

Mainland Olympians encourage local athletes 'not to be afraid of adversity'



Members of the 2024 Paris Olympic Games Mainland Olympians delegation, including eight gold medalists – boxer Li Qian (second from left), synchronised swimmer Feng Yu (fourth from left), freestyle swimmer Pan Zhanle (fifth from left), diver Quan Hongchan (seventh from left), paddler Ma Long (eighth from left), artistic gymnast Liu Yang (fifth from right), diver Cao Yuan (fourth from right) and rhythmic gymnast Guo Qiqi (second from right) interact with local youth athletes on the stage during yesterday's exchange session at the Olympic Sports Centre in Taipa. – Photo: Yuki Lei

Yuki Lei
The 2024 Paris Olympic Games Mainland Olympians delegation, which arrived in Macau on Saturday via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge for its three-day visit, met and interacted yesterday morning with 600 young local athletes at the Olympic Sports Centre in Taipa, where they told them “to trust their teammates, not to be afraid of adversity, and to give their all to their favourite sports”.

The delegation stayed in the Taipa's Olympic Sports Centre for about an hour, during which mainland Olympians and eight coaches from 16 sporting events sat together with the local athletes, while the eight gold medallists, including paddler Ma Long, diver Quan Hongchan and freestyle swimmer Pan Zhanle, had dialogues and exchanges with four local athletes on the stage.

When asked how they have managed to remain at the top of their game despite pressure and injuries, Ma said: “When you find something you're passionate about, you will go all out and hope to make it the best after playing for so many years, I still have the pursuit and dream of table tennis which I hope to be able to continue to win glory for the country in the Olympic Games”. He also talked about the

various difficulties and challenges encountered during his training: “For example, in the case of injury, we must first thank the [General Administration of Sport] for providing us with very good backup support, so that we can recover and resume training and competition more quickly. At the same time, our coaches and fellow athletes, as well as my family and friends, have also given me a lot of encouragement in

difficult times, all of which help me get back on the right path”.
Artistic gymnast Liu Yang, who underwent knee surgery in 2022, encouraged local athletes to overcome the psychological barrier: “I was injured doing the rings, and then I had a mental shadow when I did it afterwards..... The main thing is to believe in yourself and the team and try to overcome the mental barrier”.
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FM meets S African & Senegalese counterparts on China-Africa cooperation

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi yesterday met with South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Ronald Lamola and Senegal's Foreign Minister Yacine Fall respectively in Beijing.
Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, said that the 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) will soon be underway. He also noted that over the past 24 years FOCAC has effectively promoted Africa's development, becoming an important symbol of South-South cooperation and driving international cooperation with Africa.
Wang said China is willing to

closely cooperate with African countries to make this summit a grand event that strengthens solidarity and friendship between China and Africa, igniting a new wave of China-Africa cooperation.
He added that China firmly supports African countries in defending their legitimate rights to development and revitalization, and is committed to jointly promoting the building of an equal and orderly multipolar world, along with universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization.
Noting that under the strategic guidance of the two heads of state, the relationship between South Africa and China has been upgraded to a comprehensive strategic

partnership, Lamola said South Africa firmly adheres to the one-China policy, supports China's series of global initiatives and is willing to work together with China to promote solidarity and cooperation among Global South countries.
Fall said that the Senegal-China relationship is exemplary, with both countries demonstrating ongoing respect for one another.
Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye will pay a state visit to China during the summit, marking his first visit to a country outside Africa, Fall said, adding that Senegal looks forward to using the visit to deepen Senegal-China comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership. – Xinhua



Ma Zhuo (right) of China celebrates after the men's 5000m T54 final of para athletics at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris, on Saturday. – Xinhua (More on Paralympics on pages 13, 14 & 16)

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Wildlife trade now 'serious offence' under Singapore organised crime law

Wildlife trafficking is now a “serious offence” under Singapore's organised crime law, the city-state's interior ministry has said, with those prosecuted under the code subject to sentences of up to 20 years behind bars. – Story on p. 8

Israeli police arrest reservist who tried to shoot Arab in Jerusalem

Israeli police said yesterday that a reservist soldier who went “on a mission” to shoot someone of “Arab origin” was arrested after firing at a victim in Jerusalem. – Story on p. 10

Germany's far-right AfD wins first state election: exit polls

Germany's far-right AfD won a landmark first regional vote yesterday in the former East German state of Thuringia, exit polls showed, in a blow to Chancellor Olaf Scholz ahead of national elections in 2025. – Story on p. 11

Sam Hou Fai welcomes written views from community

Yuki Lei

Potential chief executive (CE) candidate Sam Hou Fai has started to contact the different sectors of the 400 members of the Chief Executive Election Committee to listen to their views and try to obtain their nomination that will enable him to stand in the upcoming election, stating yesterday that with the aim of listening more widely to the views of the community, he is open to people from all walks of life submitting their written views to his election campaign office via different channels with immediate effect.

Sam Hou Fai's election campaign office noted in a statement yesterday that in order to help Sam Hou Fai, who is running for the sixth-term of office of the chief executive, to listen to the views of the community "more extensively", members of the community are now welcome to submit their written views to the election campaign office by email at op@shfsc-raem.com, fax on 2878 8392 and post

to Room AB, 15/F, Nam Tung Commercial Building, No. 517, Avenida Praia Grande, Macau.

A separate statement by Sam's election campaign office on Saturday noted that accompanied by his election campaign trustee Lei Wun Kong, president of the Macau Legal Promotion Association; office head Ip Sio Kai, a member of the Macau Legislative Assembly (AL) and chairman of the Macao Bankers' Association and a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC); and deputy office head Chan Ka Leong, president of the General Union of Neighbourhood Associations of Macau (commonly known as Kai Fong), Sam has met with members of the committee in the industrial, commercial and financial sectors, the cultural, education, professional and the sports sectors, the labour, social services and religious – Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist and Taoist – sectors, and Macau's 12 deputies



This undated handout photo provided by the Sam Hou Fai's election campaign office yesterday shows potential chief executive Sam Hou Fai posing.

to the National People's Congress (NPC) as well as representatives of the Macau members of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the Macau Legislative Assembly (AL) and the city's municipal organs.

In order to formally launch his bid to become Macau's sixth-term chief executive, Sam is required to be endorsed by at least 66 of the 400 members of the Chief Executive Election Committee, or 16.5 percent of the elector, by next Thursday.

As reported by *Macao Daily*

News – Macau's top selling Chinese-language newspaper – yesterday, Sam met with the Chief Executive Election Committee's cultural constituency at the Macao Daily News Building on Avenida de Venceslau de Moraes on Saturday to listen to views and suggestions on the future development of the news media and cultural undertakings, including proposals to increase investment in cultural resources, give full play to Macau's unique advantages of cultural exchanges between Chinese and Western cultures, increase the number of venues for arts

performances and revitalise existing resources; to strengthen cultural transmission among young people and systematically consolidate the resources for cultural and educational activities in respect of loving Macau and loving the motherland; and to establish a cultural promotion platform through cooperation between Macau and Hengqin.

Sam said during the meeting, as cited by the news report, the development and prosperity of Macau faces many problems and challenges, adding that his aim in running for the office of the chief executive was to do his part to unite all sectors of the community, to take residents' expectations for a better life as the greatest pursuit of governance and to continuously enhance the residents' sense of gain, happiness and security, making Macau a more prosperous and harmonious city.

Announcing his CE candidacy last Wednesday, Sam, the former president of the Court of Final Appeal (TUI), said during a press conference that the fundamental reason for his candidacy was to "fully and accurately: implement the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, to contribute to the nation's construction and rejuvenation, and to safeguard Macau's long-term prosperity and stability. ■

PCV15 to be given to kids aged below 2 from today

Yuki Lei

Starting from today, the Health Bureau (SSM) announced on Friday, children aged below two will be jabbed with 15-valent Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV15) which provides two additional serotypes instead of 13-valent Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV13), providing added protection against pneumococcal disease*.

Friday's SSM statement highlighted the bureau's warning as noting that *Streptococcus pneumoniae* can not only cause otitis media, but also invade the brain membrane and blood, causing meningitis, bacteraemia and septicaemia) and leading to serious and even fatal invasive *Streptococcus pneumoniae* disease, which is particularly dangerous to infants and children under five-years old, senior citizens aged over 65 and those at higher risk, including patients who have undergone a splenectomy, suffering from HIV or AIDS, cancer, or are receiving steroid treatment.

According to the statement, children under two years of age who have started but have not yet completed four doses of 13-valent vaccine can directly switch to 15-valent vaccine to complete the remaining doses in subsequent

vaccinations, with no change in the interval between doses, i.e., the second, fourth, sixth and 15th months respectively. No changes have been made for children who have been jabbed with four doses of 13-valent vaccine.

The bureau stated that 13-valent or 15-valent vaccination will also be available at the city's health centres and stations for high-risk individuals aged two and above based on the previous vaccination records of the recipients and according to the existing stock of vaccines, before receiving one dose of 23-valent Polysaccharide Pneumococcal Vaccine (PPSV23) one year after of being jabbed. ■

*According to Wikipedia, *Pneumococcal infection is an infection caused by the bacterium Streptococcus pneumoniae. S. pneumoniae is a common member of the bacterial flora colonizing the nose and throat of 5–10 percent of healthy adults and 20–40 percent of healthy children. However, it is also a cause of significant disease, being a leading cause of pneumonia, bacterial meningitis, and sepsis. The World Health Organisation estimates that in 2005 pneumococcal infections were responsible for the death of 1.6 million children worldwide.*

Mainland Olympians encourage local athletes 'not to be afraid of adversity'



Men's singles and women's singles gold medallists Fan Zhendong (right) and Chen Meng (left) as well as two local paddlers play mixed doubles after yesterday's exchange session at the Olympic Sports Centre in Taipa. – Photo: Yuki Lei

Continued from p.1

Pan, who was once unable to rotate his right shoulder fully forward after the Asian Games, said his first expectation was to prevent any other injuries and the next step was to do his best to break through his 100-metre freestyle record of 46.40 seconds and show the world, including himself, the limits of mankind in the event: "I'm going to do my best to break through to the next level in the 100-metre freestyle, and to show the world, including myself, where the limits of mankind are in this event".

When asked how to adjust to failure, Quan said: "Don't be anxious, communicate with your coach and take time to solve the problem".

After the exchange session, five

female artistic gymnastics team gold medallists Guo Qiqi, Hao Ting, Huang Zhangjiayang, Wang Lanjing and Ding Xinyi, Olympic table tennis men's singles and women's singles gold medallists Fan Zhendong and Chen Meng, as well as the first Chinese table tennis Olympic mixed doubles champions Wang Chuqin and Sun Yingsha gave on-site lessons to local youths.

The delegation visited yesterday afternoon the three revitalisation districts of Barra, the Rua da Felicidade pedestrianisation zone and the Mount Fortress in three groups.

Meanwhile, the government hosted a banquet on Saturday night to welcome the delegation headed by Gao Zhidan, director of the State General Administration of Sports,

during which Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng expressed his gratitude to the central government for arranging the delegation to visit Macau once again, giving local residents an opportunity to experience the style of the athletes close up and, at the same time, he also urged local youths and athletes to take the national athletes as their role models, learn from the national Olympians' spirit of tenacity, hard work, and patriotism, and carry forward the spirit of sports and the spirit of the times.

