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2-day Caritas charity bazaar to start next Saturday

Armindo Neves

Caritas Macau Secretary-General Paul Pun Chi Meng announced during a press conference yesterday that the two-day 57th Caritas Macau Charity Bazaar will start next Saturday, November 7.

Caritas Macau held the press conference at Saint John de Brito School to outline details of the upcoming bazaar.

According to the organisers, the bazaar will be held next Saturday and Sunday under the theme "Inheriting Care, Embracing the Future". After deducting expenses, all funds raised will be used in full to develop new social services and to enhance existing non-subsidised projects.

Coinciding with the 75th anniversary of Caritas Macau, Pun said the bazaar will feature booths inviting members of the public to reflect on Caritas Macau's 75 years of service. Historical photographs and memories related to Caritas are currently being publicly collected, and interactive experience workshops will also be set up, according to the press conference.

The bazaar's charity raffle tickets cost 10 patacas each, with over 120,000 already sold, according to a statement issued during the press conference. Prizes include a total of 100,000 patacas in cash and more than 250 gifts.

This year, for the first time, a raffle ticket value-added scheme has been introduced: members of the public who do not win the draw can present their ticket stubs at participating merchants to enjoy exclusive offers, the statement underlined.

Pun also mentioned that an elderly residential care facility project on Avenida do Coronel Mesquita (美副將大馬路) has received government approval for its planning conditions map, planned to provide around 40 beds.

Furthermore, a new "Delightful Kitchen" in the Inner Harbour district will open soon, providing nutritious meals for the elderly in a community canteen format.

Speaking to the media on the sidelines of the press conference, Pun noted that, for the time being, the kitchen is still only operating internally, mainly providing meals to elderly service units that lack kitchen facilities.

It is scheduled to officially open to the public next Monday, serving elderly people in need. Pun explained that the target is for more than 60 per cent of the canteen's staff to be senior citizens, in the hope of providing employment opportunities while encouraging other enterprises to consider hiring older workers.

Pun added he hopes that both canteens – the new one in the Inner Harbour and the existing one in Areia Preta – can operate independently and become self-financing.

Caritas Macau is the charity outreach of the Catholic Diocese of Macau. According to Wikipedia, it started in 1951 as an outgrowth of the charitable works of Fr Luis Ruiz Suarez SJ and his Casa Ricci Social Services. ■

Caritas Macau Secretary-General Paul Pun Chi Meng speaks to the media on the sidelines of yesterday's press conference at Saint John de Brito School. – Photo: Armindo Neves

A drone photo shows power technicians working at a construction site of the ±800kV ultra-high-voltage direct current (UHVDC) transmission project along the Yangtze River in Wuhu City, Anhui Province, yesterday. The ±800kV UHVDC transmission project completed the large-span stringing construction across the Yangtze River yesterday in Wuhu. The project has a total length of 2,370 kilometers from northwest China's Gansu Province to east China's Zhejiang Province. Once operational, it will be able to transmit more than 36 billion kWh of electricity to Zhejiang Province annually. – Xinhua

Sam to deliver 2027 Policy Address on November 16

Staff Reporter

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai will deliver his 2027 Policy Address, officially known as Government Action Plan (LAG) for next year, at the Legislative Assembly on November 16, starting at 3:00 p.m., the Macao Government Information Bureau (GCS) announced yesterday.

After delivering his policy address in the legislature's hemicycle, Sam will hold a press conference at Government Headquarters slated to start at 5:30 p.m., where he will answer questions from the media.

The following day, November17, at 3:00 p.m., Sam will return to the legislature's hemicycle plenary for a Q&A session with lawmakers about his 2027 Policy Address.

On November 20, the legislature will begin to debate the government's 2027 portfolio plans by its five policy secretaries – Administration and Justice on November 20, Economy and Finance on November 23, Security on November 25, Social Affairs and Culture on November 27, and Transport and Public Works on November 30.

Sam's 2027 Policy Address, press conference, Q&A session and the debates involving the government's five policy secretaries will be broadcast by TDM and streamlined online through various channels such as YouTube and Facebook. ■

China congratulates Brazilian President Lula on presidential election victory: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – China has noted that Brazil's Superior Electoral Court announced President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's victory in the second round of Brazil's presidential election, and extends its congratulations, foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said at a regular press briefing yesterday.

China stands ready to work with Brazil to steadily advance the building of the China-Brazil community with a shared future, Guo added. – *(More on p.12)*

– Xinhua

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Xi leads CPC to advance full, rigorous self-governance

The Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee yesterday started a four-day plenary session in Beijing, which focuses on strengthening Party self-governance.

– Story on p. 7

Macron accuses social media of sowing discord ahead of election

French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday accused social media of "damaging our democracies", as he lamented the turmoil France faces ahead of an election to pick his successor.

– Story on p. 10

Serbian student movement eyes power after election triumph

Serbia's student-led movement targeted a clear parliament majority yesterday after widespread protests ended with a historic election triumph that forced right-wing leader Aleksandar Vucic to concede defeat.

– Story on p. 11

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Driver caught with 1,353 blood samples at HZMB

Sherwin Hng

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 1,353 tubes of pregnant women's blood samples from a Hong Kong-bound vehicle at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge (HZMB) Zhuhai Port (customs and immigration checkpoint) on September 22.

According to the statement, at around 7:00 p.m. on that day, customs officers at the HZMB intercepted a suspicious Hong Kong-mainland China dual-plate vehicle in the Zhuhai port's outbound passenger vehicle channel.

During an inspection, officers found several tightly sealed cardboard boxes in the vehicle's boot. Further checks uncovered 11 packages containing individually numbered blood sample tubes labelled with personal identification information in sealed plastic bags. A total of 1,353 tubes were seized from the vehicle.

The statement noted that the samples were being taken out of the Chinese mainland in violation of relevant requirements.

Customs urged the public to comply with relevant regulations when transporting biological samples across the border.

Under the Chinese mainland's Frontier Health and Quarantine Law, goods and items involving public health risks, including blood, human tissues, pathogenic microorganisms, and biological products, must undergo health quarantine approval by customs before entering or leaving the Chinese mainland, unless they are regulated as medicines, veterinary drugs, or medical devices. They may only be transported across the border after passing the required quarantine inspection.

The statement did not explain the purpose of attempting to smuggle pregnant women's blood samples from the Chinese mainland to Hong Kong. ■

This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows some of the 1,353 tubes of pregnant women's blood samples intercepted at the HZMB on September 22.

Indonesian maid steals jewellery worth 37,400 patacas: police

Sherwin Hng

An Indonesian domestic helper has been arrested for stealing four items of jewellery worth a total of 37,400 patacas from her employer's home, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Un Hong said during a special press conference yesterday.

Cheong said that the 36-year-old suspect, surnamed Yustika, was hired by a local middle-aged man earlier this month.

According to Cheong, the employer reported the suspected theft after discovering the items missing from his home in the central district on Sunday afternoon.

The missing jewellery included a diamond-set karat gold necklace, a platinum ring, a gold bracelet, and a silver necklace. Police found no signs of forced entry or ransacking at the flat and ruled out a break-in, Cheong said.

Upon investigation, police found that the suspect stole the items on four occasions while working at the flat around the middle of this month. On October 15, she sold the diamond-set karat gold necklace to a jewellery shop for 3,060 patacas.

Cheong noted that the Judiciary Police recovered the necklace from the shop, estimating its value at about 6,180 patacas. The remaining items have yet to be recovered.

The suspect admitted to the theft during questioning, saying she had acted out of greed after seeing the valuables, according to Cheong.

Yustika was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday for further investigation, facing charges of aggravated theft and fraud. ■

A diamond-set karat gold necklace valued at 6,180 patacas, 3,060 patacas in cash proceeds, and a jewellery shop receipt are displayed on a table at the Judiciary Police (PJ) pressroom, following the arrest of an Indonesian domestic helper suspected of aggravated theft and fraud. – Photo: Sherwin Hng

'Angry' man arrested for setting construction materials alight: police

Sherwin Hng

A local man was arrested for setting fire to construction materials outside a shop on Avenida 1º de Maio (勞動節大馬路) near U Wa Building (裕華大廈) after becoming angry with the building management office, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Un Hong said during a special press conference yesterday.

The suspect, surnamed Lei, is 68 years old and claimed to be unemployed.

According to Cheong, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) received a report at around 9:30 p.m. on Sunday that construction materials outside a shop on Avenida 1º de Maio were on fire. PSP officers arrived and reviewed CCTV surveillance footage, which helped them identify the suspect. Officers intercepted Lei at around 10:45 p.m. and subsequently handed him over to the Judiciary Police for further investigation.

Cheong noted that the building management staff were notified by other residents about the fire, which had been extinguished by the staff before Fire Services Bureau (CB) officers arrived. The fire damaged the outer packaging of the construction materials, but no injuries were reported.

Under questioning, the suspect admitted to setting the fire, claiming that he had repeatedly had his motorcycle locked by the building's management office when parking it in the estate's internal street. He was also angry that the management had not dealt with the construction materials stored in the public area.

Cheong said the suspect passed the site at around 9:30 p.m. and, out of anger, used a lighter to ignite a plastic bag covering the materials.

He was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing an arson charge.

The Judiciary Police stressed that arson is a serious crime carrying a maximum prison sentence of 10 years, and urged residents to resolve disputes through rational and lawful means rather than acting impulsively. ■

Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded arson suspect, surnamed Lei, to a PJ vehicle outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. – Photo: Sherwin Hng

Photographer touches female colleague's private parts: police

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a photographer from the Chinese mainland on Saturday for sexually harassing a female colleague, PJ spokesman Cheong Un Hong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 42-year-old male non-resident worker (NRW) surnamed Li. Cheong said that the victim is a young local woman who worked with Li as a saleswoman.

According to Cheong, since August this year, Li had on multiple occasions touched the victim's private parts when no one else was in the shop.

The victim, fearing that she would not be believed, had endured this in silence, Cheong said, adding that on the afternoon of last Thursday, Li again took advantage of there being no one else in the shop, putting his hand inside the victim's top and fondling her private parts.

The victim resisted on the spot and pushed him away, but Li did not stop until a female colleague returned to the shop and witnessed the incident, at which point Li left, according to Cheong. Afterwards, with her female colleague's encouragement, the victim reported the matter to the police.

On the afternoon of Saturday, the day the report was received, Judiciary Police officers detained Li at the shop for investigation.

Li has since been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing charges of sexual coercion and sexual harassment. ■

Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Un Hong looks on during yesterday's regular meeting. – Photo: Sherwin Hng

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CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS.
FORCE 3 TO 4 EAST TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 50% AND 85%.

24ºC~31ºC

Source: SMG

Residents support amended urban master plan: public consultation

Armindo Neves

The Lands and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) said in a statement yesterday that there is "widespread" public support for the government's revised urban master plan for 2020–2040.

The statement noted that the public consultation on the government's draft of its first amendments to the plan has recently been concluded and that, following the compilation, classification, and analysis of the opinions and suggestions collected, the respective "report on the analysis of the opinions presented" has been finalised by the bureau.

The report showed widespread public support for the plan's revision, the statement noted.

During the public consultation, the statement said, the bureau collected a total of 219 sets of opinions "proactively" submitted by the public, consisting of 4,091 individual opinions and suggestions.

The report's analysis concluded that civil society as a whole generally supports the government's revision of the plan, in response to major public construction projects and future development needs, the statement said, adding that it also found "broad agreement" with adjusting the spatial layout and land-use planning to align with the latest development positioning, so as to reserve space for Macau's long-term development.

In addition, attention by the participants in the public consultation process focused on the planning and deployment of major public construction projects, the allocation of land resources, and the direction of urban spatial development, according to the statement.

Under the provisions of the Urban Planning Law and regulations concerning its implementation, the bureau underlined in the statement that it has submitted the plan's draft amendments, its analysis of the outcome of the public consultation process, and related documents to the Urban Planning Committee, so that the latter can give its views on the draft.

Subsequently, the relevant opinions will be comprehensively taken into account as work on the draft amendments to the plan can be accelerated, the statement said. ■

Leong previews packed Nov calendar of cultural, sporting events

Khalel Vallo

Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) and Sports Bureau (ID) President Deland Leong Wai Man announced in a press conference at the Macao Cultural Centre in Nape yesterday that Macau will have a packed schedule of cultural and sporting events next month, including the 73rd Macau Grand Prix, an international forum on exchanges between civilisations and commemorative activities marking the 160th anniversary of Dr Sun Yat-sen's (1866-1925) birth.

Leong heads both bureaux.

Leong said that the programme would showcase Macau's cultural diversity while strengthening the integration of culture, sport and tourism.

The "2026 International Forum on Mutual Learning Among Civilisations" will return on November 9 and 10, bringing together scholars for discussions on cultural exchange and cooperation. Leong said that the annual event reflects Macau's role as a platform for exchanges between Chinese and Western civilisations.

The 73rd Macau Grand Prix, slated for November 19 to 22, will be accompanied by the inaugural Macao City Culture Festival from November 14 to 22.The festival aims to extend the benefits of the motorsport event beyond racing by combining cultural experiences with the city's sporting attractions.

November will also see a series of activities commemorating the 160th anniversary of Dr Sun's birth. Leong said the programme would pay tribute to the nation's historic figure while exploring the significance of his legacy and his longstanding connections with Macau, particularly for younger generations.

Dr Sun is recognised by the Communist Party of China (CPC) as the the great forerunner of China's democratic revolution. He is the founder of the Kuomintang (KMT – National People's Party) and the Republic of China (ROC).

Another highlight will be the upgraded "hush! Beach Concerts x Urban Sports Wellfest 2026", slated for November 14 and 15 at Hac Sa beach in Coloane. Themed "Energy Island", the event will combine live music, physical challenges and community activities to offer young people new ways to engage with culture and sport.

The 38th Macao International Music Festival (MIMF) will reach its finale towards the end of next month, with composer and conductor Tan Dun scheduled to conduct two major concerts. Meanwhile, the "8th Encounter in Macao – Arts and Cultural Festival between China and the Portuguese-speaking Countries" will continue with programmes highlighting cultural exchange, including a concert featuring Mozambican singer Stewart Sukuma and the Macao Chinese Orchestra (OM).

Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) and Sports Bureau (ID) President Deland Leong Wai Man addresses yesterday's November activities press conference at the Macao Cultural Centre in Nape.

– Photo: Khalel Vallo

Leong said that around 30 cultural and sporting activities, comprising nearly 150 sessions, will also take place across Macau's communities throughout November. She noted that next month's programme would offer residents and visitors a richer experience of Macau's blend of Chinese and Western cultures while helping turn the city's cultural, sporting and tourism resources into new drivers of development. ■

Macau wins silver in FIA 2026 Asia-Pacific Racing Championship debut

Rui Pastorin

Macau made its debut at the FIA Asia-Pacific Motorsport Championship 2026 (APMC) and among the six young drivers representing the Automobile General Association Macao-China (AAMC) to compete in different categories, Ethan Frederico de Sousa brought home a second-place trophy in the cadet slalom, the association announced in a statement last night.

The event was held at the BIRA Circuit in Pattaya from Friday through Sunday. According to the official website, the event gathered over 250 drivers and 24 countries and regions, while there was a total of six categories.

Meanwhile, Macau racers Ho On Iao and Lou Chi Leong advanced to the finals in the cadet and senior slalom respectively, the statement said, both finishing in fourth place.

Drivers Choi Chi Neng and Xu Hon In both qualified for the cadet sprint and finished 18th and 21st respectively, the statement added.

The statement pointed out that each of the participating Macau drivers are all "top-ranked drivers in the 2026 AAMC Karting Slalom standings". ■

This photo downloaded from the Asia Pacific Motorsport Championship Facebook page last night shows Ethan Frederico de Sousa holding up his second-place trophy during an award ceremony held in Pattaya.

This photo provided by the Automobile General Association Macao-China (AAMC) yesterday shows the representatives and six racers who participated at the FIA Asia-Pacific Motorsport Championship 2026 (APMC).

Inside the firecracker exhibition: Sands China seminar

Exhibition curator and Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) Faculty of Humanities and Arts Distinguished Professor Guilherme Ung Vai Meng (centre) speaks as the exhibition's visual designer and Macau Creations CEO Wilson Lam Chi Ian (first from left) looks on during the extended seminar Behind the Exhibition: Tracing Macao's Firecracker Legacy held on Saturday at the Macau Museum of Art (MAM). – Photo: Sands China

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operator Sands China held a seminar titled "Behind the Exhibition: Tracing Macao's Firecracker Legacy" on Saturday at the Macau Museum of Art (MAM), being an extended activity of the ongoing "A Century of Iec Long Firecracker Factory in Radiance – An Exhibition on the Resonant History and Aesthetic Memory of Macao Firecrackers" at Sands Gallery.

The free-admission seminar, which saw students and cultural enthusiasts attending, was held to "further enhance public knowledge about the history and cultural value of Macau's firecracker industry", according to a statement from the company that day.

Speakers at the event were exhibition curator and Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) Faculty of Humanities and Arts Distinguished Prof. Guilherme Ung Vai Meng, who is also a veteran artist, and the exhibition's visual designer and Macau Creations CEO Wilson Lam Chi Ian, each highlighting the curatorial concept and creative process behind the exhibition.

Ung talked about his years of collecting and researching Macau's firecracker labels and documents. After being invited by Sands China to curate the exhibition, he spent two years studying and collating historical materials, the statement said. He also guided the audience through the industry's history using texts, images, and tracing the times of the firecracker labels.

Lam highlighted the creative process behind the exhibition, as well as how the design team turned two-dimensional firecracker labels and archives into three-dimensional exhibition experiences, the statement said. He also highlighted design concepts for the exhibition's publication, "An Illustrated Chronicle of Macao's Centennial Firecracker Label Art".

Both speakers also gave advice to those attending. Ung encouraged young people to cultivate their passions into fulfilling careers and use their strengths to support society and cultural preservation, among others, while among the points that Lam mentioned is for youngsters to remain curious, embrace new experiences and innovation, and continuously learn to seize opportunities for their future, the statement said.

Among the event's attendees that day included Macao Museum Director Lou Ho Ian and local scholar of Taipa's history and culture Lai Hong Kin

The well-received ongoing exhibition launched in March and features over 400 exhibits and celebrates the centennial of Macau's largest surviving firecracker industrial site, which is also the most intact in the South China Sea region, the statement operator pointed out.

The exhibition ends on November 29. Meanwhile, the parallel exhibition "Legacy of Time – An Exhibition of Historical Documents on Macao's Firecracker Industry," hosted by the MUST Library, also ends on the same day.

Melco stages Tsingtao Beer Carnival to boost Macau-Qingdao exchanges

Khalel Vallo

Melco Resorts & Entertainment is holding the 6th Macau Tsingtao Beer Carnival until November 22, aiming to strengthen economic, trade and cultural exchanges between Macau and Qingdao while expanding the city's "Tourism+" offerings, according to a Melco statement on Friday.

Co-organised by Melco and Asia Brewery (Macau) Co., Ltd., the carnival opened at City of Dreams Macau (COD) integrated resort in Cotai on Friday, themed "Olá Macau! Hajiu Qingdao!", the statement noted.

The event is held under the guidance of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the Qingdao Municipal People's Government, with support from the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) and the Macau Leisure Tourism Services Innovation Association, the statement said.

MGTO Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes said that the event combines Qingdao's beer culture with Macau's leisure tourism offerings, providing residents and visitors with more leisure experiences and helping extend visitors' stays, according to the statement. She added that the carnival brings together the resources of Macau's integrated resorts and Qingdao's cultural and commercial brands, contributing to the development of tourism-related activities and reinforcing Macau's position as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure.

This handout photo provided by Melco Resorts & Entertainment on Friday shows Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes addressing the 6th Macau Tsingtao Beer Carnival opening ceremony at City of Dreams Macau (COD) integrated resort in Cotai that day.

Melco Chief Advisor Kent Wong (黃昇雄) said that the company remained committed to supporting the government's appropriate economic diversification strategy through tourism and leisure initiatives, the statement said. "Through the 6th Macau Tsingtao Beer Carnival, we hope to join hands with partners across different sectors to further enrich Macau's 'Tourism+' offerings, create new momentum for the economic development of both Macau and Qingdao, and foster mutual growth and prosperity," Wong added.

The carnival features Qingdao beer varieties at designated restaurants operated by Melco, including T for Tapas, Beijing Kitchen, Mezza9 Macau and Grand Hyatt Macau Fountain Café at City of Dreams, as well as Kiku Ramen, Joyride Diner, Louvre Pastry & Deli and Altira Macau Ballroom, the statement underlined.

The carnival forms part of Melco's efforts to support economic diversification and promote cross-sector cooperation by combining beer culture, gastronomy and leisure tourism, the statement said.

MGM, DSAL launch occupational safety and health campaign series

This handout photo taken last Thursday and provided yesterday shows a group photo of representatives from MGM and the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) posing with the integrated resort operator's staff at MGM COTAI during the recent opening ceremony of the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) campaign.

Rui Pastorin

MGM and the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) jointly launched an Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) campaign on Thursday themed "Guard with Care, Safety Aware", aiming to enhance staff awareness, health management, and safety in daily operations through a variety of activities, the integrated resort operator said in a statement yesterday.

The event for MGM staff launched with a ceremony held at the staff dining area "Home Base" at MGM COTAI with the "Vitality Cardio Stretching Exercise". The statement added that the event featured the prize-giving of the "Work Happily, Work Safely Departmental Competition", the "Healthy Restaurant Award 2026", and "Occupational Safety Improvement Award 2026".

Thursday's ceremony was attended by several MGM and DSAL representatives including MGM China Holdings Limited Chief Executive Officer Kenneth Feng Xiaofeng and DSAL Deputy Director Chan Chon U.

MGM China Holdings Limited Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director Kenneth Feng Xiaofeng was quoted by the statement as saying: "Our Safety Committee regularly reviews and continually enhances our safety management systems, while implementing innovative and effective educational initiatives to strengthen safety awareness and foster a strong culture of safety throughout the organisation.

Feng added: We will continue to work closely with the DSAL, strengthen exchanges and collaboration across the industry, and work together to further advance occupational safety and health standards in Macau, thereby protecting the well-being of our team members and their families."

The statement highlighted several activities that the company hosted, including a series of OSH-themed sharing sessions and seminars to enhance staff's "risk identification and emergency response capabilities", with topics ranging from fire safety to related tips for the hotel industry. A quiz challenge and themed symposium were also recently held.

Meanwhile, for eight consecutive years, MGM and DSAL have held OSH roadshows at the integrated resort operator's back-of-house areas, the statement said.

Experience economy emerges as fresh spur of China's domestic demand

Analysis

BEIJING – Chinese consumers are increasingly willing to travel across cities for a single concert, or add an extra night to a trip for a night tour, figures from this month's National Day holiday period suggest.

A concert by the pop duo Phoenix Legend in Shandong's provincial capital Jinan in east China drove up hotel bookings in surrounding commercial districts 12.8-fold year on year and lifted citywide bookings by 65 percent, according to online travel platform Qunar.

Searches for immersive performances, fireworks shows and night tours in the city rose more than 50 percent from a year earlier, the data shows.

Behind such holiday snapshots lies a larger structural change. China's experience economy reached 19.67 trillion yuan in 2025, up 29.58 percent year on year, and is projected to approach 59.66 trillion yuan by 2035, according to market research firm iiMedia Research.

At its core, the shift is from functional value to emotional value, with consumers paying not merely for what a product does, but for the feeling, connection and memory it produces, said Chen Lifen, a researcher at the Development Research Center of the State Council.

The change is already measurable in household budgets. Per capita spending on services reached 13,602 yuan in 2025, accounting for 46.1 percent of total consumer spending, official data showed. Service retail sales grew 5.5 percent last year, outpacing goods retail by 1.7 percentage points.

What distinguishes experience spending from ordinary consumption is its multiplier effect. Every one yuan spent on a ticket to a large-scale performance generates nearly seven yuan in related spending on transport, accommodation, dining, tourism and shopping, according to estimates by the China Association of Performing Arts. Large commercial performances with audiences above 5,000 generated more than 220 billion yuan in associated consumption in 2025, well beyond box office receipts. That multiplier is what carries experience spending beyond the box office into transport, accommodation, catering and retail.

"Unique Henan: Land of Dramas," a sprawling immersive theater complex in Zhengzhou, Henan's provincial capital in central China, illustrates how far the model can travel. The site houses 21 theaters across 56 spaces built around rammed-earth walls, wheat fields and traditional pit courtyard dwellings, with nearly 800 minutes of programming that audiences walk through rather than watch from a seat.

About 80 percent of its visitors come from outside the province, 85 percent are aged 18 to 35, and its repeat visitation rate is five times that of a conventional theme park. Liu Kaipeng, who heads the brand, describes the complex as a vast "emotional field" in which drama, architecture, music, retail and service all revolve around feeling.

Supply is changing alongside demand. At the Humble Administrator's Garden in Suzhou, east China's Jiangsu Province, digital lighting and projection illuminate the classical pavilions and ponds after dark, with Kunqu opera excerpts and traditional music staged along the night route.

Artificial intelligence, big data and the internet of things are increasingly embedded in the design of experience venues, and a highly developed digital infrastructure and mobile payment ecosystem allow a full loop, from online discovery to on-site experience, social sharing and immediate purchase.

"That capacity to link content distribution, scenario experience and social virality is difficult for many countries to replicate," said Wu Xiaobo, a professor with Zhejiang University.

The sector's reach extends well beyond tourism and performance. Research reports describe a multi-track landscape that includes scenic areas, quality accommodation, entertainment, specialty dining, cultural and creative merchandise, elderly care and wellness, and inbound tourism, with formats increasingly fusing with one another. It is also not a young person's preserve. New middle-class households, retirees and families with children form a broader base of demand.

The trend has moved onto the policy agenda. A State Council work plan issued in January called for supporting emotion and experience-oriented services, and the plan for expanding consumption during the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030) rolled out in July named experience-oriented consumption as a priority for cultivating new business models and scenarios.

Local governments have shifted their focus from scaling up supply to improving quality, with Shanghai running its "Shanghai Summer" and "FIRST in Shanghai" campaigns, Beijing developing immersive venues such as the Shougang Park complex and POPLAND, also known as the Pop Mart City Park, while Chongqing is building scenarios around its mountainous urban terrain.

The growth is also reshaping how economists read Chinese consumption. Lin Jian, vice president of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation under the Ministry of Commerce, said China's consumer market has entered a stage in which goods and services carry equal weight, and service consumption outpacing goods consumption is a normal outcome of rising incomes.

Analysts believe consumers may be more cautious about large durable goods, while demand for travel, entertainment, health care and education remains firm.

The sector is also generating new kinds of jobs. Among the new occupations and job categories published by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, several are tied directly to experience-based consumption, including drone swarm flight planners and travel-photography stylists.

For consumers, experience spending is ultimately a form of spending time. Several localities have begun exploring more flexible holiday arrangements to ease that constraint. "Many places are removing institutional obstacles to experience consumption through spring and autumn holiday schemes, better paid leave and a nighttime economy," said Zou Yunhan, a researcher with the State Information Center.

According to analysts, the longer-term value of the sector lies in scenario innovation, cultural depth and service upgrading, forming the capacity to keep meeting rising expectations for quality. By deepening that value, the sector, already measured in tens of trillions of yuan, can remain a durable source of momentum for the Chinese economy. *– AFP*

Uber Taxi's riders from the Chinese mainland jumps 130 pct

Rui Pastorin

Uber Taxi announced in a statement yesterday a 130 percent increase in active passengers from the Chinese mainland during the National Day Golden Week from October 1 to 7, being a "popular choice" to get around Macau during the period.

The statement did not reveal Uber's number of passengers during the period.

The statement highlighted popular areas frequented by mainland travellers according to Uber data, noting that aside from hotels and integrated resorts, the three stops that proved most popular were: the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St. Paul's, the Macau Tower Convention and Entertainment Centre, and the Macao Science Centre (MSC).

