterday it had reached a preliminary agreement with Sri Lanka that will allow it to access about US\$345 million from its US\$2.9 billion bailout programme.

The Washington-based lender also warned that higher energy prices, the El Niño climate phenomenon and the Middle East conflict could threaten its economic recovery.

The agreement marks the latest milestone in Sri Lanka’s recovery from its worst economic crisis, which culminated in a sovereign default on US\$46 billion of external debt in 2022.

The South Asian nation secured a four-year US\$2.9 billion IMF rescue package in 2023.

“Sri Lanka’s economy has proved remarkably resilient to successive shocks,” the IMF said in a statement, noting the economy had recorded 11 consecutive quarters of expansion after contracting 7.3 percent in 2022.

But the country “continues to face downside risks from

uncertainty over the duration and intensity of the Middle East war, global trade policy, and the impact of El Niño”, it added.

The IMF also criticised the government’s decision earlier this month to reinstate a US\$126 million diesel subsidy, saying fuel prices should continue to adjust in line with international markets while protecting vulnerable households.

It said the central bank should be prepared to tighten monetary policy further if higher energy prices trigger a second round of inflation.

Sri Lanka’s central bank recently raised interest rates 100 basis points to 8.75 percent, but has resisted calls for further increases, arguing that they could undermine growth.

The latest agreement clears the way for what is expected to be the penultimate disbursement under the programme, which is due to expire in March.

Sri Lankan authorities have yet to decide whether they will seek a new arrangement with the IMF when the programme ends. – AFP

Swiss president visits India to boost trade ties

NEW DELHI – Swiss President Guy Parmelin was given a red-carpet welcome in India yesterday as he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi for talks on trade and investment.

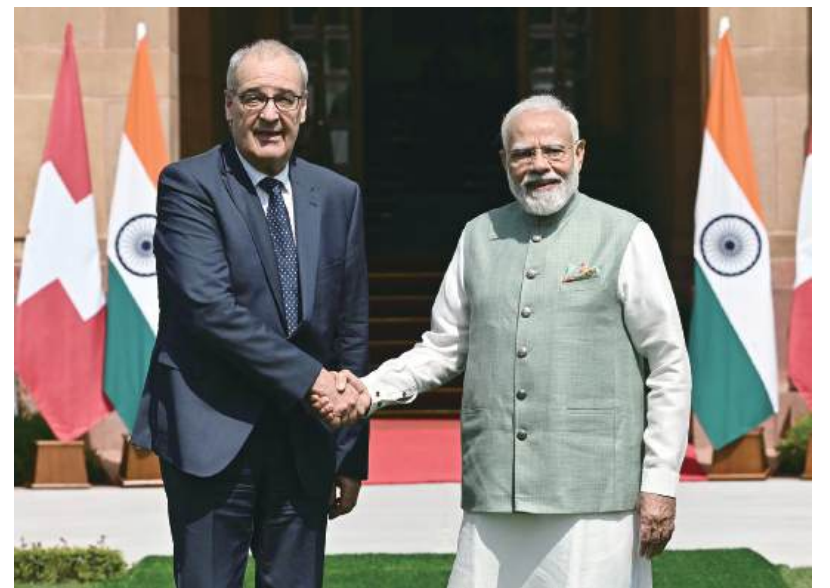
“My visit is a stepping stone towards further growth,” Parmelin said, adding that the three-day visit comes a year after a trade deal was signed with a four-member European bloc that comprises Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

Under that deal, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) aims to invest US\$100 billion in India over 15 years.

The deal cuts tariffs, making it easier for Indian companies to sell goods into the four EFTA markets, while giving European companies greater access to India, the world’s most populous nation and fastest-growing major economy.

“It is the right moment to celebrate how far we have come together but, even more importantly, to shape our joint future,” Parmelin told reporters. He was last in India in February for an artificial intelligence summit in New Delhi.

Modi thanked Parmelin for his “personal support” on the EFTA trade deal.



India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi (right) and Switzerland’s President Guy Parmelin (left) shake hands before their meeting at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi yesterday.

– AFP

Both countries took “several important decisions to increase market access for India’s exports in Switzerland, and to make investment between the two countries smoother”, Modi said during a joint news conference with Parmelin.

“This will increase the export of India’s agriculture, pharma, textile, and engineering goods to Switzerland.”

It would also “attract new Swiss investment in India’s important sectors such as biotech, life sciences, banking, insurance, food processing, and sustainability”, Modi said.

Both governments also signed a mobility agreement yesterday that Modi said would open up more opportunities for Indian students and professionals in Switzerland.

– AFP

Indian finance minister says US trade talks hit ‘plateau’

NEW DELHI – Trade deal talks between India and the United States have reached a “plateau”, New Delhi’s Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said yesterday, after negotiations dragged on for months with the sides struggling to resolve sticking points.

The two nations announced an initial understanding in February that would see Washington reduce tariffs to 18 percent and India cut duties on a range of industrial and agricultural products.

Several rounds of talks have since taken place but have been complicated by Washington launching a probe into unfair trade practices against multiple countries, including India.

“The agreement’s negotiations are still ongoing, although we’d like to believe that both the sides have reached a plateau, beyond

which giving or taking might be very, very difficult,” Sitharaman said.

But Sitharaman, responding to a question on concessions, at the Munich Security Conference in New Delhi, added that there are “rooms to operate from, both sides would do it”.

The remarks echoed sentiment expressed by US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer last week, who said he didn’t believe an announcement was “imminent”, but that both sides had identified the “universe of items that are sticking points”.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to US President Donald Trump last week in a telephone call discussing “cooperation in trade, defence, energy critical technologies and other areas”, according to a statement from the premier’s office. – AFP

Indian court seeks explanations from election body in voter list row

NEW DELHI – India’s Supreme Court ordered the government and the national election body yesterday to explain decisions linked to a large-scale revision of voter rolls that prompted accusations of wrongdoing.

Opposition parties and activists have organised protests and called for the resignation of Gyanesh Kumar, head of the Election Commission of India (ECI), alleging that the revision had improperly removed millions of names from voter lists.

Critics have accused Kumar of acting at the behest of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

The ECI, the constitutional body responsible for conducting elections in the world’s largest democracy, has rejected allegations of wrongdoing.

Yesterday, a three-judge bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant issued notices to the government, the ECI and Kumar after hearing petitions challenging decisions

linked to the voter list revision.

Another hearing is expected to be held next week.

One of the petitions sought a probe into ECI records to determine whether its decisions complied with constitutional requirements.

Protests have been held across several cities since a report last month by The Indian Express, which said two of the ECI’s three members had formally objected at least 14 times to key decisions linked to the voter roll revision.

“Newspaper reports may be 100 percent correct, partially correct or incorrect. We cannot pass an order on that basis today. We would definitely want their response. If we find there were instances where law wasn’t followed, we can undo it,” broadcaster NDTV quoted the bench as saying.

The ECI says the revision exercise, which started last year, is intended to identify fraudulently

registered voters and prevent “foreign illegal immigrants” from voting.

Critics say the drive has disproportionately affected marginalised and minority communities, especially Muslims.

India’s main opposition Congress party has announced a protest march to the Election Commission’s offices in New Delhi today, to be followed by nationwide “Save Democracy” rallies.

Among those joining the protests are supporters of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), a satirical political movement that emerged online in May and succeeded in its campaign to oust the then education minister.

The group has called for a “mass mobilisation” in the capital on Saturday.

