THE 澳門郵報 Macau POST DAILY

DIRECTOR: Harald Brüning | YEAR 22 | NO.5426 | TUESDAY November 10, 2026 | https://www.macaupostdaily.com | MOP 6.00

Civilisation forum aims to leverage Macau's 'precise interlocutor' role

Xi's Global Civilisation Initiative promotes common values of humanity: Sam

Ida Cheong

The opening ceremony for the "International Forum on Mutual Learning among Civilisations 2026" kicked off yesterday at the Galaxy International Convention Centre in Cotai, aiming to fully leverage the advantages of Macau's integration of Chinese and Western cultures, as well as Macau's unique role as a "precise interlocutor" between China and the Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs), upholding the principles of equality and respect, openness and inclusiveness, and mutual cooperation and benefit, building a platform for contemporary dialogue among civilisations.

The two-day forum brings together more than 300 representatives from government entities, international organisations, as well as experts and scholars from home and abroad across more than 20 countries and regions to engage in in-depth discussions.



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (centre), Liaison Office Director Zheng Xicong (fourth from left), Foreign Ministry Commissioner Bian Lixin (fourth from right), Legislative Assembly President André Cheong Weng Chon (third from left) Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam (third from right) and other senior officials pose for a group photo during yesterday's opening ceremony of the "International Forum on Mutual Learning among Civilisations 2026" at the Galaxy International Convention Centre in Cotai.
– Photo: Ida Cheong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai addressed yesterday's opening ceremony, noting that the three thematic sessions of this year's forum are "Cross-disciplinary Cultural Dialogue," "Cultural Connections between China and the Portuguese-speaking Countries," and "The Glory of Civilisations in the AI Era", adding that these topics truly embody historical depth while directly confronting the frontier challenges of the digital age.

Sam said that China's Global Civilisation Initiative (GCI), proposed by President Xi Jinping in 2023, advocates respect for the diversity of world civilisations and promotes the common values of humanity, thereby contributing Chinese wisdom to resolving the challenges facing today's world.

Sam expressed his hope that all distinguished guests will fully utilise the unique platform of Macau to build consensus and provide insights and wisdom with Macau characteristics for global civilisation dialogue.

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Sam says he misses Macau-born giant panda twins

Tony Wong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai published a new post on his blog on his official website last night about his thoughts on Macau's temporary farewell to "Jian Jian" and "Kang Kang" – the first pair of giant pandas born in Macau.

The twins were transported from Macau to Chengdu on a chartered flight on Sunday, where they have now started a one-month quarantine period at the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding.

Born on June 26, 2016 at the Macao Giant Panda Pavilion in Seac Pai Van Park in Coloane, the twins were relocated to the research base to enable them to begin a journey of learning and growth as they enter adulthood. They will further learn environmental adaptation skills and experience a more enriched natural habitat to foster comprehensive physical and mental development.

In his blog, Sam noted that "Jian Jian" and "Kang Kang", who had lived in Macau for a decade, began their journey on Sunday and arrived safely in Chengdu – the hometown of their parents – to start their learning and growth at the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding.

"Although I miss them, I look forward to their return after completing their training, bringing more joy to Macau residents," Sam said.

Sam said that the presence of numerous primary school students – also 10 years old, just like "Jian Jian" and "Kang Kang" – who came to say goodbye to the twins had inspired him to send a message to Macau's young people: broaden your horizons, enrich your knowledge, visit the mainland more frequently for studies and exchanges, integrate yourselves into national development, and continuously enhance your value so that in the future you can give back to Macau.

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) held a ceremony on the apron of Macau International Airport to bid farewell to the pair. The ceremony was attended by Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak, IAM President Chao Wai Ieng, and about 20 primary school students.



This file photo released in last night's article on Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai's blog shows "Jian Jian" and "Kang Kang" a few months after they were born in June 2016.

"I am convinced that the family of four giant pandas will serve as a constant reminder of the country's deep affection for Macau, strengthening our sense of belonging to the motherland while also raising our awareness of nature conservation," Sam said in his blog. ■

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China opens first university school for rare, endangered disciplines

For decades, Chinese scholar Chen Nianfu worked to turn ancient inscriptions carved on bones and turtle shells more than 3,000 years ago into searchable digital texts.

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Judo king Riner joins fight for French presidency

France's five-time Olympic judo champion Teddy Riner announced yesterday he would run in next year's presidential election, after expressing concern about the "rise of the far right".

– Story on p. 11

2 million faithful greet Pope in Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires officials said two million worshippers had turned out yesterday for a vast public Mass by Pope Leo XIV, with pilgrims travelling from across Argentina and camping overnight to get a glimpse of the pontiff.

– 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

Mainlander cheats local investor out of HK$4.68 million in cryptocurrency deal: police

Sherwin Hng

A man from the Chinese mainland has been arrested for cheating a local man out of HK$4.68 million (4.82 million patacas) in a cryptocurrency deal at a casino in Cotai, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a special press conference yesterday.

Cheong noted that the suspect, surnamed Li, a 43-year-old businessman, offered to sell the victim 640,000 USDT* for HK$5 million on November 6. The two had previously met through cryptocurrency investment, but later fell into a dispute over losses from an unsuccessful investment.

According to Cheong, the victim and Li had been unable to agree on how to share losses of about HK$3 million from their previous investment. At around 7:00 p.m. on November 6, Li contacted the victim and proposed the cryptocurrency deal. They subsequently met at a casino in Cotai to complete the transaction.

The victim deposited HK$5 million into Li's casino account. However, Li transferred only 40,000 USDT before coming up with an excuse to take a cigarette break and disappearing. When the remaining 600,000 USDT was not transferred, the victim searched for Li and eventually found him at the casino, where the two became involved in an argument.

Judiciary Police officers arrived after receiving a report at around 9:30 p.m. and took both men in for questioning. Investigators discovered that Li had converted the money into casino chips and intended to leave with them. He also did not have sufficient USDT in his cryptocurrency account to complete the transaction, Cheong said.

Police recovered all the gambling chips and seized a mobile phone from Li. He was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) for further investigation on suspicion of fraud involving a considerable amount. ■

**USDT is a stablecoin whose value is designed to be pegged 1:1 to the US dollar, meaning 1 USDT is intended to always be worth approximately US$1 USD. It is issued by Tether Limited and is the largest stablecoin by market capitalisation. USDT's issuing entity, Tether, has its global headquarters in El Salvador. – DeepSeek*



This undated handout photo provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) shows a smartphone and casino chips worth HK$5 million seized from the suspect.

Drunk driver flees crash, then rear-ends car in 2nd accident: police

Sherwin Hng

A 50-year-old local man was arrested for drunk driving after rear-ending a car at the junction of Avenida Doutor Stanley Ho (何鴻燊博士大馬路) and Praça do Lago Sai Van (西灣湖廣場) on November 5, injuring the other driver, Public Security Police Force (PSP) spokeswoman U Mei Sut said during yesterday's regular press conference.

The suspect, a businessman surnamed Ng, was driving along the road at around 10:00 p.m. when his car struck the vehicle in front of him. The victim, a male driver of the car, complained of neck pain and sought medical treatment after the accident.

According to U, police officers arriving at the scene found that Ng smelt strongly of alcohol. A breath-alyser test showed that his blood alcohol concentration was 2.53 g/l, confirming that he had been driving under the influence of alcohol.

During the investigation, police officers also noticed damage to the front of Ng's car, with green paint marks on it. Further investigation revealed that he had earlier hit a roadside railing while driving away from a metered parking space in the Pátio do Pagode (巴掌圍) area, but had failed to stop and report the incident. Debris from the vehicle was left at the scene.

Ng continued driving before rear-ending the car at the junction, where the incident came to light, U said.

Police suspect Ng of hit-and-run, drunk driving, and negligent bodily injury. The case has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) for follow-up. He was also cited for failing to maintain a safe distance from the vehicle in front and driving with no headlights. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows a PSP officer escorting the traffic accident suspect to a police station.

Falling plastic signboard injures woman

Ida Cheong

The Fire Services Bureau (CB) and Public Security Police Force (PSP) announced in a statement yesterday that a 25-year-old local woman was injured by a falling object near Wun Ip Building (垣業大廈) on Travessa dos Becos (吉慶巷).

According to the Fire Services Bureau, the woman was struck by a falling plastic signboard section while walking past the location around 12:30 p.m. She sustained contusions to her thigh and waist and was taken to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre in a conscious and stable condition.

The Fire Services Bureau noted that the plastic signboard measured about 50 cm by 30 cm. The Public Security Police Force added that the item involved was a section of an advertising signboard, and authorities were currently investigating which unit it belongs to. ■



Fire Services Bureau (CB) and Public Security Police (PSP) officers tend to a woman who was struck by a falling plastic signboard while walking near Wun Ip Building (垣業大廈) on Travessa dos Becos (吉慶巷) at around 12:30 p.m. yesterday. – Pixelated photo courtesy of Macao Daily News

Supporting Verdict of First National Security Case, Defending Rule of Law and Order

Commentary by Oriana Inácio Pun on the National Security Law Trial and Judgement of Au Kam San

The Lower Court of the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) ruled [on Friday] according to law that [former lawmaker] Au Kam San was found guilty of three charges, including "subversion of State power", sentencing him to 12 years and six months' imprisonment.

Oriana Inácio Pun (潘愛儀), secretary-general of the Board of Directors of the Macao Lawyers Association (AAM), stated that the verdict was fair, just, legal, and reasonable, expressing firm support for the judgment.

"We noted that the Collegiate Bench of the Lower Court reached its conviction on the basis of a cautious, comprehensive, and objective analysis of all evidence, establishing the vast majority of the facts set out in the indictment. During the trial, the suspect raised no objection to most of the basic facts, admitted that colluding and conspiring with multiple overseas organisations constituted criminal acts, and agreed with the defence



Undated file photo of local lawyer-notary Oriana Inácio Pun – Photo courtesy of AAM

counsel's arguments. Throughout the proceedings, the court strictly followed substantive and procedural legal provisions, fully safeguarding the litigation rights of the party involved and demonstrating the spirit of the rule of law and justice. The Judiciary exercises judicial power independently, free from any interference. The unfounded accusations made by certain overseas organisations and individuals regarding the MSAR court's lawful trial of the first national security case constitute unwarranted interference in the internal affairs of the MSAR, which we firmly oppose.

"National security is an essential prerequisite and a solid bedrock for maintaining Macao's long-term prosperity and stability, continuous economic development, and social peace and contentment. We will firmly support the MSAR in fully, accurately, and comprehensively implementing the legal system for safeguarding national security, cracking down on and punishing any criminal activities that endanger national security in accordance with the law, actively fostering a social environment that respects the law and abides by rules, resolutely defending Macao's sound order under the rule of law, and effectively ensuring Macao's security and stability". ■

Editor's Note: This unabridged text was originally published in Chinese by the Macao Daily News *on Saturday. The translation was arranged, reviewed, and edited by the* Post. *Words within square brackets have been added by the* Post.

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

TEMPERATURE FALLING.
DRY. FINE.
FORCE 4 TO 6 NORTHERLY WINDS WITH GUSTS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 35% AND 65%.

16ºC~22ºC

Source: SMG

Civilisation forum aims to leverage Macau's 'precise interlocutor' role

Continued from p.1

Sam noted that building on the success of the inaugural forum last year, which saw the publication of the Macao Initiative, this year's event focuses on the theme "Mutual Learning Among Civilisations, Preservation, and Development". The in-depth discussions hold great significance for promoting cultural prosperity and fostering bonds between peoples in the new era, he said.

Sam added that Macau will also continue to enhance its role as "a base for exchange and cooperation where Chinese culture is the mainstream and diverse cultures coexist," providing a platform for mutual understanding and dialogue among different civilisations.

In his opening speech, Li Guoqiang, academician of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), said that hosting the international forum is a concrete step toward implementing President Xi Jinping's Global Civilisation Initiative. He expressed hope that through this platform, different civilisations will be fully displayed, diverse cultures will blossom, and various ideas will inspire one another.

The opening ceremony was attended by Liaison Office Director Zheng Xincong and Foreign Ministry Commissioner Bian Lixin. Both are the Central People's Government's most senior officials posted to Macau.

The local government was represented, among others, by Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam and Culture and Sports Bureau (DSCD) Director Deland Leong Wai Man. ■

UM develops universal robotic grasping framework for complex environments

Khalel Vallo

A University of Macau (UM) research team has developed a robotic grasping framework that allows different types of robotic hands to handle objects reliably in cluttered environments, potentially advancing applications in automated manufacturing, medical assistance and service robotics, according to a statement by the public university yesterday.

The team, led by Prof. Xu Qingsong of UM's Faculty of Engineering, developed a system designed to overcome two major obstacles to the wider commercial use of intelligent robots: limited adaptability across different robotic hand designs and unreliable performance in complex environments with restricted sensory information, the statement said.

The research findings were published in *Nature Machine Intelligence*, an international journal specialising in AI, the statement noted.

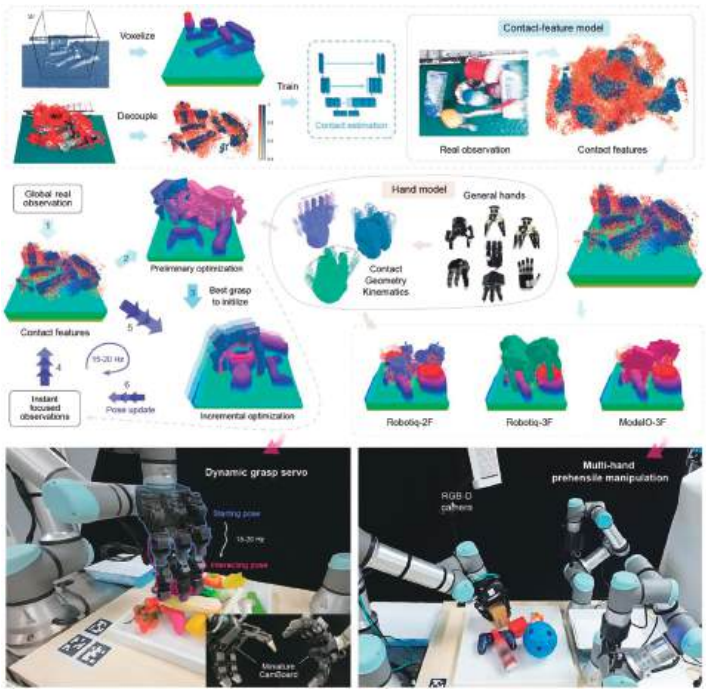
Traditional deep-learning approaches relying on monocular depth vision often struggle to accurately identify physical contact between robotic hands and objects, the statement said, noting that research teams also have difficulty generalising grasping operations across different multi-fingered robotic hands.