Uber Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau General Manager Estyn Chung (鍾志霆) was quoted by the statement as saying that they were "very encouraged" by the results achieved while also highlighting the role of the "WeChat Uber mini program" for its convenience.

The company launched the programme last month in anticipation of peak tourism events and was mainly aimed at travellers from the Chinese mainland. WeChat's mini programmes are applications that run within the app, allowing access to services ranging from shopping and dining to public utilities, according to the WeChat newsroom website.

Chung said in the statement: "In the future, we will continue to work closely with the local Macau taxi industry, as a technology platform connecting passengers with local licensed taxis, to jointly contribute to the continuous development of Macau's tourism".

This photo provided by Uber yesterday shows a person booking a ride through their phone in Taipa Village.

The US multinational transportation company returned to Macau with Uber Meter Taxi in February this year after suspending its services in the city in 2017. ■

IC to stage arts networking session alongside commissioned production

Khalel Vallo

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) said in a statement yesterday that it will stage "The Unknown I-land", its sixth commissioned performing arts production under its 2024-2026 programme, at the Macao Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape on November 14 and 15, alongside a presentation session aimed at promoting local works and exploring collaboration opportunities with arts organisations from other regions.

The production will be staged at CCM's Box II, the statement said, adding that during its run, the bureau will hold a Local Programme Presentation Session on November 14 at 4:45 p.m., inviting representatives from stage production companies, theatres and arts festivals from the Chinese mainland and neighbouring regions to exchange ideas with Macau's performing arts industry, the statement noted.

The session aims to provide a platform for local artists and organisations to showcase original productions and explore potential collaborations, the statement said, adding that applications are open to locally registered associations or companies related to performing arts, as well as individuals aged 18 or above who hold a Macau Resident Identity Card (BIR).

The session will be conducted primarily in Putonghua, without interpretation, and each presentation will be limited to five minutes, the statement said, adding that interested parties can now download the application form from the bureau's website at www.icm.gov.mo until 5:00 p.m. on November 9.

Completed forms must be submitted by email to cpap@icm.gov.mo, the statement said, adding that places are limited and will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. The session is also open to observers.

The statement underlined that the Cultural Affairs Bureau has continued to establish platforms for Macau's performing arts sector to present their work, exchange ideas and connect with resources from other regions, helping local artists expand their professional networks and development opportunities. ■

This poster provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday promotes the upcoming "The Unknown I-land", slated to be staged at the Macao Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape on November 14 and 15.

China, Europe drive deeper automotive cooperation

Analysis

BRUSSELS – In October, Stellantis began producing the Leapmotor B10 at its Zaragoza facility in Spain through its partnership with Chinese electric vehicle (EV) maker Leapmotor.

The factory had been running at roughly half capacity, a far cry from its peak output of about 470,000 vehicles in 2019. Stellantis needed to fill its production lines; Leapmotor needed a European base. Neither side called it a favor.

The arrangement exemplifies deepening cooperation between China and Europe in the automotive industry, fueled by consumer demand and manufacturers' commercial calculations alike. Analysts say this industrial partnership is more than a stopgap measure, with considerable potential to deliver mutual benefits.

CONSUMER VERDICT

Chinese cars are gaining popularity across Europe, offering competitive specifications at attractive prices. Chinese brands have targeted a segment that legacy automakers have been slow to serve: drivers who previously owned BMWs, Mercedes-Benzes or Range Rovers. According to one dealership in West London, about three in five buyers of Chinese cars previously owned a luxury brand.

Luis Murias, general manager of Spanish automotive data platform DAT, attributes the success of Chinese cars to multiple factors, including "industrial restructuring, commitment, overall quality improvement, competitive features and warranty, and progress in safety standards."

A May survey of young Italian consumers by consulting and market research firm Arete Methodos found that 53 percent of respondents are most attracted by the combination of technological features and product quality of Chinese cars – outnumbering the 43 percent who cite their competitive prices as decisive.

In recent years, Chinese car makers have accelerated localization. Ten European production plans have been announced since September 2023, advisory company AutoMotion reported, including BYD's first European plant in Szeged, Hungary and SAIC's 200 million-euro (US$223 million factory in Spain's Galicia.

SUPPLY-SIDE LOGIC

Lithium iron phosphate (LFP) – a cheaper, longer-lasting battery chemistry that underpins most affordable EVs – is forecast to rise from around 10 percent of the European battery market today to between 40 and 60 percent by 2030, yet Europe has no operational plants to make it.

In September, Gotion High-tech, a Chinese battery manufacturer, agreed to invest around 1.1 billion euros for a 49 percent stake in Volkswagen's battery-cell plant in Sagunto, Spain.

The partnership reflects a complementary division of role. Gotion contributes LFP technology, manufacturing processes and raw material supply chains. PowerCo, Volkswagen's battery subsidiary, brings its European industrial footprint, logistics and regulatory expertise.

Javier Rivera, chief financial officer of PowerCo Battery Spain, described the relationship as having evolved "from supplier to technology partner and now to industrial partner."

Michael Schumann, chairman of the Board of the German Federal Association for Economic Development and Foreign Trade, told Xinhua that German companies remain active in China. A May 2026 flash survey by the German Chamber of Commerce in China found that the share of companies planning to increase their investments in China over the next two years reached its highest level since 2023.

He also pointed to a remarkable shift: German headquarters are increasingly learning from their Chinese operations, not the other way around. "Today, the transformation of the automotive industry, particularly the shift towards electric mobility and software-defined vehicles, is creating new forms of competition and cooperation between German and Chinese companies," Schumann added.

"No single country has ever been able to dominate or capture the entire market. As a leading technology company, BYD will bring relevant technologies to Europe," said BYD Executive Vice President Li Ke. "We will grow here and help the local supply chain transition to next-generation suppliers, making important contributions to the local economy."

REBALANCING THROUGH COMPLEMENTARITY

The automotive sector attracted more Chinese Foreign Direct Investment in 2025 than any other industry in Europe. Investments in the sector totaled 7.6 billion euros, with 93 percent of them focused on the EV supply chain, according to a report by Rhodium Group and MERICS.

"Europe has a great tradition in design," Andrea Levy, president of the Turin Auto Show, told Xinhua, adding that cooperation can combine different strengths and contribute to better vehicles.

Industry insiders believe that the pairing is no temporary arrangement.

"China Speed is not a cultural phenomenon, but the result of clear decisions regarding product design, portfolio complexity, and the supplier base," said Oliver Knapp, a partner at global management consultancy Roland Berger. "And that is precisely why parts of it can also be implemented in Europe."

Alexandre Marian, a partner at AlixPartners, depicted the Stellantis-Leapmotor deal as a "reverse joint venture," in which European manufacturers seek alliances to learn Chinese EV know-how.

"If our [Stellantis and Leapmotor] partnership is the strategy, Zaragoza is the proof that we can combine global technology, competitiveness and European industrial capabilities," said Stellantis representative Silvia Vernetti. *– Xinhua*

Guests dine at the AI Mirror World Restaurant in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, yesterday. With a human-machine collaborative operation model, the restaurant makes some of its meals and drinks through standardized production powered by AI kitchen equipped with smart noodle and beverage making machines.
– Xinhua

China, DPRK hold ceremony marking completion of CPV martyrs cemeteries' renovation

PYONGYANG – A completion ceremony for the renovation project for Chinese People's Volunteers (CPV) martyrs' cemeteries was held on Saturday in Sinphyong County, North Hwanghae Province of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), on the occasion of the 76th anniversary of the CPV's entry into the DPRK to fight in the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea.

The ceremony started at around 10:00 a.m. with the national anthems of China and the DPRK. Representatives from China and the DPRK laid flower baskets for the CPV martyrs, stood in silent tribute, presented flowers and poured liquor in remembrance, and visited the martyrs' tombs and the wall of martyrs' names to pay profound respect.

Qi Han, charge d'affaires ad interim of the Chinese Embassy in the DPRK, said that 76 years ago, the CPV fought shoulder to shoulder with the DPRK army and people, shared weal and woe, and the traditional China-DPRK friendship forged in blood will never fade.

China stands ready to continue to work with the DPRK to implement the important consensus reached by the top leaders of the two parties and the two countries, do well in honoring and commemorating the CPV martyrs in the DPRK, consolidate traditional bonds of ties, enhance strategic coordination, maintain regional peace, honor the martyrs who sacrificed their lives and benefit the two peoples via peace and development, Qi said.

Hong Zongming, vice minister of China's Ministry of Veterans Affairs, said the memorial facilities for the CPV martyrs in the DPRK are "an important platform" for carrying forward the spirit of the fallen heroes and the China-DPRK friendship.

Calling the protection and management of the memorial facilities "a lofty cause passed down from generation to generation," Kang Chol Ho, vice minister of the Ministry of Urban Management of the DPRK, said the undertaking is dedicated to carrying forward the great spirit of the CPV fighters demonstrated in the war.

The DPRK side will work with the Chinese side to continue doing relevant work well and make positive contributions to inheriting and promoting the traditional friendship, he said.

In late October 2025, China and the DPRK held a groundbreaking ceremony in Sinphyong County for the renovation project. As of this month, the renovation has been completed at five CPV martyrs' cemeteries in the DPRK, through joint efforts by relevant Chinese and DPRK departments and agencies. *– Xinhua*

Volkswagen begins Level 3 autonomous driving road tests in east China

HEFEI – German automaker Volkswagen has started testing Level 3 autonomous driving technology on public roads in Hefei, capital of Anhui Province, after obtaining a road test permit, Volkswagen Group China announced yesterday.

The permit authorizes real-world on-road testing and large-scale data collection. Volkswagen aims to have its Level 3 autonomous driving technology ready by 2027.

"At Volkswagen, safety and reliability come first in autonomous driving. With this permit, we can test in real traffic in Hefei and collect data at scale. It is the next step on our road to Level 3 readiness," said Ralf Brandstätter, chairman and CEO of Volkswagen Group China.

Level 3, or conditional driving automation, allows vehicles to perform dynamic automated driving tasks while requiring a human driver to remain available to take control when requested.

Volkswagen has been developing its autonomous driving technology in China through CARIZON, a joint venture between its software subsidiary CARIAD and Chinese technology company Horizon Robotics.

The group has also introduced Hyper Sense 8, its first full-scenario advanced driver assistance system, and is developing its own L4-ready system-on-chip, known as C7H, designed to support capabilities up to Level 4 autonomous driving.

Volkswagen Group has invested more than 3.5 billion euros in Hefei, where its Volkswagen Group China Technology Company, the group's largest R&D center outside Germany, is located, housing about 3,000 R&D professionals.

The city, where Volkswagen Anhui is based, is a key hub in China's new energy vehicle (NEV) industry. In 2025, Hefei produced over 1.37 million NEVs, the most among all Chinese cities. It is home to major carmakers including JAC, BYD and NIO, along with a supply chain spanning power batteries, automotive electronics and intelligent driving.

China has been gradually expanding the use of autonomous driving technology under a regulatory framework. In December 2025, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology granted conditional approvals to two Level 3-equipped electric vehicle models produced by Changan Automobile and BAIC Motor's Arcfox, allowing trials on select roads in Chongqing and Beijing, respectively.

In July 2026, China issued a mandatory national safety standard for M- and N-category vehicles equipped with Level 3 and Level 4 autonomous driving systems, scheduled to take effect on July 1, 2027. It also calls for stronger capabilities in performing dynamic driving tasks, while specifying requirements for human-machine interaction and user notification to prevent misuse and abuse. *– AFP*

Xi leads CPC to advance full, rigorous self-governance

Analysis

BEIJING – The Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee yesterday started a four-day plenary session in Beijing, which focuses on strengthening Party self-governance.

This marks the latest move by the Party Central Committee with Xi Jinping at its core to strengthen the Party through full and rigorous self-governance.

Xi, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, has emphasized that exercising full and rigorous self-governance is an enduring task for the Party.

"One has to be very strong if he wants to strike the iron," Xi said shortly after his election to the post of general secretary of the CPC Central Committee in November 2012. He later warned at a group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee that if corruption is allowed to grow unchecked, "it could spell the end of both the Party and the state."

As China entered the new era, the CPC, the largest governing party in the world, faced unprecedented challenges in ensuring reform, development and stability, and addressing problems and risks confronting the nation.

Xi has stressed that China's success hinges on the Party, and has made clear that the CPC must continuously strengthen itself through self-governance.

In 2014, he explicitly put forward the concept of "exercising full and rigorous Party self-governance" as part of the Party's four-pronged governing strategy, alongside building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, deepening reform and advancing law-based governance.

He has made full and rigorous Party self-governance a long-term strategy, as he considers it vital to the Party's long-term governance, the country's enduring stability, and the people's happiness and well-being.

BREAK NEW GROUND

In December 2012, Xi began strengthening Party self-governance by introducing a code of conduct that became known as the "eight-point rules."

It established regulations for Party leaders regarding research tours, meetings, documentation, and other official duties, cracking down on lavish banquets, red carpet events, pomp, entourages, unnecessary meetings, and luxury perks that had once been regarded by some as typical symbols of power.

Its implementation has helped curb longstanding malpractices, with effects extending beyond Party and government offices to wider society.

"The eight-point rules have indeed brought about fundamental changes over the years," Xi said last year, when the Party launched a campaign to reinforce this code of conduct and consolidate the improvements it had brought about.

Xi also launched an unprecedented anti-corruption storm that has swept every corner of public office, netting both high-ranking "tigers" and lower-level "flies." Some of the most senior officials – including former members of the Political Bureau and its Standing Committee, top military brass, and retirees who left their leading positions years ago – have been brought to justice.

The anti-corruption campaign has continued unabated, with Xi stressing that the fight is an ongoing endeavor. In 2025 alone, 115 officials at ministerial level or above were placed under investigation, while 627,000 people were disciplined in cases involving misconduct and corruption that affect the people's immediate interests. The same year, China also opened investigations into more than 500 cases of cross-border corruption.

At a plenary session of the CPC's top disciplinary body early this year, Xi again warned that corruption remains a problem that arises all too easily and frequently.

"We must see the fight against corruption through to the end, no matter how great the resistance or how high the cost," he said. "No one who engages in corruption will be shown leniency, regardless of who they are, how high their rank or how great their contributions."