Ho presented a cheque for HK\$16 million on behalf of each donor organisation, including the city's six integrated resort (IR) operators, which was accepted by representatives of the delegation Fan Zhendong and Chen Yiwen. ■

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MACAU POST

Macau Weather

**VERY HOT.
FINE APART FROM CLOUDY PERIODS.
ONE OR TWO SHOWERS.
FORCE 2 TO 3 EAST TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 60% AND 95%.**



27°C~33°C

Source: SMG

Customs busts shop selling clothing violating copyrights worth 880,000 patacas

Ginnie Liang

Macau Customs Service (SA) officers on Thursday busted a shop suspected of selling fake products infringing on various brands' intellectual property rights (IP), involving 57 bogus items worth 879,000 patacas in total, according to the prices set by the retailers, an SA spokesperson said during a press conference on Friday.

A local female shop owner, surnamed Chou, aged 48, was arrested on Thursday, according to the spokesperson, adding that the shop that Chou owns has been in business for nearly two years.

According to the spokesperson, the Macau Customs Service carried out spot checks on local shops on Wednesday and discovered that one fashion outlet

in the Horta e Costa area was suspected of selling copyright infringement products.

The spokesperson did not reveal the affected brands.

The spokesperson noted that the bogus items were purchased from a social media platform. The items were purchased at prices ranging from 200 to 2,000 patacas each, and then sold at 1.5 to 1.8 times the purchase price, with one or two pieces sold each month in the local shop.

The spokesperson said that the suspect has been transferred to the Public Prosecution Office (MP). According to the Industrial Property Code Decree-Law No 97/99/M, the suspect faces a hefty fine and up to six months in jail. ■



A total of 57 bogus clothing items seized on Thursday, displayed at the Macau Customs Service (SA) headquarters in Barra. — Photo courtesy of TDM

3 bodies found at weekend

Ginnie Liang

The Judiciary Police (PJ) were informed by the Fire Services Bureau (CA) on Saturday at 7:15 a.m. that a male corpse was found floating in the sea opposite Hac-Sa Nautical Centre in Coloane, according to a PJ statement.

According to the statement, the firemen saw the cadaver at 7:01 a.m. on their CCTV, and after sending a boat to the scene to investigate, the body was found washed up on the shore at Hac-Sa Beach by the waves and was identified as a middle-aged male.

The statement noted that after a preliminary inspection, no suspicious or criminally induced injuries were found on the corpse.

The statement said that no identification documents were found on the body.

The case was listed as a dead body found. The cause of death still needs to be confirmed by forensic examination. The case has been transferred to the PJ Investigation Section for follow-up, according to the statement.

Body found floating in sea off Macau Tower

The Judiciary Police (PJ) were informed by the Fire Services Bureau (CA) at 10:49 a.m. on Saturday that a male corpse was found floating in the sea opposite a hotel in Avenida Dr Sun Yat-Sen, according to a PJ statement.

The statement said that the deceased is a middle-aged non-local man.

According to the statement, the Customs Service officers brought the corpse ashore, and took him to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre for treatment, after which he was confirmed dead.

The statement said that at 8:19 a.m. on

Saturday, a tenant staying in a hotel guest room in Avenida Dr Sun Yat-Sen reported to the police the discovery of the floating body.

The statement noted that after a preliminary inspection, no suspicious or criminally induced injuries were found on the corpse, except for a superficial laceration of about 3 centimetres on the top of the deceased's head.

The cause of death still needs to be confirmed by forensic examination.

The case was listed as a dead body found, and has been transferred to the PJ Investigation Section for follow-up, according to the statement.

Senior dies at home alone: police

A local male senior citizen was found dead at home yesterday morning in a rented flat in a residential building near Rua de João de Araújo, according to a Judiciary Police (PJ) statement.

The statement said that the police were notified by the Fire Services Bureau (CB) of the death at 10:20 a.m. yesterday.

According to the statement, yesterday morning, the landlord of the flat went to the residential unit to collect rent from the man, but there was a foul odour coming from the flat and no one answered the door.

The landlord then opened the door of the flat, only to find that the man was lying on his bed dead, and he called the police for help.

The statement said that the case has preliminarily been classified as a dead body found.

The statement noted that the victim had no injuries that could have been caused by foul play, but the cause of the victim's death was pending the outcome of a forensic examination. ■

MGTO, Melco & GEG win PATA Gold Awards



This undated handout photo provided by the MGTO on Wednesday shows the Macau travel trade network during Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Travel Mart, which was held from August 27 to 29 in Bangkok.

Rui Pastorin

The 2024 Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Gold Awards presentation ceremony was held on Wednesday in Bangkok, with the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO), Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) and Melco Resorts & Entertainment receiving prizes.

According to an MGTO statement on Wednesday, the PATA Gold Awards – Lunch and Award Presentation was among the highlights during the PATA Travel Mart, which this year marked its 47th edition and ran from Tuesday through Thursday. The statement noted that the travel mart gathered over 900 delegates from 45 countries and regions.

According to the statement, MGTO received the PATA Gold Award in the Human Capital Development Initiative category for “the efforts developed over more than a decade to partner with different entities to provide free training, qualifications, and accreditation

support, among other opportunities for the Macau tourism industry and related sectors to upgrade service quality”.

Melco, the statement added, was awarded the PATA Gold Award in Marketing – Hospitality for its 2023 campaign on the indoor water park's opening at Studio City, while Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) brought home a PATA Gold Award on Youth Empowerment Initiative for activities conducted over the years for nurturing Macau youth talents and its company members.

The statement said that the winners were chosen by an international jury from over 100 entries submitted by 47 travel and tourism organisations and individuals. The statement said that in total, two Grand Title Awards and 22 Gold Awards in different areas of Marketing, Sustainability and Social Responsibility in tourism were presented at the prize-giving event. ■

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SJM awards outstanding students during 20th SJM Scholarship Award Ceremony



This photo taken and provided on Wednesday by SJM Resorts shows SJM Managing Director Daisy Ho Chiu-fung (sixth from left) posing with scholarship recipients during the 20th SJM Scholarship Award Ceremony held at Grand Lisboa Macau.

Rui Pastorin

SJM Resorts hosted its 20th SJM Scholarship Award Ceremony at Grand Lisboa Macau, with scholarships, totalling 710,000 patacas, presented to 35 outstanding children of employees on Wednesday, the integrated resort (IR) operator said in a statement.

The statement noted that 10 exemplary students were chosen for this year's SJM Scholarship, namely: Li Zhenghan, Hong Song Pok, Chio Kam Ian, Chan Chi Cheng, Cheong Si Kei, Li Fong Teng, Ng San San, Wong Chon Hon, Choi Hio Teng, and Wong I Kei, each of whom will receive an annual scholarship of 20,000 patacas throughout their university studies.

The statement added that SJM also renewed scholarships for 25 previous recipients, each also valued at 20,000 patacas, with the statement adding that students Ouyang Lam Cheong and Wong Ian Kit were honoured with an "Outstanding Performance Award" and a 5,000 pataca book grant for their excellent academic achievements last year.

In her speech at the event, SJM Managing

Director Daisy Ho Chiu-fung was quoted in the statement as saying: "The SJM Scholarship underscores our dedication to the 'Building Macau Through Talent' initiative and our commitment to nurturing the city's future leaders. It also reflects our support and care for our colleagues and their families. We hope these students will embrace the opportunities the scholarship provides to step out of their comfort zones, explore new experiences, broaden their perspectives, and develop a range of skills - all of which are vital for Macau's economic diversification."

The statement also quoted scholarship recipient Cheong as saying: "Receiving the SJM Scholarship marked a perfect end to my middle school journey. It has provided me with a high-quality learning environment and valuable resources, inspiring me to remain true to my aspirations and confidently pursue my university studies."

"Academically outstanding children of employees" have been recognised since the scholarship launched in 2005, having sponsored over 200 students to date, with total contributions exceeding 14,000,000 patacas, the statement said.

Enrolment for 15th intake of Sands Procurement Academy kicks off

Rui Pastorin

Registrations for the 15th intake of the Sands Procurement Academy kicked off yesterday and runs until September 6, being open to local small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME) "suppliers", Sands China said in a statement.

The free training programme is organised by the integrated resort (IR) operator in conjunction with the Macao Chamber of Commerce (MCC) and the Macao Productivity and Technology Centre (CPTTM). It specifically targets the development of micro-enterprises, Macau young entrepreneurs, and "Made-in-Macau" enterprises, according to the statement.

The statement noted that the academy, which focuses on delivering practical knowledge to participants, has trained over 520 SMEs to date. The upcoming sessions will take place weekly from September 17 to October 15 at The Venetian Macao's Adelson Advanced Education Centre in Cotai. Enrolment, the statement said, is capped at 40 participants.

Sands China Ltd. Procurement and Sustainability Vice President Charlie Cai said: "This is the eighth consecutive year we are offering the Sands Procurement Academy programme, aimed at equipping SMEs with a deeper understanding of

international corporations' standards and requirements. We are excited about this latest session of the academy, as we are debuting a new course on the Xiaohongshu (RED) Operations Strategy for Enterprises to share various influencer techniques to help SMEs stay current and improve their business".

"Furthermore, a business matching session, where participants are able to meet some of Sands China's procurement department buyers face-to-face, will help create potential future business opportunities for the SMEs", Cai added.

The statement said that four other topics are covered, namely Macau labour law fundamentals, procurement process and system overview, supplier code of conduct, and procurement contract basics. Programme graduates can earn a completion certificate and receive preference for procurement opportunities with Sands China under otherwise equal circumstances.

Enrolment forms can be found on <https://www.sandschina.com/the-company/sands-procurement-academy.html> and sent to SME_Info@sands.com.mo on or before the deadline. A lucky draw will be held if applicants exceed the available capacity.

One can also call 8118 7866 for enquiries.



This undated handout photo provided by Sands China yesterday shows participants of the Sands Procurement Academy during a lesson at The Venetian Macao's Adelson Advanced Education Centre.

Macau's first Waso Cafe branch to debut at Galaxy Macau



This undated handout photo recently provided by Galaxy Macau shows the "Waso Signature Pineapple Bun" and the "Hong Kong-Style Milk Tea"

Rui Pastorin

Macau's first and only Waso Cafe branch is slated to have its grand opening at Galaxy Macau on September 24, the integrated resort (IR) operator said in a statement on Wednesday.

The Macau branch is currently operating its soft opening. The upcoming grand opening is set to be attended by celebrities Pakho Chau Pak-ho, Venus Wong Man-yik and Stephanie Cheng (鄭融), according to the statement.

A "legendary cha chaan teng", the statement said that Hong Kong's Waso Cafe is renowned for being frequented by stars from the mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan to sample its signature dishes. The original restaurant is located in Yuen Long in Hong Kong, the statement noted.

Among Waso Café's signature dishes are "Macaroni in Tomato Soup with Pork Chop and Chicken Wings" and "Hong Kong Style Milk Tea", as well as classics such as the "Waso Soft Bun with Cheese, Corned Beef and Egg", the statement added. A combo of the "Waso Signature Pineapple Bun" and "Hong Kong

Style Milk Tea" has also proved popular, gaining fame across Hong Kong and selling over 600 buns a day at the café's Tsim Sha Tsui branch, the statement said.