Police have maintained a heavy presence around the government-designated protest area near New Delhi’s Jantar Mantar, and dozens of demonstrators were briefly detained over the weekend. – AFP

Teenager loses hand picking up grenade in France school protests

PARIS — A 15-year-old lost a hand yesterday picking up a police grenade as students across France demanded better classroom conditions in a days-long wave of protests that have erupted into blazes and barricades at some schools while disrupting lessons at hundreds nationwide.

Some students returned to classrooms but others maintained protests outside their schools, ahead of larger demonstrations expected today in what a secondary school students' union has dubbed "Act III" of the movement.

Authorities said the teenager was injured in the northern town of Lens. A police union source said he appeared to have picked up a sting-ball grenade fired by riot police and that it exploded in his hand.

Since late September, students have blocked the entrances to hundreds of schools, complaining of teacher absences, overloaded timetables, dilapidated classrooms and buildings ill-adapted to rising temperatures, among other grievances.

"It's clear the education system isn't working," Alma, a pupil at the Lycee Charlemagne in central Paris, told AFP.

The unrest ignited just months before 2027 elections that will determine the successor to centrist President Emmanuel Macron.

The government has sought to address the grievances, while accusing hard-left activists of having hijacked the protest movement.

"They think that just because they're letting us express ourselves on a platform, on the internet, we'll stop blocking access and being angry, but this anger has been here for years," said Simon, a pupil also at the Lycee Charlemagne.

The French Human Rights League (LDH)



A protester is detained by riot police officers during clashes near the Place de la Bastille, in Paris, yesterday.

— AFP

yesterday accused security forces of using disproportionate methods against protesters, many of whom are legally minors.

"We can see that in the instructions given to the police, there is no directive to show restraint, even though they are dealing with children," LDH president Nathalie Tehio said.

24 schools damaged

More than 400 out of France's 3,700 high schools, known as lycees, were partially or totally closed yesterday morning, the education ministry said.

In central Paris, dozens of teenage students demonstrated outside a school while passing cars honked their horns. Some classmates made their way inside to attend lessons.

"We're missing our lessons to give you one," read one cardboard sign outside the

Turgot high school in Paris.

In Bordeaux, in the southwest, some students returned to the classroom while others continued to demonstrate in the presence of riot police.

Some protesters outside the Gustave Eiffel high school set off fireworks in the direction of police, who responded with tear gas, but overall the situation remained calm, AFP reporters said.

The movement started on September 17 at a high school in the Paris suburb of Creteil, in support of teachers striking over a lack of staff and resources.

It gained momentum and spread across France, at times spiralling into vandalism, including the destruction of bus shelters, the burning of school entrances and clashes between protesters and security forces.

Since the start of the movement, 24 schools had been burned or ransacked, according to the education minister.

More than 5,000 people, 85 percent of them minors, have been arrested.

Protesters have also accused the police of using excessive force, and internal investigations have been opened into at least three instances of alleged police brutality.

'Parental responsibility'

Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu on Sunday urged local authorities to prioritise filling gaps left by long-term teacher absences and unfilled posts.

He called a meeting for today with regional presidents to discuss overhauling the country's often-dilapidated school buildings.

The government is also pushing legislation to make those responsible for damaging public property pay for repairs themselves, instead of drawing on public funds.

Government spokeswoman Maud Bregeon defended the bill.

"When you have 14-, 15-, 16-year-olds who, at 9 am, are burning bus shelters or — perhaps even more seriously — the high school where they study, that raises the question of parental responsibility," she told the Europe1/CNews broadcaster.

Lecornu has said the draft law could allow compensation payments to be recovered from family allowances and housing benefits while preserving a minimum income threshold.

The head of the main CGT labour union, Sophie Binet, slammed what she called a "populist announcement", which she said would "end up targeting the most vulnerable families".

— AFP

Yemen, Saudi Arabia strike Houthis as counteroffensive gets underway

TAIZ — Yemen's military backed by Saudi jets attacked Houthi targets including in the capital yesterday as they launched an ambitious counteroffensive to recapture all territory held by the group following its recent lightning gains.

The Yemeni military said it carried out more than 1,000 strikes and began an offensive against the Houthi-held capital, Sanaa, while the Saudi-led coalition supporting the internationally recognised government said 100 warplanes flew sorties at dawn.

The government announced the lofty goal of retaking all Houthi territory — home to most of Yemen's population, and much of it held for more than a decade — on Sunday.

Last month the Iran-backed group seized swathes of coastline along the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab Strait, a chokepoint for oil and cargo shipping, in Yemen's deadliest fighting in years.

The Houthis have also been attacking neighbouring Saudi Arabia since Yemen's civil war flared back to life, and have declared a maritime blockade on its ships.

A source in the Saudi energy sector told AFP that an attack Sunday had again halted pumping by the East-West pipeline to the Red

Sea, a key conduit for the kingdom's exports since Iran blockaded the Strait of Hormuz at the start of the wider Middle East war.

Later yesterday, the Houthis' agency that liaises with airlines warned that Saudi airspace was not safe for civilian flights as it "will be the theatre of operations of our armed forces", but it carved out exceptions for the skies over the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

Crude prices had already been soaring as a result of the Middle East war, before the Houthis began targeting the tankers and infrastructure of the world's largest oil exporter.

Saudi Aramco chief executive Amin Nasser warned yesterday that global oil stockpiles were "scarily thin" owing to the US-Iran war, days after G7 nations agreed to release more of their inventories to ease supply concerns.

"The system is already straining," Nasser told the Energy Intelligence Forum in London.

'Stay and die'

The Houthis have accused the Saudi-led coalition of carrying out hundreds of strikes since the renewed fighting began.

On Sunday, Yemen's military spokesman announced over 1,000 strikes against targets including

artillery and rocket launcher positions, combat reinforcements and supply lines.

Coalition spokesman Major General Turki al-Maliki said 100 jets flew at daybreak as part of an operation dubbed "Dawn of Yemen", providing "round-the-clock air support for the Yemeni armed forces on the ground".

Yemen's military also announced a "strategic offensive" against Sanaa, which has been in Houthi hands since 2014.

The Houthis' official Saba news agency said a girl and a woman were killed in Sanaa governorate on Sunday.

The strikes have yet to blunt ongoing Houthi advances on the ground, however.

On Sunday, the group effectively encircled the city of Taiz after cutting the main supply route linking it to the interim government capital of Aden.

Taiz residents remained defiant, vowing to stay and defend their city.

"We cannot leave the city. It is impossible for us to leave. We will stay and die inside this city," Fahmi Ahmed Ghaleb told AFP.

Humanitarian crisis

Taiz city remains under the control of government forces but

has long been besieged from the north, east and west by Houthi fighters.

The Houthis' surrounding of Taiz "is a significant development, but I think it is still too early to say that we are witnessing a decisive turning point", Ahmed Nagi, a senior analyst for Yemen at the International Crisis Group, told AFP.

While the war in Yemen predates the broader Middle East war that began with US-Israeli strikes on Iran, it has become its most active front in recent weeks.

The Houthis launched a rapid

offensive around the Red Sea coast in September that killed hundreds of combatants on both sides. According to UN figures, the fighting has displaced more than 184,000 people.

The Houthis took control of Sanaa in September 2014, forcing out the government and prompting Saudi intervention the following March at the head of an international coalition.

The ensuing civil war caused hundreds of thousands of deaths and a spiralling humanitarian crisis that left a majority of the population relying on aid.

— AFP



A Yemeni man inspects melted foam inside a factory after a strike that Houthi authorities-run media attributed to Saudi Arabia, in the Shamlan neighbourhood of Yemen's capital Sanaa yesterday.

