THE 澳門郵報 Macau POST DAILY

DIRECTOR: Harald Brüning | YEAR 22 | NO.5419 | THURSDAY October 29, 2026 | https://www.macaupostdaily.com | MOP 6.00

Govt presents final proposal on amending urban master plan

Tony Wong

The local government yesterday presented its final proposal on amending Macau's urban master plan to members of the Urban Planning Council (CPU) – after a 60-day public consultation on the matter held earlier this year. During yesterday's regular meeting of the government-appointed council, Lands and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) Director Lai Weng Leong underlined that after the urban master plan is amended, the government will reveal draft urban development plans for various districts across the city one after another.

The bureau is the public entity tasked with the city's urban planning.

The meeting was open to the media. The council is a consultative body tasked with advising the government on its urban planning policies.

The official urban master plan covers the period between 2020 and 2040.

It will be the first time that the government is amending the urban master plan since it came into force in February 2022.

In alignment with its planning of three future large-scale projects aiming to inject new impetus into Macau's long-term development – the Macao International Integrated Tourism and Cultural Zone, the Macao Science and Technology Research and Development Industrial Park, and the Macao International Aviation Hub for the Pearl River West Bank – the government decided to amend the urban master plan for the first time, proposing to revise the designated land use on the areas earmarked for the three large-scale projects.

Lands and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) Director Lai Weng Leong (centre, right) chairs yesterday's meeting of the Urban Planning Council (CPU). – Photo: CPU

The public consultation was held between June 29 and August 27. After assessing the opinions gathered during the public consultation period, the government published a report earlier this week summarising the public opinion.

Afterwards, during yesterday's regular meeting of the Urban Planning Council, DSSCU officials presented the government's final proposal on amending the urban master plan, drafted in compliance with the public consultation report.

Yesterday's meeting aimed to enable councillors to voice their opinions regarding the final draft. Lai, who chaired the meeting, said that they are required to submit their written opinions on Wednesday next week at the latest. Afterwards, the bureau will prepare and submit a report on the matter to the Chief Executive, who will then decide whether the draft should be amended.

After the Chief Executive approves the final draft on amending the urban master plan, it will be promulgated in the Official Gazette (BO).

The amended urban master plan will take effect on the day after its promulgation in the gazette.

During yesterday's meeting, Lai also underlined that after the urban master plan is amended, the government will – one after another – reveal draft urban development plans for various districts across the city, including the Outer Harbour District 1, Outer Harbour District 2, Northern District 1, and Central Taipa District 2.

Continued on p.6

Sam mourns passing of ex-vice premier Liu Yandong

Tony Wong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, on behalf of the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR), yesterday expressed his profound sorrow over the passing of former vice premier Liu Yandong, according to a statement by the Macao Government Information Bureau (GCS) last night.

Xinhua reported yesterday evening that Liu passed away due to illness at the age of 81 in Beijing at 2:53 p.m. yesterday.

Liu also served as a member of the Political Bureau of the 17th and 18th Central Committees of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and a vice-chairperson of the 10th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

Liu was "an excellent Party member, a time-tested and loyal communist fighter, and an outstanding leader in the CPC's united front work and in the fields of education, science and technology, health, and children and women work in the country", Xinhua said.

According to last night's GCS statement, Sam stated that Liu served in important leadership roles in the Party and the country for a long time and was an outstanding leader in united front work as well as in the fields of education, science and technology, health, and children and women work. During her tenure as deputy leader of the Central Coordination Group for Hong Kong and Macao Affairs, she attached great importance to and supported Macau's prosperity and development. She visited Macau twice, in 2006 and 2009, to inspect the city and provide guidance, gaining firsthand understanding of the MSAR's work on improving residents' daily lives and social development, and always keeping Macau compatriots' well-being close to her heart.

"The vast number of Macau compatriots express their heartfelt gratitude for the invaluable guidance and strong support she rendered to the development of the MSAR. Her remarkable leadership skills and noble character will be remembered forever and serve as an enduring inspiration to us all," the GCS statement quoted Sam as saying. ■

Undated file photo of Liu Yandong who passed away in Beijing yesterday, aged 81. – Xinhua

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Israeli president urges against new vote despite inconclusive result

Israel's president voiced hope yesterday for avoiding a second election after a hard-fought vote produced no clear winner, leaving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the opposition scrambling for options. *– Story on p. 10*

High-speed train crash in Spain kills 68, injures over 100

A high-speed train collision south of Madrid killed 68 people and injured scores more yesterday, with the toll likely to rise, authorities said, in one of Europe's deadliest such disasters this century. *– Story on p. 11*

Portuguese president condemns violence, calls for ending housing crisis

Portuguese President António José Seguro has condemned the clashes and violence at weekend demonstrations, particularly in Lisbon, and called on the government, parliament and political parties to find concrete solutions to the housing crisis. *– Story on p. 12*

Published by Macau Cultural Box Ltd. Printed by Welfare Printing Ltd. Head office: 39 Rua dos Mercadores, Centro Comercial Ou Chong, 5/F, A-B, Macau.
Tel.: 2833 1050 E-mail: macaupost@macau.ctm.net Fax: 2833 1104 GCS Registry Nº. 223 ISSN 1813-2898

Macau hosts Chinese resources conference for first time since 2016

Khalel Vallo

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) has announced in a statement that the one-day 16th Conference on Cooperative Development and Sharing of Chinese Resources opened yesterday, bringing together librarians and scholars from various regions to discuss cross-disciplinary cooperation, technological innovation and the preservation and promotion of Chinese cultural heritage.

Hosted by the Council of the Conference on Cooperative Development and Sharing of Chinese Resources (CCDSCR) and organised by the bureau, the conference was held at the Macao Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape themed "The Future of Chinese Resources Cooperation and Sharing: Interdisciplinary Development and Heritage Revitalisation", the statement said.

The opening ceremony was attended by IC President Deland Leong Wai Man, National Library of China Secretary of its Communist Party of China (CPC) Committee and Deputy Director Chen Ying, and representatives from libraries and academic institutions in Macau, Hong Kong, the Chinese mainland, Singapore, and the United States, among others, the statement added.

This handout photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday shows officials including IC President Deland Leong Wai Man (front fourth from right) posing for a group photo on the sidelines of the 16th Conference on Cooperative Development and Sharing of Chinese Resources at the Macao Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape.

During the ceremony, the bureau's Public Library donated digital resources of 16 ancient books from the Jiaye Book Library Tower* collection to the National Library of China (National Centre for the Preservation and Conservation of Ancient Books), the statement said, adding that a handover ceremony for the authorisation document permitting the use of images of the ancient books was also held.

The digital resources will be incorporated into the Chinese Ancient Books Resource Database and the Intelligent Service Platform for Chinese Ancient Books, supporting the preservation, transmission and sharing of traditional Chinese literature, the statement underlined.

Leong noted that the conference returned to Macau for the first time since 2016, providing a platform for library professionals from different regions to promote the dissemination and application of Chinese resources and strengthen cultural exchanges, the statement said. She added that cooperation and resource sharing were important to cultural transmission and the development of cultural brands, while helping promote traditional Chinese culture and exchanges between Chinese and Western civilisations, the statement noted.

Meanwhile, Chen said that the conference addressed current industry needs through cross-disciplinary cooperation, the revitalisation and application of resources, and technological development, the statement said, noting that she proposed deepening cross-disciplinary collaboration, strengthening the preservation and transmission of Chinese resources, and embracing technological innovation to improve services.

The conference aims to strengthen cooperation among libraries, academic institutions and organisations holding Chinese resources worldwide, while exploring ways to make cultural heritage more accessible and useful through digital technology and interdisciplinary collaboration, the statement said.

Further information is available at www.library.gov.mo/ccdscr2026. Enquiries can be made by calling 2836 6320 during office hours. ■

* *The Jiaye Book Library Tower (嘉业堂藏书楼 / Jiayetang) is a historic private library in Nanxun Ancient Town, Huzhou, Zhejiang Province. Built between 1920 and 1924 by the renowned bibliophile Liu Chenggan, it was the largest and most richly stocked private library in modern China. DeepSeek*

CTT Christmas card to go on sale Nov 3

Sherwin Hng

The Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) will launch a newly designed Christmas card next Tuesday, enabling members of the public to send festive greetings to family and friends overseas, according to a CTT statement.

The card will be available at the General Post Office (GPO) on Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro, all other post offices, the Philatelic Shop at the GPO, and the Communications Museum Shop, the statement noted.

Featuring an elegant and distinctive design, the card offers a personal way to convey festive wishes in an age of rapid technological advancement. Priced at 15 patacas each, it can be sent to destinations worldwide without the need for additional postage, the statement added. ■

This image provided by the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) yesterday shows its newly designed Christmas card, set to go on sale next Tuesday.

Published since Aug 2004

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- Printed by Tipografia Welfare Lda., 82-86 Rua dos Pescadores
- Ai tools: DeepSeek, Gemini
- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua

MacauPOST

Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS.
FORCE 3 TO 4 EASTERLY WINDS, OCCASIONALLY FORCE 5 WITH GUSTS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 55% AND 85%.

24ºC~30ºC

Source: SMG

Macao Union Hospital completes classic vascular surgery

Ida Cheong

The public Macao Union Hospital in Cotai announced in a statement yesterday that Prof. Zheng Yuehong, chief physician of the Vascular Surgery Department at Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH), recently collaborated with its medical team to successfully perform an Endovascular Aneurysm Repair (EVAR) for a classic abdominal aortic aneurysm.*

The large-scale healthcare complex in south Cotai is officially known as Islands Healthcare Complex – Macao Medical Centre of Peking Union Medical College Hospital (CMM-PUMCH). It is jointly operated by the internationally renowned Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH) in Beijing and the Macau government, thanks to the Central People's Government's support.

It is known as "Hip Woh" ("Harmony") in Cantonese.

"Islands" is the official term referring to Taipa, Coloane, and Cotai.

The statement noted that the successful procedure marks a significant milestone in the continuous advancement of Macau's vascular surgery expertise.

The patient, a male in his 70s, was diagnosed with an abdominal aortic aneurysm three years ago.

As the aneurysm continued to enlarge over time, timely surgical intervention became essential, the statement said, pointing out that abdominal aortic aneurysms are often referred to as "silent time bombs" because an untreated rupture carries a mortality rate exceeding 50 percent.

Although this case presented a classic abdominal aortic aneurysm, the minimally invasive procedure faced two major surgical challenges: 1) extremely narrow vascular access routes and 2) a high risk of thrombus [blood clot] detachment, the statement said, adding that the medical team finally overcame the difficulties with professional techniques and a rigorous surgical treatment plan.

Due to the advantages of minimally invasive surgery, the operation left only two small puncture wounds. The patient recovered smoothly after waking from anaesthesia and was able to get out of bed and walk normally on the day following the surgery, according to the statement. ■

This undated handout photo provided by the Macau Union Hospital yesterday shows its medical team cooperating with Prof. Zheng Yuehong (third from left), chief physician of the Vascular Surgery Department at Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH), on an Endovascular Aneurysm Repair (EVAR) surgery.

* *Aortic aneurysm is the bulging or enlargement of the aorta, the large main artery that carries blood from the heart to the rest of the body. - DeepSeek*

Group urges society to pay attention to seniors' physical, mental health

Armindo Neves

The Macau Health Association yesterday called on civil society to pay close attention to the physical and mental health of the elderly.

The group made the appeal during a luncheon at The Plaza in Zape.

According to the statement, the banquet – themed "Community Care System for Dementia" and "Barrier-Free Communication for the Elderly" – called on society to pay close attention to the physical and mental health of senior citizens. It attracted around 400 local seniors and representatives from various sectors.

3-point proposal for dementia support system

In response to Macau's ageing population, Virginia Kong Wei Sam, director-general of the group, proposed three initiatives for a community support system for dementia:

First, establish an early help-seeking and health education mechanism: promote systematic health education information and guide families with suspected or newly diagnosed cases to connect precisely with medical and social welfare resources, reducing confusion and anxiety.

Second, expand local daycare and residential facilities: advocate that care facilities should be "localised" and recommend that the government expand relevant institutions in Macau, making it easier for family members to visit their loved ones and enabling ageing in place*. The government's continued improvement of services – such as home care, day respite care**, and short-term residential respite care – together with the forthcoming completion of the "Elderly Residential Building" in Zone A, has given the public greater confidence in Macau's future comprehensive elderly care system and brings practical support and peace of mind to families affected by dementia.

Third, draw on the mature experience of "respite services" and "integrated community care systems" in other regions, with government-funded provision of short-term respite care, psychological counselling, and professional caregiving skills training. This would comprehensively relieve the physical and mental pressure on caregivers, prevent caregiver burnout, and provide long-term, sustainable support for families affected by dementia.

Meanwhile, the banquet also invited TVB actor Matthew Ho Kwong-pui to share his personal experience of being fitted with an AI-powered smart hearing aid.

He said that performing arts work places extremely high demands on hearing and concentration, and that advanced AI hearing technology can precisely filter out background noise and lock onto human voices, improving his communication efficiency both at work and in everyday social settings.

He also encouraged elderly people to proactively undergo hearing tests, overcome any psychological reservations, maintain family relationships through clear communication, and actively take part in social activities. ■

Macau Health Association Director-General Virginia Kong Wei Sam addresses yesterday's lunch banquet at The Plaza Restaurant in Zape. *– Photo: Armindo Neves*

** Ageing in place refers to the ability of older adults to live in their own homes and communities safely, independently, and comfortably as they grow older, rather than moving to an assisted living facility or nursing home. – Gemini*

*** Day respite care (often referred to as adult day care or daytime respite services) is a structured service that provides short-term relief for primary family caregivers by offering professional care, supervision, and social activities for older adults or individuals with care needs during daytime hours. - Gemini*

Jackie Chan to bring Chinese martial arts to 'Turandot' opera

Khalel Vallo

Giacomo Puccini's (1858-1924) opera "Turandot"* will return to Macau with a new production directed by Hong Kong star Fang Shilong, known professionally as Jackie Chan, combining Italian opera with Chinese martial arts and modern visual effects to mark the centenary of the opera's premiere in 1926.