EFFECTIVE APPROACHES

To strengthen full and rigorous Party self-governance, it is imperative to uphold the Party's overall leadership.

Over the past 14 years, the Party's leadership has been further affirmed in both the Party Constitution and the country's Constitution. Central commissions have been established to oversee key areas including reform, national security, cyberspace affairs, and financial and economic affairs. Working mechanisms for central decision-making and coordinating bodies have also been strengthened.

Strengthening theoretical education is another approach. With Xi at the helm, the CPC has launched nine Party-wide major education campaigns.

The latest one, launched in February this year, prodded Party members to fix their mindset regarding governance performance, aiming to stamp out the tendency among some officials to sacrifice public well-being in seeking to polish their performance records.

This campaign built on the gains of previous ones on Party discipline and implementing the eight-point rules, among others, to advance the Party's self-governance.

These efforts have gone hand in hand with institution-building. Under Xi's watch, the Party and state oversight systems have been improved.

The National Commission of Supervision and local supervisory commissions were established to bring everyone in public office, regardless of Party membership, under supervision.

And Xi has made discipline inspections a key instrument of intra-Party oversight.

The inspection system allows higher-level Party authorities to send teams to examine how officials exercise power and carry out the central leadership's policies. Inspectors interview officials and members of the public, review documents and receive complaints. They report their findings to Party authorities.

After each round of inspections launched by the Party Central Committee, Xi reviewed the reports in detail, assessed the problems uncovered and pushed for further improvements in inspection work.

Since 2012, the Party has also formulated or revised an unprecedented number of internal regulations, building a comprehensive framework of rules to confine power in "a cage of institutions."

Noting the progress, Xi also warned that in some localities, rules were poorly enforced while "hidden rules" prevailed. He stressed that regulations must become "high-voltage lines" and that power must be exercised transparently, leaving no room for such hidden rules.

All these mechanisms are part of the integrated efforts to ensure officials, in Xi's words, "do not have the audacity, opportunity, or desire to become corrupt."

LEADING MODERNIZATION DRIVE

Full and rigorous Party self-governance serves a broader purpose: strengthening the Party's capacity to lead China's modernization drive.

"To successfully achieve the goals and tasks of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030), it is imperative to focus on enhancing the ability and competence of the Party in leading economic and social development," Xi told senior provincial- and ministerial-level officials attending a study session at the Party School of the CPC Central Committee earlier this year.

He urged Party officials to become more capable of pursuing high-quality development, serving the people, and guarding against and defusing risks.

China has entered a critical period for achieving the goal of basically realizing modernization by 2035, and still faces rising uncertainty abroad and mounting challenges at home. At such critical junctures, strong Party leadership is vital to chart the course.

All Party members, Xi said, must remain true to the Party's original aspiration and mission, and lead the nation to "create new historic glories." *– Xinhua*

China welcomes more countries to explore pathways for AI capacity-building cooperation: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – China welcomes more countries to join the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization, explore more pathways for international cooperation on AI capacity-building, and promote global artificial intelligence (AI) development for good and for all with concrete actions, foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said yesterday.

Guo made the remarks at a regular news briefing when asked to comment on China's Progress Report on the AI Capacity-Building Action Plan for Good and for All, released at the 2026 Global Governance Forum (Xiongan), and China's views on the role of AI capacity-building in global governance.

Guo said that AI is an emerging field in global governance, and a litmus test for the effectiveness of the global governance system. "The global governance system would not become more just and equitable without the collective capacity enhancement of the Global South, and requires concrete efforts to strengthen the representation and voice of developing countries," he said.

Guo said China advocates for respecting the digital sovereignty of all countries. "We believe that every country has the right to possess the foundational capabilities for independent AI development, and to seek a development path suited to its national conditions and practical needs, one that enables AI to be applied in real-world scenarios, address real problems, and generate sustained value," Guo added.

– Xinhua

A ceremony marking the arrival of the first batch of exhibits for the upcoming 9th China International Import Expo (CIIE) is held at the National Exhibition and Convention Center (Shanghai), the main venue for the CIIE, yesterday. The first batch of exhibits for the upcoming 9th CIIE includes technological equipment, medical devices, and agricultural and food products, some of which will debut at the event. Preparations are in full swing for the ninth CIIE, which is scheduled to take place between November 5 to November 10 in Shanghai. – Xinhua

China, US educational exchange, cooperation benefit both sides: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – Educational exchange and cooperation between China and the United States are desired by both sides and benefit both sides, and should not be held back or disrupted, foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said at a regular media briefing yesterday.

Last week, the US side reportedly designated the Confucius Institutes on American universities and campuses as a threat to US national security.

Guo said China rejects vilification and smears against Confucius Institute, noting that educational exchange and cooperation between China and the United States help enhance mutual understanding between the peoples of the two countries.

"They are desired by both sides and benefit both sides, and should not be held back or disrupted," said Guo. *– Xinhua*

Thailand launches US$1.5 billion household solar push

BANGKOK – Thailand offered subsidies worth up to US$1.5 billion yesterday to help households install solar panels, as it seeks to boost renewable energy and reduce dependence on costly imports.

The government offered almost US$1,500 (50,000 baht) towards installation costs for up to one million households, while also promising low-interest loans and tax benefits for those fitting panels to their homes or land.

"Today, we import a lot of our energy, we're among the top buyers globally," Finance Minister Ekniti Nitithanprapas told reporters.

But he said this "was not a sustainable solution".

The solar panel subsidy is expected to be approved at a cabinet meeting today, with applications to open soon after, Ekniti said.

It will be funded out of a 400-billion-baht emergency borrowing package announced earlier this year to cushion the economic impacts of the Middle East war

Around 60 percent of electricity production in Thailand comes from natural gas, with renewables making up almost 11 percent, according to government data from January to July 2026.

Much of the gas has historically come from offshore production or via pipeline from Myanmar, but declining production has forced Bangkok to step up liquid natural gas (LNG) imports.

Imported LNG made up 32 percent of its natural gas in the January-July period.

Qatar was a major supplier but its gas infrastructure has been hit by the US and Israeli war with Iran, as has energy production across the region.

Thailand aims to have 51 percent of domestic electricity generated from renewable sources by 2037. *– AFP*

Japan PM vows swift response to wave of cyberattacks

TOKYO – Japan will draft an emergency cybersecurity policy package in response to a sudden recent wave of hacking incidents, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said yesterday.

At an emergency meeting of her cabinet ministers, Takaichi also said Japan will join global efforts to try to identify the attackers.

Dozens of businesses in Japan have reported in recent weeks unauthorised accesses to their systems and potential leaks of client data.

"This has become a serious situation, with growing anxiety over... the misuse of the leaked information, and it is necessary to swiftly step up countermeasures," Takaichi said during the meeting.

"By next week, the government will compile an emergency package of measures," she said.

A Chinese artificial intelligence cybersecurity tool called Artex was used in several recent hacks of Japanese companies, an information security arm of Japanese IT firm GMO Internet Group Inc said last week.

GMO Internet Group itself has come under attack. A hacker demanded the firm to pay US$50 million by last Wednesday in connection to a hack, its founder and chief executive officer Masatoshi Kumagai said in a statement dated Sunday.

AI's ability to find previously unknown ways to hack into computer systems is in the global spotlight, as leading labs release ever-more advanced models.

Artex was designed to help organisations enhance their cyber defences through AI-powered security testing to find potential weak points, its developer has said. *– AFP*

Japan indicts US Marine on murder charge in Okinawa

TOKYO – Japanese prosecutors have indicted a US Marine on suspicion of murdering a woman in Okinawa, a court spokesman told AFP.

The case has prompted public outrage, caused Japan's premier to slam the "heinous crime" and reignited controversy over the heavy US military presence on the southern island.

"The case was indicted on October 25," said the spokesman for the court in Naha, confirming media reports that the suspect had been indicted on charges of murder and robbery.

The *Yomiuri Shimbun* reported that, according to the indictment document, the 20-year-old suspect allegedly strangled a 39-year-old woman from Naha in a hotel with a telephone cord on October 3.

He is also accused of stealing a backpack containing the woman's wallet and other belongings, the newspaper said, and has been indicted on robbery charges.

The Marine denied the allegations at the time of his arrest but has now made statements that imply some involvement in the case, the *Yomiuri* and other media said, citing investigative sources.

Crimes including rapes, assaults, hit-and-runs and drunk driving by US military personnel have long triggered protests on the southern Japanese island, which has for years urged other regions in the country to share the burden of hosting US troops.

Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi has said that officials were reviewing the off-base code of conduct for US troops in Japan following the alleged killing.

The US military enacted a two-day operational pause after the Marine's arrest to reinforce discipline and standards, followed by a month-long curfew. *– AFP*

Nonagenarian in Japan outwits suspected scammer

TOKYO - A 93-year-old woman in western Japan outsmarted a suspected scammer by pretending to fall for the scheme and helping police arrest him at her home, an officer told AFP yesterday.

Japan has the second-oldest population in the world after Monaco, and senior citizens are often targeted by fraudsters, who last year collectively stole around 325.7 billion yen (US$2.0 billion) from their victims.

The woman, who lives in the Shiga region, received telephone calls from Wednesday through Thursday last week from a man who claimed to be a police officer.

The caller falsely informed her that her bank account had experienced an unauthorised withdrawal.

The woman was told to hand over her ATM card to a man, posing as a police officer, who would visit her so that authorities could verify her account.

Suspecting a scam, the woman consulted her son and the police as she waited for the scammer to visit her house.

"The person's family reached out to the police on Wednesday evening, and we were able to have officers at her house" before the scammer arrived on Thursday, a local police official told AFP on customary condition of anonymity.

When a 47-year-old man appeared at her doorstep, waiting officers arrested him on the spot, he said.

"The person (the woman) is someone in good health and highly articulate," the official said, while urging other elderly residents consult family members when they suspect fraud. *– AFP*

A combination image created yesterday, shows the Warisan Merdeka Tower (KL118) and surrounding commercial buildings shrouded in haze on October 13 (top), and the same buildings seen through clear skies as haze conditions improve in Kuala Lumpur yesterday (bottom).
The haze has sent air pollution levels surging to dangerous levels not only in Indonesia, but also in Malaysia, Singapore and East Timor, prompting the ASEAN regional bloc to call a meeting over the crisis. – AFP

Malaysia's Johor reopens schools as haze eases

Isabelle Leong

KUALA LUMPUR – Schools reopened in southern Malaysia yesterday as air quality improved after weeks of toxic haze from wildfires in neighbouring Indonesia.

The closures were a consequence of a regional haze crisis that blanketed parts of Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia and Singapore, sending respiratory complaints soaring and fuelling diplomatic tensions.

In Malaysia's southernmost Johor state, face-to-face classes resumed in stages yesterday after a 10-day suspension affecting more than 1,000 schools and about 600,000 students.

Johor education and information committee chairman Muhammad Naqib Md Ghazali said the decision followed a review of air quality readings across the state and health risk assessments.

Attendance yesterday and today is limited to students sitting examinations, he said in a statement Sunday.

Full operations are expected to resume tomorrow if air quality continues to improve, he added.

Air quality had improved across Johor and much of peninsular Malaysia by yesterday afternoon, with government monitoring data showing no areas recording unhealthy pollution levels.

Several districts in eastern Sarawak state, however, continued to report unhealthy air quality, including the state capital Kuching.

Malaysia's weather agency said changing wind patterns were expected to reduce the risk of further haze episodes for the rest of the year.

"As the wind direction has finally shifted from southwest to northeast, we highly expect there will be no more haze episodes this year," Meteorological Department director-general Mohd Hisham Mohd Anip told AFP.

The regional picture remained uneven, however, with Singapore still among the world's 20 most polluted major cities yesterday afternoon, according to Swiss-based air quality monitor IQAir.

Indonesia has struggled for months to contain fires that deforestation monitor Nusantara Atlas said consumed more than 1.9 million hectares in the nine months to September.

On Saturday, Indonesia cut natural gas exports to Singapore to prioritise domestic demand, an official said, with the two countries at loggerheads over regional air pollution from wildfires on the vast archipelago. *– AFP*

4 killed in southern Philippines ambush

MANILA – Four people were killed in an ambush in Maguindanao del Sur in the southern Philippines at 3:00 p.m. yesterday, local police said.

The vehicle carrying the victims crashed into a roadside ditch during the attack. The car came under gunfire, and the victims sustained gunshot wounds to various parts of their bodies, according to police.

The victims have not yet been identified, and investigations are underway. *– Xinhua*

A Buddhist monk prays while holding a lit candle as devotees gather at Botahtaung Pagoda during the Full Moon Day of the Thadingyut Festival in Yangon, Myanmar yesterday.
Thousands of Buddhist devotees flocked to pagodas across the city to pray, make merits, and participate in the annual festival of lights marking the end of Buddhist Lent. *– AFP*

Nepal plans flood early warning systems in river basins, risk reduction in glacial lakes

KATHMANDU – The Nepali government has unveiled plans to expand flood early warning systems across six major river basins and lower water levels in four high-risk glacial lakes as part of efforts to strengthen disaster preparedness amid growing climate-related risks in the Himalayan region.

The initiatives are part of a broader strategy to improve flood forecasting, reduce the risk of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) and modernize weather forecasting through advanced technologies, according to separate documents issued by the Center for Hydrology and Water Resources Research and the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, the secretariat of Nepal's Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation said in a press statement on Sunday.

The plans come in the wake of devastating floods on August 26 that claimed around 1,500 lives, while more than 5,000 people remain missing. The floods also caused US$1.81 billion in physical damage, according to the Nepali government's preliminary Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA).

Rising temperatures have accelerated glacier melting in the Himalayas, increasing concerns over glacial lake instability, avalanches and potentially destructive floods downstream.

Under the proposed Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) Sanjeevani Project, the government plans to lower water levels in four high-risk glacial lakes: Thulagi in Manang district, Lower Barun in Sankhuwasabha district, and Lumding Tsho and Hongu-2 in Solukhumbu district.

The project is scheduled to run from 2026 to 2033, with an estimated budget of US$49.9 million.