In order to address these limitations, the researchers separated the robotic hand's movement model from the contact states generated during object manipulation, according to the statement. They then built a large database of contact features independent of specific robotic hand designs, using existing paired grasping datasets to train neural networks to reconstruct contact information from visual observations, the statement said, adding that combining this perception system with an analytical optimisation framework enabled the technology to achieve zero-shot adaptation, allowing robotic hands to perform grasping tasks without additional task-specific training.

Tests demonstrated stable grasping across robotic hands with two to five fingers in cluttered, unstructured and densely packed three-dimensional environments, the statement noted, adding that the hybrid learning-and-optimisation framework achieved state-of-the-art performance in three-dimensional grasping and could be adapted to various manipulation tasks using relatively low-cost sensors.

Xu was the corresponding author of the study, the statement underlined, while Wang Xianli, a postdoctoral fellow at UM's Faculty of Engineering, and Prof. Tam Lap Mou were the first author and a co-author, respectively.

The research was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC), the local Science and Technology Development Fund (FDCT), and the University of Macau, according to the statement. The findings are available at https://doi.org/10.1038/s42256-026-01292-y. ■



This infographic provided by the University of Macau (UM) yesterday shows the contact-feature-augmented learning-optimisation hybrid algorithm framework.











22 Gen Alpha artists show how they remember the world through art

Rui Pastorin

Interactive installations, drawings, and descriptive pieces that use various senses, among others, are on display at Riverside Macau in Barra for local non-profit art organisation MyLand Culture's children's art exhibition "Things I Can't Forget – Ocean of Memories", with all works incorporating creations by 22 young artists, all of whom belong to Generation Alpha*.

On until November 27, the showcase marks the third in a series of children's art exhibitions that have annually been held by the group since 2023. This time, the exhibition is taking place at 291 Rua do Almirante Sérgio, transforming the venue near A-Ma Temple and the Maritime Museum into a place of whimsy, childlike wonder that also explores how Generation Alpha remembers the world.

Each corner allows exhibitiongoers of all ages to not only view the exhibits, but interact with them while getting a better insight into the participating artists. Across its 19 exhibition zones, which the organiser also refers to as "memory spots", a section might feature scents that participants can't seem to forget. This might come in the form of items such as unwrapped toys and an old uniform, all described by the young artists in accompanying, descriptive texts.

Another area might invite one to watch a video that explores the participants' memories, while some might even prompt one to explore "memories that you can touch" in a section that highlights a variety of tangible textures found in Macau. Others might simply ask for interaction by pressing a button, or a tap of a card, to trigger specific actions.

Regarding the background of each work, according to a recent statement by the organisers, over the summer, the 22 contributing artists "set aside the instant feedback of their screens and rediscovered the city through their senses, lenses and bodies", with the MyLand Culture gathering "the memories they fished out into an Ocean of Memories". Exhibitiongoers are therefore invited to discover not only their memories, but even recall things that they themselves cannot forget, the statement said.

The exhibition is open daily from 12:00 noon through 7:00 p.m. Admission is free.

**Generation Alpha is defined as children born roughly between 2010 and 2024 or 2025. It succeeds Generation Z (aka Gen Z, people born between 1997 and 2012). – Gemini*

Photos taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin











Four-Faced Buddha birthday celebration draws many locals & visitors

Khalel Vallo

The annual Four-Faced Buddha Holy Birthday Celebration was held at the Four-Faced Buddha Shrine in Taipa yesterday, attracting scores of locals and visitors, including worshippers from several Southeast Asian countries, for traditional religious Thai ceremonies and prayers for peace and prosperity.

Organised by the Four-Faced Buddha Holy Birthday Celebration Organisation Committee, the event has been held in Macau for more than 20 years. This year's celebration was co-organised by the Macau Four-Faced Buddha Worshippers Association (澳門四面佛信眾會), Association of Thais in Macau, and the Macao-Thailand Chamber of Commerce.

The main ceremony began at 3:35 p.m. yesterday, followed by traditional Thai Buddhist rituals, led by monks and accompanied by a Thai music and dance troupe invited for the occasion,

The guests attending the event included former chief executive and current National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Vice Chairman Edmund Ho Hau Wah, as well as Consul-General of Thailand in Hong Kong Ranoppun Kapittai.

Worshippers gathered throughout the day to pay their respects and offer prayers for world peace, social harmony and prosperity in Macau and Thailand.

According to a statement by the organisers yesterday, the celebration attracted large crowds, with worshippers continuing to arrive into the night.

The statement said that the annual event provides an opportunity for worshippers to express their devotion while reflecting Macau's religious diversity and cultural co-existence, adding that the celebration would continue to promote the city's role as a platform for cultural exchange.

Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism and Protestantism are Macau's main religions. ■



Worshippers gather to pray during the annual Four-Faced Buddha Holy Birthday Celebration at the Four-Faced Buddha Shrine in Taipa. – Photo: Khalel Vallo

Citywide CCTV network to have 1,751 cameras by year-end: police

Tony Wong

The government said yesterday that it is planning to add 40 new cameras to the police forces' citywide CCTV surveillance system in the near future, raising the total number of cameras in the network to 1,751 by the end of this year.

Unitary Police Service (SPU) Acting Assistant Commissioner-General Lei Iat Meng made the remarks when attending a current affairs phone-in programme hosted by Ou Mun Tin Toi, the Chinese-language radio channel of public broadcaster TDM.

Yesterday's programme reviewed the government's 2026 work regarding its security portfolio.

Currently, the citywide CCTV surveillance system has a total of 1,711 cameras.

Over the past decade, the government has been expanding the citywide CCTV surveillance network in phases. A total of 1,620 cameras were installed in the first four phases.

The 219 cameras in the first phase, which came into operation in September 2016, are located in the areas around the city's border checkpoints.

The second and third phases came into use at the same time in June 2018. The 263 cameras in the second phase are located at major roads and transport hubs, while the 338 cameras in the third phase are located at so-called security black spots and tourist attractions.

The 800 cameras in the fourth phase, which came into operation in August 2020, are located in quiet places as well as places with potential security hazards.

In the fifth phase, 81 cameras were newly installed across the city, which came into use in March 2023. Moreover, 10 cameras in the Zone A new urban area came into use at the end of last year, raising the total number of cameras in the system to 1,711.



This photo taken yesterday shows a camera of the police forces' citywide CCTV surveillance system on Rua Central (龍嵩正街). – Photo: Tony Wong

The 1.38-square-kilometre Zone A, a new land reclamation area primarily being developed for public housing projects, is located between the peninsula's northeastern coast and the man-made island where the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) Macau checkpoint is located.

During yesterday's phone-in programme, Lei noted that the government is currently advancing the sixth phase of the citywide CCTV surveillance system, adding that it is planning to install 40 new cameras in the near future, raising the total number of cameras in the network to 1,751 by the end of this year.

Lei also said that the government was planning to install 680 new cameras next year, including locations around various new facilities such as the Mong Son social rental housing estate on Avenida de Venceslau de Morais (慕拉士大馬路), the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) Barra Station, and the Macao Union Hospital in south Cotai.

Macao One Account's new function to check border crossing records

Meanwhile, during yesterday's phone-in programme, Public Security Police Force (PSP) Acting Deputy Commissioner Wong Kim Hong said that the government was planning to launch a new function in the Macao One Account app in the first quarter of next year allowing residents to check their border crossing records, with the aim of enabling them to more easily calculate the number of days they have stayed in Macau in a year.

Certain government programmes require their beneficiaries to meet stay-in-Macau minimum-day requirements, such as wealth-sharing cash handouts and Central Provident Fund cash injections.

Both programmes require beneficiaries to stay in Macau for at least 183 days in a year. Those not staying in Macau due to any of various formally defined reasons can apply for exemptions from the minimum stay requirement.

Meanwhile, during yesterday's phone-in programme, Macao Customs Service Assistant Director-General Ip Wa Chio said that between January and September this year, customs officers seized a total of 3.2 million smuggled cigarettes, representing a year-on-year increase of 360 percent. During the period, customs and the Health Bureau (SSM) conducted six joint operations in the city, uncovering seven illegal cases and seizing 31,000 duty-unpaid cigarettes, he said. ■

Alexandre Marreiros to present art in Shanghai exhibition

Rui Pastorin

Macau-based artist and architect Alexandre Marreiros has taken his work to Shanghai, presenting it in a month-long exhibition "Stones, Wind and Palimpsest* – Cartographies of the Cities by Alexandre Marreiros" at the Institute for Fashioning Innovation, Shanghai University of Engineering Science (SUES).

Kicking off tomorrow, the free-admission exhibition will be on until December 11 to showcase two contrasting bodies of work, namely the quiet architectural portraits of Macau, and dense scenes of life in Rio de Janeiro's favelas**, according to a statement by organiser CAC - Círculo dos Amigos da Cultura de Macau ("Circle of the Friends of Macau's Culture").

The upcoming event is also organised by the Institute for Fashioning Innovation in conjunction with the MoCA – Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai.

"Acting as both cartographer and storyteller, the artist maps urban structures and captures the vitality within them", inviting exhibitiongoers to "enter the works and form their own interpretations rooted in personal experience".

The statement pointed out that Cascais-born Marreiros, who has held in 10 solo exhibitions and joined over 30 group shows across Lisbon, Macau, and elsewhere in China, had lived in Rio de Janeiro, where he developed his art and research on slums as "a cultural and architectural phenomenon".

The upcoming exhibition's location is at 191 North Zhejiang Road in Shanghai's Jing'an District. ■

** A palimpsest refers to a manuscript page or document from which the original text was scraped or washed off so the material could be reused for another writing, leaving translucent traces of the original script underneath. – Gemini*

***A favela, as defined by AI chatbot Gemini, is a densely populated, low-income informal settlement or slum in Brazil, most notably found in and around major cities like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.*



This image recently provided by CAC - Círculo dos Amigos da Cultura de Macau ("Circle of the Friends of Macau's Culture") shows an exhibit titled "Moro lá no morro", which, directly translated, means "I live up on the hill".

China opens first university school for rare, endangered disciplines

BEIJING – For decades, Chinese scholar Chen Nianfu worked to turn ancient inscriptions carved on bones and turtle shells more than 3,000 years ago into searchable digital texts. Now, a younger generation is helping carry his work forward.

Known as oracle bone inscriptions, these ancient characters offer a glimpse into life during China's Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BC). Their study is among China's rare and endangered academic disciplines, which face challenges including a shortage of specialists and difficulties in transmitting knowledge to younger generations.

China has established its first university school dedicated to rare and endangered academic disciplines at the University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (UCASS) in Beijing. It has also launched a national alliance of more than 80 institutions, as the country seeks to preserve specialized fields of study at risk of losing their scholars.

The newly established national alliance aims to promote resource sharing, collaborative research and joint talent development among universities, research institutes and cultural heritage institutions.

Chen, a veteran scholar formerly with Zhejiang Normal University in east China, began his meticulous work in 1998. He created thousands of digital character forms, transcribed historical texts, and built a searchable database of oracle bone inscriptions.

One of his former students, Li Ying, has brought the study of oracle bone inscriptions to a wider audience through short videos explaining ancient Chinese characters and their connections to modern writing. Her account on Douyin, a Chinese short-video platform, has attracted over one million followers.

"Every single character matters," Chen said.

Yet much of the ancient writing remains a mystery. Of the approximately 4,000 distinct oracle bone characters identified, fewer than half have been successfully deciphered.

In China, such niche disciplines are known as "lengmen juexue" (冷门绝学). According to the National Social Science Fund, the term encompasses traditional humanities disciplines that attract limited academic attention, pose difficulties in producing research findings, and have small research communities. It also covers highly specialized fields of unique cultural value that require exceptional expertise and face the risk of disappearing due to a shortage of qualified scholars.

Inaugurated on Friday, the new school focuses on more than 10 ancient writing systems and integrates research into oracle bone inscriptions, ancient bamboo and silk manuscripts, and classical studies. It establishes dedicated teaching and research divisions covering ancient writing systems used by ethnic groups in northern and southwestern China, as well as Chinese and Western classical civilizations.

The school has also established a digital research laboratory, launched an academic journal, and introduced a specialized undergraduate program as part of an integrated training system spanning undergraduate, master's and doctoral education.

Xu Jincheng, Party secretary of UCASS, said fragmented research resources and a shortage of qualified scholars have made it increasingly difficult for individual institutions to sustain these fields independently.

To address such challenges, the school has assembled a teaching and research team of more than 140 scholars, including eight members of the academic divisions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and over 30 distinguished professors and nationally recognized academic specialists.

It will also introduce a dual-supervisor system pairing a principal academic mentor with a secondary supervisor from another discipline, allowing students to draw on expertise across different research fields.

Huang Dekuan, director of the Research and Conservation Center for Excavated Texts at Tsinghua University, noted that research into oracle bone inscriptions, ancient writing systems and the history of China's border regions is important for preserving the country's cultural heritage and understanding its historical development.

China has stepped up efforts to protect and develop such disciplines in recent years. In 2018, the National Social Science Fund of China introduced a special funding program covering rare and endangered studies and other specialized research fields.

In 2024, UCASS established a collaborative innovation institute that drew on the academy's research resources to cultivate younger scholars in fields such as Manchu and Turkic studies.

Beyond institutional support, the future of these disciplines also depends on scholars transmitting their knowledge to younger generations.

In 2024, after completing the first digital draft of his oracle bone dictionary, Chen sent Li updated versions and other research materials, helping her share ancient Chinese writing with a wider audience.

Li is now exploring animated characters based on oracle bone inscriptions. She also draws on popular films and contemporary topics to make ancient writing more accessible. In her videos, she has pointed out inaccuracies in divination scenes from the Chinese fantasy film "Creation of the Gods" and explained why the Shang Dynasty had no equivalent of Chinese Lunar New Year's Eve and why its calendar sometimes had 13 months.

From inscriptions carved on bones and turtle shells over 3,000 years ago to stories shared on smartphone screens, these ancient characters are now finding their way into everyday life. *– Xinhua*



Fairgoers select blind boxes at the exhibition area of Consumer Goods during the 9th China International Import Expo (CIIE) in Shanghai yesterday. At the expo, booths featuring creative toys, trendy collectibles, and IP-themed merchandise have been packed with visitors. As consumer demand shifts toward more personalized and experience-driven choices, "emotional consumption" has become a new growth area in the consumer market. At the expo, these "feel-good" products that people buy simply to lift their mood are proving especially popular. The six-day expo ends today. – Xinhua

Singles' Day delivers AI services into Chinese shopping carts

BEIJING – A livestream studio once synonymous with lipstick and beauty products has added a very different item to its Singles' Day shopping list: artificial intelligence (AI) services.