At a meet-and-greet with the production team at the Macao Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape yesterday, the creators discussed how the centenary production introduces Chinese martial arts into the dramatic language of Puccini's final opera.

According to the CCM website, Jackie Chan makes his operatic directorial debut with the production, which pairs each principal character with a combative alter ego to express unspoken thoughts and emotions through movement. Modern multimedia effects and water-themed visuals further shape the staging.

Producer and Artistic Director Tian Hui said the production sought to connect the classic opera with contemporary audiences while incorporating Chinese cultural elements. She highlighted the use of martial arts not merely as action choreography, but as a means of adding depth to the characters.

Conductor Carlo Montanaro, who has conducted the opera more than 120 times, described the local production as particularly special because of Jackie Chan's involvement and its martial arts choreography. "In my business, we are lucky because we speak an international language, which is music," Montanaro said, adding that each interpretation brought something new to the opera.

The production features soprano Ewa Płonka as Princess Turandot and tenor Marco Berti as Calaf, accompanied by the Nuova Orchestra Scarlatti and Coro dell'Opera di Parma, according to the website.

Organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau as part of the 38th Macao International Music Festival (MIMF), Turandot will be staged at the CCM's Grand Auditorium this coming weekend at 7:30 p.m. on both days. The opera will be performed in Italian with Chinese and English subtitles. ■

Members of the Turandot production team (from left to right) Martial Arts Choreographers Zhao Zan and Zhang Feng, Marco Berti (tenor, in the role of Calaf), Ewa Płonka (soprano, in the role of Turandot), Producer and Artistic Director Tian Hui, Conductor Carlo Montanaro , and Associate Director Luisa Baldinetti – pose for a group photo during yesterday's meet-and-greet session at the CCM in Nape. *– Photo: Khalel Vallo*

This poster downloaded from the Macao Cultural Centre (CCM) website yesterday promotes this weekend's "Turandot" performance.

*** Turandot is Giacomo Puccini's final opera, left unfinished at his death in 1924 and completed by Franco Alfano. Set in a mythical, legendary China, it tells the story of a ruthless, icy princess who challenges her suitors with three riddles - executing any prince who fails to answer them correctly. The name Turandot derives from the Persian name Tūrāndokht, composed of two parts: Tūrān: A historical Persian region encompassing lands north of the Oxus River (modern-day Central Asia/Turkestan). Dokht: A Persian word meaning "daughter" or "girl". Literal Meaning: "Daughter of Turan" or "Turanian Princess." - Gemini*

'thetiredeyes' performance deserves centre stage at Macao Int'l Music Festival

Review by William Chan

Local band thetiredeyes brought Orchestra Reimagined: wHiRlwiND to the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) on October 17. My only complaint about the concert is that there was only a single performance, and it was held in the Small Auditorium. This masterfully crafted, Macau-based production boasts high international quality and deserves a much grander platform.

Versatile in style, thetiredeyes blends jazz, R&B, neo-soul, hip-hop, and pop with classical arranging techniques to create richly layered sonic textures. Built around the concept of "Orchestra Reimagined," the performance brought contrasting musical styles into dialogue and collision, giving rise to fresh, unexpected sounds, according to the band's description.

For this festival showcase, the core lineup of thetiredeyes consisted of five members: Amanda on vocals, Monic on keys, Kabi on bass, Fanfan on drums, and Patrício on clarinet and EWI*. The show also featured New York-based synthesist Kengchakaj and Macau-Hong Kong violinist Nina Wong as guest artists. The majority of songs performed were their own compositions.

The complete set flowed as smoothly as a well-pacing theatrical play. The lighting and stage design were wonderfully executed, integrated so naturally into the performance that they enhanced the atmosphere without ever being distracting. From visual elements to song transitions, each segment was seamlessly woven together to create a continuous, immersive experience.

Amanda's vocal delivery once again raised the bar for what a world-class singer from Macau can achieve. Professional and full of distinct character, her voice captures the core identity of thetiredeyes – effortlessly relaxed when needed, yet remarkably powerful, cutting, and alluring during more passionate passages.

The addition of Kengchakaj injected rich technological colour into the band's classically trained foundation. He provided vital improvisation and futuristic sound effects, reimagining how pop and rock classics can sound to modern audiences. His mastery over synth textures added a sophisticated, cosmic depth that pushed the band beyond traditional fusion boundaries, hinting at an exciting electronic-acoustic direction the group could explore further.

The rhythm section served as a rock-solid backbone throughout the night. While Monic's piano work shone as expressively as ever, the band tackled complex rhythm changes and tight tutti sections with impressive precision, repeatedly delivering those satisfying "click" moments where intricate musical flows fell perfectly into place. Nina's violin solos were equally fiery; her seamless integration and raw versatility almost made a case for modern fusion being the violin's natural home – a rare sight among classically trained string players.

My favourite piece of the concert was their rendition of Radiohead's "Exit Music (For a Film)." Amanda's vocals nailed the tense, ominous, and suffocating mood above challenging, complex chords. Kengchakaj's reimagining of the track – featuring aggressive synth leads, ambient soundscapes, and high-reverb delay effects – evoked a striking post-apocalyptic feel. Backed by the rest of the band, they managed to elevate the iconic composition to new heights while remaining faithful to its core spirit.

With guest artistes like Kengchakaj and Nina bringing such unique flair, this collaboration offers a fantastic opportunity for thetiredeyes to absorb these expansive influences and permanently integrate them into their evolving sound. Audiences won't have to wait long to catch them again, with the group's debut album on the horizon. On the organisational side, however, future events would greatly benefit from resolving a recurring issue: despite tickets selling out within seconds, the auditorium was marred by conspicuously empty seats, leaving genuine fans out in the cold.

**EWI (pronounce ewee) stands for Electronic Wind Instrument. It is a synthesizer-based instrument played using breath and woodwind/brass fingerings (most commonly associated with the saxophone, flute, or oboe). – Gemini*

Amanda Chan sings.

Kengchakaj improvises on stage.

Nina Wong on the violin.

Monic Chen plays piano.

thetiredeyes performs at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) on October 17. – Photos: Bob Wong

10 pct of job seekers aged 65 and older: DSAL

Outstanding senior employees and their employers pose during yesterday's Outstanding Senior Employees and Seniors Employers Recognition Programme award ceremony at Macau Fisherman's Wharf. – Photo: Ida Cheong

Ida Cheong

Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) Employment Department Chief Chan Ka In told reporters on the sidelines of an award ceremony yesterday that as of last month, 10 percent of job seekers were retirees aged 65 or above. Most elderly job seekers lean towards low-skilled roles, particularly in cleaning services.

The award ceremony for the "2026 Outstanding Senior Employees and Senior Employers Recognition Programme" was held at Macau Fisherman's Wharf, aiming to praise elderly employees for their outstanding performance across various roles, acknowledge enterprises and institutions actively hiring seniors, foster public respect for the experience and skills of older workers, and promote diverse employment opportunities and social inclusion.

Addressing compensation and recruitment policies for the elderly, Chan underscored that remuneration is tied to job rank and personal seniority rather than age, adding that cases of hiring elderly individuals in their 70s can be found across enterprises of various sizes and industries, showing no distinct sector or scale polarisation. Furthermore, official government job-matching procedures have no age or gender restrictions, he said.

Chan pointed out that in this year's edition, a total of 65 enterprises and organisations across 13 industries were commended for collectively employing over 3,400 elderly employees. The sectors covered property management, large leisure enterprises, food and beverage, and the social services industry. He added that a total of 20 outstanding elderly employees and 65 businesses and organisations employing "senior talents" were recognised during the ceremony.

Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) Deputy Director Teng Sio Hong noted in a speech that since the recognition scheme was introduced in 2017, about 850 senior employees have been nominated, and more than 140 enterprises and institutions have been awarded.

IAS Social Solidarity Department Chief U Ka Wai told reporters yesterday that data from this year's awardees reveals that nearly 40 percent of the recognised elderly employees are aged 70 or older, proving that advanced-age seniors retain reliable working capabilities. In addition, around 30 percent of the recognised workers have remained in their current positions for over 10 years, with the longest tenure reaching 45 years, underscoring exceptional job stability among senior workers. ■

MGM kicks off 12-day Oktoberfest celebration

Rui Pastorin

MGM COTAI saw an afternoon of performances, Bavarian delicacies, and German beer – Paulaner, along with non-alcoholic options, as it held the opening ceremony of the 16th edition of the Oktoberfest at MGM Macau, with the event running until November 8.

Held on the integrated resort's Roof Terrace, which is decorated with the Bavarian themes associated with the festival, yesterday's opening event also saw performances by this year's invited band SAKRISCH GUAT ("Darned Good" in Bavarian), marking the group's debut in Macau. They performed popular Western hits, traditional Bavarian songs, along with both Chinese and Cantonese hits. Not missing was the festival's theme song "Nei Hou, Macau!".

The performances were also accompanied by performers clad in dirndls, a traditional German and Alpine dress featuring a fitted bodice, a low-cut white blouse, a full skirt, and a front apron. They are, according to Gemini, a quintessential outfit worn during the Oktoberfest.

Among yesterday's attending guests were Oliver Bräuner, Deputy Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany in Hong Kong, and Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes.

Addressing yesterday's ceremony, MGM China Holdings Limited Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director Kenneth Feng Xiaofeng pointed out that the event has become a signature annual celebration, bringing people together through food, music and shared experiences.

He added that by combining Bavarian traditions with new elements, this year's festival continues to showcase Macau's vibrant and multicultural spirit

Guests and representatives pose for a group photo after officiating yesterday's Oktoberfest Macau at MGM 2026 opening held at the Roof Terrace of MGM COTAI. – Photos: Rui Pastorin

Bavarian band SAKRISCH GUAT perform during the opening of the Oktoberfest Macau at MGM 2026 yesterday.

This year's Oktoberfest features several new highlights. Besides the new band, it also features the "Cantopop DJ Nights", featuring two performances by popular Cantopop DJ collective Cantomania this Friday and Saturday.

To date, the integrated resort operator said in a statement yesterday that the festival has drawn over 200,000 attendees over the years. ■

Local cyclist dies after collision with motorcyclist: police

Armindo Neves

Confirmed to the *Post* by phone last night, a Public Security Police Force (PSP) spokesman said that a cyclist died on Tuesday after a collision with a motorcyclist in Ilha Verde district on Monday.

According to the spokesman, at 6:43 a.m. on Monday, the Public Security Police Force received a report of a traffic accident on Estrada Marginal da Ilha Verde (青洲河邊馬路), heading towards Rua da Ilha Verde (青洲上街), with the caller reporting that two people were injured.

Upon arriving at the scene, the spokesman said, officers found that the incident involved a collision between a scooter and a bicycle, adding that both drivers are male Macau residents.

The motorcyclist, according to the spokesman, is a 39-year-old male who suffered multiple abrasions. He was conscious, in stable condition, and was rushed to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre (CHCSJ). The cyclist, a 69-year-old local male, was suspected of having a fractured right ankle and experienced deteriorating consciousness. He was rushed to CHCSJ for emergency treatment; however, he was pronounced dead at 7:16 p.m. on Tuesday.

Although initial findings revealed that the scooter collided with the bicycle from behind, the spokesman noted that further investigation was still required to determine the exact circumstances of the traffic accident. ■

Young man loses 30,300 patacas in online sex service scam: police

Sherwin Hng

A young non-local man has lost around 30,300 patacas in an online scam involving a purported sex service after being repeatedly tricked into making payments, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Un Hong said.

According to Cheong, the victim reported the case to the Judiciary Police last Friday.

Cheong did not disclose the victim's age or any further personal details, merely saying that he is of young age.

Cheong said the victim met a person, unknown to him, online at around 8:00 p.m. on October 20, who claimed to offer sexual services. Before arranging a meeting, the person instructed the victim to download a designated mobile app, register as a member, and complete several verification procedures.

At around 11:00 p.m. that day, the victim transferred more than 1,000 yuan (1,210 patacas) as a "verification fee" as per the scammer's request. However, after receiving the money, the scammer claimed that the victim had completed the steps incorrectly and that the fee was non-refundable, Cheong added.

The scammer then repeatedly demanded further payments, claiming that the victim had to complete certain tasks, follow additional procedures, and correct errors in the system. The victim was threatened that the earlier payments could not be recovered unless he complied.

Cheong noted that, following the instructions, the victim made payments through WeChat, Alipay, and purchases of game credits, transferring a total of 25,000 yuan. The scammer continued demanding increasingly large sums but did not refund any money.

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

Suspecting that he had been defrauded, the victim finally reported the case to the police.

The case remains under investigation, Cheong said. ■

IIM inaugurates newly-renovated library

Officiating guests and representatives including the International Institute of Macau's (IIM) President of the Board of Directors Jorge Rangel (third from right), President of IIM's General Meeting Edith Silva (fourth from left), and Portuguese Consul-General in Macau and Hong Kong Alexandre Leitão (third from left) prepare to cut the ribbon at yesterday's inauguration of the IIM library. – Photos: Rui Pastorin

International Institute of Macau's (IIM) President of the Board of Directors Jorge Rangel (standing, second from right) addresses yesterday's attendees of the prize presentation ceremony as O Clarim *Director Eduardo Emilio Aguero, SCJ (standing, second from left), along with other guests and representatives, look on.*

Rui Pastorin

The International Institute of Macau (IIM) last night inaugurated its newly renovated library Biblioteca Comendador Joaquim Morais Alves at its headquarters on Rua de Berlim (栢林街).