The initiative builds on previous efforts to reduce risks at Tsho Rolpa in Dolakha district and Imja Lake in Solukhumbu district, where water levels were successfully lowered to mitigate the threat of glacial lake outburst floods.

Meanwhile, the Center for Hydrology and Water Resources Research plans to install flood early warning systems across six river basins under the Priority River Basins Flood Risk Management Project, which runs from 2022 to 2028, with an investment of US$7.54 million.

The center will also provide round-the-clock flood forecasting and early warning services from mid-May to mid-October, covering the country's main monsoon season.

In a separate initiative to improve weather forecasting, the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology plans to prioritize artificial intelligence, machine learning and high-performance computing systems to enhance the accuracy and reliability of forecasts. *– Xinhua*

A scooter rider drives past an illuminated Hindu temple as a cow crosses the street in Bengaluru, India yesterday. *– AFP*

Bangladesh measles crisis 'warning sign' of other outbreaks: report

DHAKA – Experts have warned Bangladesh that deadly outbreaks of diphtheria, whooping cough and polio could follow an ongoing measles epidemic that has already killed over 1,200 children, according to a report seen by AFP yesterday.

"The measles outbreak is a litmus test and a warning sign of a deteriorating immunisation system," said the report by an independent committee of national and international experts, which carried out its research earlier in October.

Bangladesh has struggled since March to contain the outbreak, which has killed more than 1,200 children and infected 220,000 people, making it the country's deadliest in decades, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

"If no urgent mitigation measures are taken, it is only a matter of time before there are large outbreaks of pertussis (whooping cough), diphtheria and even vaccine-derived poliovirus," added the report, which has been submitted to the government.

The health ministry pledged action yesterday.

"We are going to recruit vaccinators as quickly as possible as the first step towards implementing the recommendations," spokesman Zahid Raihan told AFP.

The government, supported by the World Health Organisation (WHO), UNICEF, the Gavi vaccine alliance and other partners, deployed a 70-member team earlier this month to assess the country's immunisation programme.

The review found that just 82 percent of children were fully immunised, well below the national target of 95 percent. Around 40 percent of vaccinator posts remain vacant.

Bangladesh was long considered an immunisation success story. Since its programme began in 1979, the country has eliminated polio and neonatal tetanus and controlled rubella and hepatitis B.

A measles vaccination campaign planned for 2024 was delayed by the revolution that toppled former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, while strikes and political instability further disrupted a campaign in 2025.

Authorities have since launched a mass vaccination drive, but cases continue to climb.

Measles spreads easily through coughs and sneezes and has no specific treatment. Complications include brain swelling and severe breathing problems, with young children particularly vulnerable.

Whooping cough can cause severe illness and death in infants. Diphtheria can obstruct breathing and damage the heart and nerves, while vaccine-derived poliovirus can cause paralysis in under-immunised populations. *– AFP*

Singapore plans to bring forward retirement age increases to 2029

SINGAPORE - Singapore plans to raise its statutory retirement age from 64 to 65 and its re-employment age from 69 to 70 on January 1, 2029, a year ahead of the previously scheduled 2030 timeline.

The plan is among six recommendations released yesterday by the Tripartite Workgroup on Senior Employment. The government has fully accepted the recommendations.

Under Singapore's re-employment framework, employers must offer re-employment to eligible employees who reach the minimum retirement age, up to the re-employment age.

Other recommendations include enhancing earned income tax relief for seniors who continue working beyond the statutory retirement and re-employment ages, and raising the minimum and maximum Employment Assistance Payment amounts for eligible workers who are not re-employed.

The workgroup also proposed replacing the Senior Employment Credit with a new Re-Employment Credit from 2028 to support employers in retaining older workers.

To encourage more flexible work arrangements, the workgroup proposed a Flexi-Load Program to help employers create part-time and fractional roles, alongside a new program office to provide career guidance and support skills transitions.

Further details on implementation will be released in the first half of 2027. *– Xinhua*

Zebrafish study offers new clues to mental health conditions

SYDNEY – New findings about zebrafish by researchers in Australia have challenged assumptions about the biological complexity required for mental-health-related behaviors.

Researchers from Griffith University's Institute for Biomedicine and Glycomics have created the first complete collection of zebrafish models lacking members of the neurexin gene family, one of the strongest groups of genes associated with psychiatric disorders, according to a statement released yesterday by the university.

Despite no obvious changes in brain development or behavior during their early development, the fish developed profound, permanent and highly specific behavioral changes emerging in their juvenile stage, the statement said.

This delayed emergence was one of the central findings of the study and strikingly mimics the human disease trajectories.

"The findings suggest that even highly complex behaviors may arise from deeply conserved biological and genetic programs," Jean Giacomotto, senior lecturer at Griffith University, was quoted as saying.

"We often think of social behavior as being shaped primarily by experience, environment and learning," he said. "Yet changing a single family of genes was enough to profoundly and permanently reshape how these animals interact with others and respond to their environment."

The zebrafish models offer a platform for searching for treatments "capable of preventing, delaying or reversing these changes," Giacomotto said.

The study has been published in the journal *Molecular Psychiatry.* *– Xinhua*

Australia reports strong results in environmental law enforcement

SYDNEY – Australia's National Environmental Protection Agency (National EPA) said yesterday that targeted compliance and enforcement activities over the past 12 months had delivered significant results in tackling environmental violations, including illegal wildlife trade and unlawful land clearing.

In a report reviewing progress against the government's environmental compliance and enforcement priorities, the agency said nearly 500 live wildlife specimens had been seized, while operations targeting illegal wildlife exports had disrupted more than A$3 million (about US$2.1 million) in potential black market value.

The report showed that authorities had completed 59 compliance audits, assessed more than 900 environmental approval conditions and detected over 370 land-use changes through remote sensing and other monitoring activities.

Enforcement measures included a A$55 million undertaking to address alleged land-clearing violations, as well as infringement penalties totaling more than A$530,000 for breaches of environmental approval conditions and failures related to environmental offsets.

The agency also provided compliance guidance to more than 1,200 recycling businesses to help prevent unlawful waste exports.

National EPA Chief Executive Officer John Bradley said the results highlighted the importance of combining early engagement and education with intelligence-led compliance activities and strong enforcement action.

He said the agency would strengthen its capacity to detect environmental harm earlier, improve regulatory oversight and focus enforcement efforts on activities posing the greatest environmental risks.

The National EPA said it would also expand the use of advanced monitoring technologies and cooperation with partner agencies over the coming year to combat environmental crime and improve compliance with national environmental laws. *– Xinhua*

Anthropic unveils IPO filing, showing soaring sales and AI risks

WASHINGTON, DC – Anthropic, one of the world's leading artificial intelligence companies, yesterday made public its plans to sell shares on the stock market, revealing soaring sales but also political and safety risks in a major test of whether the AI boom can deliver profits.

Its filing warns investors of dangers ranging from its conflict with the Trump administration to AI systems acting on their own, alongside huge spending commitments on computing power.

The listing would be the first by one of the standalone companies leading the race to build advanced AI, ahead of its main rival OpenAI, which has pushed back its own market debut to next year.

It also follows the June listing of SpaceX, which owns Elon Musk's AI venture xAI and saw its shares fall sharply after a strong debut.

A disappointing reception for Anthropic could dent investor enthusiasm for AI, a sector that has become a key driver of US economic growth.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the company is aiming to go public the week of November 16, though the timing could change.

The offering could raise as much as US$100 billion in an IPO that could value Anthropic at between US$1.5 trillion and US$2 trillion, *The Wall Street Journal* added, citing people familiar with the matter.

The prospectus devotes over 90 pages to risks specific to an industry that has faced a string of reports in recent months of AI systems behaving in unexpected and harmful ways.

The filing warns that the stakes rise as AI grows more capable, citing concerns that advanced systems "could pose catastrophic or existential risks to society if not developed and deployed responsibly."

If we are unable to manage the risks related to our focus on and commitment to AI safety, our brand, business, financial condition, and results of operations could be adversely affected.

Anthropic also warned that its "engagement with policymakers and public positions on AI regulation and safety could subject us to heightened scrutiny, political backlash, or disproportionate regulatory action."

The company has been targeted in recent months by the administration of US President Donald Trump for refusing to lift restrictions on how the Pentagon could use its technology, and the Defence Department has since labelled it a national security risk and barred it as a supplier.

Despite these challenges, Anthropic's business has grown very quickly. Sales reached US$11.6 billion in the April-June quarter, up from US$787 million a year earlier. That compares with US$4.6 billion in sales for all of 2025.

The company made its first operating profit in that quarter, close to US$1 billion. It still reported an overall loss of US$66 billion, mostly because of accounting charges linked to its rising value rather than cash spent.

Much of the growth comes from businesses using Claude to write software and handle office work.

Nearly 12,000 organisations now spend at least US$100,000 a year with Anthropic, up from fewer than 1,000 a year ago.

Slowdown risks

Anthropic warned that its growth is likely to slow, possibly sharply.

To power its AI, Anthropic has committed hundreds of billions of US dollars to computing capacity, including up to US$120.5 billion with SpaceX, about US$110 billion with Amazon and an estimated US$125 billion to US$150 billion with Google.

The company warned that if demand falls short of its projections, many of these payments must be made regardless of how much capacity it actually uses.

The company's seven co-founders, led by Chief Executive Dario Amodei and his sister, company President Daniela Amodei, will keep control of just over half of shareholder votes after the listing, meaning outside investors will not be able to outvote them.

Anthropic is registered as a "public benefit corporation," which requires it to weigh its goal of developing AI safely alongside making money for shareholders.

The co-founders have each pledged to give 80 percent of their shares to charity, though the filing notes these pledges are not legally binding.

– AFP

Macron accuses social media of sowing discord ahead of election

Francesco Fontemaggi and Jeremy Marot

MARSEILLE – French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday accused social media of "damaging our democracies", as he lamented the turmoil France faces ahead of an election to pick his successor, as authorities grapple with nationwide cost-of-living protests that have spilled over into violence.

At the same time the outgoing French president sought to project an image of a government firmly in control, calling for the looting and vandalism seen on October 17 to "never" happen again.

France has been rocked by widespread anger over the rising cost of living, with nationwide demonstrations on October 17 degenerating into some of the country's worst rioting in years.

The demonstrations have come six months ahead of a presidential election to replace centrist Macron.

The frontrunner – far-right leader Marine Le Pen – held an election rally in Orléans on Sunday, a day after yet more demonstrations also saw some violent clashes on the sidelines – though nothing like a week prior.

Polls show the protests and ensuing disorder have boosted support for Le Pen, as the government and Macron faced sharp criticism for not preventing the unrest.

French President Emmanuel Macron (bottom, centre) kneels as he poses with police officers and senior government officials at the prefecture in Marseille, southern France, yesterday. *– AFP*

'Turned things around'

Macron yesterday visited Marseille City Hall, which was briefly overrun by protesters on October 17 and where a bust of Marianne, France's national symbol, was knocked to the ground.

Speaking to members of law enforcement, he said it was "not normal" for France to be in such a state of "turmoil."

"We will continue to hold the line," he said.

"If we all do our jobs well, this movement will subside – because we will address legitimate expectations, and because order will be maintained. But nothing is a foregone conclusion."

He also called social media sites a "tool for mobilising the worst impulses," adding they harmed "our democracies."

Macron warned that a new wave of protests planned for this weekend could turn "risky", adding that protest routes would remain outside city centres to protect public order.

Authorities have admitted to security and intelligence failures that paved the way for the clashes, large-scale looting and vandalism of public property that erupted on October 17, and had stepped up security for the protests last Saturday.

Officials pledged to remain vigilant ahead of the new demonstrations.

"From a security standpoint, we've largely turned things around," said a Macron aide.

Halloween protests

Interior Minister Laurent Nuñez said "a little over a dozen" curfews imposed by local authorities would remain in place and pledged "an extremely robust security operation" for protests this Saturday.

"We expect things to be difficult again," he said. "Halloween night is traditionally always lively."

While Nuñez said the outcome of Saturday's rallies was more "positive" than a week ago, violence still erupted in the capital and a number of other cities including Marseille.

A total of 1,435 people were arrested on the sidelines of the weekend protests, Nuñez said, adding there were "no serious incidents."

He said that 267 police officers and gendarmes were injured, along with 150 protesters, including three who were seriously hurt.

The unrest followed weeks of demonstrations by students campaigning for better learning conditions.

The police response has been criticised as heavy-handed and sparked a broader movement against the cost of living and police violence.

Several teenage protesters have been seriously injured and thousands arrested.

In Paris yesterday, Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu was slated to meet student leaders, with National Education Minister Edouard Geffray and Higher Education Minister Philippe Baptiste joining him for the talks.

Macron already met representatives of secondary school pupils last Friday, but they emerged from the talks urging students to keep protesting until the government put forward concrete proposals to address their demands.

On top of the protests, the country was last week shaken by a shooting that killed one person and wounded five, including a 12-year-old girl, outside Paris.

Macron has branded the shooting a "racist terrorist attack", as most of the victims were from foreign backgrounds. *– AFP*

Serbian student movement eyes power after election triumph

Mina Pejakovic

BELGRADE – Serbia's student-led movement targeted a clear parliament majority yesterday after widespread protests ended with a historic election triumph that forced right-wing leader Aleksandar Vucic to concede defeat.

Nationwide celebrations erupted after the victory in Sunday's election, which was the culmination of two years of mounting pressure on Vucic after the 2024 collapse of a canopy at Novi Sad railway station that killed 16 people.

The disaster has been widely blamed on corruption and triggered some of Serbia's largest protests since the fall of strongman Slobodan Milosevic in 2000.

On the streets of Belgrade, where cars still routinely honked in celebration yesterday afternoon, passers-by told AFP they felt overjoyed at the result.

"Everything smells of freedom," design student Katarina Malesevic told AFP, describing a sense of relief after Vucic's defeat.

The outcome will be closely watched across Europe as the continent faces a wave of youth-led demonstrations.

But political analyst Dusan Vucicevic said the movement differed from other protests.

"This experiment in grassroots democracy ultimately succeeded in securing more than 50 percent of the vote, although it remains unclear whether a similar model could work in other countries," Vucicevic told AFP.