The statement added that the Macau branch is also set to introduce dishes that incorporate Portuguese cuisine elements such as the "Tossed Noodles with Portuguese Style Minced Pork", "Pork Chop and Spicy Sardine in Pineapple Bun" and "Foie Gras, Beef and Egg with Rice Noodles in Tomato Soup".

The Macau branch's interior design is based on the concept of Hong Kong's traditional "tea stalls", the statement said.

The restaurant is located on the integrated resort's ground floor near the Banyan Tree Macau in Cotai. More details can be found on website www.galaxymacau.com or by following the integrated resort's respective social media pages.

*Wikipedia notes that a cha chaan tengs (literally translated from Cantonese as "tea restaurant") are known for eclectic and affordable menus, which include dishes from Hong Kong cuisine and Hong Kong-style Western cuisine.

Guangdong & Macau jointly set up 20 billion yuan Hengqin investment firm

Tony Wong

Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng and Guangdong Governor Wang Weizhong have jointly inaugurated the newly established Hengqin Guangdong-Macau Development and Investment Company Limited, the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) has announced.

According to a GCS statement on Friday, Ho and Wang jointly unveiled the inaugural plaque before co-chairing a regular meeting of the administrative committee of the Guangdong-Macau In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin that day.

Friday's meeting, which was held on Zhuhai's Hengqin island, was the eighth meeting of the zone's administrative committee, according to the statement.

The zone was inaugurated in September 2021.

The Guangdong-Macau In-depth Cooperation Zone's top decision-making body is its administrative committee, which is jointly headed by Wang and Ho.

The zone's executive committee, which is run under the administrative committee, is the body tasked with the zone's daily functioning and execution of tasks. The executive committee is headed by Macau Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong.

Friday's statement said that the Hengqin Guangdong-Macau Development and Investment Company Limited has been jointly established by Guangdong and Macau, with a registered capital of 20 billion yuan.

Hengqin's 4 new key industries vs Macau's 1+4 plan

According to the statement, the newly established development and investment company will place special emphasis on investing in projects in Hengqin's four new key industries listed by its two development plans, aiming to create a major investment platform to support the in-depth cooperation zone's industrial development.

The four new key industries listed by the Master Plan of the Development of the Guangdong-Macau In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, published in September 2021, and the Overall Development Plan for the Guangdong-Macau In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, published in December last year, are 1) scientific and technological research and high-end manufacturing industries, 2) Macau branded traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), 3) MICE and commerce as well as culture and tourism, and 4) modern finance.

The Macau government's current 1+4 appropriate economic diversification model aims to consolidate and diversify the development of the city's tourism and leisure industry while putting special emphasis on promoting the development of four nascent industries, namely 1) big health mainly driven



Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng (right) and Guangdong Governor Wang Weizhong unveil the inaugural plaque of the newly established Hengqin Guangdong-Macau Development and Investment Company Limited in Hengqin on Friday. — Photo: GCS

by traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), 2) modern finance, 3) high-tech, and 4) MICE and commerce as well as culture and sport.

Meanwhile, according to the GCS statement, Ho noted during Friday's meeting that this year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR), and the 3rd anniversary of the establishment of the Guangdong-Macau In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin when its first-phase development goals are scheduled to be achieved.

Ho said that the central authorities' respective ministries and commissions, the Communist Party of China (CPC) Guangdong Provincial Committee and the Guangdong Provincial People's Government are all paying close attention to the cooperation zone's development.

Ho's 4 suggestions

Ho made four suggestions for promoting the zone's development. Firstly, according to the statement, Ho pledged that the zone's administrative committee will implement the decisions and plans made during the third plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee, which was held in Beijing from July 15 to 18, with the aim of enabling Macau and Hengqin to make their respective contributions to the nation's deepening reform and high-level opening up.

Secondly, according to the statement, Ho said that Hengqin will continue to cooperate with Macau to create a hub for international high-end talents, i.e., highly-qualified professionals, promoting the effective aggregation of innovative components in Macau and Hengqin such as technology, highly-qualified professionals, and other factors of production.

Thirdly, according to the GCS statement, Ho said that the zone's administrative committee will help Macau improve its mechanism for enabling

it to better play its role in the nation's opening up, making Macau's "golden business card" as an international metropolis shine even brighter.

Fourthly, Ho said that the zone's administrative committee will continue to deepen the convergence of regulations between Macau and Hengqin, providing experiences for deeper cooperation within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GBA).

In addition to making the four suggestions, according to the statement, Ho also underlined during the meeting that in the first half of this year, the cooperation zone was strongly pushing ahead with the development of its four new key industries, in compliance with the original intent to develop Hengqin and its first-phase development goals.

Ho said that the various achievements in the cooperation zone's development made

in the first half of this year have laid a solid foundation for achieving its first-phase goals at end of this year.

Ho pledged that the zone's administrative committee is determined to achieve its first-phase development goals at the end of this year as scheduled, such as a "significant" increase in the number of Macau residents living or working in Hengqin, achieving the initial stage of the Macau-Hengqin integrated development, and achieving preliminary results in promoting Macau's appropriate economic diversification, the chief executive said.

Hengqin positioning in nation's reform and opening up

During Friday's meeting, Wang underlined the need for the zone's administrative committee to earnestly implement President Xi Jinping's important instructions for Guangdong-Macau's cooperation on developing Hengqin.

Wang also said that the cooperation zone must accurately understand and grasp its development positioning as well as missions and tasks in the context of the nation's reform and opening up.

Wang also pledged to continue deepening the convergence of regulations between Macau and Hengqin, adding that the administrative committee will transform the nation's current strategic plan to further deepen reform into concrete measures to promote the cooperation zone's development and its concrete achievements.

Wang underlined that the zone's development must comply with the original intent to develop Hengqin, which is to serve and promote Macau's appropriate economic diversification. ■

Casino receipts rise 14.8 pct to 19.75 billion patacas in August

Tony Wong

Macau's 30 casinos produced gross gaming revenue (GGR) of 19.75 billion patacas in August, a year-on-year growth of 14.8 percent, the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) announced yesterday.

Last month's GGR of 19.75 billion patacas was also the second highest post-COVID-19 one, lower than the post-pandemic record of 20.18 billion patacas in May this year.

Last month's GGR was up by 6.2 percent month on month.

GGR in May this year was Macau's highest since January 2020, when the special administrative region recorded its first

COVID-19 case. In January 2020, GGR amounted to 22.12 billion patacas. The pandemic severely affected Macau's economy, its gaming, tourism and retail sectors in particular, for three consecutive years.

GGR in the first eight months rose 33.4 percent year on year to 152.1 billion patacas.

Macau's government-concessed gaming industry is run by six rival integrated resort (IR) operators – Sands, Galaxy, SJM, Melco, Wynn, and MGM. Under their concession agreements with the government, the IR operators are required to strengthen their non-gaming attractions and support Macau's cultural heritage promotion projects. ■

環境保護局
Direcção dos Serviços
de Protecção Ambiental

Mainlander cheats casino out of HK\$412,000 with fake chips: police

Ginnie Liang

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a mainlander on Wednesday for his alleged connection to a criminal gang after using fake gaming chips to cheat a casino in Zape out of at least HK\$412,000, PJ spokeswoman Lei Chi Hou said during a special press conference on Friday.

The suspect is a 28-year-old mainland man surnamed Qing, who told the police that he is jobless.

The gambling fraud, according to Lei, was not discovered until about 10 p.m. on Wednesday by the casino staff, who reported that a man kept exchanging 10 chips with a face value of HK\$1,000

each into chips with a face value of HK\$10,000 at a number of gambling tables, but he was not gambling at any table, which drew the attention of the casino.

The casino then sent staff to intercept the suspect, and discovered that the chips owned by the man have different sized numbers to the normal ones, and the anti-counterfeit holograms were not responsive, which it was later confirmed that they are counterfeits.

Lei noted that on that day 412 bogus HK\$1,000 chips were discovered at the casino, and 70 bogus ones were found on the suspect, totalling 482 counterfeit chips.

Under questioning, Qing admitted to receiving a 1,000-pataca payment to bring chips from the mainland to Macau to exchange, and he also knew that the chips were bogus, Lei said, adding that Judiciary Police are tracking down at least two fugitives, and the case is being followed up.

Qing was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on Friday, facing charges of organised crime and fraud involving a considerable amount of money. ■



This photo taken on Friday shows Judiciary Police (PJ) officers displaying the seized fake chips during Friday's special press conference at the Judiciary Police (PJ) headquarters. — Photo: MPDG

Macau non-Chinese permanent residents' cars can now enter Guangdong

Tony Wong

The current "Northbound Travel for Macau Vehicles" policy that allows Macau cars to travel to Guangdong now also covers cars owned by Macau non-Chinese permanent residents holding their travel permit to enter the mainland.

The "Northbound Travel for Macau Vehicles" policy's extended implementation started yesterday, which was announced by the Macau Transport Bureau (DSAT) in a statement on Friday.

The "Northbound Travel for Macau Vehicles" policy, which got off the ground early last year, benefits Macau cars without a Guangdong-Macau dual licence plate. The policy is currently only

implemented at the Macau-Zhuhai checkpoint of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge (HZMB).

Since July 10 this year, non-Chinese nationals who are permanent residents of Hong Kong and Macau have been able to apply for a travel permit to enter the mainland, officially known as Mainland Travel Permit for Hong Kong and Macao Residents (Non-Chinese Citizens), on multiple trips for up to 90 days each time within a five-year validity period.

In general, the mainland travel permits held by Hong Kong and Macau Chinese nationals, colloquially known as Home Return Permits, do not have a limitation on the length of time they stay in the

mainland each time.

Since the "Northbound Travel for Macau Vehicles" policy started early last year, it had benefited cars owned by Macau Chinese-national residents holding a Home Return Permit, but from yesterday the policy was extended to cars owned by Macau non-Chinese permanent residents who have obtained their Mainland Travel Permit for Hong Kong and Macao Residents (Non-Chinese Citizens).

The DSAT statement noted that application procedures for the "Northbound Travel for Macau Vehicles" policy from the new beneficiaries is similar to their Macau Chinese-national counterparts. ■

Mainland will intensify efforts to build unified national market: top market regulator

BEIJING — The mainland will speed up the building of a unified national market that is efficient, rule-based, fair and open, Luo Wen, head of the State Administration for Market Regulation, has said.

The country will formulate and revise rules for the implementation of the regulations for fair competition reviews, improve legal rules for determining market monopoly and unfair competition, and refine rules for fair competition in the digital economy, Luo said in an interview with Xinhua.

He said policies and measures that impede the building of a unified national market and fair

competition will be reviewed.

Strong efforts will be made to promote the inclusion of the review of fair competition in the assessment and evaluation of building a law-based government and optimizing the business environment, said Luo.

The administration will intensify efforts to address issues related to regional protectionist practices and market segmentation to ensure fair competition and market order, and promote fair and unified enterprise credit evaluation, he said.