The renovated library will officially open on November 10, after which its visitors can browse a vast collection of books in three languages (Chinese, Portuguese, and English) from Tuesday to Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Its collection of books cover works on Macau, the Chinese mainland, Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs), and Southeast Asia.

Among the highlights of the newly upgraded library are a public service counter, a spacious reading and research area, a "Little Reader Corner" that features a variety of children's books that were joint projects between the institute and organisations such as the Macau-based trilingual publishing house Mandarina Books.

Moreover, the institute's gallery corridor has also been renovated, now being an exhibition space that is currently hosting an exhibition dedicated to the history and development of Macau's oldest existing Portuguese-language newspaper that is still published regularly: *O Clarim*.

The weekly trilingual newspaper of the Catholic Diocese of Macau is the recipient of IIM's Prémio Identidade (Identity Award), which was announced in June.

The award presentation event was held prior to the library's inauguration. According to an IIM statement in 2024, the prize was established to honour entities that, through their actions, work, and exemplary efforts, have actively and meaningfully contributed to the strengthening, preservation, and promotion of Macau's identity.

Among the guests and representatives attending both the prize presentation and the library's inauguration last night were IIM President of the Board of Directors Jorge Rangel, President of IIM's General Meeting Edith Silva, Consul General of Portugal in Macau and Hong Kong Alexandre Leitão, Instituto Português do Oriente's (IPOR) Director Patrícia Quaresma, and *O Clarim* Director Eduardo Emilio Aguero, SCJ. ■

Stay tuned for more photos of the newly renovated IIM Library in an upcoming Page 4.

Love born of language exchange blossoms into children's reading room in Xinjiang

URUMQI – In a downtown reading room in Urumqi, capital city of northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, children sit in a circle around Steven Dahlke, a 45-year-old German teacher.

He holds up a picture book and imitates the sounds of its animal characters. Beside him, his wife Gulayim Akim offers gentle prompts. The room is filled with laughter, amid the rustle of pages and children's eager voices.

This is no ordinary reading room. Opened in 2024 by Dahlke and Akim, it is a bilingual picture-book space where local children are introduced to languages through stories, games and patient encouragement. It is the latest chapter in a cross-border love story that has begun with language itself.

Dahlke comes from Rostock, eastern Germany, and has lived and worked in China for many years. Fifteen years ago, an international language exchange program connected him with Akim, a young woman from Xinjiang. Language built a bridge between them and affection later followed. The couple married in 2015 and have since formed a warm cross-cultural family.

Four years ago, the family settled in Urumqi. While raising their son Jacob, the couple noticed his remarkable ability to absorb languages. Using picture books, stories and everyday conversation, they taught him Chinese, English and German. The boy's language skills improved rapidly.

"I wanted to share this experience with other parents and children," Akim said.

That desire led to the opening of the reading room in 2024. Drawing on years of university teaching experience, the couple carefully selected picture books and designed interactive games to make language learning enjoyable. They emphasize encouragement and patient companionship, aiming to spark children's initiative rather than pressure them.

"We found that when children are having fun, they easily take the initiative to learn," Dahlke said. "In the reading room, children learn together, and that makes it more enjoyable."

Their approach has gradually won recognition among local families. Outside the reading room, the couple also volunteer in the community and organize public reading activities during holidays, encouraging young people to fall in love with reading and language learning.

Dahlke said the community has been kind to them, and they hope to give back in whatever way they can.

For Dahlke, Urumqi's growth is visible almost every year. "In the past, the airport was very small. Now there is a modern international airport with routes to many countries," he noted.

The neighborhood where the family lives was under construction a decade ago. Today, it is surrounded by large parks and a cultural center.

"You can truly feel how this city has grown from a small western city into a big one," Dahlke said. He especially likes the nearby parks and often takes his son to the newly opened cultural venues.

Dahlke has traveled to other Chinese cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, Xi'an and Chongqing, and likes both the modern energy of metropolises and the deep cultural roots of historic cities. But what makes him feel most at ease is the life his family has built here.

Looking ahead, they are full of hope. "Language is an important bond that connects the world, links people and builds friendship. We met, got to know each other, and committed to each other through cross-border language exchange, and we hope to pass on the beauty and warmth that transcends borders," they said. *– Xinhua*

Govt presents final proposal on amending urban master plan

Continued from p.1

18 'subareas for planning'

The Macao Special Administrative Region's (MSAR) urban master plan for 2020 to 2040 divides the city into 18 "subareas for planning".

After the urban master plan took effect in February 2022, the government drew up its first urban development plan for a subarea for planning, i.e., Eastern District 2, which covers the Zone A land reclamation area. The government's Eastern District 2 urban development plan took effect in March 2024.

The Eastern District 2 urban development plan is the first and so-far the only one currently in force for a subarea for planning listed by the urban master plan.

According to the urban master plan, Outer Harbour District 1 covers Zape, while Outer Harbour District 2 covers Nape as well as the Nam Van Lake and Sai Van Lake areas.

The Nam Van Lake and Sai Van Lake areas are where the Macau Tower and the Legislative Assembly (AL) building are located.

Northern District 1 covers Ilha Verde, Fai Chi Kei, and Lam Mau Tong in the north-west peninsula, while Central Taipa District 2 covers central Taipa, the island's "city centre" where numerous high-rise residential buildings are concentrated. ■

This photo provided by Ox Warehouse shows Dutch artist Berend Strik posing in front of his artwork Stolen Light on Monday at the Ox Warehouse.

China becoming engine of global innovation: Merck China president

Interview by Xinhua writer Liu Yinglun

HONG KONG – China is becoming a foundational engine for global innovation, Rogier Janssens, president of Merck China and managing director of Life Science China, told Xinhua in a recent interview.

China is one of the world's most important end markets for life sciences, healthcare and electronics, which are Merck's core domains, Janssens added. This, coupled with China's growing weight in oncology, antibody-drug conjugates and other areas of global drug development, is why the company stays committed to expanding its footprint in the country.

In the latest such effort, the company announced earlier this week that it has signed an agreement with Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation (HKSTP) to establish Merck Hong Kong Center, a dedicated physical facility for scientific product supply, technological demonstrations, and expert consultation.

The move came after the launch of the Merck Greater Bay Area (GBA) Innovation and Collaboration Center in Shenzhen in June. Janssens called having two establishments in the GBA a token of Merck's deep commitment to the region, which is spearheading growth across life sciences, healthcare, and electronics.

The centers are assigned different focuses in line with the respective strengths of the two cities, according to Janssens. The one in Hong Kong is primarily focused on early-stage development and early clinical research. Its counterpart in Shenzhen focuses more on manufacturing scale-up for biotechnology and small molecules.

Elaborating on the arrangement, Janssens said that Hong Kong is exceptionally well positioned for clinical research. Its network of hospitals holds rigorous international accreditation, and clinical data generated here is widely recognized by major international regulatory bodies, he said.

On top of mature infrastructure for clinical trials, Hong Kong's established financial markets, vibrant innovation ecosystem and deep talent pool can help Chinese technologies enter global markets, said Janssens.

Multinational firms like Merck can participate in the process by fostering collaborative exchanges and mutual learning between their technical experts and local scientists and startups, as will be the case with the Hong Kong center, according to Janssens.

"The collaboration is about serving science and innovation," said Janssens.

– Xinhua

China's farm machinery industry moves upmarket, reaches abroad

Analysis

TIANJIN – Some of the farm machinery produced at German manufacturer CLAAS's factory in east China's Shandong Province is shipped to Europe, making the plant part of the company's global manufacturing network.

The factory in Gaomi City has been operating for more than a decade, combining production with research and development and technical training. It manufactures machinery for both Chinese and overseas markets and provides manufacturing services to other CLAAS plants.

"Exporting helps us improve the products we manufacture for Chinese customers," said Thomas Spiering, executive vice president of CLAAS, adding that meeting international quality standards also helps the company refine its manufacturing processes.

Spiering was among the international executives attending the China International Agricultural Machinery Exhibition (CIAME) 2026, held in north China's Tianjin Municipality from Monday to yesterday. The event brought together more than 3,000 exhibitors from China and abroad.

China is a major market for farm machinery. In 2025, the country's comprehensive mechanization rate for crop plowing, sowing and harvesting reached 76.82 percent, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

US manufacturer John Deere, which has operated in China for 50 years, plans to introduce new models which are designed specifically for Chinese farms and manufactured locally, targeting precision farming, autonomous operations and greener agricultural production.

Tianjin has long been an important manufacturing and operational base for the company, said Sun Baolin, president of John Deere China. "We have built our presence here over the years and have grown together with many of our customers and partners," Sun added.

Changes in China's manufacturing capabilities are apparent to longtime overseas buyers, and Chinese-made farm machinery and components are also reaching more overseas customers.

In the first eight months of 2026, China's exports of agricultural machinery, equipment and parts rose 21.95 percent year on year to US$15.11 billion, the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products revealed.

Among the Chinese manufacturers moving into more powerful agricultural equipment is Zoomlion Agriculture Machinery Co., Ltd., a subsidiary of Zoomlion Heavy Industry Science & Technology Co., Ltd., one of China's leading high-tech equipment manufacturers. At CIAME 2026, the company unveiled its 9DX hybrid tractor, designed for large-scale farming and with a peak output of 1,600 horsepower.

Zoomlion said it independently developed the tractor's digital chassis, core components and control systems. The company noted that the machine was designed to improve field efficiency and reduce fuel consumption.

Huo Xiaofeng, deputy general manager of Zoomlion Agriculture Machinery, said the company has also made advances in autonomous driving, adaptive tillage-depth control and other technologies, with some intelligent components already in mass production. Some of its products have reached markets including Russia, Australia and Kazakhstan.

Nicolas Meunier, director of global electronic and electrical engineering at US agricultural machinery manufacturer AGCO Corporation, said he was struck by the technology on display in Tianjin and the speed at which new Chinese competitors were emerging.

"A few years ago, we mainly saw low-horsepower tractors from Chinese manufacturers. Today, we are seeing high-horsepower tractors, including some very large models," he said.

Meunier added that the pace of development had been impressive, and that advances in technology and closer market ties could create further opportunities for cooperation between Chinese and international manufacturers. *– Xinhua*

Volunteers of the upcoming 9th China International Import Expo (CIIE) attend a swearing-in ceremony at the Shanghai Exhibition Center yesterday. A total of 4,561 CIIE volunteers took the oath online or offline yesterday, officially committing to serve at the event.Volunteers will provide services including guidance and consultation, registration management, guests liaison and reception, transaction data analysis, and medical assistance during the CIIE. The expo will be held in Shanghai from November 5 to November10. – Xinhua

China issues 800 billion yuan via financial instruments to expand investment

BEIJING – China has completed the issuance of 800 billion yuan under its 2026 new policy-based financial instruments as of yesterday, channeling funds to key projects to expand effective investment, according to three policy banks.

The China Development Bank allocated 365 billion yuan, involving projects with a total investment of 5.5 trillion yuan, and the Export-Import Bank of China allocated 120 billion yuan, helping leverage over 1.7 trillion yuan in investment, while the Agricultural Development Bank of China allocated 315 billion yuan, featuring projects with a total investment of around 4.39 trillion yuan.

First launched in 2025 with an allocation of 500 billion yuan, these instruments prioritize the digital economy, artificial intelligence (AI), consumer infrastructure, and urban renewal endeavors such as transport, energy and underground pipe network upgrades. This year's government work report set the 2026 allocation at 800 billion yuan to attract more private capital.

A large share of the funds went to AI and the digital economy. The China Development Bank allocated 179.01 billion yuan to projects in AI, the digital economy, green and low-carbon development, biomedicine and consumption.

The Export-Import Bank of China supported more than 220 projects in emerging sectors like the digital economy and AI, with loans to these fields accounting for nearly half of its total allocation.

The Agricultural Development Bank of China, meanwhile, supported almost 2,000 projects in areas including AI, the digital economy, the low-altitude economy, consumption and green and low-carbon development, with financing of nearly 200 billion yuan.

Support for private investment was also strengthened. The China Development Bank allocated 127.99 billion yuan to projects involving private investment or private capital. The Export-Import Bank of China supported more than 210 such projects, accounting for almost 40 percent of its total allocation, while the Agricultural Development Bank of China supported nearly 400 projects with over 65 billion yuan.

All of the 800 billion yuan was used to supplement project capital, helping ease capital shortages for major projects, improve their financing capacity, and leverage bank lending and private capital.

Going forward, the three policy banks will strengthen post-investment management, provide supportive loans, and accelerate the conversion of funds into physical work to maximize the instruments' effectiveness.

Wen Bin, chief economist at China Minsheng Bank, said the rollout of 800 billion yuan via new policy-based financial instruments, together with major infrastructure projects and urban renewal initiatives, could stimulate demand for electronic information products, electrical machinery, high-end equipment and certain raw materials. *– Xinhua*

‘Eat the rich’: Indonesians protest against graft, wildfires

Dessy Sagita

JAKARTA – Thousands of Indonesians protested in Jakarta and other cities yesterday against economic hardship, graft and the government’s handling of devastating wildfires emitting a toxic haze that has made thousands ill.

Many demonstrators held up the three-finger salute of rebellion from dystopian franchise “The Hunger Games” and waved posters with angry messages such as: “Hungry? Eat the Rich!” and “If we burn, you burn with us.”

Many placards expressed anger towards President Prabowo Subianto, whose popularity two years into his term has reached record lows amid claims of widespread government corruption and growing authoritarianism.

“Hey Wok! Nobody paid us. We all hate you for free,” stated one sign, using a pejorative for the president. Another said: “No Clean Air Under Dirty Government.”

Protester Sekar, 37, said her “heart is shattered” by the plight of compatriots battling months of wildfires and haze while also contending with the effects of a weakening currency and higher prices.

“I came here from home with the intention of protecting the students” who called the demonstration, Sekar told AFP.

“I will be looking for any police officers who lay hands on them and take them away, and I will be the first to step forward to defend them.”