According to independent electoral watchdog CeSID, the Students' List secured 53 percent of the vote while Vucic's rightwing Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) garnered almost 39 percent, based on 96 percent of the count.

Supporters of the victorious student movement dance in a park opposite Serbia's Parliament in Belgrade yesterday, after crowds celebrating its election results had entered the site the previous night and dismantled a pro-government encampment that had been occupying the area for months. Serbia's student-led movement declared victory in parliamentary elections on October 25 ending 14 years in power for Aleksandar Vucic's right-wing party. *– AFP*

The result would give them 140 MPs in the 250-seat assembly, with the SNS at 103. Minority parties will get the remaining seats.

"Students won and with them also a hope that Serbia can be a country of justice, freedom and dignity," Radomir Saicic, a candidate for the Students' List, told supporters at the movement's election headquarters late Sunday.

A near-record turnout of almost 70 percent likely drove the political upset.

The figure surpassed the 1993 parliamentary election, when just over 61 percent voted.

Unforgettable moment

Shocking many observers, Vucic, who had resigned the presidency to run for prime minister and has grown increasingly authoritarian in recent years, conceded defeat less than two hours after polls closed.

The defeat triggered raucous scenes as supporters of the student movement celebrated the downfall of a government they blamed for deep-rooted corruption.

Thousands poured into the streets of Belgrade and other cities to celebrate, with cars honking, crowds chanting, and fireworks lighting up the skyline.

Medical student Milutin Kandic, walking through central Belgrade yesterday morning, said he was certain that "no one from my generation will ever forget the moment he conceded defeat".

Addressing supporters late Sunday, Vucic, who has maintained close ties with Russia throughout his tenure, blamed foreign powers for the result.

"I want people to know, this was the validation of a revolution carried out with the direct support of various European countries and the US deep state, the one that is also against President Trump," he said.

For nearly two years, students have staged rallies and marched across the Balkan nation to reach voters directly and counter the media machine of Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party.

Their protests have drawn huge crowds. A final pre-election rally in Belgrade on Thursday attracted around 150,000 people, according to an independent protest monitor.

The students held a celebration rally at a central Belgrade square last night (local time).

Broad platform

Most of the student list's 250 candidates are experts from fields including academia and the arts with little political experience.

The movement has a broad platform, centred on a pledge to fight corruption.

It evolved from demands for a transparent investigation into the Novi Sad tragedy into calls for an early election.

The movement kept foreign policy issues, including Serbia's relationship with the European Union and longtime ally Russia, in the background.

Yesterday, the Kremlin said it hoped that Serbia's new leaders "understand that cooperation with Russia is in Serbia's interests, because it brings benefits to Serbia".

"From the outset, they insisted as much as possible that Serbia must first and foremost address its domestic political issues – problems with the electoral process, the media environment, and the literal dismantling of every institution in Serbia, from the national to the local level," Vucicevic said.

The students are expected to prioritise institutional reform and the rule of law, which he added would bring the country closer to EU membership.

After pushing back against the protests for almost two years, Vucic called the vote last month under mounting pressure, citing "major turbulence on the domestic political scene". *– AFP*

Canadian youth seek climate action in landmark trial

Fanny Alarcon

VANCOUVER – Fifteen young Canadians will try to prove the federal government has breached their rights through insufficient action on climate change in a landmark trial that opened yesterday in the west coast city of Vancouver.

The lawsuit by plaintiffs ages 17-25 is part of a growing global movement among environmental activists seeking to use courts to force government accountability on climate protections.

"I'm finally getting my day in court and my voice will finally be heard," said 19-year-old Calgary resident Sadie Vipond, one of the people suing Ottawa in the case, which is expected to last five weeks.

"Being on the stand might be nerve-racking, but our futures and our rights are worth standing up for," she told AFP.

The plaintiffs plan to argue that successive governments have violated their constitutional rights to life, liberty and security by failing to protect them from the threats of climate change.

They want the court to compel the government to cut greenhouse gas emissions and honour its previously set emissions targets.

Those targets currently call for a 40-45 percent reduction by 2030 compared with 2005 levels, but Prime Minister Mark Carney's government has already indicated those benchmarks may be missed.

Legal, not political

The legal battle by the 15 young Canadians began in 2019. Their case was initially dismissed, but in 2023 a federal appeals court ruled they were entitled to a trial.

The case is unprecedented in Canada, where federal courts have never tested whether climate protections are a constitutional issue.

Catherine Boies Parker, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, told AFP the government plans to argue that climate change policy is a political issue and therefore not a matter for the courts.

But she insisted the plaintiffs were pursuing a legal question.

"When a government engages in conduct that causes harm to its citizens, the courts must decide whether that conduct is consistent with the Constitution," she told AFP.

According to Our Children's Trust, a legal advocacy group backing the plaintiffs, a win for their side would require Canada to implement a binding climate protection plan.

Globally, environmental campaigners have brought hundreds of cases seeking government action on climate change.

The Canadian case has been compared to an action brought by youths in Germany, where a court ordered the government to strengthen emissions-reduction targets to protect the rights of young people.

Maria Antonia Tigre, director of Global Climate Change Litigation at Columbia University's Sabin Center, noted that climate judgments are "travelling across jurisdictions."

The Canadian case "could really contribute to that developing body of law," she said.

'We couldn't breathe'

Canada is enduring more frequent and destructive wildfires, increased flooding and more frequent episodes of extreme heat.

The plaintiffs want to show the court that they have already suffered from climate change and that the damages at issue are not speculative future risks.

Lauren Wright, a young plaintiff from Saskatchewan, recalled the 2015 wildfires in the central Canadian province that displaced thousands.

"The air was terrible. We couldn't breathe," Wright said.

The trial is opening with Carney facing increasing criticism from Canadians concerned about the environment.

The prime minister says President Donald Trump's trade war has forced Canada to reorient its economy away from dependence on the United States.

Part of his economic strategy includes boosting oil production in the western province of Alberta, including through a proposed new pipeline to the Pacific coast.

That project, along with other moves like scrapping the carbon tax on individual households, prompted the resignation of Carney cabinet member Steven Guilbeault, the architect of the robust climate protections pursued by Carney's predecessor, Justin Trudeau.

– AFP

Lula celebrates election win as Brazil markets tumble

David Salazar

SÃO PAULO – World leaders, except for US President Donald Trump, congratulated Brazilian incumbent Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on his re-election yesterday, while markets plummeted following the shock result.

The leftist president who turns 81 today pulled off an improbable victory against the son of far-right ex-leader Jair Bolsonaro, securing 51.8 percent of the vote compared to his challenger's 48.2 percent.

Markets reacted negatively to the outcome, and a plummeting Ibovespa index triggered a 30-minute trading suspension on the São Paulo Stock Exchange, which had surged after Bolsonaro's first-round win.

Polls had predicted a slight advantage for the senator, who on Sunday refused to concede defeat.

The historic result hands Lula, already the longest-serving democratically elected leader in Latin America's largest country, an unprecedented fourth term.

It also preserves Brazil as a leftist bastion amid a rising right-wing tide across the region seen favourably by Trump.

As of late last night (Macau time), US president had not yet commented on the election result, but congratulations poured in from world leaders on both sides of the political divide.

"Long live democracy, the people of Brazil won," Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said on X.

Right-wing governments in Chile, Ecuador and Peru said they wanted to work towards common goals with the region's economic powerhouse.

China echoed that sentiment, while Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also offered his friend Lula his "heartiest congratulations."

Record support

Lula pulled around 4.4 million more votes than his rival, totalling over 64.2 million on his seventh go at the presidency – the highest proportion ever counted in Brazil.

Its shock first-round defeat jolted the left awake, with Lula's campaign staging massive rallies and upping its social media game.

The abstention rate decreased from the first round, falling from 21 percent to 19 percent in the runoff.

The proportion of spoiled and blank votes also decreased.

"I owe this victory to the rebellious youth who rose up to defend democracy," Lula told jubilant supporters in São Paulo on Sunday night (local time), his voice scratchier than ever after an intense campaign.

The president also overturned his first-round defeat in the key bellwether state of Minas Gerais.

After a first Bolsonaro administration pockmarked by division, rejection of the former president's son generated much of the support for the incumbent, according to political analyst Thomas Traumann.

It was "the victory of fear over Bolsonaro's return," he told AFP.

"I feel so happy!" said 43-year-old Anna Zanatta in São Paulo before bursting into tears of joy.

"Lula's victory represents many things for us: freedom, our democracy, our history," she said.

'Unacceptable'

Chaos surrounded the final hours of Sunday's vote after a Supreme Court ruling extended voting by two hours following complaints about some voters struggling to reach polling stations.

Lula had blasted disrupted bus services which he said barred citizens from voting.

Brazil's re-elected President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva addresses supporters through a loudhailer after winning the presidential runoff election in São Paulo on Sunday. Lula pulled off a dramatic comeback after defeating right-wing senator Flávio Bolsonaro, who had trounced him in the first round. – AFP

Flávio Bolsonaro also requested an extension in some regions due to heavy rains, but he described the extension as "unacceptable" and a "dirty trick."

"It is impossible to recognise the results. I am going to request the annulment of these elections," he said, stone-faced, in a brief speech in Brasília.

Bolsonaro's father is serving a 27-year jail term for attempting a coup after his own electoral loss to Lula in 2022.

The senator had sworn to liberate Jair if elected.

Oliver Stuenkel, an international relations professor, does not believe Flávio's refusal to concede will cause as many problems as his father's in 2022.

"The margin was quite significant, so I think it'll be really hard to convince voters that this is the result of vote rigging," he told AFP.

'Interference'

During the campaign, Lula accused US tech giant Meta of alleged "interference" in favour of Bolsonaro via "algorithmic manipulation."

Meta, which owns Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, denies the allegations but previously said that some of Lula's campaign ads had been mistakenly deactivated due to technical errors.

In a speech on Sunday, the Brazilian president promised to rein in big tech.

– AFP

Ecstasy, relief among Lula supporters

Esteban Rojas

SÃO PAULO – Joyful cheers of "Let's go, Lula!" rose from the jubilant crowd again and again as Brazilians paraded down São Paulo's Avenida Paulista on Sunday, celebrating the leftist leader's improbable election win.

Thousands of people spilled onto the streets following President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's victory over his right-wing rival Flávio Bolsonaro.

Lula, who turns 81 today, joined the parade, leaning out of the sunroof of his car with a megaphone in his hand and his trademark rasp more hoarse than ever.

"I just had to tell you that I love you. Tomorrow, the fight continues," he said.

Lula received 51.8 percent of the vote compared to 48.2 percent for former president Jair Bolsonaro's son, who has refused to acknowledge the result.

"I feel so happy!" 43-year-old Anna Zanatta told AFP before bursting into tears of joy.

"Lula's victory represents many things for us: freedom, our democracy, our history," she said, waving a flag bearing the message "Antifascist Action."

Zanatta viewed a hypothetical Bolsonaro victory as a "threat" to Latin America's largest democracy.

"I was born under a dictatorship, and I promised my granddaughter that we Brazilians would never go through that again," she said, referring to the military regime that ruled from 1964 to 1985.

Supporters of Brazil's re-elected President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva celebrate after learning the results of the presidential runoff election in São Paulo on Sunday. – AFP

Doorman Alfonso dos Reis, 64, carried a sign reading "Lula again with the strength of the people" alongside a photo of the president.

"We're going to build a much better country," he beamed.

Fireworks boomed and cars honked their horns as the crowd marched down São Paulo's main avenue.

Lula appeared alongside lawmaker André Janones, who created the "Lula's Army" WhatsApp channel which surged to 10.8 million followers during the second-round campaign.

Lula's supporters attribute his comeback in part to the lawmaker's digital battle.

"I owe this victory to the rebellious youth who rose up to defend democracy," Lula said.

'No amnesty!'

Mateus Freitas, a 33-year-old theatre actor, waved a flare that sent red smoke into the air, the colour associated with Lula's Workers' Party (PT).

"No amnesty! No amnesty!" Freitas yelled at the top of his lungs.

He was referring to attempts to free Jair Bolsonaro, who governed from 2019 to 2022 and is serving a 27-year sentence for attempting a coup following his own electoral loss to Lula in 2022.

His son Flávio had promised to liberate him if elected.

"We stopped a government that would have been a fascist government, led by militias, criminals, racists, homophobes," Freitas told AFP.

"This is a victory for minorities, for the people, for Brazilian workers...Lula's government is inclusive," he said.

Sigh of relief

The leftist victory has swerved Brazil away from a rightward turn, unlike a recent string of wins championed by US President Donald Trump across Latin America.

Flávio Bolsonaro came out on top in the first round of presidential elections, and polls had given him a slight advantage ahead of the runoff.

Those indicators had concerned Felipe Rodrigues, a 53-year-old architect taking part in Sunday's celebrations.

"I'm very glad to see that, despite the risks of having a far-right government, which seems to be a global trend, here in Brazil we have a president who continues his efforts to improve the lives of the poor," he said.

– AFP

Barca's big-game defeats pose familiar questions

Rik Sharma

BARCELONA –After a superb start to the season Barcelona were brought crashing back down to earth by Real Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain last week, raising fresh doubts about the Spanish champions' ability to compete against the strongest opponents.

Hansi Flick's side have dominated in Spain over the last two seasons, winning back-to-back La Liga titles, but notably in Europe have fallen short on high-pressure nights.

The Catalan giants have played sumptuous attacking football this season and won their first 11 games across all competitions, but once the quality of their opponents rose, it was a different story.

Barca were beaten 4-2 in Paris by European champions PSG last Tuesday, showing they are still some way from matching Luis Enrique's side.

That was compounded by Sunday's painful 2-1 home defeat by Jose Mourinho's Real Madrid in La Liga, in which Barcelona's defensive frailties were laid bare again.

A draw would have been an acceptable result and maintained their six-point lead on Madrid in the top flight, but they left far too much space for Los Blancos to exploit in the final stages.

With three minutes to go Eduardo Camavinga raced through on goal and squared for Kylian Mbappe to net his 100th Madrid goal and second of the night to snatch victory.