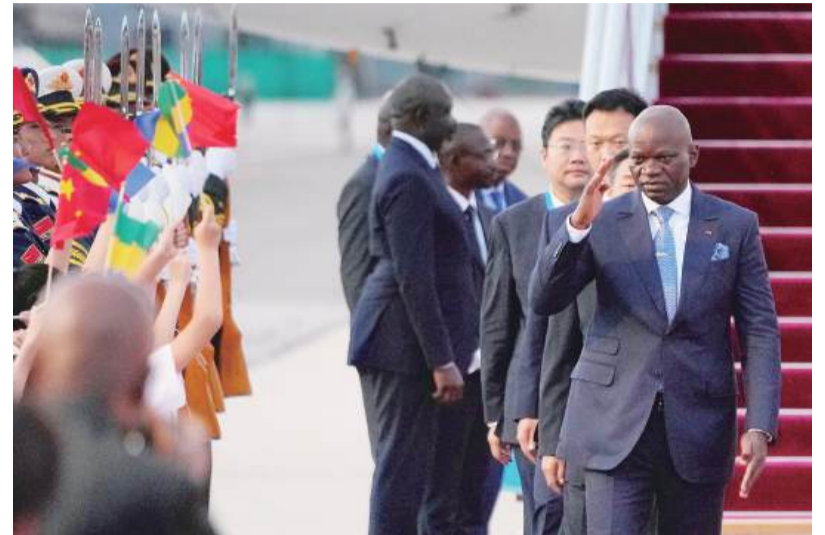
Acts that abuse administrative powers to exclude or restrict competition will be prohibited and

business entities of all kinds will be guided to compete in an orderly manner, said Luo.

To promote fair and unified market regulation, efforts will be made to strengthen the standardization and digital construction of market regulation and to build big data centers for market supervision, he said.

Noting the importance and urgency of improving the basic system of market economy, Luo said efforts will be made to improve market access and exit system, establish a trade secret protection system, and improve the credit supervision system. — Xinhua

FOCAC summit key means to leverage China-Africa partnership, says consultancy chief



Gabon's President Brice Oligui Nguema (right) arrives at Beijing Capital International Airport in Beijing yesterday, ahead of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) scheduled to be held on Wednesday to Friday. — AFP

BEIJING — The upcoming 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is a key means to leverage the unique relationship between China and African countries, says Hannah Ryder, CEO of Development Reimagined, an international development consultancy based in Beijing.

Ryder made the remarks during an interview with Xinhua ahead of the upcoming FOCAC summit in Beijing scheduled from Wednesday to Friday.

China's engagement with Africa has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly due to the impact of Chinese-led infrastructure projects, which have not only reshaped the urban landscape across the continent but also fostered a belief in the great potential of the China-Africa partnership.

"Over the last two decades, we've seen the relationship between African countries and China increase significantly. We've seen economic relationships increase, we've seen even the political relationships increase, and we hope that this next Forum on China-Africa Cooperation can lead to a further strengthening of those," Ryder said.

China's Ministry of Commerce data show that as of the end of last year, China's direct investment stock in Africa exceeded US\$40 billion, making it one of Africa's major sources of foreign investment.

"I think there is already a great deal of work that China and African countries have done together to achieve modernization. A key area that they've done that is infrastructure building," said Ryder. "I hope that we can continue to partner in that way."

Ryder, a Kenyan native and economist, has resided in Beijing for more than six years. Following her experience at the United Nations Development Program, she established the consultancy firm with a specific focus on China-Africa cooperation.

Ryder's motivation stemmed from her recognition of the genuine

need for African governments to strengthen ties with China. "I decided to create Development Reimagined to also help create a bridge between Africa, African countries, and China."

In recent decades, the Global South has become a powerful force in shaping a multipolar world. China and Africa exemplify the spirit of solidarity, with their cooperation playing a crucial role.

While acknowledging the value of other forms of South-South cooperation, such as training and exchange programs, Ryder highlighted the substantial scale of China-Africa collaboration, which has yielded practical outcomes, including infrastructure development and factory establishment.

"So we hope that there are other South-South cooperation partners who will also use that model, expand their South-South cooperation," she said.

Noting a key distinction between Africa's cooperation with China and that with Western countries, Ryder said, "I think one of the key differences is that when it comes to cooperation with China, it doesn't depend on what kinds of policies or issues or changes that you might make to your economy. It is more about what can you work with China on? What would you like to work with China on? And then there's a consideration from the Chinese side about whether they can offer that or not."

"So it's much more demand-driven than, I would say, even cooperation with some of the multilateral development banks is," she said, adding that China's demand-driven approach serves as a valuable example for other partners to emulate and expand upon.

Ryder also emphasized China's economic shift influencing Africa's future — China's ongoing transition from a labor-intensive, production-focused economy to a more sustainable, high-value, and consumption-oriented one. China's economic shifts serve as "historic windows of opportunity for African countries," she said. — Xinhua

Penny-pinching youth transforming mainland's bubble tea craze



This photo taken on August 15, shows bubble tea vlogger Stacy Chen recording footage for her vlog at her company in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. — AFP

Peter Catterall and Isabel Kua

HANGZHOU — Sweet, milky and colourful — bubble tea is wildly popular in the mainland, where people sipping through straws from large plastic cups is a common sight in high streets and shopping malls across the country.

But there's fresh competition brewing in the vast market, characterised by ultra-cheap products that are striking a chord with mainland's increasingly frugal young consumers.

Bubble tea — which classically includes tapioca balls and comes in a wide range of flavours, with or without milk — has gained huge popularity in the mainland, coinciding with an economic boom in recent decades that propelled living standards upwards.

Post-pandemic headwinds, however, have hit the economy hard, with consumers reluctant to dip into their pockets and the country's authorities struggling to get people spending.

Many of today's biggest bubble tea chains once built followings with premium products priced around 25 to 40 yuan (US\$3.50 to US\$5.50) and flashy branding that made them status symbols of contemporary urban life in the mainland.

But the sector — which last year was estimated to be worth more than US\$21 billion — has been jolted by a new wave of low-cost disruptors, some offering drinks for US\$1 or less.

"The existing market is saturated," Stacy Chen, a bubble tea vlogger based in the eastern city of Hangzhou, told AFP.

"Reducing prices is the only feasible way [for companies] to highlight their market competitiveness."

The mainland has forged an online following of bubble tea enthusiasts who watch her videos on lifestyle app Xiaohongshu and Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, where she has about 180,000 followers.

In her videos, she sits in front of a row of beverages, testing them and comparing them before offering her viewers a frank assessment of their appearance, taste and cost.

Chen showed AFP the breadth of options available to consumers on a commercial street outside her office, where uniformed deliverymen on wheeled hoverboards whisked away orders from over a dozen tea shops, all within a short walk of one another.

"There are so many milk tea brands on the market now, and they release new products very quickly," Chen told AFP.

"We milk tea and coffee vloggers can't shoot all the content."

Spoilt for choice

The mainland's bubble tea industry has flourished in recent years, with countless

brands now accounting for an estimated half million shops across the country.

Chief among the budget upstarts is Mixue Bingcheng, founded by a pair of brothers in 1997 as a humble shaved ice shop in the hinterland province of Henan.

The company — whose name translates as "honey snow ice city" — has expanded rapidly, with its smiling snowman mascot and bright red signs adorning about 32,000 stores in the mainland and around 4,000 more in 11 other nations as of last year.

"Current consumer sentiment [in China] is seeing many restaurants and cafes lower their prices to match spending behaviour," Evelyne Chang, market analyst at China Skinny, told AFP.

Mixue "has the first-mover advantage in the low-price milk tea segment", said Chang, adding that "stiff competition and product homogeneity" have led to a price war in the sector.

A highly anticipated post-COVID economic recovery in the mainland has not yet materialised, with property sector woes and heightened trade tensions weighing on consumer confidence.

Retail sales growth has remained sluggish and unemployment rates have stayed stubbornly high, fuelling concerns about a prolonged economic downturn.

Bang for buck

For many young professionals looking to pinch pennies while working in the mainland's top-tier cities, new companies such as Mixue have become more attractive.

"Other milk teas are too expensive," 21-year-old Guo Jun told AFP outside a Mixue shop in Beijing.

Guo, who hails from the northern province of Hebei but now lives and works in the capital city, said she had just purchased an iced lemonade using a discount on Douyin for a total of 2.8 yuan (US\$0.40).

"Work stress is high, the current economic environment is not good, things like salary are not great, so [young people] may choose to be more practical," said Guo.

Chen, the vlogger in Hangzhou, says that the low-cost bubble tea trend was due at least in part to the soaring popularity of domestic coffee chains offering bargain alternatives to more premium-orientated foreign firms like Starbucks.

This, according to Chen, affected the mainland's consumers on a psychological level, causing them to expect more bang for their buck.

"Before, we all fundamentally saw coffee as an imported or luxury product," she said.

"Now I can buy a luxury product for 9.9 yuan [US\$1.40] or 8.8 yuan [US\$1.20]."

"Why should I spend more than 20 yuan to buy a cup of milk tea?" — AFP

Mainland's summer rush ends with record high railway passenger trips

BEIJING — The mainland's 62-day summer travel season has concluded, with the railways handling a record 887 million passenger trips between July 1 and Saturday, up 6.7 percent year on year, China State Railway Group Co. Ltd. (China Railway) said yesterday.

During the period, the daily average number of passenger trips handled by the country's railways was 14.31 million, according to the company.

Meanwhile, more than 14.32 million student tickets were sold during the summer travel rush, according to the China Railway.

A total of 670 million tonnes of goods were also transported by railways, including 250 million tonnes of thermal coal, during the period, according to the company.

To ensure safe, orderly travel and stable operations, the company prepared a transportation plan, increased capacity and implemented passenger-friendly measures well in advance.

The summer travel rush is usually a busy season for the country's railway system as college students return home for the summer vacation, while family visits and tourist trips also increase during the period. — Xinhua



First graders sort out their desks at a primary school in Guiyang, Guizhou Province, yesterday. Schools across mainland hosted activities to mark the start of the new semester yesterday. — Xinhua

Congratulations on
the 20th anniversary of
The Macau Post Daily

20TH
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賀定一

澳門人民力量

澳門中華總商會

University of Saint Joseph

澳門土木工程實驗室

得寶建築集團有限公司

澳門街坊會聯合總會

Singaporean jailed for planting 'death penalty' weed in wife's car

SINGAPORE – A Singaporean man has been sentenced to nearly four years behind bars after attempting to frame his estranged wife by placing cannabis in her car, knowing she could get the death penalty.

Tan Xianglong, 37, was sentenced at a district court on Thursday to three years and 10 months in jail, court documents showed.

The couple had been estranged for less than two years, after having sought a divorce but failing to get one immediately because of the short duration of their union, the documents said.

Tan had been angry at his wife because he thought she did not contribute enough financially to the marriage.

He consulted lawyers and "came away with the idea that a divorce could happen if one of the parties had a criminal record", the

documents said.

He initially hired a private investigator to gather evidence she was committing adultery, but no proof was found.

This prompted Tan to hatch the scheme to frame his estranged wife by planting weed in her car - describing it to his girlfriend as a "perfect plan".

Tan bought the drugs on the black market and weighed them at home, finding they came in at 510 grams more than the 500-gram threshold that merits the death penalty in Singapore.

"From his research online, he knew that the involved party (his wife) would face the death penalty if convicted of trafficking more than 500 grams of cannabis," the court documents said.

"He nonetheless decided to proceed

with his plan as he was very angry with the involved party."

A laboratory analysis of the drugs, however, showed they only contained 216.17 grams of pure cannabis.

Tan's wife was arrested after police discovered the drugs in her car, but they found no other incriminating evidence against her.

Police then turned their investigation to Tan, who was subsequently arrested.