Police said about 14,000 officers, as well as soldiers, had been deployed to keep a lid on the demonstrations in Jakarta.

AFP saw pushing and shoving between front-row protesters and officers trying to keep the surging crowd away from Jakarta’s central Bundaran HI public square, which is surrounded by businesses and embassies.

Police fired several canisters of tear gas, while some in the crowd hurled half-empty plastic water bottles at law enforcers and burnt rubbish on the street.

Many dispersed as rain fell about six hours after the protest started.

‘They cannot breathe’

The protest organising committee, which calls itself SADAR, meaning “aware” in Bahasa Indonesia, said the action was meant to mark a “revolution that is being proclaimed”.

The group is demanding that the government declare a national emergency to unlock more resources to fight wildfires across the vast archipelago.

Protesters display signs critical of the administration’s environmental and economic policies during a protest against economic hardship, graft and the government’s handling of devastating wildfires causing toxic haze that has sickened thousands in Jakarta yesterday. *– AFP*

Deforestation monitor Nusantara Atlas says the blazes have destroyed more than 1.9 million hectares in the nine months to September.

“Hundreds and thousands of people are suffering” from the fires, said protester Annette Mau, 47, of the Indonesian Mothers’ Alliance, an NGO.

“Tens of thousands of babies are suffering from health problems. They cannot breathe” because of the toxic haze from the fires that has spread far across the region.

The government said in a statement yesterday it “understands the concerns raised by students regarding environmental issues, the economy, education, legal reform and governance, as well as the protection of human rights and democracy”.

It said the government was pursuing those five areas as “priorities”.

Spokesman Kurnia Ramadhana said more than 72,000 people had been deployed in firefighting operations, as well as over 2,100 doctors and health workers, and 5.3 million masks had been distributed.

The haze from the fires has also complicated Indonesia’s relations with its neighbours.

Singapore’s Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan met Prabowo in Jakarta yesterday, a day after saying the haze was “not a natural phenomenon” and the fires “were caused by human action”.

Protester Annette accused the government of “trying to cover” up the problem.

“They’re trying to make excuses,” she said.

“We are being oppressed by the tyrannical regime.”

A statement sent to AFP by protest organisers said that, under Prabowo, “the sovereignty of the ruling class takes precedence over the sovereignty of the people”.

They pointed to “mismanagement of the debt-burdened economy; environmental and energy exploitation that has triggered an ecological crisis; and the erosion of the rule of law and democracy”.

There were also protests in the cities of Bandung outside Jakarta, Malang and Yogyakarta elsewhere on Java island, and Makassar in the south of Sulawesi island. *– AFP*

Brunei’s Defence Minister Halbi Mohammad Yussof, (from left to right) Cambodia’s Defence State Secretary Rath Dararoth, Indonesia’s Defence Vice Minister Richard Tampubolon, Laos’ Defence Minister Khamlieng Outhakaisone, Malaysia’s Defence Minister Mohamed Khaled Nordin, Myanmar’s Defence Attache to the Philippine Tun Tun San, Philippines’ Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro, Singapore’s Defence Minister Chan Chun Sing, Thailand’s Deputy Permanent Secretary for Defence Amarit Boonsuya, East Timor’s Chief of Defence Force Falur Rate Laek, Vietnam’s Defence Minister Phan Van Giang and ASEAN Secretary-General Dr Kao Kim Hourn link arms as they pose for a family photo at the opening ceremony of the 20th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Defence Ministers’ Meeting in Cebu, central Philippines yesterday. *– AFP*

Indonesian court jails 11 for abusing toddlers at daycare centre

YOGYAKARTA, Indonesia – An Indonesian court sentenced 11 childcare workers yesterday to up to three years in prison for abusing toddlers at a daycare centre in a case that sparked nationwide outrage.

Police had arrested the workers, all women, in April along with the principal of the facility and the head of the foundation that ran it.

The arrests came after CCTV footage circulating on social media showed children, most under the age of two, lying on the floor wearing only nappies, their hands and feet bound with rags.

Some of the children’s mothers wiped away tears as Judge Sunaryanto handed down each sentence, ranging from two to three years, at a court in Yogyakarta on Java island.

The workers were “lawfully and convincingly proven to have committed the criminal offence of participating in placing a child in a situation of abuse and neglect, as well as participating in acts of violence against a child, carried out on an ongoing basis,” said the judge who, like many Indonesians, has one name.

Imedia Dwi Anjani, whose four-year-old son was a pupil at the daycare, wept as she told AFP afterwards: “These children need a lot of therapy, so if the perpetrators are only sentenced to 2 years or 2.6 years, in our view as parents, that’s not fair.”

The footage of conditions at the facility triggered a public scandal, and the centre was closed soon afterwards.

Police later said they had found 20 children crammed into a room just three metres long by three metres wide.

They estimated that more than half of the about 100 children at the daycare were maltreated.

City police chief Eva Guna Pandia said at the time that the women had told police they tied up some of the children to prevent them from disturbing others.

They also said the centre was understaffed, with not enough personnel to bathe and dress the children.

Parent Noorman Windarto told AFP in April his son was tied up and repeatedly hospitalised with pneumonia during his time at the centre, while his daughter sometimes came home with bruises her handlers said she must have sustained elsewhere.

The principal and foundation head will be judged at a later date.

– AFP

Philippine drug war enforcer says bounty puts life in danger

MANILA – Ex-Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte’s top drug war enforcer said yesterday that a government bounty placed on his head put his life in “serious danger”, and asked the Supreme Court to stop his arrest.

International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutors have named sitting Senator Ronald “Bato” Dela Rosa as one of eight “co-perpetrators” in the drug crackdown that killed thousands of drug suspects and drug users during the Duterte presidency.

The former national police chief has been in hiding since May, when officers attempted to serve an ICC warrant charging him with the crime against humanity of murder.

The Philippines designated him last week as an “armed and dangerous” fugitive, offered a 50 million-peso (US$786,000) reward for his capture, and formed a police task force to find and detain him.

“In law enforcement practice, the designation signals to operating units that armed resistance should be anticipated, which is precisely the setting in which lethal force is most likely to be used,” Dela Rosa said in a Supreme Court filing that he posted on his Facebook page yesterday.

“Coupled with a bounty and a declaration abandoning restraint, the designation places Petitioner Dela Rosa’s right to life.... in present and serious danger,” the 64-year-old said.

He asked the court to prevent law enforcement officers from arresting him and to block his surrender to the ICC.

Interior Secretary Jonvic Remulla welcomed the court filing, calling it “his right as a Filipino citizen”, before accusing the former top policeman of employing a double standard.

“Sadly, he did not afford the same rights to the thousands killed in the drug war. They never had their day to prove their innocence nor be proven guilty. He was judge, jury and executioner,” Remulla said.

Dela Rosa had ceased attending Senate sessions months before the ICC unsealed a November 2025 arrest warrant against him in May.

He emerged from months of hiding on May 11 to take refuge inside the Senate building, but slipped out days later following a standoff between security guards and investigators attempting to arrest him during which shots were fired.

That same month, the Philippine Supreme Court rejected Dela Rosa’s bid for a temporary restraining order to prevent his arrest.

It still has to rule on his petition to have the ICC arrest warrant against him declared illegal.

Duterte was arrested in Manila on March 11 last year and handed over to the ICC the following day.

The 81-year-old will stand trial on November 30 on charges of committing crimes against humanity during a crackdown on the drug trade.

Philippine police have said they killed more than 6,000 drug suspects in self-defence during Duterte’s presidency from 2016 to 2022. *– AFP*

India vows action after first cheetah shot dead

NEW DELHI – India has vowed "swift action" after a cheetah was shot dead, the first such killing since the country began reintroducing the animals in 2022, the government said yesterday.

The environment ministry said it had ordered a "high-level team for an on-ground investigation" into the shooting of the 19-month-old male, treating the incident with "utmost gravity".

The India-born cheetah – whose mother was among those introduced to India from Botswana, Namibia and South Africa as part of efforts to restore the planet's fastest land animal – was shot as it prowled in forests outside a protected national park.

Asiatic cheetahs were declared extinct in India in 1952. The critically endangered subspecies, once found across the Middle East, Central Asia and India, now survives in very small numbers in Iran.

Their African cousins were first reintroduced in September 2022 to India, to the Kuno National Park, 300 kilometres south of New Delhi.

The wounded cheetah was picked up on Sunday in forests in Madhya Pradesh state, outside Kuno's boundaries, and taken for veterinary care.

"During the surgery, five firearm pellets were recovered from its body," the environment ministry said.

Despite efforts, the cheetah died on Tuesday.

"Medical examinations corroborated multiple internal injuries associated with the recovered firearm pellets," it added.

The high-profile project, championed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has been dogged by criticism over the deaths of several of the cats.

But experts in animal reintroductions say they often result in more than 50 percent mortality, especially in the initial phases.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority, which oversees the cheetah project, said that survival rates and hunting successes are "comparable to other international cheetah reintroduction efforts, with recorded wild prey kills confirming successful adaptation to the Indian landscape".

The total cheetah population in the wild in India is around 60, including some 40 Indian-born cheetahs. *– AFP*

Thailand targets over US$1 billion from accused scam money launderers

BANGKOK – Thai authorities have vowed to seize more than US$1 billion in assets from a group accused of laundering proceeds from Southeast Asia-based scam syndicates.

A criminal court issued arrest warrants Tuesday for the alleged ring leader, South African Ben Smith, his Thai wife Cattaliya Beevor, Cambodian businessman Yim Leak and four others, police said.

Senior police investigator Ratthachin Jermsap told AFP that Smith and Yim Leak were believed to have left Thailand.

Media reports have previously linked Smith, also known as Benjamin Mauerberger, to transnational scam operations in Cambodia, part of a multibillion-dollar illicit industry that has ballooned in the region.

Yim Leak belongs to an elite political family and is the brother of a senior Cambodian police official.

Thai anti-money laundering officials and securities regulators told reporters Tuesday that illicit proceeds from criminal enterprises were moved by the group through overseas financial firms before being traded for stocks on the Thai stock exchange.

The Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO) will seize assets, including shares worth more than 14 billion baht, and real estate, cash and vehicles valued at 21 billion baht, totalling more than US$1 billion, police said in a statement.

The seizures included shares in major Thai firms, including Bangchak, one of the country's biggest oil refiners, according to AMLO deputy head Kamonsit Wongbutnoi.

Bangchak said in a statement that the asset seizures concerned individual investors and business operations were unaffected.

Confiscated assets would go towards compensating victims of online scams, Kamonsit told reporters.

The group of seven were charged with conspiracy to launder money and acting as a criminal organisation, police said.

A representative for Yim Leak did not respond to questions about the charges yesterday but referred AFP to an October 8 statement issued by his lawyers.

It accused Thai officials of conducting a trial by media against Yim Leak before he was charged. It said Thailand froze more than US$600 million in assets, including his family's, without a hearing.

A lawyer for Smith, Witoon Kengngan, declined to comment.

In February, Thai authorities ordered the seizure of assets worth more than US$410 million from Smith and other individuals accused of fraud.

Thai opposition lawmaker Rangsiman Rome, who is being sued by Smith for defamation over comments he made about scams, told AFP yesterday the fresh seizures and arrest warrants were "a positive development... even if it's taken a while". *– AFP*

'Cruise for life' operator strands passengers in Cambodia

Passengers walk down from Villa Vie Residences' cruise ship Odyssey, as it is docked at Sihanoukville port in Preah Sihanouk province, Cambodia yesterday. – AFP

Suy Se with Alice Ritchie in Bangkok

SIHANOUKVILLE, Cambodia – Around 200 passengers who paid to live on a cruise ship while travelling the world were abruptly left in Cambodia after the company ran out of money – but one passenger told AFP yesterday he would do it again.

US-based operator Villa Vie Residences announced on Tuesday it was suspending operations of the Odyssey, two years after the ship set off, citing "extraordinary increases" in fuel costs following the Iran war.

It had been billed as an affordable, continuous voyage around the world, in which residents could buy or rent rooms for a holiday or for life, some passengers selling everything they had to pay for it.

However, residents were given just seven hours to pack their bags and leave during a scheduled stop in the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville on Tuesday, according to local authorities.

American Randy Cassingham and his wife Kit had been on the ship since it left Belfast in October 2024, spending around US$1 million on the all-inclusive trip they hoped would last at least 15 years.

"It was great, for a while," he told AFP by phone from his Sihanoukville hotel.

"My wife and I really enjoy travelling. But we really hate airports and airlines. This was a way that you could unpack once, you can sleep in your own bed every night and wake up in a new place every few days.

"Cambodia is our 65th country in two years. It was brilliant."

Operator Villa Vie said in a statement the per-cabin monthly fuel expenses had gone from an average of US$1,800 to an estimated US$6,000 to US$8,000 in parts of Asia.

"The company cannot simply pass increases of that scale on to residents, and the resulting shortfall has placed its current operating model under unsustainable financial pressure," it said.

'Thousands of miles from home'

The 200-metre ship arrived from Thailand on Friday carrying 203 guests and 156 crew, according to Long Dimanche, deputy governor of Preah Sihanouk province.

He said in a statement some passengers took flights out while others remained in Sihanoukville, adding that the ship was due to refuel and leave on Saturday.

"The sudden order to disembark has left many retirees and remote workers homeless thousands of miles from their home countries," he said.

Cassingham said they had planned to stay in Thailand, where he was treated recently for cancer, until the issue was resolved but the ship sailed on to Sihanoukville.

They hoped to return to Thailand, but he said he had no regrets.

"But money aside, it was a fantastic adventure," Cassingham said.

"If they can restart we will consider going back."

He accused the company of doing "absolutely nothing" to help stranded passengers, saying they were driven into the centre of town and left without even a list of hotels.