During a recent Singles' Day livestream, a Chinese livestreaming star sold 100,000 monthly membership cards for QwenWork, an AI-powered productivity service, in just half an hour at a promotional price of 0.01 yuan each; the subscriptions carried a combined allowance of about 2 trillion tokens.

The sale marked an unusual moment for China's annual shopping festival. The discounted monthly membership gave consumers access to AI-powered tools for everyday tasks. In the livestream, the familiar shopping slogan "Everybody, buy it" gave way to a new pitch: "321, tokens up."

The livestream was part of a wider push to bring AI services onto mainstream e-commerce platforms. Since launching its token recharge center on Sept. 3, Tmall has brought in AI service providers including DeepSeek, Alibaba Cloud, Zhipu AI and Kimi. MiniMax has opened its first official flagship store on the platform, while QwenWork and StepFun have also joined.

The trend has gained traction during this year's Singles' Day campaign. Transaction value in Tmall's token category soared 450 percent month on month as the platform's sales campaign kicked off on October 20, according to a Tmall representative.

Tokens are the basic units for measuring large language model inference, and providers use the number consumed to calculate charges. Until recently, token consumption was billed through AI providers' own systems according to usage, leaving users with little information about unit prices and few ways to compare costs. Putting tokens and AI subscriptions on e-commerce shelves, notably, is changing how consumers access and pay for these services.

AI ENTERS EVERYDAY LIFE

Who is buying these services? According to a Tmall representative, the main customers are individuals and small businesses with clear AI needs, including households, people using AI for learning and research, and one-person businesses. Many are already regular users of large language models but previously had to pay different providers separately based on usage. E-commerce platforms now allow them to compare prices in one place and purchase tokens according to their needs.

Among the buyers was Zhang Ji, an office worker at a tobacco processing company in east China's Shandong Province, who purchased a QwenWork membership during the livestream. She has used Qwen to prepare work-related documents since May and has also tried Doubao and DeepSeek. "I thought it was normal to pay for access to more AI capabilities, but never imagined seeing tokens sold in a livestream. The price was so low that I bought one right away," she said.

Her use of AI goes beyond work. Before traveling to Singapore with her parents and young child in August, Zhang turned to Qwen for help planning the trip, including transportation from Singapore Changi Airport to the hotel, attractions suitable for a five- or six-year-old, reservations and routes between destinations. The tool offered several options based on her family's needs.

"You tell AI what you need, and it offers different options, but the final decision is still yours," she said. Instead of spending half a day planning the trip herself, Zhang saved time to spend with her family.

Other consumers are putting AI to work in their hobbies and businesses. Su Guoqing, a short-video enthusiast in Xining, northwest China's Qinghai Province, stocked up on tokens during the shopping festival to improve his videos. He said more complex scene creation and action storyboarding required more tokens than simpler productions.

Businesses are also taking advantage of the discounts. Wang Daoxing, executive director of an AI technology company based in Chongqing Municipality in southwest China, said his firm spends more than 2,000 yuan a month on tokens for software development, presentations and promotional images. During the sales campaign, it purchased a year's worth of monthly memberships for Qwen's standard version at a lower price than on the provider's official website.

Fan Yubo, deputy director of the institute of economics at the Shandong Academy of Social Sciences, said consumers previously had to navigate technical jargon and complicated billing rules to access large language models. By packaging AI capabilities into monthly subscriptions for everyday work and personal use, providers are now making these services easier to understand and buy, much like topping up mobile phone credit or buying mobile data packages.

The growing range of token packages on e-commerce platforms also suggests that some consumers are beginning to include AI services in their regular spending budgets. While users once tended to rely on free versions, some are now willing to pay for more stable usage quotas and stronger multimodal capabilities. In some applications, AI is moving beyond novelty value to become a productive tool, Fan said. *– Xinhua*

World media leaders urge stronger oversight, inclusive cooperation amid AI-driven transformation

BEIJING – Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the global media landscape, opening up new possibilities for media organizations to improve efficiency and reach wider audiences, while posing pressing challenges to journalistic integrity, human judgment and the future of the very profession.

At the 7th World Media Summit, held in Beijing from November 5 to 9, media professionals from around the world explored ways to better harness AI to improve news production while avoiding ethical pitfalls that could undermine trust in their content.

They emphasized that embracing the technology must go hand in hand with upholding journalistic principles, and that international cooperation is essential to navigating the transformation.

The summit, jointly organized by Xinhua News Agency and the Beijing municipal government under the theme "Media in the Intelligent Age: From Consensus to Action," brought together about 500 representatives from nearly 330 media organizations, think tanks, government bodies and international organizations across 112 countries and regions.



A participant in the 7th World Media Summit interacts with a robot in Beijing on Thursday. Representatives of the media, think tanks, government departments and other institutions, from home and abroad, discussed during the five-day summit how the media can adapt to changes, embrace opportunities and meet challenges together in the AI era. The summit ended yesterday. *– Xinhua*

'AUGMENTED JOURNALISM'

AI is finding its way into virtually every stage of news production, from story planning, information gathering and processing to fact-checking, proofreading, and even the generation of news images and videos.

Addressing the opening ceremony, Fu Hua, president of Xinhua News Agency, called on media professionals to share new technologies and applications, exchange experience in using them, and close gaps in AI research, development and understanding.

"We should lead the way in ensuring that all media professionals have a fair chance to benefit from AI," he said.

"Newsrooms everywhere are under pressure. Audiences expect faster coverage, more formats, more languages and more explanations," Agence France-Presse (AFP) Chairman and CEO Fabrice Fries told a high-level dialogue during the summit, which brought together executives from Xinhua News Agency, The Associated Press, Reuters, AFP and CNN.

"AI can help us automate repetitive tasks, process large amounts of information, translate content more efficiently and support our journalists in their daily work," he said.

The AFP chief described this approach as "augmented journalism," in which journalists spend less time on routine production and more time observing reality, meeting people, identifying emerging trends and explaining complex developments with greater depth and context.

At the opening ceremony, Reuters President Paul Bascobert also mentioned AI as "a resource, a tool that increases speed, efficiency and scale" for journalists. "Those are real gains, but AI does not replace our standards. It has to meet them. We automate tasks. We do not automate judgment," he added.

During the summit, two life-sized robot news anchors, as the world's first bionic humanoid robot news anchors, made their official debut, greeting the audience in fluent English.

"I heard about and saw AI anchors presenting news during my previous visit, which really impressed me," Sumeyra Teymur, CEO of Turkish news platform Haberler.com, told Xinhua ahead of the summit. She also expressed interest in the potential use of humanoid robots to cover dangerous situations, such as earthquakes and conflicts, where deploying human reporters could pose risks.

Fu said that as AI technology advances, media practitioners should make good use of AI while safeguarding the credibility of mainstream media.

"Xinhua is willing to strengthen dialogue with all parties to advance the industry's development and promote exchanges and cooperation," he told media executives at the high-level dialogue during the summit.

TOOL VS HUMAN JUDGMENT

AI is becoming increasingly embedded in the media industry, yet one message came through clearly in discussions among media representatives at the summit: it is a tool to assist journalists, not to replace them. Many speakers used the same word, "tool," to describe AI's role in news production.

Toshimitsu Sawai, president of Japan's Kyodo News, said generative AI is an "assistive tool" for editorial work. However, he said, AI carries risks such as copyright infringement and the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation. He also noted cases triggered by "out-of-control behavior" by AI models.

"Humans bear final decision-making authority and responsibility for content," Sawai said. "In this respect, it is increasingly important that professional journalists have a strong grasp of how to handle information and make judgments about news."

In the same vein, CNN Senior Vice President Kostas Oikonomou said AI is "a tool to strengthen our reporting, not replace the human judgment that defines it."

Bascobert of Reuters said that news delivery methods had evolved dramatically over the years, from carrier pigeons and telegraphs to today's digital technologies. "The tools have changed a great deal since then. The principle has not," he said, stressing that the core task of journalism remains getting the facts, checking them and reporting them.

While AI is a valuable tool, Bascobert said, it cannot replace the human qualities that make a good journalist, including the ability to gain people's trust, read people, and understand nuances in conversation. "Whatever technology we adopt, we should never lose sight of the fact that the most important aspects of journalism are done by people," he said.

Fries of AFP expressed optimism about the future of journalism, saying professional journalism becomes even more important in the future because it remains one of the few ways to maintain a direct connection with reality.

"AI and journalism should not be viewed as rivals," he said. "They need one another. Our challenge is to build a future in which technological innovation and trustworthy information grow stronger together."

For media organizations and journalists standing at the intersection of technology, information and public trust, Tatiana Valovaya, director-general of the United Nations Office at Geneva, highlighted three priorities: protecting information integrity and public trust; ensuring AI benefits everyone; and keeping human dignity and responsibility at the center.

COOPERATION FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

While AI offers extraordinary opportunities, "it also presents serious challenges, from synthetic content and information manipulation to threats to privacy, algorithmic bias, and unequal access to technology," Valovaya said.

"We believe international cooperation is essential," she said, emphasizing that AI's opportunities and risks are "too consequential to be left to a handful of countries or companies."

Media representatives at the summit shared the view that no single organization could address these challenges alone.

"International cooperation holds the key," said Sawai of Kyodo News, expressing hope that "discussions at this summit will deepen our collaboration and lead to a more informed, connected – and peaceful world."

In this evolving environment, collaboration between media companies is "a strategic necessity" to combine their respective strengths, create greater value and offer audiences a richer, more comprehensive view of the world, said Oikonomou of CNN.

Strong partnerships also "create opportunities to learn from one another, embrace innovation and explore new ways of working across content, platforms and business models," he added.

A concrete step toward such cooperation came with the summit's release of the Global Media Initiative for the Joint Development of AI Application Standards on Saturday.

Launched by Xinhua, the initiative brings together major media outlets and other professional organizations to safeguard the authenticity of information, protect data security, and uphold media ethics, thereby maintaining public trust in the media.

Under this initiative, participants plan to work together for about two years to develop a set of standards that address different media uses of AI and are validated by media outlets. The initiative also calls for a global database of AI applications.

Xinhua looks forward to further strengthening cooperation with fellow media organizations to promote closer people-to-people ties and play a positive and constructive role in advancing relations between countries, said Fu.

The need for inclusive media cooperation was also highlighted by representatives from the Global South.

"We hope the initiative will become a practical avenue for cooperation, sharing expertise and building capacity, and media organizations of different sizes and with different resources can apply the standards," said Mohammed Alyami, director general of the Union of News Agencies of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which is also among the first participants, in an interview with Xinhua.

"International cooperation must therefore ensure that developing countries and small island states can contribute not only to AI's development, but also to the principles governing it," said Aminath Namza, chairperson of Public Service Media in the Maldives.

Likewise, Wong Chun Wai, chairman of the Malaysian National News Agency (Bernama), called on Global South countries to work together more closely in the changing media landscape and ensure that media organizations worldwide can share in the benefits of AI. *– Xinhua*

Dialogue, human-centered journalism key to understanding China: German newspaper chief

Interview

BERLIN – German society needs a more comprehensive understanding of China, and the media should play a greater role in bridging differences through direct contact, dialogue and in-depth reporting, said Nick Brauns, co-editor-in-chief of German daily newspaper *junge Welt ("young World")*, in a recent interview with Xinhua ahead of the 7th World Media Summit.

Brauns said many Germans want to know more about China's history, economic development and international role. They wonder, for example, why the Chinese economy has become so powerful and why Chinese electric vehicles are increasingly competitive in international markets. However, their understanding of China relies largely on German mainstream media coverage and government statements, which offer limited insight into the factors behind its development and growing global influence.

Brauns said reporting on other countries should involve listening directly to the people concerned. He also called for greater attention to voices from the Global South, which he believes remain underrepresented in Western media.

"Direct contact helps us challenge one-sided narratives and understand other societies in their full complexity," he said.

The World Media Summit provides a valuable opportunity for media professionals from different countries and social systems to share experience and deepen mutual understanding, he said.

Turning to AI, Brauns said at *junge Welt*, AI can be used for translation and research, but the newspaper maintains a clear principle: "Human beings write for human beings."

"AI should be a tool, and it should be a tool that we also control. It should not be more than that," he said.

"We work in different political systems and have different roles and responsibilities. But we share an interest in understanding the world and its economic and political changes," he said.

The five-day 7th World Media Summit in Beijing ended yesterday. *– Xinhua, MPD*

Can't cook or shower: Indonesians take aim at data centres

BATAM, Indonesia – Cooking and bathing became difficult when taps ran dry in Batam, an Indonesian island where residents are protesting as data centres spring up to power the global artificial intelligence boom.

The area had suffered a "long drought" caused by low rainfall, the local water utility operator told AFP, as a strong El Niño cycle exacerbates dry weather.

But, as in other countries, anger has been directed at the data centres, warehouse-like facilities that keep apps and artificial intelligence tools running, with water often used to cool their humming servers.

Frustration is bubbling over in Indonesia and Malaysia – especially in regions bordering Singapore that are seen as a prime location for new tech facilities.

At first the main reaction was, "thank God industry is coming" to Batam, 54-year-old tradesman Juniardi Adinda Sembiring Gurukinayan told AFP.

But severe recent outages hitting the municipal water service in some Batam communities meant "sometimes I skipped my shower".

"We cannot eat rice without water. We cannot cook vegetables without water," he said.

At the worst point, dozens of angry residents staged spontaneous protests outside Nongsa Digital Park – a new cluster of data centres and other amenities, designated a special economic zone.

People in the district believe "that the water shortages... are related to the construction of data centres", Juniardi said.

The drought caused the nearby Nongsa Reservoir to run very low, and supply systems were further disrupted by an electrical fault, said Ginda Alamsyah, a spokesman for water utility operator Air Batam Hilir (ABH).



This aerial picture shows the Nongsa Digital Park (NDP) area, a hub for artificial intelligence (AI)-based data centre and digital infrastructure development, in Batam, Riau Islands, Indonesia last Tuesday. – AFP

The tech park receives water from a different source, Duriangkang Reservoir, an industry source told AFP.

'Smelly, yellowish'

Authorities in late September told developers they must build plants to desalinate seawater for cooling, to avoid straining local resources.

Companies behind operational or planned data centres at Nongsa Digital Park include the Singapore-headquartered BW Digital, DayOne, and Princeton Digital Group.

Another owner, Hong Kong-based Gaw Capital Partners, said it was "aware of the distress and frustration expressed by local residents in Nongsa and surrounding Batam communities" over water shortages.