The United Nations and rights groups say capital punishment has no proven deterrent effect, and have called for it to be discontinued.

Singaporean officials, however, contend it has helped make the country one of Asia's safest.

The city-state carries out the death penalty by hanging. – AFP



A male Sumatran elephant calf named Rocky Balboa, born on May 25, stands next to his mother, a 40-year-old elephant named Lembang, at the Surabaya Zoo during the introduction of the 3-month-old calf to the public in Surabaya on Saturday. – AFP

Wildlife trade now 'serious offence' under Singapore organised crime law

SINGAPORE – Wildlife trafficking is now a "serious offence" under Singapore's organised crime law, the city-state's interior ministry has said, with those prosecuted under the code subject to sentences of up to 20 years behind bars.

Singapore is a preferred transshipment route for traffickers, conservationists say, with Southeast Asia at the centre of much of the multibillion-dollar illicit industry.

"The Ministry of Home Affairs will be including wildlife trade offences as serious offences in the Schedule of the Organised Crime Act 2015 with effect from 30 August 2024," the MHA said in a statement on Thursday.

If found to have links with crime groups, offenders could face up to 20 years in prison under the organised crime act, the ministry added.

The offences include the import and export of endangered species and their transit without a permit issued under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The inclusion also empowers authorities to seize ill-gotten gains from wildlife traders with links to organised crime.

Wildlife traffickers without links to organised crime are not covered by the act, and only face up to six years in jail.

The organised crime law covers offences

considered serious threats to public safety and security, and those associated with criminal groups, like drug trafficking and unlicensed moneylending.

"International wildlife trafficking operates through a sophisticated cross-border supply chain," the MHA said.

The move was a "proactive measure" to deter operations of "organised crime groups should such activities emerge in Singapore in the future", it added.

The black market for illegal wildlife products is worth up to US\$20 billion a year, according to Interpol.

Southeast Asia is "at the epicentre" of much of the illicit trade, with Singapore seen as a convenient transshipment route by organised crime groups because it is a regional commercial hub, environmental group WWF-Singapore said on its website.

Singapore authorities in October 2022 made their biggest seizure of rhino horn, confiscating a US\$830,000 haul from a smuggler arriving from South Africa and intending to travel on to Laos.

In July of 2019, Singapore made its largest seizure of smuggled ivory, impounding nearly nine tonnes of contraband tusks from an estimated 300 elephants.

The illegal cargo from the Democratic Republic of Congo was bound for Vietnam.

– AFP



This handout photograph released by Tabanan's Regional Disaster Management Agency yesterday shows rescue personnel during their week-long joint search mission since August 26, to locate a missing French teenager who disappeared while trekking on Mount Batukaru, in Bali. – AFP

Rare twin elephants born in southern Myanmar

YANGON – A rare occurrence of twin elephants, a male and a female, was recorded in southern Myanmar's Bago region.

On August 26, a 21-year-old elephant named Pearl Sandar gave birth to the twins at the Wingabaw elephant camp. The first calf, a female, was born, followed by a male calf about four minutes later, Myo Min Aung, a veterinarian at the camp told Xinhua yesterday.

The twin elephants were initially unable to drink milk from their mother for the first

two days, so they were fed with bottles. By the third day, the twins started consuming their mother's milk, which is more nutritious and beneficial for them, he said.

The birth of twin elephants is a rare event in Myanmar, the 12th recorded case since 1960, he said.

At present, there are nine elephants in the Wingabaw Elephant Camp, including the new twins, and the staff are committed to providing special care for them due to the rarity of this event, he said. – Xinhua

2 dead, 4 injured in central Philippine disasters

MANILA – A 17-year-old girl was confirmed dead in a landslide in the early hours of yesterday, while a 26-year-old woman also died after she was pinned by a concrete wall that collapsed in Cebu City in the central Philippines yesterday, local authorities said.

Authorities said the rain-induced landslide also affected at least nine families whose houses were damaged. The villagers, including the victim, were asleep when the landslide hit.

There were no further reports of anybody missing in the landslide that occurred around 3 a.m. local time.

Authorities also reported that a 26-year-old woman died in another village when a wall collapsed due to heavy rains around 11:20 a.m. local time yesterday.

The accident also injured three children and a 23-year-old female, affecting four families of 15 people.

Authorities evacuated villagers to a safer place as the city continued to experience heavy rainfall due to a tropical depression affecting the country.

The state weather bureau said the tropical depression is affecting the central Philippine provinces and other parts of the country, warning of heavy rainfall in many areas. – Xinhua

Local leaders skeptical about Japan's efforts to address declining birthrate: survey

TOKYO – Governors and mayors across Japan revealed widespread skepticism about the country's ability to improve its declining birthrate by 2030, a recent survey conducted by local media showed.

Despite the government's "unprecedented measures" to tackle the challenge, including expanding child allowances and parental leave benefits, 79 percent of respondents expressed doubt that these efforts would lead to meaningful improvement, according to the survey conducted by national news agency Kyodo.

According to Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the total fertility rate, which estimates the average number of children a woman will have in her lifetime, hit a record low of 1.20 in 2023, but the rate needs to be 2.07 to maintain the population.

The government has labeled the period up to 2030 as the "last chance" to reverse the declining trend.

In the survey, 23 percent of respondents said they "do not think" the fertility rate will improve by 2030, while another 56 percent also gave negative answers. Only 2 percent of the surveyed local leaders were sure of such improvement.

The survey highlighted a call for more comprehensive measures beyond current strategies, including government financial support to make school meals and medical expenses free, Kyodo reported yesterday.

Respondents also stressed the need to address the rise in unmarried individuals, indicating that support should extend beyond families with children to tackle underlying social challenges. – Xinhua

Pope heads to SE Asia in ambitious trip

Clément Melki with AFP bureaus

VATICAN CITY - Pope Francis embarks today on a 12-day trip to Southeast Asia, the longest and farthest of his papacy that will challenge the 87-year-old's increasingly fragile health.

The pontiff will fly overnight and arrive tomorrow in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, before heading to Papua New Guinea, East Timor and Singapore.

The distance covered – some 32,000 kilometres – and time difference of up to eight hours would be enough to make a testing trip.

But Francis – for whom spreading the faith is a priority – will also deliver 16 speeches and preside over several giant masses as he seeks to rally the region's growing Catholic community.

The trip – his 45th abroad – was originally planned for 2020 but postponed due to the COVID pandemic. And in those four years, the pontiff's health has suffered.

The Argentine now routinely uses a wheelchair to move around, underwent hernia surgery last year and has been plagued by respiratory issues.

He has not travelled abroad since visiting Marseille in France in September 2023, having cancelled a planned address at United Nations climate talks in Dubai two months later.

But in recent weeks the pontiff has appeared in good spirits, and the

Vatican said Friday there were no special arrangements being made, saying he was travelling with his doctor and two nurses as normal.

Create communion

The four countries on the tour are very different, but the pope will seek to bolster ties with each of their Catholic communities and their governments, observers say.

The goal is to “strengthen the sovereignty of the pope and the role of the Holy See with local Catholics, to create communion”, said Michel Chambon, a theologian and anthropologist at the National University of Singapore.

“If the Holy See wants to show its universality, it must rub shoulders with Asian traditions which, increasingly, play a major role in the international order,” he told AFP.

Francis is also expected to address some of the key issues that have marked his 11 years as head of the Catholic Church, notably inter-religious dialogue, migration and the environment.

Religious dialogue

Francis will take most of the first day in Jakarta to recover from the flight, and the next day hold talks with outgoing President Joko Widodo, as well as separate meetings with a group of young people, diplomats and local clergy.



A signboard welcoming Pope Francis is displayed at the Jakarta Cathedral in Jakarta on Friday. By embarking aged 87 on the farthest journey of his papacy, Pope Francis is doing something some believed impossible - and seeking to silence those who doubt his ability to fulfil his role. The pontiff's 12-day trip to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, East Timor and Singapore starting next week involves 43 hours of flight time and a distance of 32,000 kilometres. - AFP

On Thursday, he will meet representatives of all Indonesia's main religions at Istiqlal Mosque, the largest in Southeast Asia, and sign a joint declaration with the grand imam, Nasaruddin Umar.

Indonesia is the largest Muslim nation in the world but the country also officially recognises Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism.

Yet observers point to growing discrimination against religious minorities.

“Discrimination against the Christian minority in Indonesia

remains a concern,” Usman Hamid, executive director of Amnesty International in Indonesia, told AFP.

He said the situation varied widely depending on the region, but noted reports of attacks on churches and harassment of believers, as well as difficulties obtaining permits to build or renovate churches.

“Some congregations have been fighting for permits for decades,” confirmed Krispurwana Cahyadi, a Jesuit priest and theologian who lives on the island of Java, which includes Jakarta.

“We still have problems with religious intolerance,” he told AFP.

“Our country is not always as smooth as the ideals portrayed in the authorities' speeches.”

Francis will be the third pope to visit Indonesia, an archipelago of 17,500 islands, after Paul VI in 1970 and John Paul II in 1989.

East Timor sexual abuse

Francis heads on Friday to Christian-majority, multi-ethnic Papua New Guinea, for a three-night visit during which he will meet with street children and make a day trip to Vanimo in the far northwest.

He is expected to repeat calls to protect the environment in a Pacific nation marked by deforestation and regularly struck by natural disasters.

Francis is then enthusiastically awaited in East Timor, one of the world's newest nations and the most Catholic of his tour.

Some 97 percent of the 1.3 million inhabitants are Catholic. But as elsewhere, the Church in East Timor has been hit by the global scourge of clerical child sex abuse.

In 2020, the Vatican sanctioned Nobel Peace Prize-winning Bishop Carlos Belo, who was accused of sexually abusing boys in East Timor over a 20-year period.

The pope's tour wraps up with a 48-hour visit to Singapore, a densely populated city-state of six million residents. - AFP

Congratulations on the 20th anniversary of
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20TH ANNIVERSARY

Terrence Lei, Carl Leong

Israel set for general strike after Gaza hostages found dead

GAZA STRIP – Israel's main union yesterday ordered a nationwide general strike after soldiers recovered the bodies of six dead hostages from the Gaza Strip where the military is battling Palestinian militants.

The remains of the six were recovered Saturday "from an underground tunnel in the Rafah area" in southern Gaza, the military said.

They were among 251 hostages seized during Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel that triggered the ongoing war, 97 of whom remain captive in Gaza including 33 the army says are dead.

Scores were released during a negotiated one-week truce in November, but relatives of those still held believe not enough is being done to free them.

Campaign group the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said a negotiated "deal for the return of the hostages" was urgently needed.

"Were it not for the delays, sabotage and excuses" in months of mediation efforts, the six hostages "would likely still be alive", a statement said.

The families called for a nationwide general strike to force the government to reach a deal to secure the release of the remaining captives.

Shortly afterwards, the head of Israel's powerful Histadrut trade

union ordered a "complete strike" for today in support of the hostages.

'Complete strike'

"I have come to the conclusion that only our intervention can shake those who need to be shaken," Histadrut chairman Arnon bar David said in a statement.

"Starting tomorrow [today] at six in the morning, the entire Israeli economy will go on complete strike."

"A deal is not progressing due to political considerations and this is unacceptable."