Villa Vie did not respond to an AFP request for comment, but said in its statement it was "working with residents to coordinate disembarkation and identify temporary living arrangements".

"Villa Vie Residences recognises that this is a difficult and disruptive period for residents, crew members, and employees, and is working to support those affected as plans develop," it said. *– AFP*

Afghan-Pakistan border clash kills 1, injures 5

PESHAWAR, Pakistan – A clash on the restive border between Afghanistan and Pakistan killed one person and injured five, Pakistan officials said yesterday.

The countries went to war earlier this year and, with no permanent resolution reached on security issues, there have been sporadic attacks since a March truce.

Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of harbouring militants responsible for deadly attacks on its territory, an allegation the Taliban government in Afghanistan denies.

Homes and shops were targeted in the market town of Angoor Adda during the cross-border fire from Afghanistan, according to the office of the deputy commissioner in Pakistan's South Waziristan district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

It blamed the "unprovoked" attack on Afghanistan's Taliban authorities.

A senior administrative official in South Waziristan, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP the casualties were caused by mortar fire from Afghanistan.

Pakistani forces responded with a "brief operation targeting the Afghan side with artillery fire", targeting an Afghan checkpoint, the official said.

They said they could not confirm any casualties on the Afghan side of the border.

A security official in Angoor Adda also confirmed the attack.

The governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Faisal Karim Kundi, condemned the "unprovoked and blatant aggression by the Afghan Taliban regime against civilian homes".

Hundreds of civilians have been killed in fighting between the two countries since October last year, according to figures from the United Nations' mission in Afghanistan. *– AFP*

Israeli president urges against new vote despite inconclusive result

Stuart White, Shaun Tandon and Alice Chancellor

JERUSALEM – Israel's president voiced hope yesterday for avoiding a second election after a hard-fought vote produced no clear winner, leaving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the opposition scrambling for options and making Israeli Arab parties possible kingmakers.

With more than 85 percent of ballots counted, Netanyahu's right-wing bloc was slightly ahead but still short of a majority after Tuesday's election, the first since the October 7, 2023 attack that led Israel to wage war in Gaza and across the region.

Both Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister who is allied with far-right and ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties, and Gadi Eisenkot, a former military chief leading a broad opposition bloc, said they would seek to form the next government.

But neither looks set to reach the 61-seat threshold, with Netanyahu's bloc projected to win 53 of the 120 seats in parliament and Eisenkot's opposition set for 48.

The final results could still change, but one group which made clear gains was Israeli Arabs, whose seats were set to jump to 19.

"We must do everything we can, certainly after yesterday, to avoid another round of elections," said President Isaac Herzog, who is tasked with determining which candidate to tap to form a government, urging parties to keep "an open mind".

This combination of pictures shows Yashar party leader Gadi Eisenkot (left) addressing his supporters at an election night rally in Tel Aviv early yesterday (local time), and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressing his supporters at an election night rally in Jerusalem also early yesterday. – AFP

'Have to talk to us'

Yousef Jabareen, head of the leftist Arab-majority Joint List, said the Israeli public had voted for new leadership and "anyone who wants to offer a substantive and genuine alternative to Netanyahu's blood-soaked government will have to talk to us".

He later told AFP, however, that while he was willing to cooperate with an opposition-led government to unseat Netanyahu, he was not open to joining such a coalition outright.

"We do not see the possibility of being part of an Israeli government coalition under the current political circumstances, particularly given the ongoing war in Gaza, the settlements in the West Bank" and other issues, he said.

The ad hoc support of Arab lawmakers could enable Eisenkot to maintain a minority government, although few observers believe such an arrangement would survive for long.

Arab voters, descendants of Palestinians who stayed after Israel's creation and who make up around 20 percent of the population, turned out in unprecedented numbers for Tuesday's vote, enraged by the Netanyahu government's ultra-nationalist Jewish vision for the country and the Palestinian territories.

Netanyahu during the campaign relentlessly stoked fears of Arabs in power to motivate his base, and his Likud party yesterday accused the Arab lists of having "stolen" the election.

It alleged "corruption, threats, violence, falsehoods and the use of prohibited software" to encourage voter turnout. It did not share evidence but said it would share it with authorities.

Eisenkot and most of his allies have resisted partnering with Arab lawmakers.

But Yair Golan, the head of Israel's main left-wing party and a member of Eisenkot's camp, became its first to call for such an alliance.

"We must no longer accept Netanyahu's racist division between Jewish votes and Arab votes," Golan said on social media.

Iran conflict

A lack of a clear majority for either camp could mean weeks spent trying to cobble together coalitions, with new elections a possibility if negotiations fail.

"Maybe everybody lost in these elections but the Arab parties. And for the Arab parties, it's unclear that they can make use of their huge success," Hebrew University of Jerusalem political scientist Gideon Rahat said.

A stalemate could in the immediate term benefit Netanyahu, who would remain caretaker prime minister until a new government is formed.

Both Netanyahu and Eisenkot appeared to indicate another factor was on the horizon: an Israeli attack alongside the United States on Iran.

Netanyahu has ordered two campaigns against Iran, reluctantly stopping the most recent only after US President Donald Trump reached a now-defunct ceasefire.

In the days leading up to the election, Netanyahu repeatedly called for the overthrow of Iran's government. News reports, which Netanyahu denied, said the military top brass pushed back on his plans for pre-election action.

Trump has said that the United States is no longer negotiating with Iran but will not attack until after next Tuesday's US midterm elections.

Speaking at a rally, Netanyahu said that Israel had a "unique opportunity" with Trump to "forever eliminate the existential threat of Iran".

Eisenkot in a post-election appearance warned Israel's security chiefs not to let Netanyahu put his political survival over the national interest.

"Netanyahu, don't you dare use Israel's security for your political needs," he said.

Defence Minister Israel Katz lashed out at the remarks yesteday, calling them "an anti-democratic statement detached from reality".

All eyes will now be on Herzog, who has reportedly supported a unity government, which could take on more urgency if Netanyahu attacks Iran, although Eisenkot has publicly ruled out serving with him. – AFP

Arab Israelis proud of high election turnout, uncertain for future

Majd al-Krum, Israel
Louis Baudoin-Laarman

MAJD Al-KRUM – A librarian in an Arab town in northern Israel, Maysa Nasser never thought to vote in national elections. But on Tuesday she cast a ballot for the first time, stung by the racism she has felt from the hard-right government.

Many in Israel's Arab minority felt like her, heading in unprecedented numbers to the polls out of fury at Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Winning a record number of seats, Arab lawmakers now have the power to unseat him – but only if the opposition overcomes resistance to allying with them.

Nasser, 50, sees brighter days ahead after the landmark turnout.

"Everything about this election campaign felt different this time. There was unity. In the final hours before the polls closed, there was a kind of happiness that we had previously lost," the librarian from Majd al-Krum, north of Haifa, told AFP.

"I am 50 years old, but I had always boycotted elections and defended the boycott because I had been deeply disappointed by members of the Knesset," she said of Israel's parliament.

Israeli Arabs are forecast to secure around 19 seats in the 120-member Knesset, a major gain driven by communities such as Majd al-Krum, where 85 percent of eligible voters turned out.

The community which once often shunned elections is now turning out at rates even beyond Jewish Israelis, in an atmosphere that has become more fraught since the October 7, 2023 attacks on Israel by Hamas.

Around 20 percent of Israel's population is Arab – descendants of Palestinians who stayed after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 – with many of them living in towns and villages of the hilly Galilee region in the north.

Netanyahu's far-right partners including National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir have called for moving Jewish settlers into the Galilee, following the model of the occupied West Bank where settlers have enjoyed virtual impunity in attacking Palestinians.

'Don't know what comes next'

On the highways leading to Galilee towns such as Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus Christ, Hebrew-language billboards showcase Netanyahu and Ben Gvir before gradually giving way to posters in Arabic encouraging voters to choose Arab lists.

"I'm proud of myself, proud of everyone who voted. Not just the people from my town, but the entire Arab community that voted," Amal Farhan said, recalling the crowds she saw when she cast her ballot.

"My rights in this country should be equal to those of a Jewish student studying alongside me," said the 18-year-old who is preparing for university entrance exams.

Young and old alike in Majd al-Krum, a town of 15,000 nestled between a highway and a mountain, celebrated into the late hours at the election result.

But one day later, as political horsetrading and seat counting began, hope gave way to uncertainty.

"We shouldn't let the celebrations carry on and rejoice too much, because we don't know what comes next," said Mohammed Zarkawi, a 23-year-old student and employee in his father's pizzeria.

"The turnout was high, but the celebrations will only really mean something when there is a change of government, a government that comes and makes peace," he said.

His father Ahmad said that though he voted for an Arab party, many in town including his other son chose The Democrats, a left-wing party led by Jewish Israeli Yair Golan.

"Golan really wants peace between Jews and Arabs," he said.

Golan has urged opposition chief Gadi Eisenkot to form a government with Arab lawmakers and replace the "racism" of Netanyahu.

But other opposition leaders have been hesitant, and Netanyahu has relentlessly attacked the prospect of Arabs in government as a threat to the country.

'Drive the Arabs out'

Residents said they hoped the next government would provide more resources to tackle gang violence within Arab communities that in recent years left hundreds dead.

"There are killings every day. What are they doing about it? Nothing," said Mahmoud Zihon, an 83-year-old activist.

But he said he voted mostly due to fear of racism and that the Netanyahu government "will drive Arabs out of Israel".

He said he feared a new Nakba – "catastrophe" in Arabic – referring to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people at the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.

Those who remained saw some of their lands confiscated, like Samiha Shaaban, who remembers that large tracts of her family's olive tree grove were taken when the Israeli town of Gilon, near Majd al-Krum, was built in 1980.

And yet on election night, "there was a joy that we hadn't seen for 30 or 40 years", the 75-year-old said.

"And if there are more elections – because there's no agreement between Eisenkot and the Joint List – then we will get an even stronger result!" – AFP

Mona Lisa scrubbed from Syrian textbooks as critics slam conservative drift

Maher al-Mounes

DAMASCUS – In one book, an illustration was redrawn to show the girls gathered around a computer wearing hijabs. In another, an image of the Mona Lisa was taken out entirely.

Changes to Syria's official school books are sparking criticism of the country's new Islamist authorities as the nation tries to move on after 13 years of civil war and decades of authoritarian rule.

After ousting longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad in December 2024, Syria's new authorities, led by former jihadist Ahmed al-Sharaa, have taken several conservative steps including imposing stricter dress codes for beaches and restricting alcohol sales, while some universities have limited certain courses to men only.

Now the textbook changes are drawing outcry, after they were pointed out last week by Syrian journalist Mohammad Salloum, drawing on a report by the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se).

AFP confirmed several changes by consulting electronic versions of textbooks on official websites.

Among them was the removal of an image of the Mona Lisa from a seventh-grade history textbook, and the removal of images of statues emblematic of ancient Syrian civilisations in a third-grade social studies text.

In a fourth-grade Islamic education textbook, illustrations of several people wearing Western clothing were replaced with two separate drawings – one of two men in traditional robes, and another showing two women wearing the niqab.

On social media and some local media platforms, Syrians shared images of a Pharaonic bust that had been clothed with a modern shirt, and an illustration of girls at a computer that now shows them wearing the hijab.

Images of people dancing were also removed from sixth-grade social affairs textbooks.

'Ideological narrative'

While nominally secular, Assad's clan committed horrific abuses over the course of several decades against people who dared to speak out against their rule, including anyone perceived to be Islamist.

Sharaa meanwhile once headed the country's chapter of Al-Qaeda, and his Islamist group led the alliance that toppled Assad. But he has undergone a major transformation and adopted a more moderate image as Syria's head of state.

The curriculum controversy comes as supporters and critics tussle over the religiously conservative country's direction in the post-Assad era.

On Monday, the education ministry said changes to the curriculum included "removing symbols of the defunct regime and its ideological content, and correcting images and content connected to it".

The ministry last year had made changes to the curriculum, mainly in primary school subjects of social studies, Islamic education, history and geography, removing symbols linked to the Baath party which ruled the country for decades.

But according to IMPACT-se, the new curriculum "demonstrates a far-reaching ideological transformation that extends well beyond routine pedagogical adjustments".

"Across subjects and grades, textbook amendments collectively attempt to reconfigure national identity, historical memory, civic values, and regional positioning through what appears to be a consolidated Islamist and Sunni-centred framework," it said.

Lawyer and human rights activist Michal Shammas called for a revision of the curriculum according to "educational and scientific standards", and for a bolstering of critical thinking and respect for diversity.

He also noted changes linked to the Ottoman period, with references to the 1916 execution of Syrian nationalists in Damascus now presenting those killed as "agents and conspirators" – after they were long characterised as "martyrs".

Sharaa's administration has a close relationship with Turkey.

The textbook controversy comes after certain universities last month restricted some courses to men, and a renowned school in Damascus decided to segregate boys and girls, citing the bullying and harassment of girls.

Opinions were divided between supporters of the school's move, and opponents who saw it as a sign of growing religious conservatism. *– AFP*

High-speed train crash in Spain kills 68, injures over 100

Javier Soriano

URDA – A high-speed train collision south of Madrid killed 68 people and injured scores more yesterday, with the toll likely to rise, authorities said, in one of Europe's deadliest such disasters this century.

The second such accident to strike Spain this year will raise fresh questions about the country's rail safety, with the transport minister speaking of an "error" and "inexplicable circumstances" that led to the collision.

AFP reporters on the scene in the central region of Castilla-La Mancha saw one train embedded into another and some carriages lying on their side in tangles of metal debris at the bottom of an embankment.

Dozens of emergency services vehicles were racing to and from the site during a frantic search for survivors, while several black vans arrived from a funeral parlour.

Castilla-La Mancha's regional leader Emiliano García-Page told reporters at the scene that 68 people had died, raising an earlier toll of 64 and having already warned of more victims being found.