— AFP

US-German trio wins medicine Nobel for work on optogenetics

Pia Ohlin

STOCKHOLM – The Nobel medicine prize was awarded yesterday to US psychiatrist and neurologist Karl Deisseroth and German scientists Peter Hegemann and Georg Nagel for their pioneering work in the neuroscience field of optogenetics.

Optogenetics involves controlling nerve signals with light, and helps researchers understand how specific cell types contribute to behaviours like learning, fear, addiction and movement.

The trio were honoured “for their discovery of a molecular switch for nerve cells”, the Nobel Assembly said.

Using light, researchers are now able to switch individual neural circuits on or off in a brain.

They have been able to reveal neural circuits governing specific memories, feelings, and behaviours relevant for neurological and psychiatric disorders.

In clinical medicine, the method has been used on humans on a very limited basis, particularly to treat a specific form of blindness, and may one day lead to treatments for disorders such as Parkinson’s disease and epilepsy.

“Optogenetics provides opportunities for mapping the brain in a way that we could once only dream of,” Per Svenningsson, chair of the Nobel committee, said in a statement.

The jury said the field had “fundamentally altered our understanding of the brain”.

The secretary general of the assembly, Thomas Perlmann, told reporters he was able to reach the three laureates by phone to break the news.



A screen displays portraits of (left to right) US scientist Karl Deisseroth and German scientists Peter Hegemann and Georg Nagel during the announcement of the winners of the 2026 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden, yesterday. – AFP

“I first called Deisseroth, he was very tired when he answered. He was definitely asleep, but he woke up,” he said.

“All three said the same thing, that they thought it was absolutely wonderful to receive the prize with the other two.”

‘Seen it coming’

“This is one of those Nobel prizes that we’ve all seen coming for quite a while now,” Simon Schultz, professor of neurotechnology in the department of bioengineering at Imperial College London, said in comments sent to AFP.

“Being able to manipulate cells with a combination of light and genetics has been transformational across the biological sciences,” he said.

One of the key areas for future development

is its use in humans, said Konstantin Nikolic, visiting professor in electrical and electronic engineering at Imperial College London.

While there were initial ethical and safety concerns about introducing genes encoding non-human, typically microbial, proteins into human cells, “the field has progressed considerably, and optogenetic approaches have already entered early-stage clinical trials,” he said.

Deisseroth, 54, is a professor at Stanford University in the US, while Hegemann, 71, is a neuroscience professor at Humboldt University of Berlin.

Nagel, 73, is a biophysics professor at the University of Würzburg.

In a comment posted on X, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said: “This award shows that German research is top-notch.

International collaboration in science remains crucial.”

Illumination

In the early 2000s, Hegemann and Nagel were examining why a single-celled alga was able to swim toward a light source.

They discovered an algal protein with unique properties, called channelrhodopsin, found on the surface of the cell.

When illuminated by blue light, a channel opens through the protein.

Charged ions then flow into the cell, creating an electrical impulse. They found that any cell they put the protein in became light sensitive.

Deisseroth then introduced the gene for channelrhodopsin into nerve cells from rats.

By illuminating the cells with blue light, he was able to trigger a nerve signal.

He published his breakthrough in 2005, and two years later, made the light-controlled switch for nerve cells work in the brains of living mice.

In 2021, Deisseroth and Hegemann won the Lasker Prize for their work, often considered a precursor to the Nobel.

The Nobel prize for physics will be announced today, followed by the chemistry prize tomorrow and the literature prize on Thursday.

The peace prize will be announced on Friday, and the economics prize will round off the Nobel season on October 12.

This year’s laureates will receive their prizes – a diploma, a gold medal and US\$1.2-million to share – on December 10, the anniversary of the death in 1896 of the prize’s founder, scientist Alfred Nobel. – AFP

NGO says climate change driving child marriages and teen pregnancies

PARIS – The Plan International charity said yesterday that global warming has increased the risk of child marriages, teenage pregnancies and violence against girls.

Climate disasters such as floods, droughts, cyclones, and extreme heat are destroying the health and education services girls depend on while also forcing families to marry off young daughters as a “survival strategy”, Plan International said.

The charity’s “Change Her Forecast, the State of the World’s Girls 2026” report was based on interviews with 5,000 girls and young women aged between 15 and 24 in Bangladesh, Kenya, Peru, Senegal and Zimbabwe.

It said one in 10 girls reported an unintended pregnancy “following a climate-related event” and 33 percent reported an increase in unintended pregnancies in their community.

“Nine in 10 girls said climate-related events were placing serious pressure on their family’s survival, health, and stability,” according to the report.

Some 28 percent said they had witnessed an increase in violence against women following climate related events. The figure rose to 60 percent in Zimbabwe, which has been severely hit by rising temperatures blamed on human activity.

“Slow-onset drought destroys the household economies that keep girls out of marriage,” said Plan International.

“Across 52 countries and three decades, prolonged drought emerged as the hazard most consistently associated with rising rates of child marriage and early unions, as families lose harvests, livestock, and income over months and years until marrying a daughter becomes a survival strategy.”

The report was released ahead of the international day of the girl child on October 11 and a month before the COP31 UN climate conference opens in Turkey.

Plan International said countries had to allocate “a defined share of climate adaptation finance to adolescent girls’ health, including sexual and reproductive health services.” – AFP

US Supreme Court hears bid to shut the door on climate suits

Issam Ahmed

WASHINGTON – The US Supreme Court was hearing arguments yesterday in a case that could determine the fate of dozens of climate lawsuits seeking damages from oil companies for their role in global warming and for concealing the dangers of fossil fuels.

Known as Suncor v. Boulder, the dispute began in 2018 when the city and county of Boulder, Colorado, sued ExxonMobil and Suncor Energy, claiming they “knowingly caused and contributed to the alteration of the climate” while “concealing and/or misrepresenting the dangers” of their products.

Suncor operates a refinery in Colorado, while ExxonMobil has deep ties to the Rocky Mountain State. The plaintiffs say they have suffered hundreds of millions of US dollars in losses from wildfires, flooding and other weather extremes stemming from climate change linked to the burning of fossil fuels.

It is one of around 40 similar suits brought by cities, states, tribes and other local jurisdictions, modeled on successful litigation against tobacco and opioid producers.

Kannon Shanmugam, representing the oil giants, told the justices during opening arguments that the case “involves an unprecedented effort to use state law to regulate global conduct.”

“Our constitutional system does

not permit state law to be used in that manner,” Shanmugam said.

The companies contend the lawsuits aim to impose an enormous “carbon tax” that could bankrupt the energy industry – that they are an illegitimate attempt to regulate greenhouse gas emissions – and are essentially asking the court to make them all go away.

After failing to move the case to federal court, the companies lost bids to have it dismissed in state court and at Colorado’s Supreme Court.

US President Donald Trump’s administration filed a brief urging the US Supreme Court to take up the case, and the justices agreed.

The court is considering whether federal law – specifically the Clean Air Act – preempts Boulder’s claims, whether the Constitution itself bars such suits, and whether it can review the case before a trial has taken place.

If the justices focus on the last question, “that essentially just kicks the can down the road” since the wider questions would likely be raised later, Katrina Kuh, a professor of environmental law at Pace University, told AFP.

A ruling on the federal law questions, however, would matter for many pending suits.

“It could extinguish them entirely,” said Kuh. Or the justices could narrow them – allowing Colorado, for example, to apply its state law only to emissions within the state.

Alito recusal

The questions also bear on so-called “climate superfunds” – laws in New York and Vermont that would make polluters pay for climate resilience projects.

New York’s was struck down by a federal judge last month, and an adverse Supreme Court ruling could shut the door to it being revived on appeal.