"In the end sometimes in the big, big games, small things are important and they decide the game and which way they end, and today that was not on our side," Flick told reporters, pledging to improve.

"We know what we have to make better. We speak about this in every training. We will do it, I'm not worried about that.

"It's a part of this game to lose also. In this week, we had two (losses) and it's too much."

However, it is a discourse which the German coach has repeated during his tenure.

"We are a young side and we have to mature," said Flick, after Inter Milan ousted Barcelona in the Champions League semi-finals in May 2025.

"We are working on it and we have to improve in defence and in other aspects."

Lack of 'freshness'

Despite spending good money on Anthony Gordon, Rodri and others this summer, and trying to bring in Atletico Madrid striker Julian Alvarez, Barcelona did not sign a centre-back.

Instead Flick has persisted with Gerard Martin, a converted left-back, playing alongside Pau Cubarsi.

Martin has done well, considering his technical limitations and change of position, but against the world's best strikers is clearly out of his depth.

The defender's poor clearance handed Madrid their first goal against Barca, with Mbappe gleefully capitalising.

To Martin's credit, he did defend well to stop Jude Bellingham and Mbappe in a two-on-one situation early in the second half, which exposed a more structural problem Barca have.

Their high-line defence is easy to breach when the team's pressing is not executed perfectly, with high energy.

Flick suggested Barcelona lacked "freshness" against Madrid, after a gruelling schedule, although his team had an extra day to recover midweek and the coach waited until the final minutes to introduce Gabriel Jesus and Karim Adeyemi.

Barca do have injury problems at the back, with Eric Garcia, Jules Kounde and Andreas Christensen all missing the Clasico, along with midfielder Dani Olmo.

"This may be the most important point, the injuries we have," explained Flick.

Barcelona still hold a three-point lead on Madrid, third, in the title race. They are more than capable of going on another run of victories, but the weeks ahead will pose further interesting tests.

Aston Villa visit Camp Nou in the Champions League on November 3, before Barcelona head to Atletico Madrid on November 8. A month after that, Manchester City come to the Camp Nou.

Flick has been promising improvement in these types of matches for over two years - perhaps now he will finally focus on implementing it. *– AFP*

Real Madrid's Portuguese midfielder Bernardo Silva (left) confronts Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Rodrigo during the Spanish league match between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF at Camp Nou Stadium in Barcelona on Sunday. – AFP

Liu double lifts China past US to top group at U17 Women's World Cup

RABAT – Liu Yuxi scored twice as China beat the United States 3-2 on Sunday to finish top of Group E with three wins from three at the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup.

China finished the group stage with 13 goals scored and two conceded while the United States ended on six points.

China will face France in the round of 16 on Thursday, while the Americans will take on two-time champions Spain after finishing second, three points behind China.

Both teams had already qualified for the knockout stage before Sunday's match, but China needed a victory to overtake the United States, which entered the match ahead on goal difference. China had beaten Kenya 3-0 and Samoa 7-0 in earlier group games, while the Americans had scored 23 goals in victories over the same opponents.

Liu put China ahead in the seventh minute, racing clear of the defense before firing a low shot into the far corner.

Maddie DiMaria leveled for the United States in the 69th minute, but China responded almost immediately as Zhao Jiayi restored the lead two minutes later. Liu struck again in the 81st minute, unleashing a powerful shot from the right side of the penalty area to make it 3-1.

Substitute Isa Ortiz reduced the deficit in the seventh minute of second-half stoppage time, but China held on to complete its perfect group campaign.

Also in Group E, Kenya defeated Samoa 4-0 to qualify as one of the four best third-placed teams, earning a last-16 meeting with Japan.

The knockout stage begins tomorrow, when Germany face Venezuela, DPR Korea meet host Morocco, Argentina play Ghana and Brazil take on Poland.

Thursday's fixtures also include Nigeria against Mexico and Japan against Kenya.

– Xinhua

Liu Yuxi (left) of China shoots during the Group E match against the United States at the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup, in Rabat, Morocco, on Sunday. – Xinhua

Barca defender Espart out for 7 weeks

BARCELONA – Barcelona defender Xavi Espart will miss "around seven weeks" with an ankle injury, the La Liga leaders said yesterday.

The 19-year-old full-back was taken off hurt during the 2-1 Clasico defeat by Real Madrid on Sunday at Camp Nou.

Espart broke into the team this season and had become a regular starter for Hansi Flick.

The defender joins several team-mates on the sidelines, including Jules Kounde, Eric Garcia, Andreas Christensen and Dani Olmo.

Espart will miss the trip to Atletico Madrid in La Liga on November 8, along with Champions League matches against Aston Villa, Sabah and Manchester City, among other games.

After their first domestic defeat of the campaign Barcelona lead the top flight by two points from Atletico and are three ahead of Jose Mourinho's Real Madrid.

– AFP

AFC backs Infantino for re-election as FIFA president

TOKYO - The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has endorsed Gianni Infantino for re-election as FIFA president, marking a turnaround from two months ago when it criticized him over a controversial World Cup investment plan.

AFC President Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa voiced his support at the confederation's extraordinary congress in Tokyo on Friday, embracing Infantino and pledging the region's backing for his bid for a fourth and final term.

"We affirm our full commitment to supporting you and your leadership as you seek a new mandate as the FIFA president," Sheikh Salman said.

In August, the AFC joined UEFA and CONCACAF in accusing Infantino of a "fundamental breach of trust" over his plan to open FIFA's premium competitions, including the World Cup, to private investors. The plan was subsequently scrapped, prompting several European football associations, including the English Football Association, to withdraw their support for Infantino's re-election.

"Gianni, yes, we had some issues we spoke about in the past. But let's not relate the two things together," Sheikh Salman said. "We need to move forward ... football is strongest when we work together."

He acknowledged that not all AFC member associations might follow his lead but expressed confidence that most would support Infantino.

"My feeling is, I'm sure, the feeling of most of my members," he said.

Infantino, who has led FIFA since 2016, is seeking a fourth and final term in the election scheduled for March 2027 in Morocco. The deadline for candidates to register is November 18 this year, and no challenger has announced a bid so far.

Addressing AFC delegates, Infantino acknowledged his mistakes and stressed the importance of learning from them.

"When you do many things, you do - hopefully, as we did, many good things - you do some mistakes as well," Infantino said. "The important thing, however, is, as you said, to learn always from the experience, from the mistakes, to apologize, to move ahead, to come together, to unite, to build for our future, for your future."

Infantino has also received backing from the Confederation of African Football, while South America's governing body CONMEBOL is largely supportive.

The AFC has 47 member associations, 46 of which are FIFA members eligible to vote in the presidential election. While the endorsement does not guarantee unanimous support from its members, it significantly boosts Infantino's re-election bid.

FIFA's president is elected by its 211 member associations.

– Xinhua

Senegal to host Youth Games, Africa's 1st ever Olympics

Lucie Peytermann

DAKAR, Senegal – Signs across the Senegalese capital proclaim "Africa welcomes, Dakar celebrates" ahead of the Youth Olympic Games, which will mark the continent's first time to hold an Olympic event when they kick off on Saturday.

Over the course of two weeks some 2,700 athletes aged 17 or younger are expected to compete across 25 sports, including Russians who are returning to the Games following a ban.

Events ranging from athletics to beach wrestling, rugby sevens to breaking will be held across eight venues in three locations.

Dakar, the nearby suburb of Diamniadio and the beach town of Saly, 80 kilometres from the capital, will all host events.

In total, 136 Senegalese athletes will participate.

The fourth edition of the YOG opens with Senegal mired in debt amid a severe economic crisis.

While a sense of excitement is beginning to stir in the capital, the Youth Olympics have struggled to stoke wild enthusiasm across Senegal, where many are more concerned with the high cost of living, unemployment and economic hardship.

Senegalese authorities, who have overseen extensive infrastructure projects, view their efforts as an investment in the future as well as an occasion for training and long-term skill development.

They also hope the event will highlight Dakar as a major African destination.

Upon welcoming the Youth Olympic flame to Dakar on September 12, Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye told the country that "all of Africa's youth is watching (you) with confidence and pride".

He said he wanted those who attended "to take away from the experience that Africa's youth is brimming with energy, that they are standing tall and determined, and that they are proud".

The flame then travelled 3,600 kilometres, touring all 14 regions of Senegal.

Return of Russian athletes

The Games will mark the return of Russians to Olympic competition under their own colours following a ban.

In July, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) effectively lifted the Russian Olympic Committee's (ROC) suspension.

According to the ROC, 13 Russian athletes will participate and 10 coaches will accompany them to Senegal.

During a meeting in Moscow a week ago, Russian Sports Minister Mikhail Degtyarev, who also heads the ROC, told the young athletes that "after your victories - and I'm sure there will be some - the Russian anthem will be played and the Russian flag will be raised".

Cyclist Angelina Novolodskaya shared her excitement with AFP.

"When I was told that there would be Youth Olympic Games and that I could go, it was just 'Wow'. It's so cool and extraordinary", she said.

However, it is up to each sport's international federation whether to authorise the Russian athletes' participation.

The international athletics governing body, World Athletics, is maintaining a ban, while the judo and swimming federations have allowed the Russians' return with their flag and national anthem.

The Dakar Youth Games will also welcome a refugee Olympic team, composed primarily of athletes based in Africa.

The mascot Ayo, a young lion representing the energy, pride, and joy of African youth is seen in Dakar, Senegal on Thursday ahead of the fourth Summer Youth Olympic Games. – AFP

Milestone

The IOC has called the Dakar YOG an important milestone for the continent and an opportunity to showcase Senegal's cultural richness and Africa's growing role within the Olympics.

That said, Senegal has recently doubled its maximum penalty for same-sex relations, amid a wave of homophobia in the conservative, predominantly Muslim nation.

As the Games approached, Human Rights Watch called on Senegalese authorities to halt what it said was a "brutal crackdown" on LGBTQ people.

"The Olympic Charter prohibits discrimination on any grounds and commits host countries to respect human rights and human dignity", it said.

South Africa could potentially become the first African nation to host the Olympic Games, having already paved the way by hosting the men's FIFA World Cup in 2010. The country is officially in the running for the 2036 Summer Olympics. *– AFP*

Sport in brief

Alcaraz heads strong Spanish Davis Cup team

Tennis

BARCELONA – Carlos Alcaraz will lead a strong Spanish Davis Cup team named by captain David Ferrer yesterday.

Seven-time Grand Slam winner Alcaraz, Rafael Jodar, Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, Marcel Granollers and Pedro Martinez will compete for Spain, who last won the competition in 2019.

"We have a very good team, without a doubt," said Ferrer.

"I'm happy to have all the players available and very excited.

"Obviously, we're one of the favourites to win the Davis Cup, but that's okay, it's always better to have the best players."

World number three Alcaraz missed four months of the season with a wrist injury, but returned at the US Open and triumphed in Tokyo at the Japan Open earlier in October.

The competition takes place in Bologna from November 24-29.

Last year's runners-up Spain will open with a quarter-final against Austria, before a possible semi-final against Britain or Germany. *– AFP*

Feng/Huang claim mixed doubles title at badminton French Open

Badminton

PARIS – China's Feng Yanzhe and Huang Dongping claimed the mixed doubles title at the 2026 badminton French Open on Sunday, defeating Malaysia's Hoo Pang Ron and Lai Pei Jing in straight games.

The top-seeded Chinese pair needed just 37 minutes to win the final 21-10, 21-13, securing a third consecutive French Open title.

Having competed in three tournaments in Europe, Feng and Huang admitted they felt tired, but said the experience had also taught them valuable lessons.

"Reaching the final under difficult circumstances and then winning a high-intensity match have given us a lot of confidence," Feng said.

In the women's singles, world No. 1 An Seyoung of South Korea rallied from one game down to beat Indian veteran Pusarla Venkata Sindhu 16-21, 21-11, 21-12, claiming her fourth French Open title and 10th crown of the season.

France's Christo Popov defeated Indonesia's Moh. Zaki Ubaidillah 21-11, 14-21, 21-13 to win the men's singles title.

In the men's doubles final, Man Wei Chong and Tee Kai Wun of Malaysia beat compatriots Goh Sze Fei and Nur Izzuddin 13-21, 21-15, 21-7 to secure their first BWF World Tour Super 750 title.

Japanese duo Yuki Fukushima and Mayu Matsumoto successfully defended their title, rallying to defeat Malaysia's Pearly Tan and Thinaah Muralitharan 10-21, 21-17, 21-16 in the women's doubles final. *– Xinhua*

Townsend urges Scotland to use Nations Championship as World Cup springboard

Rugby

LONDON – Gregor Townsend has challenged Scotland to build momentum ahead of next year's Rugby World Cup in Australia by finishing strongly in the inaugural Nations Championship.

The cross-hemisphere tournament resumes next month with Scotland second in the European standings ahead of Murrayfield clashes with New Zealand, Australia and Japan.

The Nations Championship is designed to provide an extra competitive edge to the July and November international windows.

It culminates in a finals weekend at Twickenham, with northern and southern hemisphere teams matched according to their respective rankings, with an overall winner crowned.

"We're in a competition where we're in a decent place right now, so we've got that motivation of not just taking the game in isolation, but where we can finish up as high as possible and be involved against a leading side in that final weekend," said Scotland coach Townsend after naming a 37-man squad yesterday.

"And then 12 months from now, the (World Cup) pool stages will be finished.... Our goal (is) to be playing knockout rugby in 12 months' time, and between now and then, play our best rugby."

Scotland have failed to get out of the group stages at the past two World Cups but will be expected to reach the last 16 from a Pool D, which also features old foes Ireland as well as Portugal and Uruguay.

Newcastle back-row Ollie Leatherbarrow is the only new face in the squad as Scotland look to build on an encouraging start to the Nations Championship, having lost just once in three games - a 42-28 reverse against world champions South Africa in Pretoria in July.

"We want to finish as high up as possible and win the northern hemisphere table, or at least finish top two, top three, so we're going to play a real big gun from the southern hemisphere (in the finals weekend at Twickenham)," said Townsend.