The six hostages were named as Carmel Gat, taken from a kibbutz community near the Gaza border, and Eden Yerushalmi, Almog Sarusi, Ori Danino, US-Israeli Hersh Goldberg-Polin and Russian-Israeli Alexander Lobanov – all seized by Palestinian militants from a music festival site.

Military spokesman Daniel Hagari said all six "were abducted alive on the morning of October 7" and "brutally murdered by Hamas terrorists shortly before we reached them".

Qatar-based Hamas official Izzat al-Rishq said the six were "killed by Zionist (Israeli) bombing", an accusation the military denied.

A senior Hamas official told AFP on condition of anonymity that "some" of the six had been

"approved" for release in a potential hostage-prisoner swap as part of a deal yet to be agreed.

Critics in Israel have accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of prolonging the war for political gain.

Netanyahu told Lobanov's parents yesterday: "I would like to tell you how much I regret and request forgiveness for not succeeding in bringing Sasha back alive."

He blamed Hamas leaders "who kill hostages and do not want an agreement", vowing to "settle the score" with them.

West Bank attack

US President Joe Biden said he was "devastated and outraged" by their deaths, but told reporters he was "still optimistic" a truce and hostage release deal could be reached.

The Biden administration has been involved in ceasefire mediation efforts along with Qatar and Egypt.

In the occupied West Bank, as soldiers pressed day five of coordinated raids targeting Palestinian militants, Israeli police said a "shooting attack" killed three officers.

The attack near Hebron added to surging violence in the territory where at least 24 Palestinians, including 14 militant groups said were their members, have been killed by the military since the Israeli raids began on Wednesday.

One 20-year-old soldier was killed Saturday in the raids, which Israel's military has called "counter-terrorism" operations.

Yesterday, a "shooting attack" near the Tarqumiya checkpoint in the Hebron area in the southern West Bank killed three police officers.

The military said it "eliminated" the suspected attacker after surrounding a house in Hebron.

In the northern West Bank, an AFP photographer saw Israeli bulldozers in Jenin city centre, a day after an official said soldiers had destroyed most of the streets and power and water had been cut off in the adjacent refugee camp.

Later yesterday an AFP photographer heard loud explosions



This combination of pictures created yesterday shows undated portraits provided yesterday, by The Hostages Families Forum Headquarters, representing families of Israeli hostages held by Palestinian militants in Gaza, showing hostages (clockwise from top-left) Almog Sarusi, Alex Lubnov, Carmel Gat, Ori Danino, Eden Yerushalmi and Hersh Goldberg-Polin at unspecified locations. – AFP

near the camp and saw black smoke over the city.

The United Nations said Wednesday that at least 637 Palestinians had been killed in the territory by Israeli troops or settlers since the Gaza war began.

Twenty-three Israelis, including soldiers, have been killed in Palestinian attacks or during army operations over the same period, according to official figures.

Polio vaccinations

In the besieged Gaza Strip, "humanitarian pauses" in the nearly 11-month war between Israel and Hamas were due to take place to facilitate a massive polio vaccination drive which a health official told AFP had begun in earnest yesterday.

Hamas's October 7 attack resulted in the deaths of 1,205 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures.

Israel's offensive has killed at least 40,738 people in Gaza, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry. The UN rights office says most of the dead are women and children.

The fighting has devastated Gaza, repeatedly displaced most of

its 2.4 million people and triggered a humanitarian crisis. Water, sanitation and medical facilities have been ravaged, contributing to the spread of preventable disease.

The World Health Organisation has said Israel agreed to a series of three-day "humanitarian pauses" to facilitate the vaccination campaign that aims to reach some 640,000 children, after the first confirmed case in Gaza in 25 years.

Yesterday, it was formally launched at three health centres in central Gaza, said Yasser Shaaban, director of Al-Awda hospital.

"We hope this vaccination campaign for children will be calm," said Shaaban, noting there were "a lot of drones" flying overhead.

Louise Wateridge, a spokeswoman for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, later said nearly 2,000 children were vaccinated initially yesterday.

But she added that they were anxious about later: "If the bombing continues after 2 p.m. this is of course going to impact the vaccination campaign... The only way to do this is a ceasefire."

Yesterday, rescuers in the Gaza Strip said 10 people had been killed in Israeli bombardment and an air strike. – AFP



A health worker administers the Polio vaccine to a baby in Zawayda in the central Gaza Strip yesterday, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas. – AFP

Iran probe finds Raisi helicopter crash caused by weather

TEHRAN – Iran's final investigation into the May helicopter crash that killed president Ebrahim Raisi has found it was caused by bad weather, the body investigating the case said yesterday.

The helicopter carrying 63-year-old Raisi and his entourage came down on a fog-shrouded mountainside in northern Iran, killing the president and seven others, and triggering snap elections.

The main cause of the helicopter crash was the "complex climatic and atmospheric conditions of the region in the spring", the special board investigating the dimensions and causes of the helicopter accident said, according to state broadcaster IRIB.

The report added that "the sudden

emergence of a thick mass of dense and rising fog" caused the helicopter's collision into the mountain.

Iran's army in May similarly said it had found no evidence of criminal activity in the crash that also killed Raisi's foreign minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

In August, Fars news agency cited the main causes of the May 19 crash as bad weather conditions and the helicopter's inability to ascend with two extra passengers against security protocols.

But the Iranian armed forces were quick to reject the finding saying, "what is mentioned on Fars news about the presence of two people in the helicopter against the security protocols... is completely false". – AFP

Israel police arrest reservist who tried to shoot Arab in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM – Israeli police said yesterday that a reservist soldier who went "on a mission" to shoot someone of "Arab origin" was arrested after firing at a victim in Jerusalem.

A police statement said the incident occurred "on a Friday night" last month, without specifying the date, when the 34-year-old suspect left home "with the weapon he held as part of his reserve service".

The suspect "was on a mission to search for a victim of Arab origin" in a park in west Jerusalem, the statement said.

"When the suspect identified a potential victim, he made the individual sit on a bench by the side of the road and began questioning him while holding the weapon against his body," it said.

"After the suspect was convinced that the person was of Arab origin, he aimed his weapon and attempted to shoot. However, the victim managed to escape without injury."

The suspect was arrested a few days later and told authorities "he fired the weapon to intimidate the victim", the statement said, adding that "an indictment is expected to be filed against him in the coming days".

Such incidents are relatively rare in Jerusalem, although in June Israeli police said a Palestinian man was seriously wounded in a shooting incident in annexed east Jerusalem's Old City during "a quarrel" between off-duty Israeli soldiers and Palestinians. – AFP

Germany's far-right AfD wins first state election: exit polls

Pauline Curtet and Femke Colborne in Berlin

ERFURT – Germany's far-right AfD won a landmark first regional vote yesterday in the former East German state of Thuringia, exit polls showed, in a blow to Chancellor Olaf Scholz ahead of national elections in 2025.

The AfD took between 30.5 and 33.5 percent of the vote in Thuringia, according to exit polls, with the conservative CDU in second place at around 24.5 percent.

The AfD was also neck-and-neck with the CDU for first place in the neighbouring state of Saxony, which also held a regional election yesterday, the polls showed.

The AfD is unlikely to come to power in either state because other parties have ruled out working with the far right to form a government.

But the result is still a political earthquake as it would represent the first time in Germany's post-World War II history that a far-right party has won a state election.

If confirmed, it would also be a huge blow for Scholz's Social Democrats and the other parties in his fractious coalition government, the Greens and the liberal FDP.

The SPD looked to have scored between 6.5 and 7 percent in

Thuringia, and between 7.5 and 8.5 percent in Saxony.

'Historic success'

Alice Weidel, the co-leader of the AfD, hailed the result as a "historic success", while the party's other co-leader, Tino Chrupalla, said the party had a "clear mandate for government" in Thuringia.

Chrupalla said both states had sent the message that "there should be a change of politics" and the AfD was "ready and willing to talk to all parties".

Bjoern Hoecke, the controversial head of the AfD in Thuringia, told the ARD broadcaster his party was the "people's party in Thuringia".

"We need change and change will only come with the AfD," he said, hailing the "historic result".

Hoecke is one of Germany's most controversial far-right politicians and was fined twice this year for deliberately using a banned Nazi slogan.

The exit polls also showed a good night for BSW, a new party founded by the firebrand politician Sahra Wagenknecht after she quit the far-left Die Linke.

BSW scored between 14.5 and 16 percent in Thuringia and between 11.5 and 12 percent in Saxony, according to the polls.



Joerg Urban (right), top candidate of the far-right Alternative for Germany party (AfD) reacts after the first exit polls during the party's election night in Dresden, eastern Germany, yesterday. – AFP

Wagenknecht's party has appealed to voters in eastern Germany with a dovish stance towards Russia and calls for a radical crackdown on immigration.

The party scored an immediate success in June's European elections, hauling in around six percent of the German vote.

Other parties' refusal to work with the AfD potentially leaves BSW as the kingmaker in Thuringia and Saxony, despite serious policy disagreements with potential partners, especially on Ukraine.

Scholz's coalition partners, the

Greens and the FDP, had a dismal night in both states, scoring even less than the SPD.

Knife attack

The contests in Thuringia and Saxony come just over a week after three people were killed in a suspected Islamist knife attack in the western city of Solingen, which has fuelled a bitter debate over immigration in Germany.

The alleged attacker, a 26-year-old Syrian man with suspected links to the Islamic State group, was slated for deportation but evaded

attempts by authorities to remove him.

The government has sought to respond to the alarm by announcing stricter knife controls and rules for migrants in Germany illegally.

Saxony is the most populous of the former East German states and has been a conservative stronghold since reunification.

Thuringia meanwhile is more rural and the only state currently led by the far-left Die Linke, a successor of East Germany's ruling communist party.

The state was an early centre of support for the Nazi party, which first came to power there in 1930 as part of a coalition government.

A third former East German state, Brandenburg, is also due to hold an election later in September, where polls have the AfD ahead on around 24 percent.

Created in 2013 as an anti-euro group before morphing into an anti-immigration party, the AfD has capitalised on the fractious three-way coalition in Berlin to rise in opinion polls.

In June's EU parliament elections, the party scored a record 15.9 percent overall and did especially well in eastern Germany, where it emerged as the biggest force. – AFP

'Russian spy' whale found dead in Norway

STOCKHOLM – A Beluga whale whose strange harness sparked suspicions it was trained by Russia for spying purposes has been found dead in Norway, according to an NGO which tracks his movements.

Nicknamed "Hvaldimir" in a pun on the Norwegian word for whale, hval, and its purported ties to Moscow, the beluga first appeared off the coast in Norway's far-northern Finnmark region in 2019.

At the time, Norwegian marine biologists removed an attached man-made harness with a mount suited for an action camera and the words "Equipment St Petersburg" printed on the plastic clasps.

Norwegian officials said Hvaldimir may have escaped an enclosure and may have been trained by the Russian navy as he appeared to be accustomed to humans.

Moscow has never issued any official reaction to speculation that he could be a "Russian spy".

On Saturday, the beluga's lifeless body was discovered off the southwest coast at Risavika by Marine Mind, an organisation that has tracked his movements for years.

"I found Hvaldi dead when I was scouting for him yesterday [Saturday] like usual," Marine Mind's founder Sebastian Strand told AFP.

"We had confirmation of him being alive little more than 24 hours before finding him floating motionlessly," he added.

Fredrik Skarbovik, maritime coordinator at the port of Stavanger, confirmed the beluga's death to the VG tabloid newspaper.