Conservative legal scholar Jonathan Adler, a William & Mary law professor who filed a brief supporting Boulder, told AFP he disagreed with the oil companies’ legal theories and believed such cases are “viable” – without offering a view on the underlying merits.

He added that Justices Amy Coney Barrett, Neil Gorsuch and Clarence Thomas bear the most watching because “all three of them have shown some skepticism towards broad preemption arguments,” though he said they are also likely to be skeptical of suits of this nature.

Ahead of the hearing, ultraconservative Justice Samuel Alito recused himself after critics called on him to step aside over his oil and gas stock holdings.

Conservatives still hold a 5-3 majority without Alito, but a 4-4 split is now possible – which would leave the Colorado ruling in place and let the case proceed to trial. – AFP

Brazil heads to run-off as Bolsonaro pulls off shock first place finish over Lula



Brazil's right-wing senator and presidential candidate for the Liberal Party (PL) Flávio Bolsonaro smiles, standing next to his wife Fernanda, following the release of partial results of the presidential election, in Brasília on Sunday. – AFP

Brazil's President and re-election candidate for the leftist Workers' Party (PT) Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (centre, left) and his wife Rosângela Janja da Silva raise their arms following the release of partial results of the presidential election, in São Paulo on Sunday. – AFP

Sebastian Serrano and Fran Blandy

BRASÍLIA – Right-wing senator Flávio Bolsonaro pulled off a surprise first-place finish ahead of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Sunday's election, which heads to a run-off in three weeks as neither clinched a majority.

In a result that defied opinion poll projections showing Lula in the lead, Flávio Bolsonaro scored 47 percent of the vote to the incumbent's 45 percent.

If Bolsonaro triumphs in the October 25 election, the Latin American powerhouse will join a steady rightward march in the region in recent elections, a trend championed by US President Donald Trump.

The election results included a series of landslide wins for the right in parliament in a massive setback to Lula, who at almost 81 is seeking a fourth term in office to cement his legacy.

"I admit I was convinced I would win in the first round. The game is about to start. In extra time, we will win over the Brazilian people," the 80-year-old said.

The veteran leftist has branded the election a battle between democracy and "barbarism," warning voters that Brazil's sovereignty was at stake in the face of US pressure.

Flávio Bolsonaro was a little-known senator a few months ago when his father anointed him his political heir, unable to run himself as he serves a 27-year sentence for an attempted coup after losing a 2022 election bid.

However, his father's powerful name won over the country's conservative base and he slid past Lula despite a campaign marked by scandals and mudslinging.

"I am truly happy with the result," Flávio Bolsonaro said after results came through, hailing the "very real possibility" of a run-off victory.

Voters in the deeply polarised nation were jaded by familiar choices.

Oscarina de Oliveira, a 62-year-old caregiver, told AFP she had planned to vote for Lula, as she always has. But "when I got there, I switched to Bolsonaro. Just to see what happens, to see if anything changes."

Carolina Botelho, a political scientist at the Rio de Janeiro State University, told AFP that the leading candidate in the first round has won every election in Brazil since the end of the country's military dictatorship in 1985.

Bolsonaro dynasty

With 56 million votes, Flávio Bolsonaro's first round performance outdid that of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, when he was elected, and 2022.

It emerged during the campaign that Flávio Bolsonaro was under investigation for corruption over the financing of the biopic "Dark Horse" about his father.

For many voters, this did little to move the needle.

"Things are truly terrible. As far as I'm concerned, the left just doesn't work anymore," said tech worker João Batista, 36, in the Rocinha favela (shantytown), saying he was fed up with the "horrible" expense of basic goods.

Flávio Bolsonaro highlighted on Sunday that as president he will have the possibility of appointing four justices to the powerful Supreme Court – which convicted his father and has been at the centre of key political and criminal scandals.

The elections proved a triumphant comeback for the Bolsonaro family after Jair Bolsonaro narrowly lost a re-election bid in 2022, leading to violent riots in the capital and his conviction last year for attempting a coup.

Former first lady Michelle Bolsonaro and another one of Jair Bolsonaro's sons, Carlos Bolsonaro, both secured seats in the Senate.

Jair Bolsonaro's youngest son Jair Renan, 28, was elected as a federal lawmaker.

Flávio has cast himself as more "moderate"

than his firebrand father, but his critics were concerned.

"Flávio is a danger to Brazil, he represents a step backward. We can see everything his father did...He really destroyed Brazil," said Anderson de Almeida, a 45-year-old doorman.

Trump watching

Trump had said he was watching the election "very closely," but did not endorse Flávio Bolsonaro.

The US president has wielded tariffs and sanctions to pressure Brasilia over complaints ranging from the trial against his ally Jair Bolsonaro to alleged unfair trade practices.

Lula repeatedly warned him not to "meddle" in the elections.

Revered for social welfare programmes that lifted millions out of poverty, Lula made a dramatic comeback to office in the 2022 elections after being jailed on a corruption conviction for 18 months.

The charges, thrown out on procedural grounds, have continued to haunt him.

In his third term he oversaw a drop in inflation and unemployment, but voters complain about a high cost of living and as in many Latin American nations, citizens are fed up with high levels of crime and violence. – AFP

Sánchez calls early election after housing crisis defeat

Daniel Silva

MADRID – Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez yesterday called a snap election for November 29, after parliament rejected housing relief measures proposed by his minority government.

The defeat on Friday was just the latest political setback for the Socialist premier, one of the few European prime ministers from the left still in power.

"To do more, we need to renew and broaden the support of the people," Sánchez, in office since 2018, said in a televised address, adding his aim was "to secure a much broader, progressive majority in parliament".

The next general election was due by August 2027.

Tens of thousands of protesters marched in Madrid and other cities in Spain on Saturday to demand affordable housing.

The government's proposed measures, which included automatic renewal of tenancy contracts and restrictions on evicting vulnerable tenants, were voted down by opposition parties in Spain's parliament.

The defeat infuriated those protesting the country's increasingly expensive housing

market and underscored the difficulties his minority coalition government faces in passing legislation.

Spain has been operating under its 2023 budget, the last national spending plan passed by Sánchez's government, for several years.

The demonstrations extended a crisis that has gone on for more than a week, triggered by the eviction last month of 87-year-old Maricarmen Abascal from her Madrid flat where she had lived for decades.

Hundreds of protesters have been occupying a tent city for more than a week in the heart of Madrid to press for reforms.

Recent opinion polls have generally placed the main opposition conservative People's Party (PP) ahead of the leftist Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE).

Soaring prices

Housing has for years been a top concern for Spaniards as supply falls short of demand, with rents and house prices rising as elsewhere in the European Union.

Average rents in Spain have almost doubled over the past decade, while asking prices for homes have risen by about 90 percent,

according to real estate website Idealista.

Abascal's eviction catalysed long-running anger about runaway housing costs.

The pensioner was forced to leave the Madrid flat where she had lived for more than seven decades after it was acquired by an investment company that sought to increase her rent by 275 percent, say housing campaigners.

The backlash led the new owners to reach a deal allowing her to return to the flat at a low rent.

The housing bills Sanchez's leftist coalition had presented to parliament were rejected after the Catalan separatist party Junts – on whose support the government relies – voted against them, arguing they were hastily drawn up and would make the housing crisis worse.

Mixed record

Sánchez defended his government's record in his address, pointing out that under his leadership Spain's economy has grown faster than those of its main European peers, while unemployment has fallen.

But after eight years in power, Sánchez is also under pressure over corruption scandals involving people close to him, including his

wife and top figures in his party.