A spokeswoman for the Castilla-La Mancha regional government told AFP that more than 100 people had been injured. Of them, 58 had been taken to hospital, with 15 in a critical condition.

State railway operator Renfe confirmed in a statement that the main high-speed line from Madrid to southern Spain had been suspended after one of its services suffered an accident with a train from private Spanish company Iryo.

Emergency services work at the site of a deadly train crash between two high-speed units, a Renfe AVE train and an Iryo train around 150 km south of Madrid between Urda and Los Yébenes in the province of Toledo yesterday. – AFP

'Chaos'

Pablo Mejia, 42, with blood staining his grey jumper, told AFP that he had miraculously survived after changing his seat, as he awaited a transfer to the southern city of Seville.

He recounted "a very strong hit. It lasted a long time until it stopped, lots of people on the floor, on top of each other, seats ripped out, suitcases, a lot of chaos."

A visibly shaken Manuel Ortiz who lives in the village of Urda close to the site of the accident, around 130 kilometres south of Madrid, told AFP he had been transporting survivors all morning in his car.

Ortiz, 49, described a "horrific, horrible" scene that "smelled of an accident, of metal".

Transport Minister Oscar Puente told reporters that the collision came after a train was ordered to go in "error" despite a technical failure affecting the automatic control system that halted all services on a 69-kilometre stretch of track.

"The decision to resume traffic, while that system had not been restored, belongs to the control centre," which resumed traffic "in circumstances that, from our point of view, are inexplicable", Puente said.

The Renfe train restarted and travelled 25 kilometres until it collided with the stationary Iryo, at a speed that could have reached "up to 200 kilometres per hour", Puente added.

The control centre "had more than enough time to verify the error, and they did not fix it", Puente said.

Rail safety under scrutiny

The accident comes one month before Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, who faced heavy criticism for this year's first disaster, seeks to overturn unfavourable polls and extend his eight-year premiership in an early general election on November 29.

He said Spain would observe three days of mourning from today, conceding it was "not acceptable" that two high-speed collisions could happen within months. His Socialists halted campaign activities.

The leader of the main opposition conservative People's Party, Alberto Núñez Feijóo, who leads in most polls, also suspended campaigning but said: "Spain has the right to know what is going on with its infrastructure."

Condolences flooded in from across Spain and Europe. The Spanish royal household said on X it was "shocked and concerned" by the accident, conveying its support to the victims, their loved ones and the emergency services.

Spain's high-speed rail network has received huge investment in recent years, growing to become the second-largest in the world after China's and a source of national pride.

But yesterday's accident comes after another collision between two high-speed trains outside the southern village of Adamuz in January left 46 dead, which raised major questions about safety on the country's railways.

That crash was Spain's deadliest train accident since 2013, when 80 people died after a train veered off a curved section of track outside the northwestern city of Santiago de Compostela. *– AFP*

UK far-right figure Tommy Robinson convicted of harassment

LONDON – A London jury found far-right activist Tommy Robinson guilty yesterday of harassing two journalists in the latest criminal conviction for the controversial anti-immigration figurehead.

Jurors at Southwark Crown Court in the British capital convicted Robinson – whose real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon – by majorities of 10 to two on two harassment counts, after deliberating for 11 hours and 25 minutes.

The 43-year-old, who remains on bail, will be sentenced on December 16 and could face up to 10 years in prison, under UK harassment law.

One of Britain's best known far-right activists with a large online following, he already boasts a string of criminal convictions, including for assault, fraud and contempt of court, and has served multiple jail terms previously.

The latest case concerns Robinson's actions towards two journalists – freelance reporter Andrew Young and *Daily Mail* editor Jacob Dirnhuber – amid nationwide unrest in 2024 that followed the murders of three girls in Southport, northwest England.

He had posted a series of social media messages online about the unfolding situation while on holiday in Cyprus, prompting the *Daily Mail* to send Young and a photographer to the island.

After the tabloid published a story about him "stoking riots from his sunbed", Robinson was accused of harassing the two journalists through his X account.

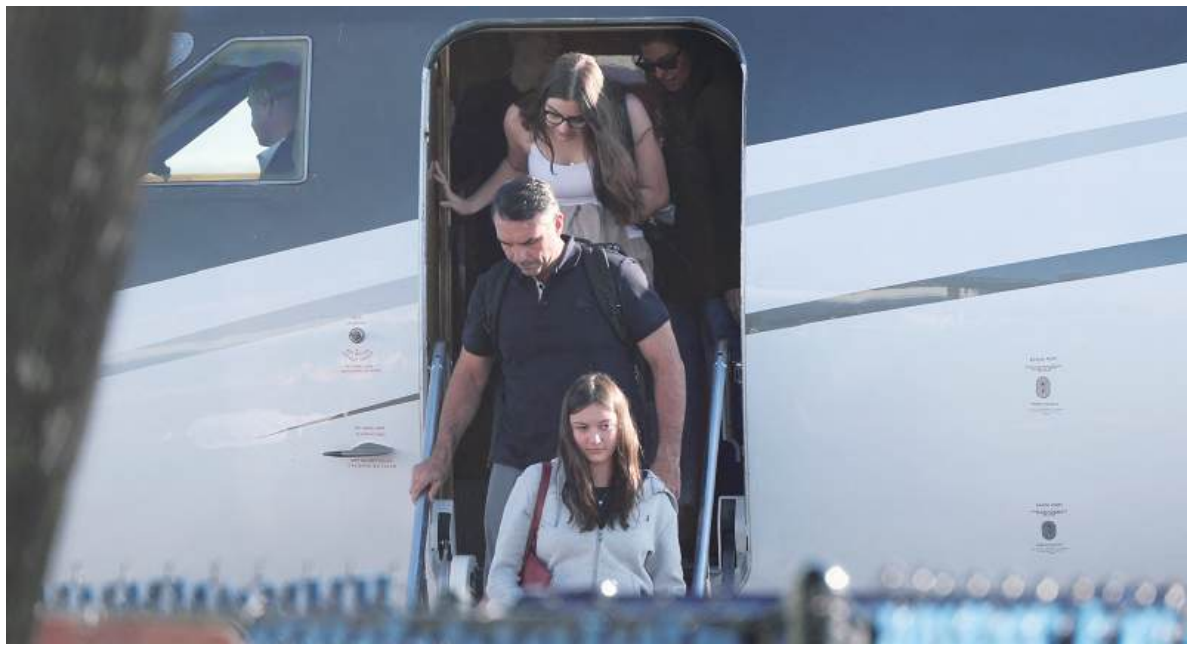
The trial heard he had "retaliated" against the pair, posting criticism of them online and then hiring private investigators to find their home addresses, as well as the address of *Daily Mail* editor-in-chief Ted Verity.

Verity provided evidence to police of a voicemail he received from Robinson, in which he swore and said "I've already located every .... one of you", jurors were told.

Prosecutors said his "bully" behaviour left the two journalists in fear of a "vigilante" attack and they either left their homes or employed extra security in response.

Robinson had denied harassment, with the British activist thanking billionaire X owner and ally Elon Musk at the outset of the trial for funding his legal defence costs. *– AFP*

Bolsonaro flees Brazil for US after election defeat



Flávio Bolsonaro, accompanied by his two daughters and wife, steps off a private plane after arriving at Opa Locka Executive Airport in Miami, Florida yesterday. – AFP

Yussel González

OPA-LOCKA – Brazil's defeated right-wing presidential candidate Flávio Bolsonaro arrived in Florida by private plane yesterday, AFP witnessed, after defying a court order that banned him from leaving his country.

Following swirling speculation over his whereabouts, the 45-year-old was seen disembarking the jet at Opa-Locka Executive Airport outside Miami, having flown via Argentina and Ecuador.

Bolsonaro who lost a runoff election to incumbent Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on Sunday, is under investigation in Brazil for alleged corruption and money laundering and, with his election loss, is set to lose parliamentary immunity.

The plane – also carrying his wife and daughters –that landed in Florida had made a brief stop in Guayaquil, Ecuador in the early hours yesterday (local time).

Bolsonaro had seemed likely to be the next president after he came out on top in the first round of elections, but Lula made a surprise surge to retain power.

Bolsonaro had campaigned on a pledge to liberate his father, who is under house arrest for coup-plotting after his own electoral loss to Lula in 2022.

Jair Bolsonaro – a close ally of US President Donald Trump – never conceded defeat and left the country on the eve of his rival's inauguration, only returning to Brazil three months later.

US visa

A police source told AFP that Flávio Bolsonaro's Brazilian and diplomatic passports had been cancelled, but the senator has held Italian nationality since 2023, according to Italian documents seen by AFP.

Washington has said it would grant him a US visa.

Flávio Bolsonaro said in a video posted on Instagram on Monday that he "never had any intention of leaving the country" and the ban on his exit was a scare tactic.

Flávio said the travel ban was ordered by a Supreme Court justice, and was based on a comment by his US-based brother Eduardo Bolsonaro, who said before the election that "if my brother does not win, I am in favour that he would leave the country."

Lula, who won the election with 51.8 percent of the vote, called fleeing the country a "shameful" act.

"A person who sneaks out of their country must have something to hide," he said in Brasília during his 81st birthday celebration on Tuesday.

Following his loss, Bolsonaro said he would seek to annul the result, citing the decision to extend polling hours over transport problems that prevented some citizens from voting.

While congratulations rolled in for Lula from world leaders on both sides of the political divide, Trump said the election "looked terrible to me."

"I didn't take sides but it looked like another rigged election frankly... it looked so corrupt," he told reporters in Washington.

"I just thought it was a very bad look, the way it was tabulated – with the extension." – *AFP*

Portuguese president condemns violence, calls for ending housing crisis

LISBON – Portuguese President António José Seguro on Tuesday condemned the clashes and violence at weekend demonstrations, particularly in Lisbon, and called on the government, parliament and political parties to stop blaming one another and find concrete solutions to the housing crisis.

"Stop the blame game. Everyone has responsibilities," Seguro said in a statement criticizing the lack of political dialogue.

Seguro, who had not commented publicly on the issue for about a week, said he had followed the situation and had requested information from the competent authorities, adding that he urged the parties and the government to reach an understanding last week.

Seguro said the protests were discussed at his meeting on Monday with Prime Minister Luis Montenegro.

Seguro announced that he has convened the parties for a meeting tomorrow, has already held a session of the Council of State, with plans to meet housing experts.

He also admitted that the law on demonstrations, in force since 1974, could be the subject of parliamentary debate. – *Xinhua*

US, Cuba shouting match derails debate at UN

NEW YORK – A furious shouting match between representatives of the United States and Cuba prompted the temporary suspension of debate at the UN General Assembly in New York on Tuesday.

The row broke out during debate on a resolution calling for an end to the US embargo on its communist-led neighbour, a non-binding measure which Cuba has put forward every year since 1992.

The debate this year, however, is taking place amid a major new pressure campaign by Washington against Cuba, including an oil blockade and broad sanctions that have severely crippled Cuba's economy.

As US Ambassador Mike Waltz was addressing the General Assembly, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez objected to the remarks and walked up to the podium, demanding that the speech be halted.

Waltz, while arguing for the resolution to be rejected, had been criticising the Cuban government.

"This is the United Nations. This isn't your communist dictatorship. You cannot silence me," Waltz shouted, demanding that Rodríguez and other Cuban diplomats back away.

"You are a liar!" Rodríguez shouted back.

The chair briefly suspended the session and instructed both countries' representatives to return to their places, after which Waltz was allowed to continue.

Cuba has accused Washington of launching an "unprecedented" pressure campaign this year to persuade countries to oppose the resolution, which has traditionally had overwhelming backing.

Last year, the resolution received 165 votes in favour, seven against and 12 abstentions, its weakest level of support in two decades.

A vote on this year's resolution was expected later this week.

The row also came days after US Secretary of State Marco Rubio urged Cubans to discreetly work with the CIA to end the island's communist government. – *AFP*

Flávio Bolsonaro: right-wing heir moves from presidential hopeful to US exile

Fran Blandy

RIO DE JANEIRO – Just days ago, Flávio Bolsonaro was riding high, convinced he would be Brazil's next president and follow in the footsteps of his far-right father, Jair Bolsonaro.

Now, he has self-exiled to the United States after a stealthy exit from Brazil that took him via Argentina and Ecuador as the whole country wondered where he was.

The right-wing senator's vision of triumph crumbled after his shock loss in Sunday's run-off election to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Flávio Bolsonaro had beaten Lula in a first-round vote, but Lula pulled off a dramatic comeback to win with 52 percent of the votes to his rival's 48 percent.

Bolsonaro was defiant: He refused to concede defeat and vowed to fight the result in the courts.

"I will not give up on my Brazil," he said on Sunday.

He vowed he had no intention of leaving the country as authorities demanded he hand over his passports.

Flávio Bolsonaro has maintained close ties to the administration of US President Donald Trump, an ally of his father who described Sunday's election as "rigged."

Flávio Bolsonaro arrived in Florida yesterday with his two daughters and his wife Fernanda, a dentist.

'Blood of a Bolsonaro'

The 45-year-old senator was little known nationally when he was anointed as the heir to the far-right political movement by his father, who is serving a 27-year sentence for plotting a coup after his 2022 election loss to Lula.

But his campaign quickly gained traction, and Flávio, pitching himself as a more jovial, moderate Bolsonaro, fired up his father's base and won over less ideological voters looking for a change.

He never hesitated to remind Brazilians: "I have the blood of a Bolsonaro in my veins."

In the first-round election, he came in ahead of Lula, 47 percent to the incumbent's 45 percent.

No candidate who lost the first round had gone on to win the second in Brazil since 1989, the first direct election after the end of the country's military dictatorship.

However, while Lula's loss jolted the left awake, leading to massive mobilisation that carried him to victory, critics say Bolsonaro was overly confident and his allies were already publicly jockeying for government positions.