To ensure sustainable operations, "our data centre facilities must deploy a combination of advanced engineering, efficient architectural designs, and renewable energy sourcing," it said.

That includes using so-called "closed-loop" water systems that reuse resources and so require less fresh liquid.

As residents demanded a return to normal water supply at one protest last month, AFP saw a police officer filling up buckets they had brought to Nongsa Digital Park.

In nearby coastal village Mata Ikan, people had to use seawater to wash after defecating, said demonstrator Rahmat, 52, who like many Indonesians goes by one name.

"The water crisis has been going on for the past year, but it got worse in the last six months," 38-year-old Sulastri said at her home, where supply was out, so she poured water from a plastic bottle to wash dishes.

"Many of us here run small stalls. We used to make ice cubes, but we can't anymore."

The government has been distributing water from tanks driven around, but Sulastri said it was "smelly" and "yellowish".

AFP contacted the local government BP Batam, and Indonesia's ministry for economic affairs, which regulates Nongsa Digital Park, for comment. Neither responded.

Recent disruption to water distribution "was not caused by data centres or AI or investors entering that sector," Amsakar Achmad, Batam mayor and head of BP Batam said in October, according to local media.

The decline in water supply was instead "due to weather and climate factors", he said.

Tech boom

Data centre capacity in Southeast Asia is projected to triple from 2025 levels by 2030, driven by a tenfold surge in AI use, according to a KPMG report.

This can put pressure on water supplies, but also electricity grids still heavily reliant on planet-warming fossil fuels.

The data centre construction boom in Indonesia and Malaysia began when resource constraints led hyper-connected Singapore to halt new developments between 2019 and 2022.

It has since ramped up, boosting both countries' economies as governments and tech giants pour hundreds of billions of dollars into training and running AI.

Ginda said water provider ABH supports policies to encourage investment and development in Batam, south of Singapore and connected to it by undersea cables.

But he added that water demand must be managed properly, adding that ABH is trying to boost the capacity of Batam's six reservoirs by dredging them, with cloud seeding another option in dry periods.

'Inflection point'

North of Singapore, Malaysia's Johor region has become "one of the largest emerging AI infrastructure clusters in the world", according to researcher James Chai of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

Just half a decade ago, Johor hosted 10 megawatts of data centre capacity. That has ballooned by a factor of 200 to 2.1 gigawatts today, Chai said.

The environmental cost could be high.

By 2035, data centres are forecast to swallow up one-third of Malaysia's total energy consumption, the deputy prime minister told parliament in July.

The government said at that time it would only approve data centre projects after ensuring sufficient energy and water supply capacity.

Johor residents have protested over dust pollution and flash floods linked to data centre construction, as operators build closer to residential areas.

"Johor is at a critical inflection point," Mohd Fadhil Md Din of Malaysia's University of Technology told AFP.

"It has the potential to become Southeast Asia's leading sustainable data centre hub," but only if it manages resources and spatial planning carefully, he said.

'We all feel it'

Pushback sometimes works.

In Kota Damansara on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, a plot of land intended for a data centre remains empty after local opposition.

The developer withdrew its planning permission application in August, after its neighbours spoke out online, lobbied their MP and gathered more than 9,000 petition signatures.

Jahaidi Harun, 72, had been concerned that the proposed data centre could be noisy and pressure existing infrastructure.

Data centres "use a lot of water," the retiree told AFP, adding that, as in Batam, "if the rain doesn't come for one month, we all feel it".

Following the withdrawal, Malaysia's human resources minister Ramanan Ramakrishnan told local media he wasn't against "development or investment".

But "for large-scale projects that could affect the residents' lives, the people must have a say". *– AFP*

Okinawa governor calls for review of US forces pact after murder

TOKYO – The governor of Okinawa said yesterday he would request a review of a pact seen as giving the US military preferential treatment in Japan, following a murder allegedly committed by an American Marine.

Prosecutors indicted the Marine last month on suspicion of murdering a 39-year-old Japanese woman at an Okinawa hotel, in a case that triggered outrage and reignited controversy over the US military presence on the southern island.

The United States has around 54,000 military personnel stationed in Japan, mostly on Okinawa, and crimes committed by its personnel have been a thorn in relations between the close security allies.

"I'll call for a fundamental review of the SOFA," said Okinawa governor Genta Koja, referring to the 1960 Japan-US Status of Forces Agreement which critics say has rendered US military bases virtually extraterritorial and immune to Japan's domestic laws.

Under the accord, US military authorities have the primary right to investigate and punish service members in Japan when they are on official duty.

Critics say this arrangement has sometimes blocked indictments by Japanese investigators, while the extraterritoriality of the US bases has deterred Japanese authorities from probing suspected soil pollution around them.

Lawmakers in Okinawa adopted a resolution last month calling for revisions to the pact, which will soon be submitted to the US embassy.

"After every incident or accident involving US military service members or civilian employees, Okinawa has repeatedly lodged strong protest with the US military and the governments of both Japan and the United States," Koja told a news conference in Tokyo yesterday.

The alleged murder "was an extremely heinous crime that has caused great anxiety amongst residents of Okinawa," he said.

Koja, who was elected governor in September, is the first Okinawa leader in 12 years who has approved of a contentious US military base relocation plan.

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

Koja said yesterday he would seek the "swift return" of lands used by the US military in Okinawa's commercial centre under a 2013 agreement, which he said will help boost the local economy.

The review of the pact should include "prompt compliance with requests from the Japanese side to transfer suspects in detention prior to indictment and adoption of Japanese laws such as the aviation act to the US military," he said.

Japan and the United States agreed on Friday to measures aimed at preventing crimes by US service members on Okinawa, including holding talks on community relations and Japan's legal system.

US officials also said on Friday they would extend for some service members a 30-day curfew imposed after the woman's murder through December 7. *– AFP*

'Cruise for life' ship impounded in Singapore

SINGAPORE – A cruise ship left stranded in Southeast Asia after its US-based operator ran out of money has been impounded in Singapore, maritime officials said yesterday.

The Odyssey, meant to take passengers on a continuous voyage around the world, was seized after arriving on Sunday from Cambodia, where around 200 guests were told to disembark.

"The vessel has been placed under arrest pursuant to a court order," the city-state's Maritime and Port Authority said in a statement, without giving further details.

"The crew onboard are reported to be well, and arrangements for their welfare and wellbeing are being managed by the vessel's creditors. There are no passengers on board."

It added that the ship "is currently anchored in Singapore port waters".

The ship arrived at the port of Sihanoukville in Cambodia during a scheduled stop last month.

But the passengers were forced to leave the vessel in Sihanoukville after the ship's operator, Villa Vie Residences, abruptly announced it was suspending operations of the Odyssey, two years after it set sail.

Villa Vie Residences cited "extraordinary increases" in fuel costs due to the US-Israel war with Iran as a reason for stopping operations.

The cruise had been billed as an affordable voyage around the world in which passengers could buy or rent rooms for a holiday or for life.

Some passengers said they sold everything they had to pay for the cruise.

Residents were given just seven hours to pack their bags and disembark from the 200-metre ship.

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

The ship carried 203 guests and 156 crew. *– AFP*

Pakistan farmers in long fight to make German firms pay for flood damage

Sameer Mandhro with Charlotte Greenfield in Islamabad

JACOBABAD, Pakistan – In a Pakistani village nestled in rice fields, Abdul Hafeez Khoso remembers the vast industrial zones he saw in Germany when he visited to file a pioneering climate legal case.

"They're spreading pollution: up in the sky there are no borders, it can affect anywhere," the 43-year-old said, describing areas far larger than his village of 800 people.

"This is a problem for the whole world - that is why it should be resolved at the global level."

Khoso and 38 other farmers from Pakistan's southern Sindh province who were devastated by "apocalyptic" flooding in 2022 are suing German energy firm RWE and cement maker Heidelberg Materials in a rare bid to make big polluters pay damages for climate impacts.

The companies are being targeted not over specific operations in Pakistan, but because of their climate-warming emissions. They are headquartered in Germany, where a recent legal case opened the door to such suits.

The litigation argues that the companies' emissions contributed to climate change and turbo-charged rain that wiped out their crops, livestock and homes.

"The year 2022 was an apocalyptic scene – not even our elders had ever witnessed such weather," Khoso, who lives in the district of Jacobabad with his wife and toddler, told AFP.

"We had nothing left."

Both firms, which the plaintiffs estimate contributed 0.68 percent and 0.12 percent to global industrial emissions respectively, deny wrongdoing.

Khoso's case is backed by Pakistani and European organisations hoping to win compensation and build on nascent but vigorous international efforts to extract climate damages from corporations.

"We always blame natural disasters, and sometimes we blame God, but science tells us that climate change is increasing the risks and intensity of extreme weather events," said Mir Keerio, a development expert at Pakistan's HANDS Welfare Foundation, which mobilised communities for the lawsuit.

"Those who have contributed significantly to this crisis must be held accountable... we realised we must take our fight for climate justice to the major polluters."

Debt and damages

Climate litigation is a growing field globally, but action has so far largely targeted governments, with only a handful of firms such as Shell and cement maker Holcim facing suits for climate disaster compensations.

Lawyers say a ruling requiring a company to pay out compensation proportionate to its greenhouse gas emissions would mark a major breakthrough.

Germany's judiciary moved towards that principle last year in a case brought by a Peruvian farmer, also against RWE.



This photograph taken on July 29 shows Abdul Hafeez Khoso (centre), one of the 39 Pakistani farmers pursuing a climate lawsuit in Heidelberg against German energy firm RWE and cement producer Heidelberg Material for climate-warming emissions and over losses incurred during the 2022 floods, speaking with villagers at Jacobabad in Pakistan's Sindh province. *– AFP*

His compensation claim was rejected, but the courts left the door open to holding emitters liable.

Roda Verheyen, a German lawyer involved in both cases, told AFP the Pakistani farmers' lawsuit builds on that ruling and further accuses companies of "wrongful behaviour".

"Large companies knew about the general impacts of climate change since the 1960s," said Verheyen.

"They should have exercised due diligence and actually at least tried to reduce emissions, which they didn't do enough."

The lawsuit also draws on research documenting farmers' losses in the floods, which hit a third of the country, killed 1,700 and affected 30 million Pakistanis.

Munawar Khatoon, a rare female landowner in a conservative area, said the floods struck just before the wheat harvest, submerging seeds and wiping out her family's main source of income.

"We worry about how the next generation will manage to live if this continues," the 43-year-old told AFP in her village Usman Samtio.

"Now when the rainy season comes, we feel fear."

In nearby Dadu district, litigant Abdul Khalique Laghari said the floods affected the region for years.

"To this day, we are unable to repay our debt," said the 55-year-old, who estimates he lost US$14,000 in assets including his house, 40 acres (16 hectares) of crops and livestock.

"When we wake in the morning, we start getting calls from the people we owe money to," he said, pointing to crumbling walls and the remnants of flood-damaged houses.

"This has caused us serious mental harm."

'For justice'

RWE and Heidelberg Materials both call the claims in the suit "unfounded".

Heidelberg Materials told AFP its operations were compliant with German laws and that firms could not be expected to retroactively face different standards.

RWE referred AFP to a statement describing the lawsuit as "yet another attempt to shift climate policy demands to German courtrooms".

"It would be a contradiction in terms if the state allowed CO2 emissions, regulated them by law and even demanded them in some cases, but at the same time allowed retroactive civil liability for them," it said.

Even if the case succeeds, an uphill battle remains for millions across Pakistan, ranked among the countries most affected by climate change despite contributing less than one percent of global emissions.

The case will be considered in a civil process likely to take years. But for the litigants, the attempt is worth it.

"This case is for justice," said Khatoon. "We hold these companies responsible for our destruction."

– AFP

Mumbai bans rockets, aerial firecrackers until Nov 25 after Diwali fire surge

NEW DELHI - Authorities in India's financial capital, Mumbai, yesterday banned the letting off of rockets and aerial firecrackers in both public and private spaces until November 25 following a surge in fire incidents during Diwali celebrations.

The Mumbai Disaster Management Authority said densely populated localities, high-rise buildings, slum areas, narrow roads and closely packed residential and commercial structures increase the risk of fire accidents caused by such firecrackers, thus posing a serious threat to life and property.

The restriction came after Mumbai recorded 142 fire incidents on Sunday, of which 137 were attributed to firecrackers. Two women were injured in these incidents.

Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, was celebrated across India with religious fervour and gaiety on Sunday, with people letting off firecrackers to mark the festival.

– Xinhua



Students from a Hindu religious school light firecrackers during the celebrations to mark Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, in Varanasi, India on Sunday. *– AFP*

Bangladesh challenges ousted PM Hasina over return pledge

Sheikh Sabiha Alam

DHAKAR – Bangladesh challenged yesterday ousted leader Sheikh Hasina to seek extradition from India if she was serious about returning home, while reviewing an application to renew her passport.

Hasina, whose 15-year rule was ended by a mass uprising she tried to crush, has vowed to return in December to Bangladesh, where she was sentenced to death for crimes against humanity over the 2024 crackdown on protesters.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed told reporters yesterday that authorities were looking into Hasina's request for a new passport, adding that she was a convicted offender who had taken refuge abroad.

"The legal basis of the application, whether it followed due process, and whether there is a right to apply for a passport – all those matters are being reviewed," he said.

"We had already sent a letter to that country (India) seeking her extradition through due process," he added.

Hasina has said several times she intends to return, telling AFP in an email that she was "fully aware" she faced being hanged.

Hasina's British lawyers have requested to renew her documents after the "reported revocation" of her passport.

A letter by law firm Matrix Chambers, addressed to Bangladesh's high commission in New Delhi and seen by AFP, requested her passport renewal – but made no mention of when, or where, she planned to travel.

Md Aminul Islam, chief prosecutor of the court that sentenced Hasina to death in November 2025, dismissed the application as "nothing but political stunt".

Humaiun Kobir, Bangladesh's junior foreign minister, said she should simply surrender herself to face justice.

"Let her tell India: 'Yes, there is an extradition treaty. Please hand me over. I killed this many people, and I am ready to face the sentence. Please execute me there'," he told reporters.

"She is a thief, a bandit and a terrorist who fled... How could she, having fled, want to come back?"

'Trying to create panic'

Hasina fled to old ally India in 2024, and has not been seen in public since but has taken part in online news conferences by telephone.

She was convicted and sentenced in absentia.

Her continued presence in India has strained ties between Dhaka and New Delhi, which says the extradition request is under legal review.

The government of Tarique Rahman, whose party won elections in February in which Hasina's Awami League was barred from contesting, has said it would ensure the former prime minister receives due legal process in all cases against her should she return.

But Hasina's pledge to return presents a political challenge for Rahman's government.