Sánchez – one of Europe's chief critics of US President Donald Trump – has also faced widespread criticism over his handling of the crisis in the North African territory of Ceuta, where thousands of migrants from Morocco entered in late July.

The situation at Europe's land border with Africa has gradually deteriorated, with many migrants still sleeping in makeshift camps.

Many ordinary Spaniards are not feeling the benefits of the country's strong economic growth, with inflation outpacing wage growth and rent taking up an increasing share of household incomes.

"If eight years have not been enough, why would four more be?" People's Party leader Alberto Núñez Feijóo said, welcoming the fact that Spaniards would "finally" get the chance to have their say.

His party has repeatedly called for an early election.

While polls put the People's Party ahead, they suggest the party would fall short of an absolute majority in parliament and would need the support of far-right Vox to govern. – AFP

Messi readies for final farewell in Argentina send-off

Football

Tomás Viola

BUENOS AIRES – Lionel Messi will bring the curtain down on his glittering Argentina career today with a farewell friendly against Benin that marks the dawn of a new era for the South American champions.

After more than two decades of service to his country, the 39-year-old superstar will hand over the captain's armband for good as he makes his final appearance in the Albiceleste jersey at the Estadio Monumental in Buenos Aires.

Messi will be joined for his international swansong by 85,000 spectators and several of the teammates with whom he reached the pinnacle of football at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, alongside members of Argentina's emerging generation.

The friendly marks a symbolic passing of the torch for a player whose international legacy includes a World Cup title, two Copa America crowns and the Finalissima.

Messi also bows out as Argentina's record appearance-maker and leading scorer, with 125 goals in 207 games, as well as a record 68 assists.

His farewell comes two and a half months after Argentina's ill-tempered World Cup final defeat to Spain in New Jersey, where Messi

exited in tears after making little impression.

"I gave it my all; I have nothing left to give, and besides, there are great young players coming up who deserve their chance," Messi wrote when announcing his international retirement in August.

Messi remains under contract with Inter Miami until 2028, although following the death of his father, Jorge, two months ago, he revealed he may hang up his boots for good sooner than anticipated.

Friends reunited

Members of Argentina's 2022 World Cup-winning squad – the players who delivered the country's third star – and their families will join Messi for today's farewell against Benin, ranked 93rd in the world.

Veterans of that Doha triumph such as Angel Di María, who retired from international football in 2024, will be there to witness the passing of the torch to a new generation charged with extending the Albiceleste's golden era.

Several of the newcomers, including Franco Mastantuono and Leonel Flores, were not even born when "La Pulga" ("The Flea") made his Argentina debut in 2005 for a team whose history had for so long been dominated by Diego Maradona.

"It's going to be an unforgettable



Argentina's forward #10 Lionel Messi (right) celebrates scoring his team's second goal during the 2026 World Cup round of 16 football match between Argentina and Egypt at Atlanta Stadium in Atlanta on July 7. – AFP

day for everyone. Everyone wants to be at this match, and now it's just about enjoying it," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said.

Argentina's new generation has already shown what it can do without its captain, although nobody is pretending replacing a man regarded by many as the greatest footballer in history will be straightforward.

"Collectively, we will try to fill the void left by Leo," said Scaloni, who is negotiating a contract extension after leaving his future unresolved following the World Cup defeat in July.

Scaloni, who mastered the art of building the right supporting cast around Messi, will also say goodbye today to 38-year-old vice-captain Nicolas Otamendi.

Like Messi and Otamendi, midfielders Rodrigo De Paul and Giovanni Lo Celso were called up solely for the Benin game, raising the possibility that neither will represent Argentina again.

New generation

Those certain to be involved, at least from the bench, include other veterans of the 2022 World Cup

who will be the standard-bearers for Argentina after Messi: defender Cristian Romero, midfielders Alexis Mac Allister and Enzo Fernandez, and forwards Julian Alvarez and Lautaro Martinez.

Tenacious centre-back Romero is set to inherit the captain's armband, first worn by Messi at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

Goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez and Lautaro Martinez are next in the captaincy hierarchy.

They have already begun to rally around Messi's heirs, who showed their appetite for success in Argentina's first game since the World Cup final, against Bolivia in Cordoba on Wednesday.

Argentina swept the Bolivians aside 4-0, with young talents Nico Paz and Jose Manuel Lopez among the scorers.

They followed that victory with a 7-0 rout of Burkina Faso at the Monumental on Saturday, with Mastantuono and Gianluca Prestianni scoring their first international goals.

While Argentina's future is beginning to take shape, one small but symbolically significant question remains: who inherits Messi's number 10 shirt?

"We won't give the number 10 to anyone until Leo's match takes place," Scaloni said. "After that, we'll see." – AFP



Ronaldo-less Portugal beat Norway to reach Nations League quarters

PORTO – Portugal defeated Norway 2-1 without sulking superstar striker Cristiano Ronaldo on Sunday to qualify for the Nations League quarter-finals.

Goncalo Ramos secured a comeback victory for Jorge Jesus's Portugal in the Group A4 clash after Joao Cancelo's rocket levelled Kristoffer Ajer's stunning opener for Norway.

Portugal played out the final minutes with 10 men after Francisco Conceicao was dismissed for two yellow cards in the space of a few seconds for dissent after he appealed for a penalty unsuccessfully.

Former Real Madrid and Manchester United striker Ronaldo walked out on the squad on Wednesday ahead of the previous game against Denmark, after Portugal's all-time top goalscorer learned he would not start.

Portugal are now guaranteed to finish in the top two spots in the group with two matches to spare, thus becoming the first team to reach the last eight in March 2027.

"Cristiano is our captain, the best player Portugal has ever had," Cancelo told RTP.

"Things will certainly end in the best way (with Ronaldo) but the important thing is the four victories."

Norway took the lead in Porto against the run of play with a stunning effort from Brentford defender Ajer after 36 minutes.

The Norwegian met a bouncing ball on the edge of the box perfectly to bend it into the top corner.

However two minutes later Barcelona defender Cancelo scored



Portugal's forward #09 Goncalo Ramos (centre) fights for the ball with Norway's forward #09 Erling Haaland (left) and Norway's midfielder #08 Sander Berge (right) during the UEFA Nations League Group 4 football match between Portugal and Norway at Dragao stadium in Porto on Sunday. – AFP

a similarly superb goal, rifling home from around 20 yards.

Manchester City striker Erling Haaland fired across the face of goal after an hour and was replaced by Jorgen Strand Larsen a few minutes later.

Nations League holders and two-time record champions Portugal nosed in front when AC Milan striker Ramos, starting in place of Ronaldo, tucked home from close range.

Ramos was teed up by Joao Felix, who reached Vitinha's lofted pass and put it on a plate for the forward.

Ramos scored for a third consecutive game, and helped Portugal seal back-to-back wins since 41-year-old forward Ronaldo left the squad.

Conceicao's foolish dismissal left Jesus's team in a tough spot for the final few minutes. The Juventus winger was about to be replaced by Pedro Neto but his complaints led to a red card before the substitution could happen.

Portugal held on to triumph for the fourth time in four games in the group, completing a successful first international window for 72-year-old coach Jesus, despite the Ronaldo controversy.

"Any player who comes to the national team is welcome, obviously. If Cris returns, we'll be here to receive him with open arms," said Portugal defender Nuno Mendes. – AFP

Ronaldo can return to Portugal team if he wants: coach Jesus

Football

PORTO – Portugal superstar Cristiano Ronaldo can return to the squad if he wishes, despite walking out on his team-mates, said national team coach Jorge Jesus on Sunday.