Strand said the cause of the whale's demise was unknown and no visible injuries were found during an initial inspection of Hvaldimir's body.

"We've managed to retrieve his remains and put him in a cooled area, in preparation for a necropsy by the veterinary institute that can help determine what really happened to him," Strand added.

With an estimated age of around 14 or 15, Hvaldimir was relatively young for a Beluga whale, which can live to between 40 and 60 years of age.

Beluga whales can reach a size of six metres and generally tend to inhabit the icy waters around Greenland, northern Norway and Russia.

Those include the Barents Sea, a geopolitically important area where Western and Russian submarine movements are monitored.

It is also the gateway to the Northern Route that shortens maritime journeys between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

– AFP

Poland marks 85 years since WWII outbreak

WARSAW – Poland yesterday marked 85 years since the outbreak of World War II during annual commemoration ceremony held at dawn to remember Nazi Germany's first attacks that triggered the deadly conflict.

Nearly six million Poles died in the conflict that killed more than 50 million people overall, including the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust, half of them Polish.

The remembrance ceremony yesterday is traditionally held in Westerplatte, on Poland's Baltic coast, where a Nazi German battleship had opened fire on a Polish fort 85 years ago to the day.

Speaking at Westerplatte, Prime Minister Donald Tusk said the lessons of World War II were "not an abstraction" and drew parallels with the war in neighbouring Ukraine.

"This war is coming again from the east," he said.

He urged NATO member states to be "fully devoted to defence... against the aggression that we are witnessing today on the battlefields of Ukraine".

Adolf Hitler's attacks on Poland led Britain and France to declare war on Nazi Germany. On September 17, the Soviet Union in turn invaded Poland.

After the Nazis tore up their pact with Moscow, two alliances battled it out: the Axis powers led by Germany, Italy and Japan and the victorious Allied forces led by Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States.

Polish President Andrzej Duda took part in commemorations in the



Poland's President Andrzej Duda lays a wreath at the monument in memory of victims of the Nazi bombing on September 1, 1939, following the ceremony marking the 85th anniversary of the start of World War II in Wielun early yesterday. – AFP

western Polish city of Wielun where Germany's first bombs fell 85 years ago.

Duda said "sorry" from Germany was not enough and called for reparations, adding: "This issue is not settled".

Although it has been 85 years since the war started, there are still unresolved matters according to Poland.

Poland's current pro-EU government led by Tusk has urged Germany to provide financial compensation over losses the country sustained at the hands of Nazi troops.

It echoed an earlier similar push by the populist Law and Justice (PiS) party that lost power in October election.

During his visit to commemorate

the anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, a doomed revolt against occupying forces, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier spoke of plans to establish a memorial to the Polish victims of the Nazis.

"Many other efforts are underway, including for the remaining survivors of the German occupation. Our two governments are liaising closely on this," he said.

Steinmeier did not, however, provide any further details on the possible compensation measures.

According to Polish media, discussions between Warsaw and Berlin on financial compensation to the living victims of the Nazi Germany are underway, with Poland estimating up to 70,000 people would be eligible. – AFP

Alexandre de Moraes: Brazilian judge in feud with Elon Musk

Ramon Sahmkow

BRASÍLIA – With his stern gaze and shiny-bald head, Supreme Court judge Alexandre de Moraes has emerged as one of the most powerful and polarizing people in Brazil by probing far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro’s alleged attacks on democracy.

The latest target in his disinformation crackdown: Elon Musk.

The billionaire X owner, who calls himself a “free-speech absolutist,” in recent months went on the attack against Moraes, labeling him a dictator and threatening to defy the judge’s rulings blocking users found to be spreading disinformation – largely Bolsonaro supporters.

Moraes on Friday ordered the suspension of X, formerly known as Twitter, following a months-long standoff with the tech titan over disinformation in South America’s largest nation.

Musk, who also owns Tesla and SpaceX, reacted with fury to the judge’s order, branding Moraes an “evil dictator cosplaying as a judge” and accusing him of “trying to destroy democracy in Brazil.”

Known by his nickname, “Xandao,” Moraes, 55, looms large over the fissures of a deeply divided Brazil.

The immensely powerful judge, who also heads the Superior Electoral Tribunal (TSE), is hated by the far right, which accuses him of censorship and abuse of office.

To others, he is a hero using

the bench to save Brazil’s young democracy.

‘Political animal’

There was little in Moraes’s background to hint he would become a conservative nemesis.

The constitutional law expert worked as a Sao Paulo state prosecutor, then went on to become state security secretary. Known as a hardliner, he drew criticism from left-wing activists, who accused him of repressing social movements.

He served as justice minister under center-right ex-president Michel Temer, who named him to the Supreme Court in 2017.

“Legal expertise has played a part in his meteoric rise, but what put him on the Supreme Court, and 99 percent of his career, is politics. He’s a political animal,” constitutional law expert Antonio Carlos de Freitas told AFP.

Despite his severe demeanor, Moraes is known for a sense of humor behind the scenes.

Supreme Court insiders call him a pragmatist with a gift for engaging in dialogue with various players, including the military.

But he soon found himself on a collision course with Bolsonaro.

During Bolsonaro’s administration (2019-2022), Moraes ordered investigations of several of the president’s allies. Bolsonaro called him “scum” and vowed to stop following his rulings.

Moraes has presided over a slew of cases targeting the politician dubbed the “Tropical Trump,” who

has been barred from running for office until 2030 over his attempts to discredit the electoral system – a decision delivered by the TSE, the electoral court Moraes heads.

Moraes’s current docket includes what may be the most damaging case against Bolsonaro: the investigation into charges the ex-president and his inner circle plotted a coup to stay in power despite losing the 2022 elections to veteran leftist Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

“Bolsonaro’s camp has found a favorite enemy in Moraes, who has dealt them their biggest defeats at the Supreme Court and blocked the spread of fake news,” Freitas said.

Police investigating Bolsonaro’s alleged coup plot say it included a presidential decree that would have declared a state of emergency, called new elections and ordered Moraes’s arrest.

Disinformation war

Moraes was an omnipresent figure during the polarizing 2022 campaign, aggressively using his rulings to fight election disinformation on social media.

That included blocking some prominent right-wing figures’ accounts, leading to his standoff with Musk, who has been accused of turning his social media platform into a megaphone for right-wing conspiracy theories.

Moraes gives few interviews, and rarely posts on his own X account, “@Alexandre,” where he nevertheless has a million followers.

“Freedom of expression doesn’t mean freedom of aggression,” he has said.

“It doesn’t mean the freedom to defend tyranny.”

Still two decades away from the mandatory retirement age for judges in Brazil – 75 – Moraes has political ambitions, including being president some day, a source close to him told AFP.

Meanwhile, Musk will want to watch out if he challenges Moraes to a cage fight, as he did with fellow tech titan Mark Zuckerberg – and as some internet wags have been hoping: Moraes has studied “muay thai,” the martial art known as Thai boxing. –AFP



Photo illustration of the logo of the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on Saturday. –AFP

Body of missing soldier recovered in Portugal helicopter crash

LISBON – The body of a missing soldier involved in a helicopter crash in northern Portugal was recovered on Saturday afternoon, according to Portugal’s civil protection authorities.

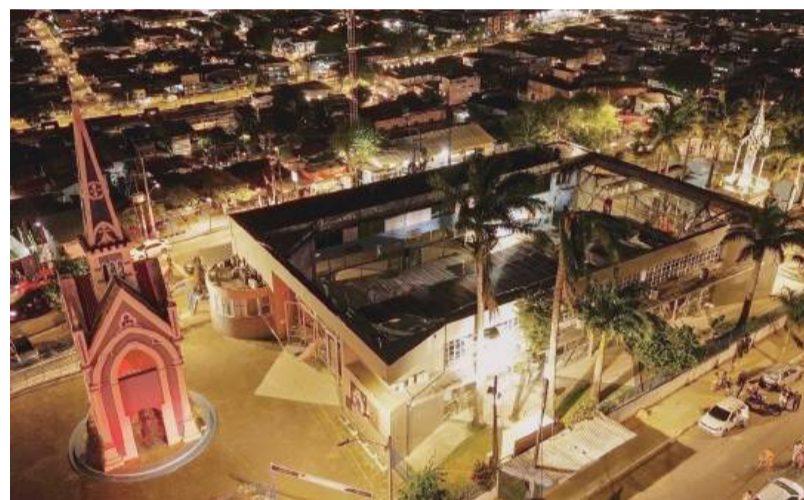
The helicopter, with a pilot and five soldiers on board, crashed Friday on the Douro River while returning from firefighting operations in northern Portugal.

The crash has killed all the

soldiers, with four bodies retrieved on Friday. The pilot suffered injuries, and is currently receiving medical care.

The impact was described as “strong,” leading to the “total destruction of the aircraft,” said Rui Silva Lampreia, regional commander of the Northern Maritime Police, quoted by local media.

The Portuguese government has initiated an investigation into the cause of the crash. –Xinhua



An aerial view shows the Archdiocesan Sanctuary of Our Lady of Conception after its roof collapsed in Recife, Pernambuco state, Brazil, on Friday. Two people were killed and dozens more injured when the roof of a Catholic church in northeastern Brazil fell in on Friday, officials said. –AFP

East Timor PM thanks int’l community on anniversary of independence vote

DILI – East Timor’s leader thanked the international community as his country celebrated the 25th anniversary of its referendum on independence from Indonesia, with visiting UN chief Antonio Guterres urging the world to do more to support the young democracy.

Thousands of citizens flocked to a stadium in the capital Dili to commemorate the tiny Southeast Asian nation’s 1999 vote, which paved the way for its current democratic system.

“Remember, our nation’s independence is also thanks to the solidarity and efforts of the international community... especially the United Nations, which helped with the referendum process on August 30, 1999,” Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao said at the event, which was also attended by Guterres and Timorese President Jose Ramos-Horta.

The poll saw nearly 80 percent of East Timorese vote to split from Indonesia, ending a brutal 24-year military occupation that claimed up to 250,000 lives through fighting, disease and starvation.

The vote briefly sparked joy before Indonesian security forces and militias destroyed infrastructure and displaced hundreds of thousands to other parts of Indonesia.

The post-referendum terror killed around 1,400 people before the mainly Catholic country of 1.34 million was recognised as an

independent state in 2002.

Guterres said that after 25 years, the former Portuguese colony still struggled to provide essentials like food, education and healthcare, adding international support had been insufficient.

“The nation has won the battle for independence and democracy, and now it must win the battle for development,” he said at Friday’s event, appealing “to the international community to strongly support East Timor”.

On Thursday, Ramos-Horta – who along with Gusmao is one of the country’s independence heroes – said in a statement that East Timor’s journey to self-determination was “long and heavy”, but with international support it had been able to achieve peace, stability and development.

Local teacher Filomeno Salsinha said the legacy of the independence vote was a positive one.

“We are happy because the decisions that we gave have resulted in good things and justice for the people of Timor-Leste,” the 54-year-old told AFP.

Vendor Luis da Silva Amaral, 60, recalled the old days of bloodshed, saying East Timorese could live peacefully now.

“The difference is that we are now free, we sleep well. In the past, we couldn’t sleep peacefully, because militias were all over the place, looking for us.” –AFP

Equatorial Guinea repatriates 15 mercenaries to Chad

MALABO – Fifteen Chadian mercenaries accused of involvement in a 2017 attempted coup in Equatorial Guinea have been repatriated after a presidential pardon, according to a report on state television.