Many Bangladeshis want to see her hanged, while others fear her return could galvanise her former supporters and trigger a fresh confrontation between rival camps.

Police yesterday said they had arrested 12 people for a series of petrol bomb attacks, including against property, an empty bus and police vehicles this month, without causing any casualties.

Dhaka police spokesman Md Akhtar Hossain said the suspects were members of Hasina's banned Awami League party.

"They are trying to create panic among people," he told AFP. "We are remaining vigilant to deal with any untoward situation." *– AFP*

COP31 opens under climate, finance pressure

Laurent Thomet and Juliette Michel

ANTALYA, Turkey – The COP31 climate talks kicked off yesterday with an early fight over money as the UN's chief urged world leaders to "get serious" about tackling the crisis after a year of devastating weather extremes.

António Guterres made his plea as thousands of participants descended on a sprawling expo centre in the Turkish Mediterranean city of Antalya for the UN's annual two-week climate conference.

The summit comes after a year of punishing heatwaves in Europe, major wildfires in Indonesia and catastrophic floods in Nepal, with an exceptionally strong El Niño weather phenomenon fuelling more climate chaos.

Observers expect few major breakthroughs at COP31 as countries grapple with an oil price shock and geopolitical tensions fuelled by the US war with Iran and the Ukraine war.

In a statement, the UN secretary-general urged leaders to "get serious by cutting emissions faster, accelerating a just transition from fossil fuels and delivering the finance and protection vulnerable countries need".

Old battles over money emerged even before COP31 started, with negotiators debating until the early hours yesterday over demands by developing nations to include items on climate finance in the official agenda.

Under UN climate agreements, developed countries, which are historically responsible for most greenhouse gas emissions, have provided financial support to help developing nations adapt to climate impacts and transition to cleaner energy.

Climate finance discussions "will always be a challenge, because it's all about competing priorities", Papua New Guinea's Ruel Yamuna, the COP31 Pacific envoy for climate finance access, told AFP.

"It's like Christmas. You have a long Christmas list ... you want it all but you can't have it all," Yamuna said.

Jasper Inventor, head of Greenpeace's COP31 delegation, said developed countries had taken a "hard line" over whether to include a platform, agreed at COP30 in Brazil last year, aimed at discussing how wealthy nations should provide funds to developing nations.

But it was ultimately added to the agenda.

African countries also unsuccessfully pushed for a specific agenda item on tripling adaptation finance, which aims to help poorer nations pay for measures such as building sea walls or planting drought-resistant crops.

The UN says developing countries will need US$305 billion a year by 2035 to adapt to climate change, nearly 10 times what they currently receive from wealthy nations.

A senior European Union official warned last week that there would be "no political will" for extra funding pledges at COP31.



Danish Minister for Climate, Energy and Supply, Samira Nawa (centre) and Australia's Minister for Climate Change and Energy Chris Bowen (left) attend a signing ceremony at the Australian Pavilion whilst Queen Mary of Denmark looks on during the COP31 UN Climate Change Conference at the Antalya Expo Center yesterday. Turkey is hosting the COP31 climate talks between November 9 to 20 in the Mediterranean resort city of Antalya, with Australia presiding over the negotiations. – AFP

The long-term climate outlook is bleak: the United Nations warned in September that global warming will likely exceed 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, breaching the most ambitious threshold set by the Paris Agreement.

"This COP must respond to the overshoot to save countries like mine from disappearance," said Maina Talia, climate minister of the Pacific island of Tuvalu.

Fossil fuel fight

Turkey is presiding over COP31, with Australia leading negotiations under an unusual arrangement that settled a dispute over who would host the conference but raised concerns over how it would work.

But COP31 President Murat Kurum, who is also Turkey's environment minister, and Australian Climate Minister Chris Bowen hailed their partnership, raising their clasped hands above their heads to applause during the opening ceremony.

The partners have branded the summit as the "implementation COP", focusing on turning commitments into concrete action after years of ambitious announcements.

"We know that delay carries one of the heaviest costs in climate action," Kurum said.

Turkey is inviting countries to join a voluntary "electrification" pledge to raise the share of global energy demand met by electricity from around 20 percent today to 35 percent by 2035.

'Clean' electrification

The European Union has called for "clean" electrification, a term that could spark debate over the role of oil, gas and coal in the Turkish proposal.

Countries committed to transition away from fossil fuels in a landmark pact at COP28 in Dubai in 2023 but have struggled to agree on how to turn that pledge into action.

COP30 ended with a deal that made no explicit mention of fossil fuels after oil-producing countries opposed the language, prompting the Brazilian hosts to propose a voluntary "roadmap" for countries to transition to clean energy.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who will be among leaders addressing COP31 later this week, was due to attend the talks, fresh from a re-election win that activists hailed as a victory for climate change.

But climate diplomacy is still missing a major player as climate-sceptic US President Donald Trump has not sent officials to COP31.

A US congressional delegation, however, will come to Antalya, with Democrats beaming after last week's historic US midterm election win. *– AFP*

Kenya busts US$27-million crystal meth haul

NAIROBI – Kenyan authorities have seized 454 kilogrammes of crystal methamphetamine worth US$27 million in a multi-agency operation, the police said yesterday.

Kenya has long served as a transit route for narcotics because of its strategic location next to the Indian Ocean, and in recent years has stepped up efforts to combat drug trafficking.

Displaying the seized drugs to journalists, Kenya's Director of Criminal Investigations Mohamed Amin described the seizure as an "operational breakthrough".

The raid took place on Saturday along the Kenyan coast following a tip-off from Tanzanian authorities, who had arrested a suspect in a separate drug bust.

A total of three suspects, two Tanzanians and a Ugandan, were arrested during the operation.

"This is a significant operational achievement... It underscores the importance of intelligence-led investigations, cross border cooperation and sustained pressure on trafficking networks," Amin said.

The seizure comes a year after the east African nation confiscated 1,036 kilograms of methamphetamine in what was then the largest drug haul in its history.

"Kenya will not be allowed to serve as a transit route, a destination market or a safe haven for drug traffickers," Amin said.

The prosecution told the court the three suspects were a "flight risk" and secured a 15-day detention order.

Between January and October, Kenya arrested 1,631 people in connection with narcotics offences and seized drugs worth millions of dollars. *– AFP*

Expelled Danish tenants 'optimistic' over Supreme Court discrimination case

COPENHAGEN – A group of Danish tenants told AFP yesterday they were confident the country's Supreme Court would back their discrimination case over their eviction from social housing under a law aimed at breaking up so-called "hard ghettos".

Seven families from Helsingor, north of Copenhagen, had their leases terminated in 2022 under a 2018 law that orders changes to social housing estates where more than half of residents are "non-Western".

Under the law, owners have to rebuild, renovate or sell the housing to change the social mix by 2030.

"Non-Western" is one criterion the government uses to define "transformation areas", which it previously termed "hard ghettos".

The plaintiffs took their case to the Supreme Court claiming their leases were wrongfully terminated, citing discrimination based on ethnic origin.

"After attending the two days of hearings and listening to the lawyers as well as the Human Rights Institute, I remain optimistic," Riad, one of the plaintiffs, told AFP.

"We have a strong case," the 33-year-old engineer, who did not want his family name published, insisted.

The Supreme Court began hearing the case on Friday, after Denmark's lower courts ruled in favour of the landlord. A decision is expected on November 23. *– AFP*

Netanyahu again seeks unity govt despite mandate denial

JERUSALEM – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called again yesterday for a unity government that would keep him in power, a day after opposition rival Gadi Eisenkot was given a mandate to form a coalition.

"A unity government is, simply, a necessity," Netanyahu said in a video posted on social media that ignored President Isaac Herzog on Sunday formally giving Eisenkot the first chance at a government.

Eisenkot's opposition bloc received 48 out of 61 seats needed for a majority in Israel's parliament in October 27 elections. Netanyahu's bloc won 53 seats.

But Eisenkot received a majority of recommendations in parties' talks with Herzog. He could rely on Arab-majority parties, which won a record 19 seats after unprecedented voter turnout on anger over racism and marginalisation by Netanyahu's far-right government.

In his video, Netanyahu warned Israelis against what he described as the threat of including Arab-Israelis in a future government.

"You cannot form a government with Hamas supporters, a government that depends on Hamas supporters," Netanyahu said yesterday, repeating an often-used scare tactic against Arab-Israeli parties, which he has also accused of election fraud despite a lack of evidence.

The parties deny the charges. Eisenkot faces resistance within the opposition to including Arab-Israeli parties, which could also vote to put him in power without joining the government, leaving it fragile.

Netanyahu said that a unity government around his Likud party should instead include all Zionist parties as well as ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties.

Avigdor Liberman, a right-wing critic of Netanyahu and leader of the smallest of the core opposition parties, has made clear he opposes any partnership with Israeli-Arabs, questioning their ideology and warning of the political cost.

Liberman has instead courted the ultra-Orthodox, despite his years of criticism of the community over its key demand that its young people remain exempt from mandatory military service.

Liberman met yesterday with Eisenkot in a public show of unity.

"Both expressed full confidence in their ability to form a stable government for a full four-year term," Liberman's Yashar party said in a statement.

Eisenkot and Netanyahu have both offered a national-unity government with the rival party – but with each one insisting he would be in charge.

Eisenkot has publicly said that Netanyahu is dangerous and unfit to lead Israel, pointing to his failure to prevent the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack, his deep divisiveness and corruption charges that could land Netanyahu in prison if he were to lose power. *– AFP*

What to know about the Krakow mass shooting

WARSAW – Poland has been rocked by a killing spree in the historic centre of Krakow that left six people dead and 15 wounded – in what prosecutors called the country's first modern day mass shooting. Here is what is known so far about the crime:

Mass shooting

Michal Oksinski, 24, drove his car into Krakow's Main Market Square – bustling with locals and tourists – on Saturday afternoon and opened fire.

Dressed in military garb and carrying an AR-15 rifle, he shot at random into the crowd before a final battle with police.

He was shot, wounded and hospitalised.

Three more bodies were found at the suspect's home in Ostrowiec Swietokrzyski, around 150 kilometres northeast of Krakow. They were revealed to be the gunman's parents and sister.

Police announced Oskinski had died in hospital in the early hours yesterday.

Six dead, 15 wounded

A 32-year-old British man and a 51-year-old Austrian woman were among the dead.

The four others killed were three women and one man, all Polish. They included Izabela Wozna, a 47-year-old painter and mother of four, who had come to Krakow for the opening of her exhibition.

Among the 15 wounded were nationals from Germany, Portugal, Britain, Austria and Russia.

Two of the wounded were police officers who confronted the gunman.

One, Jakub Kulik, has been hailed as the hero of the drama. Social media images showed him shooting and wounding the gunman despite being hit himself.

Two of the injured have been discharged from the hospital, said Przemyslaw Nowak, a prosecution spokesman. Seven remain in "non life-threatening" condition, while the rest are in "serious" condition, including two in "critical" condition, he added.

'Very, very radical'

Oksinski had no prior criminal record, according to investigators cited by Polish media.

Along with his father, the suspect was a member of a shooting club. Investigators seized 11 firearms during their search.

His paternal grandmother said Oksinski had obtained a gun licence this year, according to Polish media.

On Saturday evening, Interior Minister Marcin Kierwinski said the evidence at hand indicated Oksinski had "very, very radical views" and "may have been fascinated by far-right ideologies".

He later told private broadcaster TVN24 that he was referring to "initial hypotheses" and that the killer's motives were unknown.

The prosecution office spokesman said yesterday that investigators "do not have findings that we could, in a responsible way, categorically state that he was inspired by any particular ideology".

"It is far too early to comment on the motives ... We have not found any obvious symbols that are generally associated with a particular political movement, whether far right or far left," he added.

An interior ministry spokeswoman told Polish radio that the "many emblems and patches" on Oksinski's clothing were being analysed as part of the investigation.

While unverified reports on social media claimed Oksinski was in the Polish military, Defence Minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz insisted Oksinski was not and had never been in the army.

Photos allegedly taken from his social media accounts have provoked online discussions on his ideologies. But authorities have warned against disinformation and images created or altered using AI.

Searches of the shooter's home in Ostrowiec Swietokrzyski showed he had a so-called "Gadsden flag" – a historical American yellow flag featuring a rattlesnake and the motto "Don't Tread on Me". While this has been used as a symbol of the American right, prosecutors said there was "no obvious connotation".

Prosecutors have launched a terrorist investigation following the killings, which will continue despite Oksinski's death. *– AFP*

Judo king Riner joins fight for French presidency

Jacques Klopp and Anna Smolchenko

PARIS – France's five-time Olympic judo champion Teddy Riner announced yesterday he would run in next year's presidential election, after expressing concern about the "rise of the far right".

"My name is Teddy Riner and today, I am telling you face to face: I am a candidate in the 2027 presidential election," the 37-year-old said in a surprise announcement on social media.

Riner, one of the greatest judokas in history, said in the two-minute-37-second video that he feared France could soon become deeply divided, appearing to cast himself as a candidate for voters unwilling to choose between two political extremes – the far right and the hard left.

His announcement comes as far-right candidate Marine Le Pen leads in the polls to replace centrist President Emmanuel Macron next year, with hard-left firebrand Jean-Luc Mélenchon in second place.

"Today we live alongside one another," said Riner, who hails from the French overseas territory of Guadeloupe. "I fear that tomorrow we'll be living in confrontation."

'Right skin colour'

Riner, among France's best-known sports figures, has publicly said he was very worried about the "rise of the far right".

Le Pen has benefited from one of the most fractured political landscapes in modern French history, with a crowded field of candidates competing for support.

Infighting among centrists has increased the likelihood of a second-round runoff between Le Pen and Mélenchon.

Riner voiced concern about a France that is "collapsing under the weight of debt" and said he was troubled to see "a father or mother gritting their teeth while filling a shopping trolley".

He lamented that "state authority has disappeared" in the face of "thugs".



France's five-time Olympic judo champion Teddy Riner appears in a video displayed on a smartphone and released on his Instagram social media account, as he announces his candidacy for the France 2027 presidential election, in Brussels yesterday. *– AFP*

Riner, who is black, also criticised excessive bureaucracy and a system where he said "a young person's future can be destroyed simply because they don't have the right network, the right name or the right skin colour".

"I will not be among those who watch the country burn while making excuses," he added, sitting in front of a bookcase and wearing a white shirt and dark jacket.

"Fighting has always been part of who I am. I know what it means to struggle, to fall, to always get back up."

'Starting from zero'

He acknowledged that some people would dismiss his candidacy.

"I know what people are going to say about me: 'He's crazy. He's not from the establishment. He doesn't have the codes. He's never done politics,'" he added.