Jesus said Ronaldo can come back into the fold "if he wants to" after the team beat Norway without the veteran attacker to reach the Nations League quarter-finals.

The dispute began last week when Jesus left 41-year-old Ronaldo on the bench for Portugal's first win over Norway. Ronaldo subsequently walked out on the squad on Wednesday after learning he would not start against Denmark.

"For me, Cris, in the next call-up, if he's playing at Al-Nassr, he'll be a player who can be called up," Jesus told reporters, referring to Ronaldo's Saudi club side. "If he wants to, he'll return to the national team."

The coach said if Ronaldo wishes to speak to him before Portugal's next matches in November, that would happen.

"If he wants to, as we did before this call-up, we talked before the call-up, we can talk before the next call-up," continued Jesus. "But Cris is the one who's going to decide."

Former Real Madrid and Manchester United attacker Ronaldo is Portugal's all-time leading scorer and most-capped player.

Jesus said he had told Ronaldo he needed him in the squad for his first games at the helm after replacing Roberto Martinez following the 2026 World Cup.

"Cristiano should end his time in the national team the way he wants, he's the one who will decide how he wants it," said Jesus.

"That's how we talked, the two of us -- I said, 'I need you'. In my first call-up, I said, 'I need you, I need you to be close to me, playing or not playing, I need you'. And now I'm saying the same thing."

Ronaldo, who made his Portugal debut in 2003 at the age of 18, has said this will "probably" be his final year in football.

The forward has been a fixture of the national team for more than two decades and has played at six World Cups.

In Ronaldo's absence Portugal became the first team to secure a place in the quarter-finals, with two group games still to play.

Ronaldo's long-time rival for the title of the world's best player, Lionel Messi, will play his final match for Argentina in a friendly against Benin in Buenos Aires today. – AFP

Djokovic advances to China Open final as Medvedev out for hitting fan with ball



Serbia's Novak Djokovic hits a return to Russia's Daniil Medvedev during their men's singles semi-final at the China Open tennis tournament in Beijing yesterday. — AFP



China's Zheng Qinwen hits a return to Czech Republic's Marie Bouzkova during their women's singles match at the China Open tennis tournament in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

Tennis

Novak Djokovic advanced to the China Open final yesterday after Daniil Medvedev was disqualified in the second set, when a ball that came off the Russian's racquet hit a spectator.

A man sitting in the stands behind Medvedev's side of the court was seen holding his face and escorted out of his seat after being hit, as Djokovic was serving for the match with the score at 7-5, 5-3.

Eleventh-ranked Djokovic will play world number nine Alex de Minaur for the title today in Beijing.

The Australian had advanced over Hubert Hurkacz after the 29-year-old from Poland retired from their semi-final with an abductor strain.

Medvedev hit the ball with a backhand at the edge of the stands when he failed to return a point, with the chair umpire stopping play.

"Terribly sorry to the spectator, first of all," he told reporters afterwards, adding it was "100 percent an accident" and that he wished to apologise to the fan in person.

It had been a physical battle before Medvedev's disqualification.

A valiant Djokovic, 39, put on a dazzling performance and saved 16 break points, diving at the baseline and sprinting to the net.

"I didn't see what happened, to be honest," he told the crowd afterwards.

"I'm sure that Daniil didn't... do it intentionally. It happened by accident. Sorry for the crowd," he said, adding that it had been a tough match.

Djokovic was red-faced and hunched over between points, with both players forcing each other through gruelling rallies, until the Serbian took control in the second set.

Earlier in the women's draw, former world number one Iga Swiatek staged a comeback to advance to the last 16, while home hope Zheng Qinwen survived another three-set test.

Swiatek overcame frustration to cling on as her opponent served for the set, dominating a must-win tie-break to beat Croatia's Donna Vekic 4-6, 7-6 (7/0), 6-2.

"I was just angry, wanted to change something, because clearly it wasn't working," the 25-year-old from Poland said on court.

"Sometimes if you care a bit less because you're... probably going to lose, it also helps you a bit," she later told reporters.

She will face American teenager Iva Jovic for a spot in the quarter-finals.

'Gave everything'

China's Zheng was tested by Marie Bouzkova, enduring her third three-setter of the tournament to beat the Czech player 7-6 (7/3), 4-6, 7-5.

Zheng voiced frustration in each set at movement outside the court, including as she tried to salvage the second set on Bouzkova's serve.

But she pulled out some of her most accurate tennis to clinch the last two games and win the match when 27th-ranked Bouzkova fired long.

"I gave everything," said Zheng, who had already spent more than five hours on court in the first two rounds.

"Truthfully speaking, I felt a lot of pressure today[Monday]," the 23-year-old told her home crowd, thanking fans for their support.

Zheng, the current world number 54, next plays 118th-ranked Alina Charaeva, who sent out top seed Elena Rybakina in the second round.

Wimbledon champion Linda Noskova also advanced and will face Ekaterina Alexandrova in the last 16. — AFP

Alcaraz advances to Japan Open final

Tennis

TOKYO – Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz advanced to the final of the Japan Open yesterday after securing a hard-fought 5-7, 6-3, 6-1 victory over fellow Spaniard Jaume Munar.

The world number three said regaining "consistency" at a high level has remained elusive after a months-long wrist injury. He reached the quarter-finals of the US Open last month.

"Right now, I'm trying to get my level back. I would say it's still far from it, still far from it," he said when asked about his current condition compared with his success last year.

He said he was "feeling good" but was still "trying to get into the competition, trying to get into the rhythm of playing matches, playing tournaments".

The Australian Open champion clinched the Tokyo win despite struggling with mistakes, particularly from the end of the first set through the middle of the second set, when his 49th-ranked opponent put up a brave fight.

Alcaraz unleashed a barrage of big serves and aggressive returns to keep Munar off-balance and running along the baseline, occasionally mixing in delicate drop shots that wowed the packed crowd at the Ariake Colosseum.

Munar maintained his composure to stay competitive, especially late in the opening set, as Alcaraz hit shots wide and long and racked up four double-faults in that set alone.

Nevertheless, Alcaraz kept pressure on his opponent, showering him with precise forehands, fast volleys and drop shots, breaking Munar's serve in the first, third and ninth games of the second set.

Alcaraz dominated the final set, wrapping up the match in two hours and 31 minutes.

"I don't know what happened until the middle of the second set," Alcaraz said.

"Last year I came here with a lot of trophies... with a lot of confidence. But I'm going to fight for the same result, which I'm really happy about," he said.

In the final, Alcaraz will face 19th-ranked Jiri Lehecka of Czechia, who beat Valentin Vacherot of Monaco 6-4, 6-2. — AFP

Talking points from the Bahrain Grand Prix in Malaysia

F1

SEPANG – Tropical storms, software bugs and a bad tyre choice may have delayed them, but in the end the three generational talents of modern Formula One stood on the podium.

After a race weekend that placed a premium on experience, preparation and pure talent, AFP Sport looks at three things we learned from Sunday's delayed rain-hit Bahrain Grand Prix held in Malaysia:

Verstappen and Red Bull poised for run-in

Having committed himself to a fresh long-term deal with Red Bull, Verstappen has galvanised the team and, with the keen and able support of Isack Hadjar, led them back to the front of the field.

It was Verstappen's first win this year. It was also Red Bull's first with their own power unit which they developed around a Ford engine. The victory confirmed they have recovered from the implosion that followed Christian Horner's exit and the loss of design genius Adrian Newey and others.

Verstappen also moved level with Michael Schumacher on 72 wins for the same team.