"We got huge learning from that game out in South Africa. We're going to get huge learning playing New Zealand in a couple of weeks' time, so we want to be playing those teams more regularly. That's a motivation." *– AFP*

Eala breezes past world No. 411 in Tokyo opener

Tennis

TOKYO – Philippines star Alexandra Eala said "the ball doesn't know what rank you are" after beating world number 411 Mika Stojsavljevic 6-1, 6-2 in her opener in Tokyo yesterday.

World number 19 Eala arrived at the Pan Pacific Open on the back of a poor run of form that saw her win just one match at her last three tournaments.

That included a shock first-round defeat to 217th-ranked Chinese qualifier Shi Han at the Wuhan Open this month.

Eala avoided a similar banana skin against British 17-year-old Stojsavljevic, brushing past her opponent in 75 minutes.

"I try to look at the player separate from the ranking," said Eala.

"The ball doesn't know what rank you are.

"It's just being ready and trying to keep that intensity all the time."

Eala is followed everywhere by adoring fans eager to see the 21-year-old, who in August became the first player from the Philippines to win a title on the women's WTA Tour.

She was again supported by a small but passionate group of fans on centre court in Tokyo.

Eala breezed into a 5-0 lead in the first set and closed it out despite Stojsavljevic pulling a game back.

The British player gave her more problems in the second set, but Eala was never seriously troubled and took the match without ever having her service broken.

"It's a little faster than the court I played on last week," said Eala.

"It's indoor, comfortable weather, not very hot. I think I'm finding my groove."

Number five seed Elise Mertens of Belgium also progressed, beating Japan's Moyuka Uchijima 6-4, 6-2.

But number two seed Maja Chwalinska and defending champion Belinda Bencic both withdrew from the tournament through injury without playing a match.

Bencic, who was the fourth seed, said her season was over after several ligament tears were discovered in her right foot.

"I am still completely unsure when and how this occurred, but it is sadly preventing me from competing here in Tokyo this week and in Hong Kong next week," said the Swiss player. *– AFP*

Sacha Baron Cohen revives the 'problematic dinosaur' Ali G in new film

Paula Ramon

LOS ANGELES – With "Ali G: Who Iz I?" English actor, filmmaker and comedian Sacha Baron Cohen has returned to the guerrilla-style comedy that catapulted him to global fame – but this time, the character has faced criticism.

The film, which marks the comedian's debut as a director, revives the persona that originated in a British television segment and went on to star in "Da Ali G Show."

In the series, Cohen played a white man obsessed with hip-hop and reggae who would interview public figures including Donald Trump and Buzz Aldrin – and they weren't in on the joke.

The new mockumentary follows the character known for flashy outfits and gold chains as he seeks a second chance on television, efforts driven by his need for funds after discovering his girlfriend Julie, played by Morgana Robinson, is pregnant.

In a bid to highlight society's current polarisation, Baron Cohen also plays the character's nemesis, Dr. Nira Cain-N'Degeocello – a professor so left-wing that "he makes AOC look MAGA," referring to the Democratic socialist congresswoman from New York, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

The filmmaker also plays a character at the opposite end of the political spectrum, Colonel Morad.

Yet for some, Ali G is a relic of the past whose cultural appropriation is no longer funny.

"The film has a few scattered giggles, but it's dawdling and cumbersome, and far less 'relevant' than it thinks," read a review from the Hollywood trade publication *Variety*.

"The joke of Ali G is that he was a maximally clueless white-bro poseur," the review continued. "He was most funny as a talk-show stooge."

Speaking with journalists, Baron Cohen acknowledged how times have changed, saying that's exactly why he wanted to dust off the character.

"I brought back Ali G because he is a problematic dinosaur," he said. "I just love the idea of dropping him into today's world."

"It felt like this was the perfect time to bring back a character that should have been left in the 2000s."

Two decades ago, Baron Cohen used his hit film "Borat: Cultural Learnings of American for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan" as a sociological mirror to lay bare certain prejudices within US society.

His work has been compared to that of filmmaker Nathan Fielder, whose documentary "You Can See Everything" – about fallen biotech prodigy Elizabeth Holmes – debuted earlier this month to both critical acclaim and box office success.

Baron Cohen praised Fielder, noting that the comedian "created something completely different."

'Shared lies'

Baron Cohen, 55, arrived at the Los Angeles premiere of his new film in character, wearing neon yellow from head to toe.

He stepped out of a convertible alongside Julie and performed "Richer than Elon" – a song that satirises ethe SpaceX executive, who is the wealthiest man in the world.

"The world's gone to crap. You know, there's wars, there's COVID, people are listening to Ed Sheeran more," Baron Cohen told AFP in character.

"You know, Coldplay still exists. It's, like, well depressing."

At a later press conference, Baron Cohen – as himself – defended satire as the quintessential format for "shining a light on, maybe, subjects that we haven't really discussed as a society before."

"We're at this really dangerous point in society where a handful of billionaires control what information is being spread, and societies and democracies in particular rely on shared facts," Baron Cohen said.

"We're moving to these autocracies that rely on shared lies, and now we have AI. Who's choosing what is the information that goes in there?" *– AFP*

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 1°C~16°C	Manila 24°C~33°C	New York 8°C~18°C	Lisbon 14°C~23°C
Shanghai 11°C~21°C	Bangkok 23°C~35°C	London 7°C~17°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~23°C
Hong Kong 23°C~29°C	Tokyo 13°C~22°C	Frankfurt 9°C~17°C	Luanda 24°C~27°C
Taipei 19°C~26°C	Singapore 25°C~32°C	Vancouver 6°C~10°C	Maputo 19°C~34°C
Guangzhou 21°C~32°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~31°C	Paris 5°C~18°C	Dili 22°C~32°C
Nanjing 9°C~20°C	Jakarta 24°C~32°C	Moscow 2°C~10°C	São Tomé 24°C~32°C
Guilin 15°C~28°C	Seoul 1°C~16°C	Las Vegas 13°C~26°C	Praia 23°C~31°C
Xi'an 7°C~15°C	Sydney 13°C~23°C	Monte Carlo 15°C~20°C	Bissau 24°C~35°C

Oscar hopeful 'La Bola Negra' offers lessons about communicating, directors say

Paula Ramon

LOS ANGELES – Festival darling "La Bola Negra" ("The Black Ball"), now leading many Oscars predictions lists, retraces the tragic past of Spain, but its subject matter is more relevant than ever, its co-directors say.

Spanish filmmakers Javier Ambrossi and Javier Calvo, collectively known as "Los Javis," have wowed critics and filmgoers with their sweeping queer epic telling the interconnected stories of three gay men over multiple generations.

"It's a film about the danger of lack of communication... which really can lead us into horrible situations," Ambrossi, 42, said in a recent interview with AFP. "We live in an increasingly interconnected world of mobile networks, yet we make less and less effort to understand one another."

The film stars rising talents Guitarricadelafuente, Miguel Bernardeau, Milo Quifes and Carlos González alongside veterans Penélope Cruz and Glenn Close.

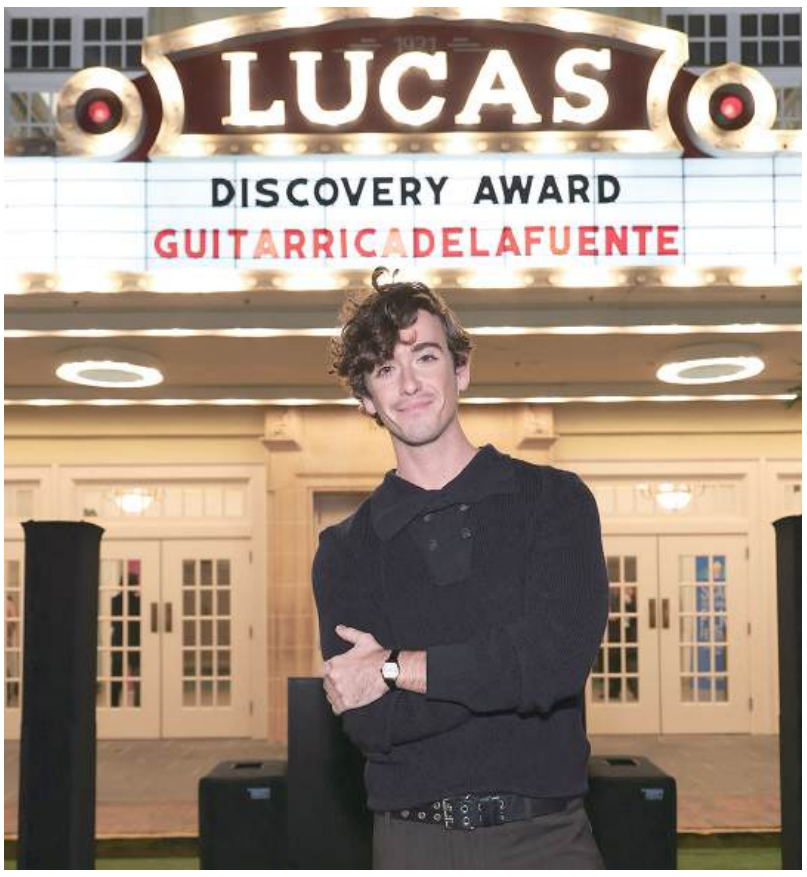
The movie begins in 1932 in Granada, amidst tensions that ultimately led to the Spanish Civil War, before winding through history to wrap up in 2017 in modern-day Madrid.

Early inspiration came from an unpublished play written by poet Federico García Lorca, who was executed by fascist forces in 1936.

"We had to dig deeply into all the material, into Federico's works," the 35-year-old Calvo said, explaining he memorised some of Lorca's poems to better understand the writer and guess how the play might have ended.

Oscars buzz

The film's first thread follows Carlos (Quifes), who has been rejected from a social club for being gay through a voting system using black and white balls.



Discovery Award recipient Guitarricadelafuente poses in front of the marquee ahead of the Gala Screening of "La Bola Negra" and Award Presentation during the 29th SCAD Savannah Film Festival on Saturday in Savannah, Georgia, United States. – AFP

As conflict erupts, young trumpeter Sebastián (Guitarricadelafuente) is co-opted by Francisco Franco's rebels and ordered to watch over prisoner Rafael (Bernardeau), a Republican inspired by Lorca's real-life partner.

Los Javis use the stories to tell the tale of a brutal war that divided Spain, and the hardships of ordinary men turned into soldiers.

"It was a war that ultimately involved everyone," said Guitarricadelafuente, who generated Oscars buzz for his performance and co-wrote "La Nieve" from the soundtrack, a contender for best original song.

For Bernardeau, the film helped him develop a critical perspective on his country's history and "understand the significance of events at that time."

The film wraps up in 2017, when Alberto, a young historian, unearths a family secret.

Los Javis tied for best director in Cannes, and the film won top audience prizes in San Sebastián and Toronto, a reliable bellwether for Academy Awards success.

Calvo said the reaction outside Spain taught him that "if something is important to you, if you have truly felt it, then many other people will feel it, too." *– AFP*

Villain intrigue: 'Clayface', Holmes doc lead N American box office

LOS ANGELES – A buzzy new documentary about jailed tech CEO Elizabeth Holmes gave "Clayface," a gory Batman villain origin story, a run for its money at this past weekend's domestic box office, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

"Clayface," from Warner Bros. and DC Comics, debuted in first place with US$24 million in the US and Canada, but A24's "You Can See Everything" was not far behind at US$20 million, according to Exhibitor Relations.

That represents the second biggest weekend ever for a documentary – after Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004) – and an "extremely rare" 28-percent increase from its debut the prior week, according to analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

The three-hour documentary, co-directed by comedian Nathan Fielder and Lance Oppenheim, follows Holmes and her family at home in 2023 during the month before she began an 11-year prison sentence.

Holmes was convicted of defrauding investors in her medical testing company Theranos after touting lofty promises she couldn't deliver.

The scandal fuelled a media circus and was chronicled in a book, multiple podcasts, and the biographical mini-series "The Dropout," starring Amanda Seyfried – who has sparked some awards chatter with her surprise cameo in "You Can See Everything."

The film has now earned an estimated total of US$45 million at the North American box office, with some analysts predicting it could become the first documentary to be nominated for Best Picture at the Oscars.

Third place last week went to Fathom Events' animated film "Wildwood," which debuted at US$11 million after over a decade in production.

Made by the stop-motion animation studio behind 2009 hit "Coraline," "Wildwood" follows a young girl who must venture into an enchanted forest after her brother is whisked away by crows.

"Audiences love this movie, but it needs a very long run to recoup its costs, or an over-performance overseas, and neither appears likely," said Gross.

In fourth place, falling from first in the previous week, was Paramount's "Street Fighter" at US$8.6 million.

Based on the beloved Capcom video game, "Street Fighter" follows superpowered martial artists competing in a global tournament who uncover and battle a sinister conspiracy.

Fifth place went to Black Bear's "Wicker," which debuted at US$5.8 million.

The film stars Olivia Colman as a lonely fisherwoman and Alexander Skarsgard as her fantastical husband made out of wicker, whose housework – and bedroom skills – quickly become the talk of the town. *– AFP*

Beacon of light

A vendor selling prawns waits for customers at the Galle Face seafront promenade, as it rains in Colombo, Sri Lanka yesterday. – *AFP*

Multi feathered

A person in costume attends Hollywood Forever Cemetery's 27th annual Dia De Los Muertos event in Los Angeles on Saturday. – *AFP*

A cat is a cat is a cat!

Lion cubs play in their enclosure at the zoo of Dortmund, western Germany, yesterday.
Five-year-old lionesses Zuri and Saba gave birth to five and seven cubs on July 28 and 31 at Dortmund Zoo and are raising all twelve youngsters together, the father is six-year-old Boeti. – *AFP*

Up close & personal

A squirrel is pictured in a park of the Branicki Palace in Bialystok, Poland on Friday. – *AFP*

Total catitude

A judge examines a cat as they are judged in competition during the FIFe World Show 2026 at Vijfhuizen on the outskirts of Amsterdam, the Netherlands on Saturday, the world's biggest annual cat event where over two days some 1,500 felines are competing for 34 world titles. – *AFP*

Watch the make-up!

A couple take part in the Catrinas Parade, ahead of the Day of the Dead in Mexico City on Sunday. – *AFP*