"If refusing to bow my head and refusing chaos makes me crazy, then yes, I'm completely crazy."

Dani Podgoretskaya, an analyst at Eurasia Group, said Riner addressed "the right pain points" but that she did not see him as a serious contender.

"The French take the presidential election very seriously, given how much power the office holds. He has no experience in elected office, no party and no detailed programme yet," she said.

"While I still find it possible that we may yet see a providential figure emerge who unites the anti-populist vote, I doubt that Riner is that figure."

Erwan Lestrohan of polling firm Odoxa said that while no candidate was generating broad enthusiasm among French voters, Riner's popularity would not necessarily translate into electoral support.

"He's starting from zero in terms of political credibility," Lestrohan said.

In an interview with *Le Parisien*, Riner said he intended to continue his sports career.

If elected president, he said he planned to compete in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, "if the position allows me to, and if the French people allow me to".

Riner said he intended to launch his campaign quickly, with financing coming from donations as well as his own funds.

Riner won the heavyweight division at the 2012, 2016 and 2024 Olympics and mixed team gold at the 2020 and 2024 Games.

He has also won 11 world titles. *– AFP*

Cruise ship pianist rescued after 9 hours at sea

LOS ANGELES – A pianist working on a cruise ship was rescued by two fishermen after drifting for nine hours in the Pacific Ocean about 30 kilometres off the coast of California, US media reported yesterday.

The circumstances under which the 37-year-old man fell overboard from the "Ovation of the Seas," a Royal Caribbean ship bound for Mexico, are unknown, CBS News reported.

The man, whose identity wasn't released, was hospitalised and is not in a life-threatening condition, according to the US Coast Guard.

In the incident, which occurred on Friday, two fishermen – Grant Garrett and Sean Norton were returning from marlin fishing near Santa Catalina Island, which is part of Los Angeles County, when they spotted the man in the open sea.

Garrett recounted the rescue to CBS, saying he called out "that's a human being. Let's stop the boat."

"Grant and I each got an arm and lifted him up, and he was in total shock," Norton said. "The only thing he said to me was, 'Thank you. I thought I was going to die.'"

The fishermen put out an emergency maritime call, and a group of Newport Beach lifeguards responded. They believe the man fell overboard around 2:30 a.m. on Friday (local time).

Norton suggested the pianist may have been able to survive for so long because of the exceptionally mild ocean temperature due to the El Niño effect.

"A different year, no way he makes it," he said. *– AFP*

French PM's minimum wage boost pledge fails to placate protesters

PARIS – French Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu yesterday said the government would raise the minimum wage slightly in response to cost-of-living protests, but trade unions swiftly dismissed the offer as "crumbs".

Protesters in the eurozone's second largest economy have in recent weeks demanded higher wages, but the government has limited leeway to respond as it seeks to rein in high deficit and debt ahead of presidential elections next year.

After meeting the unions Lecornu promised to increase the minimum wage by 1.6 percent on December 1.

That would include an adjustment for inflation of one percent and an extra boost of 0.6 percent, he said.

This would raise the minimum wage by around 24 euros to around 1,502 euros net per month – far below that demanded by the unions.

The French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT) had called for a 100-euro increase and the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) for around 150 euros.

CFDT General Secretary Marylise Léon said that the proposed hike was "insufficient".

CGT leader Sophie Binet dismissed the extra five euros a month on top of the automatic adjustment for inflation anyway as "crumbs".

"Five euros is one kilo of tomatoes," she said.

France adjusts its minimum wage for inflation every January. The last discretionary boost dates back to 2012.

Public sector unions have called for a strike and demonstrations next Tuesday. *– AFP*

2 million faithful greet Pope in Buenos Aires

Ella Ide

BUENOS AIRES – Buenos Aires officials said two million worshippers had turned out yesterday for a vast public Mass by Pope Leo XIV, with pilgrims travelling from across Argentina and camping overnight to get a glimpse of the pontiff.

The gathering is tipped to be among the largest of Leo's 12-day Latin American tour. Crowds chanted "Olé, olé, olé, León, León" and waved yellow-and-white Vatican flags as they waited.

León is Leo's Spanish name.

Some faithful travelled more than 1,000 kilometres to attend, while others kept vigil through the night along the capital's broad avenues.

Giant screens carried images of the pope's journey through the city as folk musicians performed and pilgrims sheltered from the spring sun under umbrellas.

"It's going to be unforgettable. It's going to be one of a kind," said health worker Marta Calderón, who camped out overnight to see Leo on the second leg of his Latin American tour.

Earlier, the Chicago-born pope visited the Pequeño Cottolengo, a home for abandoned people with disabilities in the Buenos Aires suburb of Claypole.

Addressing residents, staff and volunteers, Leo said disabled people were "not a burden on society" but "a blessing."

"A nation's progress is also measured by how it welcomes all people with disabilities and particular needs," he said.

His remarks touched on a sensitive issue in Argentina, where disability organisations and Church leaders have voiced concern over measures affecting assistance programmes under President Javier Milei's austerity drive.



Pope Leo XIV (centre) greets the faithful as he arrives at the Pequeño Cottolengo Don Orione de Claypole residential care home in Claypole, Buenos Aires province, Argentina, yesterday. *– AFP*

Founded by an Italian saint, Cottolengo is one of Argentina's best-known Catholic charitable institutions.

The Vatican describes the sprawling 50-hectare complex as a "city of charity."

The stop formed part of Leo's first trip to Latin America as pope, a tour taking him to Uruguay, Argentina and then Peru, where the Chicago-born pontiff spent years as a missionary and bishop before his election.

In his speech, Leo praised communities that uphold the dignity and inclusion of people often pushed to society's margins.

"Places like this have much to say to our societies, which are often driven solely by the pursuit of economic success or the cult of outward appearance," he said.

The visit also followed comments by Leo a day earlier that appeared to challenge Milei's economic policies.

Speaking after arriving in Argentina on Sunday, the pope said the economy should serve people rather than the reverse and called for special concern for those affected by "illness, dependency and disability."

Leo also expressed hope that Argentina would remain a country where "the love of Christ triumphs over individualism and exclusion," and urged young people to embrace what he called the country's tradition of charity.

Across Buenos Aires, enthusiasm for the first papal visit to Argentina in decades was evident in souvenir stalls selling T-shirts, caps and flags bearing Leo's image.

His likeness has even appeared on alfajor* pastries and jars of dulce de leche as Argentines celebrate the landmark visit.

– AFP

**An alfajor is a traditional confection widely popular across Latin America and Spain, consisting of a filling sandwiched between two soft cookies or baked layers.The word originates from Andalusian Arabic al-hasú (meaning "filled" or "stuffed"), which evolved into the Spanish word alfajor. – Gemini*

Colombia investigates ex-president Petro over sex scandal, top court says

BOGOTÁ – Colombia's leftist former president, Gustavo Petro, is facing an investigation after a woman accused him of trading sexual favours for government contracts while in office, the Supreme Court chief said on Saturday.

Petro leads the opposition to President Abelardo de la Espriella and previously served as president from 2022 until August of this year.

The case reached the top court after a woman filed a complaint with prosecutors alleging that she and approximately 30 others received government contracts in exchange for having sexual relationships with Petro.

He denies the allegations.

Supreme Court chief Mauricio Lenis told local media that "some of the events date to his time in Congress and others to his time as president."

Investigators will disclose "which of the alleged acts have criminal implications and who may be held responsible," Lenis added, referring to the confidential inquiry the court is conducting with prosecutors.

Recently, former government contractor Deicy Jiménez shared a video showing her with Petro after an alleged sexual encounter. The video, which went viral on social media, shows the two embracing and kissing passionately.

The former president said he would answer the corruption allegations in court and wrote on X that he had never used "a government contract to obtain favours from anyone."

Before the presidency, Petro served five terms in Congress between 1991 and 2022.

His daughters, Antonella Petro and Sofía Petro, issued a statement on Sunday urging people to avoid causing further harm to the woman who filed the complaint.

"We trust that our father, as he has already said, will appear before the courts without delay," the statement said.

The former president's conduct toward women has come under scrutiny before. He once called a group of female journalists "mafia dolls."

Memes supporting Petro have gone viral on social media, pairing photos of the former president with captions such as "let's practice the politics of love" and "the right doesn't have sex."

– AFP

In Chile, Cape Verde hero Vozinha struggles to cope with glare of fame

Axl Hernández

SANTIAGO DE CHILE – After repelling eventual champions Spain and becoming an instant global celebrity, Vozinha* was an unlikely hero of this year's World Cup. But four months on from his tournament exploits, Cape Verde's veteran goalkeeper is discovering that adapting to his new-found fame is not easy.

The 40-year-old, whose full name is Josimar José Évora Dias, moved to Chile in July and now finds himself struggling to settle at new club Colo Colo.

At the World Cup, Vozinha helped Cape Verde hold Spain to a 0-0 draw on their tournament debut as the tiny African island nation reached the last 32, where they took Lionel Messi's Argentina to extra time before bowing out.

Before that game against Spain in Atlanta, Vozinha was just a journeyman goalkeeper who had spent his career shuffling between unremarkable clubs in Portugal, Cyprus, and Slovakia.

A clean sheet against the World Cup favourites saw his Instagram account balloon from 50,000 followers to several million in a matter of hours. He now has 27.5 million followers.

Vozinha shed tears after that match, because of the scale of his and the team's achievement, but also sadness at not being able to obtain a visa for his mother to be there.

After joining Colo Colo, Chile's most successful side from the capital Santiago, he was unveiled at their Estadio Monumental before thousands of fans to a backdrop of fireworks.

He has been recruited by global brands like Adidas, Pepsi and Red Bull to be the face of advertising campaigns.

Vozinha also recently attended the Ballon d'Or ceremony in London as he came sixth in the voting for the men's goalkeeper of the year prize.

However, on the field the player who spent last season in Portugal's second division has toiled.

By the start of this month he had appeared in only five games out of a possible 14 for Colo Colo, who won the Copa Libertadores, South America's equivalent of the Champions League, in 1991.

Reluctant celebrity

Vozinha's life was turned on its head following his World Cup exploits. He has moved to a new country, and went from being a virtual unknown to a celebrity with no privacy.

He worked as a rubbish collector before turning professional. To put his number of Instagram followers into perspective: the entire population of his native Cape Verde is only a little over 500,000.

"I've lost my peace and tranquillity," Vozinha told British newspaper *The Observer*.

"I no longer have any privacy, or at least much less than I used to. Now I go out, I go to a restaurant, and there's always someone who wants to take a photo with me or asks me for an autograph. Or, worse, someone is filming me."

In the first few weeks after signing for Colo Colo, Vozinha regularly went to a bakery in the wealthy Vitacura neighbourhood of Santiago.

"I think it was good for him to go because he felt welcomed and was able to chat to people," Gustavo Cassin, the manager of the café called Metissage, tells AFP.

Cassin and Vozinha avoided discussing football. The player would talk longingly about his home country as he waited for his morning croissant.

Will he stay?

The past, when he combined playing with teaching beach volleyball, is now a distant memory.

"To be honest, if I were offered the life I have today or the life I had before, I'd choose the one I had before," he told *The Observer*.

In Chile, media are speculating as to whether Vozinha will remain into 2027 – he signed a six-month contract with Colo Colo extendable by a year only if he plays enough minutes.

He has faced criticism, with Chilean goalkeeping legend Claudio Bravo, formerly of Barcelona and Manchester City, questioning his ability.

"He has made several errors in situations that require coordination," said the ex-Chile captain. "And if you don't have coordination, you'll never do it."

Vozinha has a handful of games remaining before his contract runs out, and perhaps with it his Chilean adventure. *– AFP*

**The nickname means "little grandmother" in Cape Verdean Creole. – DeepSeek*



Colo Colo's Cape Verdean goalkeeper Vozinha eyes the ball during the Copa Chile football against Union Espanola at the Nacional Stadium in Santiago on August 26. *– AFP*



Benfica's Ukrainian midfielder Georgiy Sudakov (left) and Estrela da Amadora's Swedish defender Kevin Hoog Jansson vie for a header during the Portuguese League match between CF Estrela da Amadora and SL Benfica at Jose Gomes stadium in Amadora, on Sunday. Benfica won the game 3-2. – AFP

Football shorts

Former Real Madrid star Raul to coach Oviedo

MADRID - Former Real Madrid striker Raul Gonzalez was appointed as coach of Spanish second-division side Real Oviedo yesterday.

"Oviedo have reached an agreement to hire Raul... as the new first-team coach until June 2028," said the Asturian side in a statement.

Oviedo, who were relegated from La Liga last season, dismissed coach Julian Calero earlier yesterday with the team ninth in the table.

"My way of understanding football is with respecting the talent (in the squad) but asking for unconditional effort," said Raul in a video published by the club on social media platform X.

"The team has to fight from the first minute to the last for victory so the fans are proud of them."

Raul, 49, previously coached Real Madrid's reserve side from 2019 to 2025.

As a player, Raul won six La Liga titles and three Champions Leagues with Real Madrid, before joining Schalke, Al Sadd and the New York Cosmos.

The striker was also a regular for Spain, making 102 appearances and netting 44 goals with La Roja. – *AFP*

England call up Burn to replace injured Guehi for Nations League ties

LONDON – Newcastle defender Dan Burn has been called into England's Nations League squad after Manchester City's Marc Guehi pulled out of the matches against Croatia and Spain.

Thomas Tuchel's side host Croatia at Wembley on Thursday before playing world champions Spain in Madrid on Sunday.

Guehi had featured in England's last 15 matches but the City centre-back will miss out due to a reported hip issue, giving Burn a chance to return to the squad for the first time since the World Cup in June and July.

The 34-year-old Burn missed the previous international break in September and October with an ankle injury.

"Dan Burn has been added to the England squad following the withdrawal of Marc Guehi through injury," the Football Association said yesterday.

"The Newcastle United defender, who has 11 caps, joined up with the rest of Thomas Tuchel's group at Tottenham Hotspur's training ground yesterday.

"Guehi was substituted at half-time of Manchester City's fixture at Nottingham Forest on Saturday and will now remain with his club." – *AFP*

Spain's Yamal, Oyarzabal out for Czech Nations League clash

MADRID – Lamine Yamal and Mikel Oyarzabal will miss Spain's upcoming Nations League match against the Czech Republic, the Spanish football federation (RFEF) said yesterday.

Barcelona's teenage winger Yamal "reported discomfort in his right knee" after their 2-1 win at Atletico Madrid in La Liga on Sunday.

Real Sociedad forward Oyarzabal "is in the final phase of a bout of flu", explained the federation.