The German set his total with Ferrari between 1996 and 2006. They are behind only Lewis Hamilton who, won 84 for Mercedes between 2013 and 2024.

Verstappen's loyalty and leadership have helped forge a new spirit of unity under Laurent Mekies' soft power as team chief, setting an example in commitment and work ethic that makes Red Bull a threat to Mercedes.

Sepang shines despite storms and bugs

The unprecedented crowds, relishing a spectacular return event after a nine-year gap, were evidence of the success of Formula One's lateral thinking in taking the Bahrain Grand Prix to Malaysia after it was cancelled in April.

A thunderous downpour caused a 100-minute delay to the start, exacerbated by a software failure, in programmes controlled by the International Motoring Federation (FIA). That led to bizarre scenes on an aborted formation lap. What followed was a memorable race.

"It was insane," said Verstappen, who was one of many to lose power. "At some points, we were five-wide on the straight because we couldn't understand it... I saw eight cars

crawling and Lewis stopped... It's not what you want for the sport."

Hamilton came to a complete halt and did a full re-start before the FIA abandoned the lap and re-loaded new software. The ruling body apologised for the chaos.

The energy management cutouts, in systems created as part of car controls for the new 'hybrid era', may have delivered frustration, but they also enticed teams to take risks.

Ferrari chose dry slick tyres, resulting in both Hamilton and Charles Leclerc tumbling down the order after starting in the wet.

Red Bull and Mercedes stayed on intermediates.

"When I saw they were on "inters", my heart sank," said Hamilton.

He produced a vintage recovery from 19th to third ahead of Leclerc and thrilled an enthusiastic crowd as Verstappen reprised his 2017 win.

"The software was tested," said the FIA's Nikolas Tombazis. "It just wasn't tested in those specific conditions."

Antonelli benefits from Russell's bad luck

George Russell's continued ill fortune

enabled Antonelli to pull 84 points clear with seven races remaining, this time due to a power failure while running third in the closing laps.

It was a reminder of F1's adage that "to finish first, first you must finish" and painful for both Russell and Mercedes boss Toto Wolff.

Mercedes had introduced an extensive upgrade package but ended the weekend well-beaten by Verstappen and wondering if the changes had worked.

Antonelli suggested the problem may be that their cars are sensitive to open, low-grip asphalt.

"I'm sure the team – with a lot of data, especially after this weekend – will come with a better view of the package for Singapore. Hopefully, we can extract full potential."

For the precocious 20-year-old, it could prove a key race in his charge for Italy's first drivers' title since 1953.

Russell, admitted it was "exceptionally unlikely" that he can become champion.

But the Englishman won last year in Singapore, where Mercedes have taken five of the last 10 races, including three with Hamilton, and where Verstappen has never won. — AFP

Zuckerberg skewered again on screen in ‘The Social Reckoning’

Antoine Guy and Adam Plowright

PARIS – Sixteen years after being portrayed as a power-hungry start-upper in “The Social Network” film, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg is set for another damning on-screen depiction, this time as a ruthless Silicon Valley overlord.

Hitting screens internationally from tomorrow, the follow-up movie “The Social Reckoning” by Aaron Sorkin delves into the darkest corners of Facebook’s legacy, from spreading hate speech to encouraging political polarisation, and undermining democracy.

It is told through the real-life story of Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen, played by “Anora” star Mikey Madison, and *The Wall Street Journal* reporter Jeff Horwitz (Jeremy Allen White), who were the duo behind the 2021 “Facebook Files” PR disaster for the company.

The Zuckerberg character, played by “Succession” star Jeremy Strong, is the central figure in the drama, but the heroic Haugen and hard-working Horwitz provide the emotional core of the film.

“This is a whistleblower story. It’s a newspaper story,” Sorkin told AFP and a handful of other entertainment journalists last week.

“In ‘The Social Network’ I made an attempt to understand his [Zuckerberg’s] motives and get inside his head. I do that less in ‘The Social Reckoning,’” added Sorkin, who wrote the script of the first movie.

“I put him in a single situation and have him make a single argument so that by the end of the film he is confronted with the consequences of what he’s done,” Sorkin said.

That situation is Facebook’s refusal to fact-check political advertisements on its platform in the run-up to the 2020 US elections,

which ended with President Donald Trump contesting the results and his supporters smashing their way into the Capitol.

Cool kids

Critically acclaimed “The Social Network” in 2010, which went on to win three Oscars, was written by Sorkin but directed by “Fight Club” maker David Fincher.

It featured a break-out performance from Jesse Eisenberg as a then-student Zuckerberg, a socially awkward mogul-in-the-making who has trouble making friends and is accused of ripping off the idea for Facebook from his peers at Harvard University.

“What I had suggested back in 2010 was that he was a guy uncomfortable with the social structure of college – feeling, as so many people do, that there’s a cool kids table somewhere and he’s not welcome at it,” Sorkin said.

“And so he created his own cool kids table, which he’s now the mayor of.”

In “The Social Reckoning”, Sorkin does not wrestle with what motivates 42-year-old Zuckerberg as he runs his Meta empire that now includes Instagram, WhatsApp and his faltering parallel online world called the “Metaverse”.

“It can’t possibly be money. There’s nothing you can buy for US\$120 billion that you couldn’t buy for \$119 billion,” Sorkin said.

Jeremy Strong told GQ magazine last month that he had reached out to the Meta supremo via email to say he had approached the role “very seriously” and “with respect”.

He did not reveal Zuckerberg’s response.

On screen, the Zuckerberg character is heard acknowledging his image problem, saying: “I know what people think of me”.

‘Tech bros’ on screen

The US tech billionaire class is inspiring a growing number of films, while also becoming more tightly enmeshed in the business



US actor Jeremy Strong (left) and US screenwriter, playwright and filmmaker Aaron Sorkin pose upon arrival for the “Social Reckoning” world premiere at Regal Union Square on Sunday in New York City. Strong portrays Mark Zuckerberg in the film.

– AFP

side of Hollywood.

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman was set to be the subject of new biopic “Artificial” by Italian director Luca Guadagnino until it was dropped by producers Amazon MGM Studios – shortly after Amazon entered into a partnership with OpenAI.

Independent film distributor Neon has stepped in and is set to release the movie next year.

Elon Musk was seen as inspiration for the space-faring main character in black comedy “Mickey 17” starring Robert Pattinson last year, while the Tesla and SpaceX boss is the subject of a new documentary by Oscar winner Alex Gibney.

British comedy writer-turned director Jesse Armstrong made

“Mountainhead” for HBO last year that imagined four tech billionaire villains stuck in a mountain retreat.

Given the deep pockets and powerful lawyers available to Zuckerberg, Sorkin’s script was picked over at studio Sony Pictures’ behest.

The “West Wing” creator also re-shot two scenes, but has denied legal fears were to blame.

“Under normal circumstances when you’re doing non-fiction, there is a thorough legal vet that happens. In this case, they decided to hire an outside law firm just to handle this,” Sorkin explained.

“There were some, not many notes from the lawyers and those notes did not affect [the film],” he said.

– AFP

‘Verity’ kills, Cruise flops in N American cinemas

LOS ANGELES – The bookish thriller “Verity” cleaned up in its North American box office debut this past weekend while Tom Cruise flopped in “Digger” playing a rich old guy who thinks he can save the world.

“Verity,” an MGM film starring Dakota Johnson, Anne Hathaway and Josh Hartnett, took in US\$32.6 million in its first weekend, industry monitor Exhibitor Relations said.