"I think the victory in the first round was poison for the Flávio Bolsonaro campaign because it generated a sense of, you know, that they already won," Oliver Stuenkel, an international relations professor at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, told AFP.

Despite his loss, Bolsonaro secured almost 60 million votes in the runoff.

His brother, Eduardo Bolsonaro, who is also self-exiled in the United States, said before the election: "If my brother does not win, I am in favour that he would leave the country."

Among other investigations, Brazilian police are probing Flávio Bolsonaro for corruption over the financing of the biopic "Dark Horse" about his father, bankrolled by disgraced banker Daniel Vorcaro.

Haunted by accusations

Born in Rio de Janeiro state, Flavio Bolsonaro is the eldest of the former president's five children and the one who most resembles him.

He was elected to the Rio de Janeiro state legislature at age 21 and became a senator at age 37. He holds a law degree.

On the campaign trail, Bolsonaro displayed the relaxed Carioca style and language that the city of Rio is known for.

But he has been dogged by accusations over his career.

When he was a Rio legislator, he was accused of taking a portion of his aides' salaries in a kickback scheme, but the case was dismissed.

He has also faced scrutiny over alleged ties to Rio de Janeiro's violent and shadowy militia figures. He has denied any wrongdoing.

– *AFP*

Odegaard urges Arsenal to move on after Fleetwood upset

FLEETWOOD, UK – Arsenal captain Martin Odegaard has insisted "we can't feel sorry for ourselves" and must move on quickly following their stunning loss away to fourth-tier Fleetwood in the League Cup.

The Premier League champions crashed out 5-3 on penalties in an incredible upset after the fourth-round tie finished 1-1 in normal time at Fleetwood's home ground of Highbury.

Arsenal's Bruno Guimaraes had his penalty saved by Jay Lynch in the shoot-out before teenage defender Conor Haughey scored Fleetwood's winner.

Aaron Loupalo-Bi's first-half goal had put Fleetwood ahead before Viktor Gyokeres equalised after the interval.

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta made nine changes to his starting side but after a ragged first-half display he sent Norway midfielder Odegaard on for the second period.

The visitors, last season's losing finalists, managed an improved performance but still missed several chances before teenage rising star Max Dowman was sent off five minutes from the end of normal time.

"It's very frustrating to go out," Odegaard said after Fleetwood made a mockery of the 84 places between the clubs in the English football pyramid.

"Obviously, the way we've played was not on the level. We need to do much, much better than we did.

"Frustrating, but congratulations to Fleetwood and we look forward to the next game already and bounce back.

"They did well so we have to give them credit, but... we need to do better. I thought we improved during the game, but again, we need to step up even more - so that's a shame."

Arsenal now just have days to get the defeat out of their system ahead of what promises to be a tough match at Liverpool on Sunday, with the Gunners having drawn level on points with Premier League leaders Manchester City last weekend.

"We can't feel sorry for ourselves. We need to move on - we have a big game at the weekend, so bouncing back at the weekend is all we can do now," Odegaard added.

Meanwhile, British media reports yesterday said Arsenal would lodge an appeal against Dowman's red card with the Football Association and were hopeful of a decision being handed down prior to the trip to Anfield.

The 16-year-old was dismissed for kicking out at Harrison Neal following a heavy challenge by the Fleetwood midfielder, with an unimpressed Arteta giving Dowman a strong word as he trudged off.

"Something that we discussed already before the match," Arteta said when asked what he told Dowman. – *AFP*

Fleetwood Town's Northern Irish defender Conor Haughey scores the winning penalty during a penalty shoot out following a 1-1 draw in the English League Cup fourth round match against Arsenal at Highbury Stadium in Fleetwood, north west England, on Tuesday. Fleetwood won the match 5-3 following a penalty shoot out. – AFP

Rodrigo Mora (first right) of Roma heads to score during a Serie A football match against Cagliari in Rome, Italy, on Tuesday. Roma won the game 4-2. – Xinhua

Xhaka, Embolo can return to Swiss squad after fake COVID docs affair

GENEVA – Switzerland captain Granit Xhaka and striker Breel Embolo are available for selection again for next month's Nations League matches after being sanctioned for using forged COVID-19 certificates during the pandemic, the Swiss FA said Tuesday.

The pair were dropped and missed the first four Nations League games, in September and October.

Sunderland midfielder Xhaka, 34, who holds a Swiss record 152 caps, admitted to using a forged vaccine certificate to avoid mandatory jabs during the COVID crisis.

Atlanta United forward Embolo, 29, similarly acknowledged that a penal order against him concerned fake COVID certificates.

"The Swiss Football Association (SFV) will once again consider Granit Xhaka and Breel Embolo for the national team, beginning with the Nations League matches in November," it said in a statement.

"The SFV has thoroughly examined both cases and has concluded that the players' return is justifiable given the completion of legal proceedings and the sporting consequences incurred (having missed four international matches)."

National team director Pierluigi Tami said: "We are convinced that a return to the national team in November is both responsible and the right course of action."

Switzerland coach Murat Yakin, his staff and the players' council unanimously decided that Xhaka will remain the captain.

Switzerland are top of Group B1 in the Nations League, with four straight wins so far.

Yakin will announce his squad for the final two Nations League group matches on November 5. Xhaka and Embolo are on the shortlist, the Swiss FA said.

Switzerland travel to face second-placed Slovenia on November 13, then host Scotland in St. Gallen three days later.

"I'm pleased that I can once again make unrestricted selections for the squad in November," said Yakin.

When the Swiss squad got together in late September, the Lucerne public prosecutor's office opened an investigation into Xhaka, who admitted obtaining a fake certificate and stepped down.

A few days later, Embolo withdrew from the squad for similar reasons.

Both received suspended financial penalties.

The SFV has announced guidelines for handling future matters that involve criminal law. – *AFP*

Japanese football official quits over World Cup row

Football

TOKYO – The vice president of Japan's football association quit yesterday saying the "series of responses" to controversies surrounding the World Cup did not align with his personal values.

Takeshi Okada, who coached Japan at the World Cup in 1998 and again in 2010, stepped down a week after the head of Asian football said the region supported Gianni Infantino's bid for re-election as FIFA president.

Asian Football Confederation (AFC) president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifa delivered the unequivocal backing at a meeting in Tokyo.

It came weeks after the AFC had joined football bodies in Europe and North America in condemning Infantino over his plan to open FIFA's premium competitions such as the World Cup to private investors.

Infantino has faced calls to quit and lost the support of some associations in his bid to be re-elected to a fourth and final term.

Okada, who is one of three Japan Football Association (JFA) vice presidents, said he was stepping down "entirely of my own volition".

"Throughout my career I have treasured the social value of sport based on my conviction that sport must be conducted with integrity," he said.

"However, with regard to the series of responses surrounding the recent FIFA World Cup, there is a significant gap between those responses and my own beliefs, and as a sportsman I cannot accept them."

Infantino, who apologised for the failed private investment project, has headed FIFA since 2016 and is running for re-election in March.

Two months ago the AFC and Sheikh Salman signalled they could turn on Infantino.

A joint letter with European body UEFA and CONCACAF, representing federations in North and Central America and the Caribbean, declared football "belongs to no individual".

Okada said his decision had been "reached after careful and repeated deliberation".

"Taking into account our relationship with the AFC and the impact on Japanese football, I do understand that there are practical reasons for aligning our stance with that of the AFC," he said. – *AFP*

Football shorts

Former player Garcia to take temporary charge of Espanyol after Gonzalez sacking

MADRID – Former player and B-team coach Sergio Garcia will take temporary charge of Espanyol after the La Liga side sacked Manolo Gonzalez following its Copa del Rey exit against Sestao River on Tuesday night.

Gonzalez leaves Espanyol after 107 matches in charge, recording 33 wins, 30 draws and 44 defeats. The team currently sits in La Liga's bottom three and faces a difficult away match against Villarreal tomorrow night.

Garcia will oversee training sessions and take charge of the team for tomorrow's match as the club search for a permanent successor to Gonzalez. Jose Luis Mendilibar and Julen Lopetegui have both been mentioned in the Spanish press as possible candidates.

Garcia spent seven seasons at Espanyol across two spells as a player, scoring 50 goals in 231 appearances. After retiring, he coached Spain's Under-17 team before joining Espanyol this summer. Under his guidance, Espanyol B has recorded five wins, one draw and one defeat this season. – *Xinhua*

Ghana targets Olympic football return after 24-year absence

ACCRA – Ghana's under-23 men's football coach Desmond Ofei has expressed confidence that his side can overcome Libya in next month's two-legged qualifier as the country seeks to return to the Olympic Games for the first time since 2004.

The Black Meteors will travel to Tripoli for the first leg during the November 9-17 international window before hosting Libya in the return fixture.

"I believe we can qualify because I feel the time is right. It has been far too long, and we are preparing well," Ofei said.

"I am 100 percent certain that we will qualify for the 2028 Olympic Games. We will exert every effort to defeat Libya. In March, we will take on any opponent, and we will be ready for that."

Ofei also expressed confidence in the talent available to Ghana as his side prepares for the qualifying campaign.

"The boys are hungry to prove to the nation that there is a lot of talent in this country and that Ghana is one of the best footballing nations in Africa," he said.

Ghana last competed in the men's Olympic football tournament at the 2004 Athens Games and is seeking to end a 24-year absence from the competition.

The winner of the tie will advance to the next stage of qualifying for the 2027 U-23 Africa Cup of Nations in Egypt, which will serve as the final African qualifying tournament for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

The top two teams at that tournament will secure Olympic berths. – *Xinhua*

Eala recovers to move into Tokyo quarters

Tennis

TOKYO – Philippine sensation Alexandra Eala came from behind to beat Talia Gibson 4-6, 6-2, 6-0 in Tokyo yesterday and said "it took a lot to turn that match around".

The world number 19's recent run of early tournament exits looked in danger of continuing when Australia's Gibson, ranked 38, took the first set at the Pan Pacific Open.

But Eala dug in and evened the match before hitting top gear in a dominating third set.

The 21-year-old said the turnaround had been "a gradual increase of level".

"Maybe just a couple of small details that when accumulated make a big difference," she said.

"In one 30-all I went more for my shot or in one deuce I did so and so.

"Those little details when all summed up, that's the difference."

Eala faces Russian third seed Diana Shnaider in the quarter-finals.

She became the first player from the Philippines to win a title on the women's WTA Tour in August and her every move is big news at home.

Eala was again backed by passionate support in Tokyo but she was on the ropes in the first set as Gibson punished her for missing chances.

She began her comeback in the second set but she still let her opponent off the hook on several occasions.

Eala went from strength to strength as the match moved into the final set and closed it out when Gibson dumped a shot into the net.

She hit nine aces and broke Gibson's serve six times in the match.

"Of course the support helps a lot all the time," said Eala.

"It creates a great atmosphere and I think there was a bit of back and forth within the crowd.

"You want to be present, you're very invested in the match so it comes naturally to focus."

Shnaider beat Aliaksandra Sasnovich of Belarus 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3 to book her place in the quarter-finals.

World number one Elena Rybakina plays her opening match today when she takes on fellow Kazakh Yulia Putintseva.

Home favourite Naomi Osaka is also in action against Slovakian wild card Mia Pohankova. – *AFP*

Philippines' Alexandra Eala hits a return against Australia's Talia Gibson during the WTA Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament at Ariake Coliseum in Tokyo yesterday. – *AFP*

Former Grand Slam winner Wawrinka ends tennis career

Tennis

PARIS – Stan Wawrinka bid farewell to tennis as he brought the curtain down on a decorated 24-year career following a first-round exit at the Basel Open on Tuesday.

The 41-year-old Swiss announced earlier in the season that his last tournament as a professional would be the ATP 500-level event in his home country and a 7-5, 7-6 (7/2) defeat by Czech Jiri Lehecka brought an end to the career of the three-time major champion.

Former world number three Wawrinka, along with Andy Murray, was the only player to win multiple Grand Slams in a period dominated by Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic.

"I was lucky enough to be able to play alongside them and sometimes beat them," Wawrinka told AFP in 2024.

He bested Nadal to win his first Grand Slam at the Australian Open in 2014, before beating Djokovic in the French Open final the following season and then again in the US Open title-match in 2016.

Alongside his compatriot Federer, the Lausanne native won the Davis Cup for Switzerland and claimed gold in the doubles at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

On court in Basel, Wawrinka's every point won, as well as several trademark booming one-handed backhands, was greeted by wild cheers from the partisan home crowd.

But Lehecka got his nose in front with a break of serve in the 11th game and sealed the opening set with an ace.

A tight second set went to a tie-break, but it was just a step too far for Wawrinka as his 21st-ranked opponent took firm control to seal the breaker and the match.

Wawrinka, who enjoyed a farewell ceremony in Basel on Monday, did a lap of the court to thank the crowd, before disappearing down the tunnel for the last time.

"He won the biggest tournaments, so for me to be here in his moment is a little bit weird," Lehecka told Sky Sports.

"But at the same time, it's a pleasure and I will never forget this match."

However, fans will have one more chance to see the Swiss in action this year.

Wawrinka announced in June that he will throw a farewell party on December 19 in Geneva with Federer and Murray also on the card of the "One last backhand" event.

Elsewhere, second seed Arthur Fils beat his fellow Frenchman Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard 7-6 (7/5), 7-5 to reach the round of 16.

Spanish third seed Rafael Jodar cruised past Chilean Alejandro Tabilo in straight sets, while top seed Ben Shelton battled past his American compatriot Aleksandar Kovacevic 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/4).

Djokovic, who trained with his old friend and foe Wawrinka ahead of the tournament on Sunday, opened his campaign last night against Ugo Humbert of France and won the match 4-6, 6-3, 6-4. – *AFP*

Shadman guides Bangladesh to 213-3 in West Indies Test

Cricket

MIRPUR, Bangladesh – Opener Shadman Islam hit an unbeaten 99 to steer Bangladesh to 213-3 on the opening day of the first Test against West Indies yesterday.