"Both players will join the training camp in the coming days so they can be available to face England at the Metropolitano Stadium (on Sunday)," added the RFEF.

World champions Spain, who have already qualified for the Nations League quarter-finals, visit the Czechs on Thursday before hosting Thomas Tuchel's England in Madrid. – *AFP*

Brighton 'can dream' of Premier League title charge after surge to 2nd place

Steven Griffiths

LONDON – Once homeless and destitute, Brighton have defied the odds to emerge as the most unexpected Premier League title contenders since Leicester's fairytale run a decade ago.

Brighton head into the international break proudly sitting second in the Premier League after Sunday's 2-0 win against Brentford.

Fabian Hurzeler's side have moved above far wealthier clubs including Manchester City, Liverpool and Chelsea, with leaders Arsenal only five points ahead of the high-flying Seagulls.

Brighton's climb towards the top of the table could easily be written off as a brief blip before the league's traditional powers reassert their supremacy.

But that would be to ignore the rock-solid foundations laid by Hurzeler and Albion's astute owner Tony Bloom, a professional gambler who has transformed Brighton since taking a major gamble when he bought the club in 2009.

Brighton have won seven of their 10 league games this season, a blistering run that included a pair of statement victories.

Swatting aside champions Arsenal 3-0 in September while wearing a commemorative kit to mark the club's 125th anniversary was a memorable afternoon.

But beating City 1-0 in Manchester in October - just days after losing a League Cup penalty shoot-out at the Etihad Stadium - showed Brighton have the bloody-minded streak required to cope with the pitfalls of a title race.

In a season in which City are distracted by their appeal against a guilty verdict for financial breaches, Liverpool and Chelsea are rebuilding under new managers and Manchester United are in disarray, there could be an opening for Brighton to replicate Leicester's fairytale title triumph in 2016.

Catching Arsenal will not be easy but Hurzeler admitted there is mounting excitement around his club.

Asked when supporters could start to dream of a title bid, Hurzeler said: "They should be always excited if they watch our game, and that's our job to make them excited.

"I always say they can dream, they can have high expectations on us, but these are things we can't control."

Hurzeler became the youngest permanent manager in Premier League history when Bloom lured him from St Pauli in 2024.

Born in Texas, the 33-year-old German had a modest playing career before turning to coaching, where he caught Bloom's eye by leading St Pauli into the Bundesliga.

His work at Brighton has been even more impressive, taking them to a pair of eighth place finishes in the Premier League and into this season's UEFA Conference League.

Stampeding bull

Bloom has also been a gleeful disruptor of football's establishment.

When lifelong fan Bloom purchased Brighton, they were languishing in the third tier with significant debts and playing at a ramshackle athletics stadium on the outskirts of the town.

Implementing the ground-breaking use of analytics and advanced scouting technology, Bloom has helped Brighton sign unknown youngsters and turn them into top-level stars.

He took Brighton back to a purpose-built new stadium in 2011, sparking a golden era that serves as a stark contrast to their chaotic past.

"Anyone walking into Brighton today compared to even 15 years ago would not think it was the same football club," sporting director Mike Cave said.

In keeping with the hipster seaside town's colourful community, Brighton has always been one of English football's more eccentric outposts since their foundation in 1901.

Trophies might have been in short supply on the South coast, but Brighton have a habit of giving their fans unforgettable moments - for better or worse.

A 1983 FA Cup final appearance against Manchester United featured a famous miss by Gordon Smith that could have secured the club's first major silverware.

Brighton were thrashed by United in the replay and crashed out of the top-flight the same season.

An even more catastrophic relegation from the Football League in 1997 was only avoided on the last day of the season after a live bull - used as Hereford's mascot - stampeded onto the pitch during a dramatic draw that saved Brighton from potential oblivion.

The club spent two years in exile, playing their matches 70 miles from Brighton at Gillingham, after the Goldstone Ground, their home since 1902, was sold because of escalating debts.

From the depths of despair, Brighton have emerged unscathed.

"What got this football club through was the determination of its fans. The bucket collections. The protests. The refusal to accept the Albion should disappear," Bloom said.

Whether their dreams of Premier League glory are fulfilled or not, the mere possibility is already a footballing miracle. – *AFP*



FIFA President Gianni Infantino (back row, centre) and the President of the Lebanese Football Federation, Hashem Haidar (back row, centre left), pose for a group photo during the inauguration of the FIFA Arena football pitch in the village of Shanay near the town of Aley, east of Beirut yesterday.
Gianni Infantino's re-election as FIFA president is a foregone conclusion, the vice-president of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) told AFP yesterday, on the sidelines of the inauguration by the Italian-Swiss football chief of a mini football pitch in Lebanon. – AFP

Security concerns as Australia name under-strength squad for Mideast friendlies

Football

SYDNEY – Football Australia said it was continuing to assess security ahead of the Socceroos' two upcoming friendlies in the Middle East, with an under-strength squad named amid player safety concerns.

Australia are scheduled to play Qatar in Doha on Friday and Jordan four days later in Amman, but the latter game is in doubt given unrest in the region.

Football Australia chief Martin Kugeler said in a statement late Saturday "the safety and wellbeing of our players and staff remains our highest priority".

"For the match against Jordan, we will continue to assess the security environment and provide players and staff with timely, comprehensive updates, including relevant safety advice and risk assessments," he added.

The games were meant to be preparation for the Asian Cup which has been postponed from January to December 2027 due to security worries in host country Saudi Arabia which has been targeted by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis.

Professional Footballers Australia, which represents the players, on Friday said the Jordan match should not go ahead in Amman.

"With the full support of the PFA, the players have overwhelmingly expressed their view that the Jordan match should be rescheduled or relocated," said chief executive Beau Busch.

Only 11 members of Australia's World Cup squad were included in the 25-strong lineup for the two games.

Coach Tony Popovic named seven potential debutants including Diesel Herrington – the brother of Hull City defender Lucas Herrington.

Two other brothers – Tete Yengi and Kusini Yengi – were also included.

"We will have an eye on continuing to evolve the squad for the future, with our World Cup 2030 qualifying campaign and the Asian Cup both now in the second half of 2027," said Popovic.

"This camp gives us another chance to work with new players and see how they fit into what we are building." – *AFP*

Gauff outlasts Pegula to win group opener at WTA Finals

Tennis

LOS ANGELES – Coco Gauff outlasted fellow American Jessica Pegula to win a tension-packed group stage opener 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2 on Sunday in the WTA Finals at Indian Wells.

Two-time major winner Gauff fell behind 5-1 in the second set but saved three set points in the 10th game and captured five games in a row to seize a 6-5 edge.

Pegula denied a Gauff match point and held in the 12th game to force a tie-breaker, then jumped to a 5-2 lead and forced a third set with a forehand return winner.

Gauff seized a 3-0 lead in the third set and dominated from there, holding in the final game to take the match after two hours and 39 minutes when Pegula swatted a backhand beyond the baseline.

"I was having a lot of fun," Gauff said. "I took a little break. First match in like a month. To play a tournament like this with no preparation is something I've never done in my career.

"I'm just really happy to get through today. It was a tough match. It was 2 1/2 hours and I feel like every point was - I don't know if you guys were holding my breath but me too, so just happy to be through.

"I'm really proud of myself for this one."

Gauff, the 2023 US Open and 2025 French Open champion, and Pegula had split 10 prior career matches, Gauff winning the Cincinnati final and a Wimbledon quarter-final this year in their most recent prior meetings.

In the other Group One opener, reigning Wimbledon champion Linda Noskova defeated Marta Kostyuk 6-2, 6-4.

Noskova, a 21-year-old Czech, needed only 86 minutes to defeat Ukraine's Kostyuk.

World number one and reigning champion Elena Rybakina withdrew from the WTA Finals on Saturday due to a viral illness with Kostyuk replacing her at the California hardcourt event.

Noskova improved to 3-1 against Kostyuk, all matches coming this year as both made the WTA Finals for the first time.

Noskova won in three sets at the US Open fourth round in their most recent prior meeting and in the Wimbledon semi-finals, while Kostyuk won on her way to the Madrid clay crown.

This year's WTA Finals were scheduled to be held in Saudi Arabia but in July were moved to Indian Wells after US military strikes on Iran in February and the subsequent war in the region. – *AFP*



Jessica Pegula (left) of the United States congratulates Coco Gauff of the United States after their match at the FAGE WTA Finals in Indian Wells Tennis Garden on Sunday in Indian Wells, California. – *AFP*

China wins women's 100m hurdles gold, men's 100m silver at Dakar 2026 YOG

DAKAR – China's Zhang Keyi won the women's 100m hurdles title with a personal best, while compatriot Zhang Hangyu took silver in the men's 100m at the Dakar 2026 Youth Olympic Games (YOG) on Sunday.

China also secured places in the women's artistic gymnastics team and individual all-around finals, while its women's 3x3 basketball team advanced to the semifinals.

The 17-year-old Zhang Keyi clocked 13.17 seconds at Iba Mar Diop Stadium to claim gold in the women's 100m hurdles. After the race, Zhang said she was delighted to win the title but felt she had yet to fully demonstrate her potential in training despite setting a personal best.

"Regarding the future, I don't want to make any big promises. But I will take it step by step while making sure I stay injury-free," she added.

In the men's 100m, 16-year-old Zhang Hangyu clocked 10.57 seconds to finish second, 0.29 seconds behind Nigeria's Gift Bright.

Making his international debut, Zhang said standing on the podium with the national flag had long been a dream. He added that the silver medal would motivate him to continue improving his technique, mental strength and ability to adapt in future training and competitions.

In the men's 400m heats, Liu Han finished second in his heat in 46.74 seconds to qualify for yesterday's final.

Nigeria also claimed the women's 100m title, with Rosemary Nwankwo winning in 11.16 seconds. Kenya took two distance-running titles, with Abigael Kosgei winning the women's 2,000m steeplechase and Enock Tuitoek claiming the men's 3,000m gold.

In field events, Ecuador's Patry Ivan Valdez Arroyo won the men's hammer throw, while Japan's Koki Hasebe claimed the men's long jump title. Spain's Gift Okunrobo won the women's triple jump, France's Julie Bourgis took gold in the women's pole vault, and Cyprus' Marina Hadjicosta triumphed in the women's discus throw.

In gymnastics, China's women's team of Chen Ziyan, Zhong Qi and Xie Guying topped qualification with 106.864 points to advance to yesterday's team final. The Chinese gymnasts delivered strong performances on the uneven bars and balance beam.

In individual all-around qualification, Xie ranked first with 53.099 points, followed by Zhong in second with 52.932. Chen placed sixth with 51.665. Under the competition rules, the top 18 gymnasts advance to the individual all-around final, with a maximum of two athletes per delegation. Xie and Zhong will therefore represent China in Tuesday's final.

Xie said she had made progress on the balance beam but admitted that nerves had affected her performance, preventing her from delivering her best routine. She added that there was still room for improvement.

Chinese coach Zhang Xia said the gymnasts had performed largely in line with their training levels, noting that occasional mistakes were understandable for young athletes. She encouraged them to adjust their mindset and focus on each event rather than dwell on individual errors.

China's women's 3x3 basketball team defeated the Czech Republic 21-14 in the quarterfinals to set up a semifinal against host Senegal yesterday.

In women's windsurfing, Wu Ziyan swept all three races held in Saly to take the overall lead. The competition uses a low-point scoring system, with races four to six scheduled for yesterday.

In boxing, Wang Jia'en and Zhang Zhengkun both won their respective bouts to advance to the women's and men's 60kg quarterfinals, scheduled for today.

In taekwondo, China's Zhao Yueyannan lost 2-0 to Chinese Taipei's Lai Yi-Jhen in the women's 44kg quarterfinals. Croatia's Petra Uglesic went on to win the title, while Egypt's Youssef Hassan Kamal claimed gold in the men's 48kg category.

In beach wrestling, Azerbaijan's Tunar Guliyev and Elgun Karimli won the men's 70kg and 90kg titles, respectively. Senegal's Ndeye Khady Anna Diatta claimed gold in the women's 45kg category, while the Dominican Republic's Yolayni Rosado Valerio won the women's 65kg title.

France's Mael Lamouret defeated Chinese Taipei's Chen Pin-An in the men's individual archery final. In fencing, Russia's Uliana Belykh beat Egypt's Sara Amr Hossny to win the women's individual foil title. Russia's Angelina Novolodskaya and Belgium's Daan Wilmsen claimed the women's and men's road cycling titles, respectively.

Another 12 athletics gold medals were decided yesterday, with China's Wang Tengfei competing in the men's 400m hurdles, Chen Shijie in the men's 110m hurdles, Liu Sen in the men's high jump, Liu Lixuan in the women's long jump and Wang Changle in the women's javelin.

The men's and women's gymnastics team finals were also scheduled for yesterday, while China's women's beach handball team will face Spain and Croatia in Saly. – *Xinhua*

Games photos on page 16

Medal Tally

Rank	National				
1	CHN	12	4	2	18
2	JPN	9	5	5	19
3	RUS	6	4		10
4	EGY	6	1	2	9
5	KEN	4	1		5
6	FRA	3	3	2	8
7	CRO	3	3		6
8	AZE	3	1		4
9	SEN	3		3	6
10	NZL	2	3		5
11	BRA	2	2	1	5
12	ROU	2	2		4
13	HKG	2	1	3	6
14	POR	2	1	1	4
15	SUI	2		2	4
15	TUR	2		2	4
17	ECU	2			2
17	NGR	2			2
19	RSA	1	4	2	7
20	TPE	1	3	3	7
21	ETH	1	3		4
22	ESP	1	2	2	5
22	GER	1	2	2	5
24	GRE	1	2	1	4
24	USA	1	2	1	4
26	AUT	1	1	3	5
27	ITA	1	1	2	4
28	LTU	1	1	1	3

‘Sexual predator’ Russell Brand jailed for 10 years for rape, assault

Helen Rowe

LONDON – British comedian and TV star Russell Brand was yesterday jailed for more than 10 years for a string of sex offences including rape as the judge told him he had been a “sexual predator” whose fame had protected him.

Brand, 51, showed no emotion as judge Joel Bennathan said he had acted with “staggering arrogance” and shown “contempt” for his victims who had suffered significant and lasting harm.

Paying tribute to the “bravery” of the women who came forward, the judge told Brand he had acted “how you liked and when you liked, unhindered by the rules by which decent people live”.

His wife Laura Gallacher, with whom he has three children, slumped in her seat in the public gallery of London’s Southwark Crown Court as the total sentence of 10 years and six months was announced.

Brand told his wife, who has supported him in court throughout the case, “we’ll be OK” as he was led down to the cells.