Adapted from a novel by Colleen Hoover, the story of a struggling writer hired to help a famous author finish her book scored an excellent opening for an original psychological thriller, said veteran industry watcher David A. Gross of FranchiseRe Movies.

“The weekend figure is well above average for the genre, in spite of weak reviews and audience ratings,” he wrote. “The reception is not hurting the film – audiences are showing up in big numbers.”

Holding on to second place was Sony’s “Resident Evil,” with US\$12.5 million this weekend, bringing its North American total to US\$125 million after three

weekends in cinemas.

“Heart of the Beast,” starring Brad Pitt as a former soldier and his loyal but traumatised combat dog as they survive in the Alaskan wilderness, brought in an estimated US\$11 million for Paramount on its second weekend. It stayed in third place.

Then in fourth with debut revenue of just US\$8 million was “Digger,” a black comedy starring Cruise as a powerful man who sets off a climate disaster, then tries to show he is the one to save the world from it.

“For a black comedy, the numbers are not bad, but black comedies are small films and this isn’t a small film, it’s a Tom Cruise movie,” Gross wrote.

Dropping one rung to fifth, also with US\$8 million, was “Primetime,” starring Robert Pattinson as reality TV host Chris Hansen.

The film is based on a real-life US show from the mid-2000s called “To Catch a Predator” in which Hansen and his production staff lured would-be paedophiles into sting operations where police were waiting to make on-screen arrests.

– AFP

Glastonbury festival tickets sell out in 45 minutes

LONDON – Tickets for next year’s Glastonbury music festival in the UK sold out in 45 minutes on Sunday, organisers said, with thousands rushing for sought-after tickets despite the hefty price tag.

“Tickets for Glastonbury 2027 have now sold out,” the organisers posted on social media, less than an hour after the general sale began.

The iconic festival held at Worthy Farm in southwest England has become a fixture of the international musical calendar, after first launching in 1970 inspired by British hippie and counterculture movements.

Prices have risen steadily in the last decade, with standard tickets costing £408 (US\$539) for the June 2027 iteration, which follows the “fallow year” of no festival in 2026.

The performers for next year

have not yet been announced, although organisers confirmed the recently reunited Britpop band Oasis will not play at Worthy Farm after months of speculation.

Once a mecca for legendary British rockers, Glastonbury’s line-up in recent years has veered to include global pop stars alongside festival veterans, with the likes of Charli XCX, Dua Lipa and Olivia Rodrigo gracing the stages.

The festival, popularly known as Glasto, courted controversy in 2025 after two acts offered messages of support for Palestinians in Gaza, where the United Nations says there are “reasonable grounds” to conclude that Israel’s authorities and security forces “have continued to commit the crime of genocide”.

Police assessed comments made on stage by Irish rappers Kneecap

and the London-based duo Bob Vylan – but ultimately took no action against either band.

Frontman Bobby Vylan had led the crowd in chants against the Israeli army, sparking backlash against the BBC from some quarters for its live broadcast of the moment.

Last year’s festival also saw singer Lewis Capaldi make an emotional return to the vaunted Pyramid Stage, two years after he stopped a performance on the same stage as he struggled to overcome his Tourette symptoms.

Glastonbury 2025, which was attended by some 210,000 people, featured veteran stars Neil Young and Rod Stewart, as well as performances by Raye, The Prodigy, Alanis Morissette and Snow Patrol.

The festival will take place from June 23 to 27, 2027.

– AFP

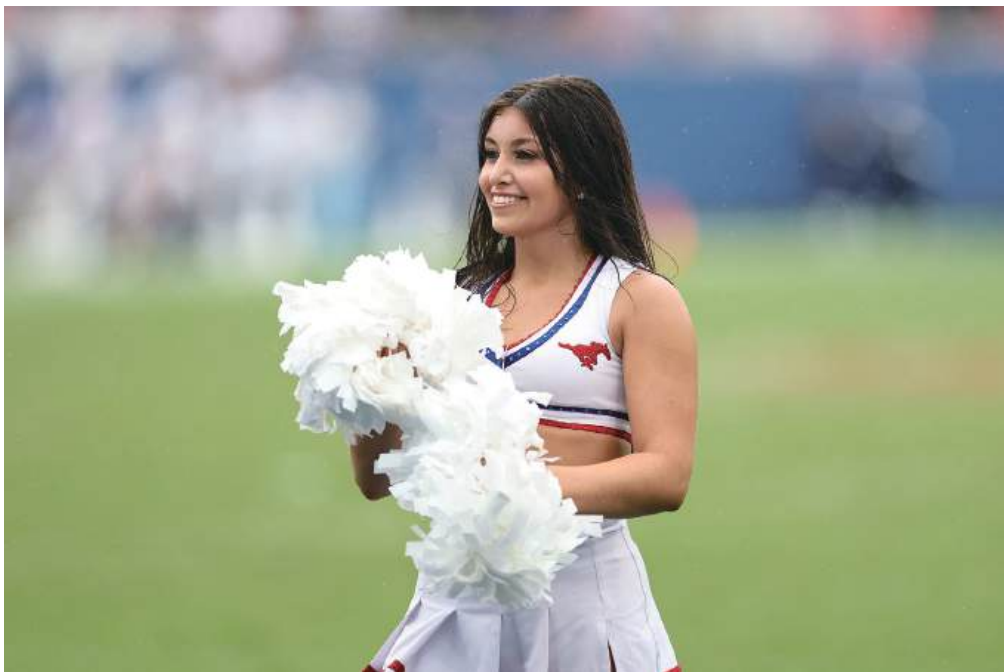
World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 11°C~26°C	Manila 24°C~32°C	New York 9°C~19°C	Lisbon 17°C~25°C
Shanghai 13°C~24°C	Bangkok 24°C~33°C	London 14°C~21°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~25°C
Hong Kong 21°C~28°C	Tokyo 18°C~27°C	Frankfurt 9°C~23°C	Luanda 21°C~24°C
Taipei 19°C~25°C	Singapore 25°C~34°C	Vancouver 10°C~17°C	Maputo 18°C~30°C
Guangzhou 17°C~27°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~33°C	Paris 13°C~25°C	Dili 21°C~32°C
Nanjing 11°C~25°C	Jakarta 24°C~35°C	Moscow 8°C~13°C	São Tomé 24°C~29°C
Guilin 13°C~27°C	Seoul 10°C~23°C	Las Vegas 22°C~35°C	Praia 24°C~30°C
Xi'an 10°C~25°C	Sydney 15°C~26°C	Monte Carlo 19°C~24°C	Bissau 23°C~31°C



ACQUIRED TASTE

A model presents a creation for Zimmermann Women's Spring/Summer 2027 collection fashion show as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris yesterday. – AFP



CHEER UP!

A cheerleader for the SMU Mustangs performs during a game against the Boston College Eagles at Gerald J. Ford Stadium on Saturday in Dallas, Texas. – AFP



COMPETITIVE SLEEP-OFF

Contestants take part in a sleep competition organised by a mattress brand in Tokyo yesterday. – AFP



THE LITTLE GUY VS. BIG OIL

Demonstrators rally against oil corporations involved in a suit against Colorado municipalities outside of the US Supreme Court Building yesterday in Washington, DC. The Supreme Court reconvened for the 2026-2027 legislative cycle, expected to rule on a slew of cases in upcoming weeks. – AFP



UNPLUG AI!

Activists protest AI and data centres ahead of a New York City Council Committee hearing on the risks and regulation of AI, at City Hall Park in New York City yesterday. Protestors against AI gathered ahead of the hearing where senior leaders from Anthropic, OpenAI, Google and Meta were expected to testify under oath about the potential dangers of AI. – AFP