The left-hander was on the verge of his third Test century when bad light ended play after 74 overs at the start of the two-match series in Mirpur.

Shadman hit 10 fours in his 219-ball stay, with Litton Das on 10 not out.

"It was nerve-racking even for us - at the end of the day, the whole team was nervous because everyone wanted him to get to his hundred," Bangladesh batting coach Mohammad Salahuddin said.

"He has played around 30 (32) Test matches but has only two centuries, and I think that number should have been higher."

Towhid Hridoy retired hurt on 42 due to cramps after he and Shadman added 88 runs for the fourth wicket to steady the Bangladesh innings.

West Indies struck early when in-form opener Tanzid Hasan edged Jayden Seales to second slip for nine.

Mominul Haque added 28 before falling to Jomel Warrican's left-arm spin.

Shadman guided Bangladesh to lunch at 96-2, before Warrican struck again shortly after the break to trap Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto lbw for 19.

"Ideally, I would want one more wicket, but we have control of the game. The game never got away from us," said Warrican.

"We were very disciplined as a bowling group. Even if you're not getting wickets, you try to be as disciplined as possible. That's the key, which we did very well. But ideally, we wanted at least one or two more wickets today."

Shadman brought up his half-century off 95 balls and he found an able partner in Hridoy, who came into the side in place of the injured Mushfiqur Rahim.

They batted through the afternoon session to take Bangladesh to 177-3 at the tea break.

Hridoy then suffered cramps as he approached his maiden Test fifty and was helped off the field.

Bad light then interrupted play for an hour, the umpires then calling off play for the day after a short resumption.

Warrican was the pick of West Indies' bowlers with 2-33. – *AFP*

Bangladesh's Shadman Islam plays a shot during the first day of the first Test against West Indies at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, Bangladesh yesterday. – *AFP*

Australia's Molineux clinches top deal at WPL auction

Cricket

NEW DELHI – Australia captain Sophie Molineux clinched the biggest deal of the day at the Women's Premier League (WPL) auction yesterday after a winning bid of US$115,600 by UP Warriorz.

Molineux, a left-handed bowling all-rounder who led Australia to this year's T20 World Cup title in July, had former team Royal Challengers Bengaluru interested before Warriorz got her at more than double her base price of US$52,500 in Kochi.

Warriorz, led by Australian veteran Meg Lanning, came into the mini auction with the biggest budget as the five franchises finalised their teams for the fifth edition of the women's T20 tournament.

Another Australian all-rounder, Grace Harris, returned to Warriorz with a deal of US$31,500.

And all-rounders ruled the day as Orla Prendergast became the first player from Ireland to land a WPL deal, heading to Gujarat Giants for US$31,500.

India batter Kiran Navgire was the second-costliest buy after Delhi Capitals got her for US$78,800.

The most expensive player ever sold at the WPL auction is India's Smriti Mandhana, who was bought by Bengaluru for 34 million rupees (US$380,000) in 2023.

Next year's WPL begins on January 14 with the final scheduled for February 7.

The WPL, staged first in 2023, delivered the Indian cricket board roughly US$700 million in franchise and media rights alone.

The deals made the WPL the world's second-most valuable women's sports league after WNBA basketball in the United States.

Reigning champions Bengaluru and Mumbai Indians have won two titles each in the four editions. – *AFP*

'Faerie' nights: 'ACOTAR' fans finally get their book

Manon Beliot

LOS ANGELES – Thousands of costumed fans lined up for Tuesday's release of the sixth novel in Sarah J. Maas's hit "A Court of Thorns and Roses" series, a leading force in the booming romantasy genre that is bolstering publishers' bottom lines.

Waiting to get their hands on "A Court of Splintered Harmony," readers thronged midnight parties at bookshops across the nation, including The Ripped Bodice in Los Angeles, where fans sporting "faerie" ears and wings took in performances by fire breathers and acrobats.

"To see the new one come out and have everyone around, this is really what we've been waiting for," Taylor Capizola, the bookstore's general manager, told AFP.

The series – known to fans by its acronym "ACOTAR" – is one of the most successful in the romantasy genre – a heady combination of the swords-and-sorcery of "Game of Thrones" and the breathless passions of Danielle Steel.

Maas, who has sold 75 million books in 40 languages, was the best-selling author in the United States in 2024.

"'A Court of Thorns and Roses' really is the backbone, is the foundation of this genre," said Capizola.

Romantasy – a genre that also includes "The Fourth Wing" series by Rebecca Yarros and "Quicksilver" by Callie Hart – has been propelled by BookTok, the corner of TikTok where readers review and recommend titles in short videos.

But reviews are no longer enough for some fans.

With no film or series in sight since Hulu dropped its adaptation in 2025, some are now using AI to make their own trailers and short episodes of ACOTAR, propelling the series' heroine Feyre to an even bigger audience.

The Maas Effect

Tuesday's release of "A Court of Splintered Harmony" is expected to be good news for Bloomsbury – home also to the "Harry Potter" series.

The publishing house will be looking for a bump to turn around a year that saw first half revenue slip five percent and adjusted pre-tax profit down 30 percent.

"Sarah J. Maas is a publishing phenomenon," Bloomsbury founder and Executive Chairman Nigel Newton said in 2024, when her novels carried the company to record profits.

She's also a durable one: the original ACOTAR – which first came out in 2015 – has now spent 92 consecutive weeks on *The New York Times* paperback bestsellers list.

Such is the demand for Maas's latest instalment that several translations are being released almost simultaneously.

The German edition also came out on Tuesday, and several other translations followed yesterday, including Spanish and French.

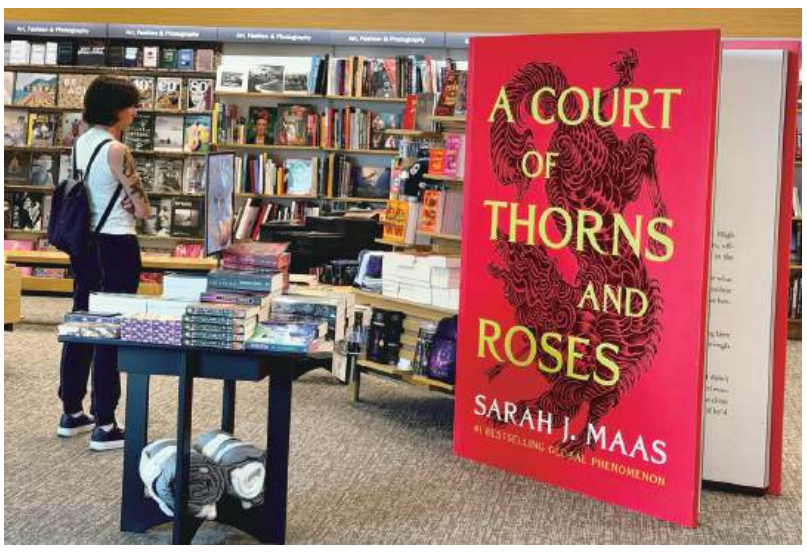
At the midnight party in Los Angeles, fans said they were ready to jump straight in – despite the novel's hefty 350-page count.

"I imagine most people will read it at least once or twice by the weekend," said Natalie Jean, 44, who co-hosts the Sarah J. Maas podcast "LNP Deep Dives."

"I'll buy all the merch* and I'll buy all the books, I'll buy every edition," laughed her co-host Jackie Zebrowski, 39.

"And I'll love it." – *AFP*

**An informal, widely used short form and slang term for merchandise. – Gemini*



A shopper looks at books next to a large promotional display of Sarah J. Maas's new book "A Court of Thorns and Roses" at a bookstore in Los Angeles last Friday. – AFP

Meghan on TV menu for 'Junior MasterChef Australia'

Britain's Prince Harry (right), Duke of Sussex, looks on as his wife Meghan (centre), Duchess of Sussex, decorates birthday cupcakes during a visit to Epic Partners in Nottingham, central England, on October 15. – AFP

SYDNEY – Prince Harry's wife Meghan says she has agreed to feature as a special guest in television cooking sensation "Junior MasterChef Australia".

Meghan, who was a guest judge on "MasterChef Australia" this year, is to appear in next year's contest for young cooks on Network 10.

"When they approached me to come back and work with this young group of talent, it was an easy yes," the Duchess of Sussex said in a statement on Tuesday.

"I love cooking with my own kids, so seeing what these young stars create in the kitchen is going to be a lot of fun."

The series is to be filmed in Melbourne next year, according to Australian broadcaster ABC.

Harry, the second son of King Charles III and estranged brother of heir to the throne Prince William, married Meghan, a US former actress, at Windsor Castle in May 2018.

The couple left Britain for the United States and quit royal duties in 2020, but made an unexpected return with their two children to live in the United Kingdom in August. – *AFP*

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 5°C~19°C	Manila 24°C~33°C	New York 13°C~23°C	Lisbon 13°C~26°C
Shanghai 14°C~24°C	Bangkok 24°C~33°C	London 7°C~16°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~25°C
Hong Kong 21°C~28°C	Tokyo 11°C~17°C	Frankfurt 3°C~13°C	Luanda 24°C~27°C
Taipei 19°C~28°C	Singapore 25°C~31°C	Vancouver 5°C~9°C	Maputo 16°C~27°C
Guangzhou 20°C~31°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~32°C	Paris 4°C~15°C	Dili 23°C~33°C
Nanjing 10°C~19°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 3°C~11°C	São Tomé 25°C~32°C
Guilin 18°C~30°C	Seoul 8°C~13°C	Las Vegas 15°C~24°C	Praia 22°C~32°C
Xi'an 4°C~19°C	Sydney 14°C~23°C	Monte Carlo 16°C~21°C	Bissau 23°C~33°C

Pierce Brosnan and Helen Mirren share the joy behind 'MobLand'

Paula Ramon

LOS ANGELES – Pierce Brosnan and Helen Mirren have found they quite enjoy mob life, as they embody the dangerous and volatile criminal boss couple Conrad and Maeve Harrigan in "MobLand."

The second season of the series finds the Harrigans locked in a power struggle, as internal divisions and external adversaries threaten the family.

Brosnan's Conrad is impulsive yet vulnerable, confronting his own mortality after receiving a brain condition diagnosis.

Maeve, meanwhile, is manoeuvring to expand her own power.

The second season of the series, which co-stars Tom Hardy and is co-directed by Guy Ritchie, premiered in September.

"I'm having the time of my life," Brosnan told AFP in an interview.

The former James Bond actor credits screenwriter Jez Butterworth for the "orchestration" of his "clever" plot development.

"He kind of picks elements of you, or your performance from the past, and uses it within the context of the drama," Brosnan said.

To embody Conrad, 73-year-old Brosnan had a process: "You sit quietly with a cup of tea, and you read the script, and you read the script many times over."

"And you just let your imagination run free."

Mirren, meanwhile, said she embraced the freedom her character offered, infusing the role with her own personal touch.

The 81-year-old has played Queen Elizabeth, Alfred Hitchcock's wife and collaborator Alma Reville, and more recently the author Patricia Highsmith in "A Talent for Murder."

When playing real-life figures, she said: "You have to behave like a sort of detective."

The challenge is "to penetrate the psychology of a real person and reflect it as truthfully as possible," she said.

But fictional roles offer greater creative freedom, she added.

"It's fabulous for the person to be in your own imagination," Mirren said.

'Haunted'

The second season of "MobLand" sees Conrad take on new dimensions.

The family patriarch's "mental acuity is definitely in doubt now," Brosnan said, "and he's haunted by the blood on his hands."

"He's haunted by the past," added Mirren, an evolution of character which adds "great colour" to the story.

The couple are "very violent and they're very ambitious" – until suddenly, "it's going a little bit off-piste," she added.

Brosnan said as filming continues, he's become "more reflective" on what's next for Conrad.

"You wonder... am I going to end up with some nurse in a bed somewhere on dialysis or something like this? I have no idea."

Rumours have swirled about alleged tensions between Tom Hardy and the show's producers, but Paramount+ confirmed last month that a third season is in the works, with Hardy, Brosnan and Mirren set to return to the cast. – *AFP*

Legend of Entertainment Award recipient Dame Helen Mirren poses in front of the marquee ahead of the Opening Night Gala Screening of "A Talent For Murder" and Award Presentation during the 29th SCAD Savannah Film Festival on October 24 in Savannah, Georgia. – AFP

Playing the part

Muerte Maria (second from left) and Charlie Orellana (second from right) attend the 2026 Dia De Muertos Gala Presented by Lexus, Wells Fargo, Tequila Don Julio, NBCUniversal Telemundo Enterprises, and DNERO at NBC Universal Lot on Tuesday in Universal City, California. – *AFP*

What a whopper!

Pumpkin carvers Drew Smith (left), of Columbia, Kentucky, and Anthony Peter, of Davenport, Florida, carve a 2,518-pound (1,142 kg) pumpkin billed as the second-largest in the country, on display outside a Raising Cane's restaurant on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles, on Tuesday.
The pumpkin was grown in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, by Emmett Andrusz, the 2025 Grower of the Year. – *AFP*

Beautiful windhoverer

This photograph shows a common kestrel (Falco tinnunculus) in Nice southeastern France, yesterday. – *AFP*

Up in the wide blue yonder!

Tourists experience paragliding in Danyang-gun, Chungcheongbuk-do, South Korea, yesterday. – *Xinhua*

Comforting spirits

Brazilian artist Celso Alvino paints a mural at the General Cemetery in La Paz, Bolivia on Tuesday, ahead of All Saints' Day celebrations. – *AFP*

Exceptional quality

A merchant shows emerald stone from Panjshir province, Afghanistan during the first specialised mining exhibition at the Afghanistan International Exhibition Centre in Kabul yesterday. – *AFP*