The disgraced star was convicted by a jury last week of one rape and three sexual assaults committed against four women between 2004 and 2009.

The sentence marks the final fall in a scandal-hit showbiz career that saw him embody the anything-goes culture of 2000s British TV and radio.

Brand, who has reinvented himself as an online Christian guru, held a string of prayer beads and made the sign of the cross before one of his victims personally read out her impact statement from behind a screen.



Media workers attempt to photograph through the windows of a police vehicle believed to be carrying British comedian and actor Russell Brand as he arrives at the Southwark Crown Court in south London yesterday. – AFP

The woman said she had been left “traumatised” by the assault in a London bar in 2004.

“For many years as his star was rising it was impossible to escape seeing him all over the media, being celebrated for his disgusting behaviour against women like it was all a joke,” she told the court. Brand listened impassively, looking straight ahead.

‘Celebrated’

A second woman, a 21-year-old fan he raped in 2009 after they met at one of his shows, told the court she had felt she simply would “not be believed” if she reported him.

“His fame, wealth and influence created a power imbalance which made me feel powerless,” she said, adding the consequences of the rape had “affected almost every aspect of my life”.

The hearing came as Prime Minister Andy Burnham said the victims’ bravery would bring about wider changes to the legal system.

Burnham pledged to be “relentless in making whatever improvements we can” to provide more support for victims, including setting up teams in every police force for handling rapes and serious sexual offences.

Brand was cleared of two other alleged rapes and one count of attempted indecent assault. But he is facing further investigations after London police said it was probing rape allegations by two more women.

From Channel 4 to MTV and an eponymous primetime show on BBC Radio 2, the wild-haired comedian worked for major British media houses in the 2000s, where his obsession with sex contributed to his notoriety.

Brand denied the charges, but he admitted to being “extremely promiscuous” and using his fame to “facilitate sexual access”.

‘Wake-up call’

Born to working-class parents in Essex, east of London in 1975, Brand dropped out of drama school before joining MTV at the age of 25.

He had his own radio show at the BBC, which last week apologised for the “culture and failings” when Brand worked there between 2006 and 2008.

Brand left the BBC after sending a well-known actor sexually explicit messages about having slept with his granddaughter.

He made a foray into Hollywood after a brief marriage in 2010 to US pop star Katy Perry, followed by a stint as a left-wing commentator and campaigner.

The court found him guilty of sexual assaults against an MTV worker, a Channel 4 worker and a Capital Radio employee, as well as raping a fan.

The organisations that propped up Brand for years are now facing questions about how he continued for so long.

British culture minister Lisa Nandy on Sunday said men in power were still exploiting women in the media industry, saying his case was a “wake-up call”. *– AFP*

‘Godzilla Minus Zero’ stomps to the top of N American box office

WASHINGTON, DC – Japan’s “Godzilla Minus Zero” roared to first place in the North American box office over the weekend, industry estimates showed on Sunday, gobbling up US$31.6 million in sales on its opening weekend.

Set in 1949 as postwar Japan looks to rebuild, the film sees a new threat emerge: a giant three-headed dragon-like monster called King Ghidorah.

Enter Godzilla – believed defeated in the 2023 “Godzilla Minus One,” but radioactively regenerated – who takes on the three-headed beast with at least some human assistance.

“This [past] weekend’s opening takes the Japanese production to a new level – it’s nearly three times the previous opening in Dec 2023,” veteran industry analyst David A. Gross wrote.

Godzilla in this making is the same iconic beast that many North American viewers know from the 1998 Sony Pictures film, but he exists in a different storyline with different producers.

Directed by Takashi Yamazaki, “Godzilla Minus Zero” is produced by Japan’s Toho and distributed in North America by GKIDS.

In second place sat a far-less scary beast: “The Cat in the Hat.”

The legendary Dr Seuss feline brought in an estimated US$20.5 million in its opening weekend in the latest instalment distributed by Warner Bros.

Gross warned that Dr Seuss films don’t typically perform well outside the United States, but may be able to make up for that by earning money on streaming platforms or through television rights.

Marching into third place was Angel Studio’s “Drummer Boy,” which banged out US$9.3 million at the box office, according to estimates by Exhibitor Relations Co.

The unique film – a combination of historical drama and musical – follows an American soldier and his brother during the Revolutionary war, with the brother marrying an enslaved woman and fighting for the British.

Gross said the film brought in double what would be expected of a similar film on its opening weekend.

“Angel specialises in inspirational stories and they know how to reach this audience,” Gross wrote in his weekly newsletter.

Fourth place went to A24’s “You Can See Everything,” the biopic that follows convicted fraudster Elizabeth Holmes in the month before she began an 11-year prison sentence.

The film brought in about US$8.9 million over the weekend, bringing its four-week total to an estimated US$79.8 million.

In fifth was Sony’s “Ramayana,” earning about US$8.7 million on its opening weekend, according to estimates.

Gross noted that it was “one of only five Indian wide releases in the US” over the last three decades. *– AFP*

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -1°C~14°C	Manila 23°C~32°C	New York 9°C~19°C	Lisbon 17°C~21°C
Shanghai 7°C~15°C	Bangkok 21°C~32°C	London 8°C~10°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~23°C
Hong Kong 15°C~23°C	Tokyo 4°C~12°C	Frankfurt 6°C~10°C	Luanda 25°C~28°C
Taipei 16°C~19°C	Singapore 25°C~32°C	Vancouver 11°C~11°C	Maputo 16°C~28°C
Guangzhou 10°C~22°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~31°C	Paris 10°C~13°C	Dili 24°C~33°C
Nanjing 3°C~13°C	Jakarta 24°C~34°C	Moscow 1°C~5°C	São Tomé 24°C~31°C
Guilin 8°C~18°C	Seoul 3°C~13°C	Las Vegas 12°C~25°C	Praia 22°C~32°C
Xi’an -1°C~12°C	Sydney 15°C~24°C	Monte Carlo 14°C~17°C	Bissau 22°C~34°C

Met Gala unveils new theme after Galliano row

NEW YORK – New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art has announced a new theme for the exhibition accompanying its prestigious annual Met Gala, after scrapping a planned retrospective of British designer John Galliano amid controversy over his past anti-Semitic remarks.

Running from May 9, 2027, to January 9, 2028, the exhibition, titled extraORDINARY, “will examine how design reveals unexpected possibilities within everyday things,” the renowned New York museum said in a press release.

The exhibition was initially planned as a retrospective of Galliano, but the designer and the museum announced in late August that it would not go ahead, following criticism from donors and political figures over the fashion designer’s past comments.

“After much reflection and discussion with all those involved, I have decided, with great sadness, that it is best for the exhibition not to take place at this time,” Galliano, 65, wrote on Instagram then.

“I remain fully accountable for the pain caused by my words in the past, particularly the hurt I caused to the Jewish and Asian communities, and I remain deeply sorry,” he added.

Galliano, who served as creative director of Christian Dior from 1996 to 2011 and is widely regarded as one of his generation’s most talented designers, saw his career collapse after making antisemitic remarks to customers at a Paris bar.

He was subsequently convicted by a French court over the incident.

After a period of rehabilitation and personal work, he found a new home at the discreet but influential fashion house Maison Margiela.

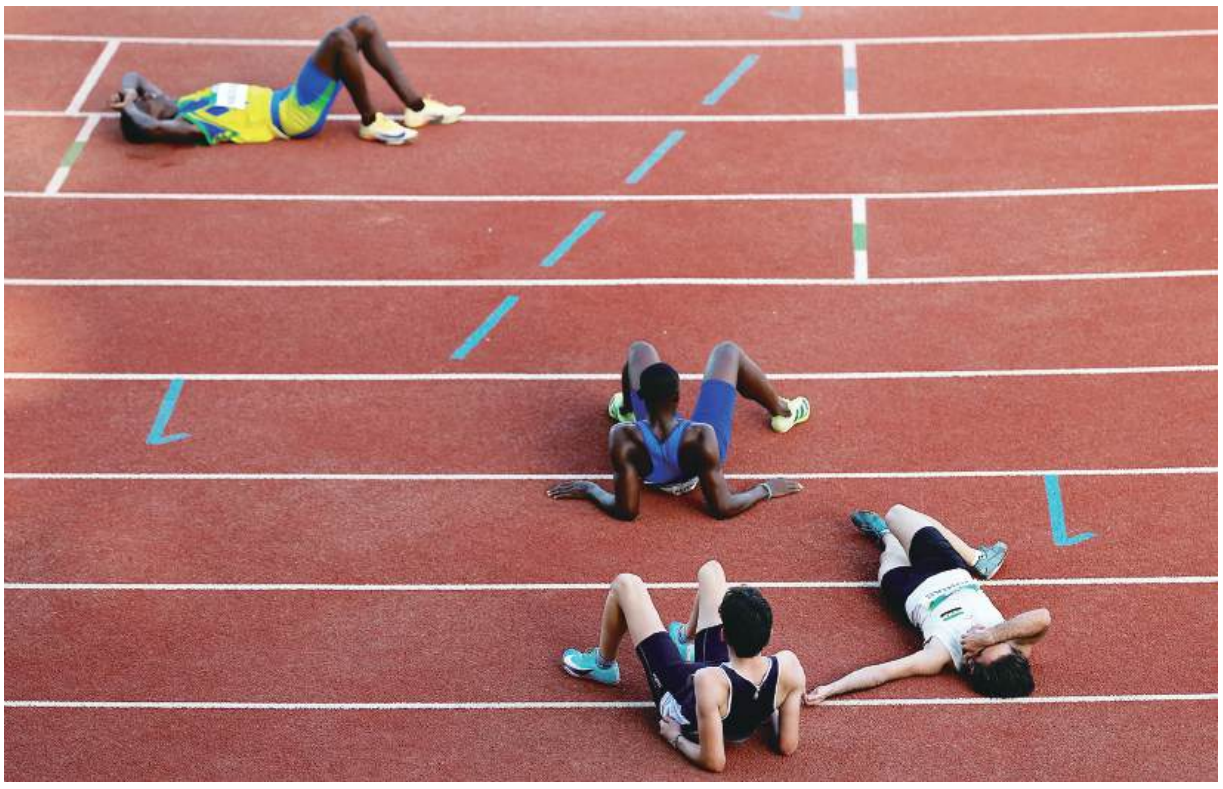
He served as the label’s creative director for a decade, leaving in 2024.

In March 2026, he announced a two-year artistic partnership with Spanish fashion retailer Zara.

The Met’s annual Costume Institute exhibition is largely funded by its star-studded gala, which draws leading figures from fashion and entertainment. The 2027 edition of the event is scheduled for May 3.

“The ordinary is never quite as simple as it appears,” said Andrew Bolton, curator at the Met’s Costume Institute. “A pair of jeans, a white shirt, or a sweatshirt can hold traces of a life—the habits, memories, and attachments that make something our own.” *– AFP*





Athletes react after the Men's 400m Semifinal 2 at Dakar 2026 Summer Youth Olympic Games at Complexe Iba Mar Diop in Dakar, Senegal, on Sunday. – Xinhua

Judges leave the FOP on Day 1 of Athletics at Dakar 2026 Summer Youth Olympic Games at Complexe Iba Mar Diop in Dakar, Senegal, on Sunday. – Xinhua



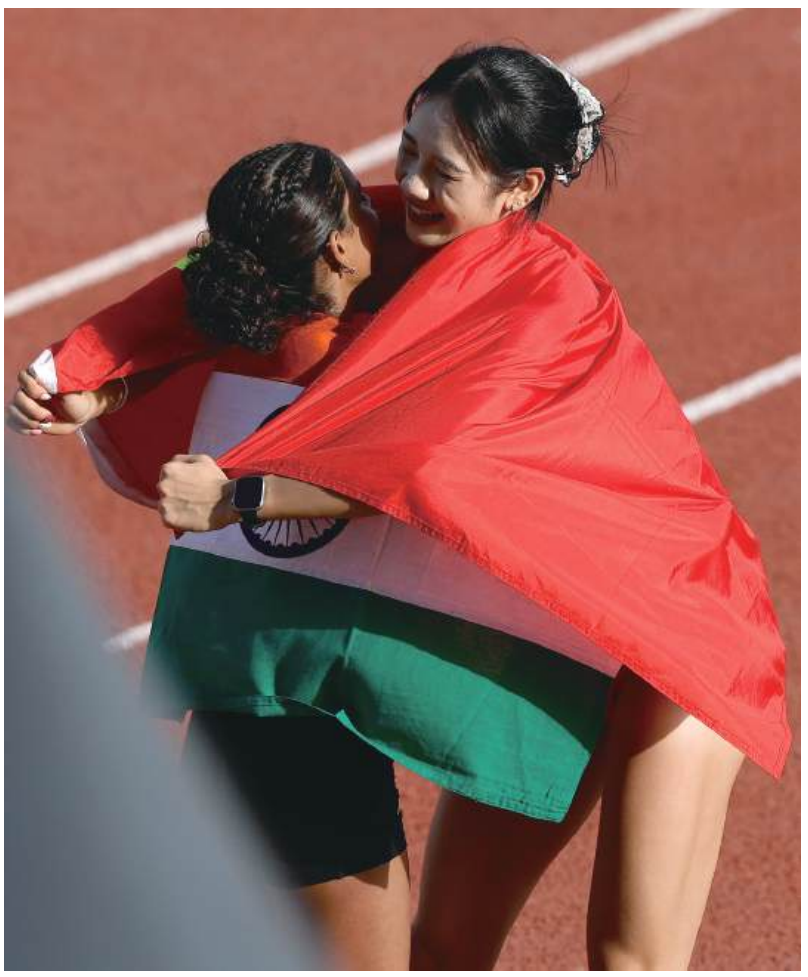
Burkina Faso's Zalissa Zongo competes in the women's triple jump final at the 2026 Dakar Youth Olympic Games, held at the Iba Mar Diop Complex (CID Stadium) in Dakar, Senegal on Sunday. – AFP



Nigeria's Rosemary Nwankwo winner of the women's 100-metre track and field final at the 2026 Dakar Youth Olympic Games reacts in front of the board at the Iba Mar Diop Complex (CID Stadium) in Dakar, Senegal on Sunday. – AFP



Austria's Lena Mayerl (right) and Poland's Danuta Tym compete in the Fencing Women's Foil Individual Finals Bronze Medal Bout #15 during the Dakar 2026 Youth Olympic Games at Dakar Expo Centre (CICAD) in Diamniadio, Senegal on Sunday. – AFP



Zhang Keyi (right) of China celebrates with Shourya Avinash Ambure of India after the Women's 100m Hurdles Final at Dakar 2026 Summer Youth Olympic Games in Dakar, Senegal, on Sunday. – Xinhua