The group left Equatorial Guinea for the Chadian capital N’Djamena on Wednesday where they were handed over to the government, the TVGE channel said.

In January 2018, Security Minister Nicolas Obama Nchama announced that authorities had thwarted a coup the previous month.

He said a group of foreign mercenaries from Chad, Sudan and the Central African Republic were “recruited by Equatorial Guinean militants from certain radical opposition parties”.

More than 130 people went on trial in March 2019 accused

of being behind the foiled coup. Those found guilty were handed sentences ranging from three to 90 years in prison.

The small Central African state, rich in oil deposits, has been ruled with an iron fist for more than 45 years by 82-year-old President Teodoro Obiang Nguema, who took power in a 1979 coup, making him the world’s longest-serving president. –AFP

Paralympics sprint stars enter fray after triathlon postponed

Guy Jackson

PARIS – The stars of the Paralympic sprint world enter the fray at the Paris Games yesterday but organisers were forced to delay the triathlon events by 24 hours due to concerns about the water quality of the River Seine after heavy rain.

The 11 triathlon races were to take place early yesterday but after heavy rain on Saturday which can stir up pollution in the Seine, organisers and governing body World Triathlon decided to postpone by a day.

“The latest analysis shows a deterioration in the water quality of the Seine following heavy rainfall over the past two days,” the organisers said.

“It was decided to schedule the 11 medal sessions of the Para triathlon on September 2,” they added.

The triathlon was originally scheduled to take place over two days - yesterday and today.

The issue also caused disruption to the Olympics triathlon and open-water swimming events earlier this summer, with several practice sessions being cancelled due to high levels of pollution caused by heavy rainfall.

Of 11 days of events and training scheduled in the river during the Olympics, only five got the green light.

Despite a 1.4 billion euros (US\$1.5 billion) upgrade to improve the Paris sewerage and water treatment system, the Seine has been dogged by pollution concerns, notably for its levels of enterococci and E.coli bacteria.

Amputee speed merchants

The scene was set at the Stade de France for the entry into the competition of the amputee sprinters later yesterday.

The heats of the T64 100m event

features arguably the deepest field in any event on the Paralympics track and field programme.

Reigning champion Felix Steng of Germany has a fight to defend his title in the face of the challenge from two-time champion Jonnie Peacock of Great Britain and US athlete Hunter Woodhall.

Woodhall, 25, is one half of an Olympic-Paralympic super couple with his wife Tara Davis-Woodhall, who was crowned Olympic women's long jump champion in the same stadium just weeks ago.

Peacock though says at 31 he has the major championship experience and is approaching a return to full form after a low-key two years, although he did win bronze in Tokyo three years ago.

“I know people in that race who consistently run fast times outside the championships but I am the person who every time turns up at championships and runs faster times in them,” Peacock said before the Games.

“Provided I do not make too many mistakes, touch wood, I know I can do that again but the question is how many of the guys can as well.”

The blind football competition kicked off at the foot of the Eiffel Tower with the players guided by a rattle in the ball.

Colombia beat Japan 1-0 in the opening match of the men's tournament before Morocco and Argentina drew 0-0.

Brazil, who have not lost a single match since the event was introduced in 2004, faced Turkey later yesterday.

China added more golds in early action to move to 24 golds at the top of the medals table, but a rush of medals in the velodrome, including from James Ball in the men's B 1000m time trial, kept Great Britain in touch in second place on 16 golds at the midway point yesterday. –AFP



Liverpool's Egyptian striker Mohamed Salah (right) crosses the ball during the English Premier League match against Manchester United at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, yesterday.

–AFP

Liverpool rout woeful Man Utd, Chelsea held by Palace

Football

Steven Griffiths

LONDON - Luis Diaz starred as Liverpool routed arch rivals Manchester United 3-0 to extend their perfect start under new boss Arne Slot, while Chelsea suffered fresh frustration in a 1-1 draw against Crystal Palace yesterday.

Hired from Feyenoord to succeed Jurgen Klopp in the close-season, Slot has overseen three successive wins in a flying start to the new era at Liverpool.

The Reds sit second in the Premier League, behind champions Manchester City on goals scored, after handing United an embarrassing loss that finished with thousands of empty seats at Old Trafford.

Diaz and Mohamed Salah were United's chief tormentors as the Liverpool forwards tore Erik ten Hag's side to pieces with their pace and predatory finishing.

Diaz put Liverpool ahead with a 35th-minute header from Salah's cross after United midfielder Casemiro carelessly conceded possession.

Casemiro was guilty of surrendering the ball too easily again when Diaz converted another Salah assist with a cool finish seven minutes later.

Salah put the result beyond doubt in the 52nd minute, netting for the third time this season with a fierce strike from Dominik Szoboszlai's pass.

The Egypt star has scored 10 goals in nine appearances at Old Trafford for Liverpool in all competitions.

Slot is the first permanent Liverpool manager to win his first league game against United since Bob Paisley in 1975.

The Dutchman is also the first manager to win each of his first three Premier League games without conceding a single goal since Sven-Goran Eriksson at Manchester City in 2007.

While Slot soaks up his dream start, United boss Erik ten Hag is under pressure after a woeful display that came hot on the heels of their 2-1 defeat at Brighton last weekend.

Ten Hag survived a close-season review into his job, which including United speaking to former Bayern Munich boss Thomas Tuchel about potentially replacing him.

But while last season's surprise FA Cup final win over Manchester City saved his job, he cannot afford another poor league campaign after finishing eighth in 2023/24.

Enzo Maresca's Chelsea have won only once in the first three league games of the Italian's reign after a chaotic close-season.

Beaten by Manchester City on the opening weekend, Chelsea powered to a 6-2 win at Wolves last weekend before scraping into the UEFA Conference League group stage after a 2-1 loss at Servette on Thursday.

Former Leicester boss Maresca insists his expensive Chelsea rebuild, featuring a host of new signings, is ahead of schedule despite their inconsistent start.

Maresca fumes

But Chelsea failed to kill off Palace after Noni Madueke picked out Cole Palmer and his pass was slotted home by Nicolas Jackson in the 25th minute.

Maresca was furious after Palace midfielder Will Hughes avoided a second yellow card for a foul on Palmer.

Looking for their first point this season, Palace made the most of that escape to draw level in the 53rd minute.

England midfielder Eberechi Eze unfurled a superb curling finish that flashed past Chelsea keeper Robert Sanchez from 20 yards.

“If they had been with 10 I think the game would have completely changed,” Maresca said of the Hughes incident.

“It was clear for all of us it was a second yellow card. The only one that thinks in a different way is the referee.”

At St James' Park, Newcastle punished profligate Tottenham with a 2-1 victory.

Newcastle took the lead in spectacular fashion in the 37th minute when Lloyd Kelly pulled the ball back to Harvey Barnes, who unleashed a sublime volley into the far corner from 10 yards.

Tottenham equalised in the 56th minute as Newcastle defender Dan Burn accidentally diverted the ball into his own net while trying to clear after Brennan Johnson's cross eluded Nick Pope.

The Magpies went back in front in the 78th minute when Jacob Murphy ran onto Joelinton's defence-splitting pass and laid on a tap-in for Alexander Isak.

Unbeaten Newcastle's second win in three league games condemned Tottenham to a first defeat this term.

“It's massive, isn't it?” Newcastle boss Eddie Howe said. “You need to win at any stage but I think when there's difficult moments - and this transfer window has been tough for us - then it's even more important.”

–AFP



Gold medalist Portugal's Miguel Monteiro poses on the podium of the Men's Shot Put-F40 during the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, North of Paris, yesterday.

Monaco held as perfect start to French season ends

Football

PARIS – Monaco's perfect start to the Ligue 1 season ended yesterday as Przemyslaw Frankowski's stoppage-time penalty earned Lens a 1-1 draw in searing heat in the principality.

It looked as if Monaco were going

to claim a third win in as many matches this season when Denis Zakaria headed them in front with only six minutes remaining at the Stade Louis II.

That goal was a harsh blow for Lens, who had seen Adrien Thomasson and Wesley Said strike the same post seconds apart in the first half, and had a Remy Labeau

Lascary goal disallowed for a handball after the break.

But their luck was in when Zakaria deflected a shot with his hand in his own area, and the referee gave Lens a spot-kick after a VAR check.

Polish international Frankowski stepped up to convert the penalty four minutes into stoppage time, and

both sides are level on seven points in the fledgling table, behind leaders Marseille on goal difference.

The final result was a boost for Lens after they were knocked out of the UEFA Conference League during the week, losing to Panathinaikos in Greece in their play-off tie to miss out on a place in the league stage.

Monaco will be in the Champions League after finishing last season as runners-up in Ligue 1, and the principality side will begin their campaign at home to Barcelona on September 19.

Marseille are top after Mason Greenwood scored twice in Saturday's 3-1 win at Toulouse. –AFP

Mixed fortunes for Chinese duos in Paralympic table tennis

PARIS – Paralympic powerhouse China had three doubles pairs in gold medal action at the Paris Games yesterday, adding two golds and a silver to its already burgeoning medals tally.

Feng Panfeng and Zhou Ying claimed the first gold of the day's action for China before Liao Keli and Yan Shuo also emerged victorious, but Liu Chaodong and Zhao Yiqing went down in straight games as they took silver.

Things did not go China's way in the opening match of the three finals, with Poland's Patryk Chojnowski and Piotr Grudzien

beating Liu and Zhao 3-0 for MD18 men's doubles gold.

There was a dispute with an official over a point in the first set and speaking after the match, Chinese silver medallist Liu said the incident "put us off our game and we didn't get going again".

"I think the disagreement with the official distracted us... It affected us mentally and we needed to focus more. We are disappointed," Liu added.

But China, long the dominant force in the sport of table tennis, bounced back against Thailand in the second and third finals to win gold.

First, Feng and Zhou beat Thai

duo Yuttajak Glinbancheun and Wijitra Jaion three games to one in the XD7 mixed doubles final.

"We are very happy," said Feng. "We prepared very hard for this match... We studied our rivals' strengths and weaknesses, and it worked well."

Liao and Yan then rounded off yesterday's early action by coming back from one game down to also beat a Thai pairing 3-1 in the MD14 men's doubles final.

China won 96 gold medals at Tokyo 2020 and so far in Paris lead the overall medals table with a total of 24 golds by the midway point of action yesterday. –AFP

Ferrari's Leclerc wins Italian Grand Prix as Verstappen falters again



Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc (centre, left) celebrates with his team after winning the Italian Formula One Grand Prix race at Autodromo Nazionale Monza circuit, in Monza yesterday. –AFP

F1

Terry Daley

MONZA – Charles Leclerc won the Italian Grand Prix yesterday to delight Ferrari's massed ranks of fans as Lando Norris again chipped away at struggling champion Max Verstappen's lead in the Formula One drivers' standings.

Monegasque Leclerc claimed victory at Monza for the second time after winning in 2019, holding off McLaren pair Oscar Piastri and Norris in a thrilling race in which Verstappen finished nearly 38 seconds off the pace in sixth.

Huge roars engulfed the stands as Leclerc took the chequered flag for his second win over the season, after his own home Monaco GP, after holding out on a set of hard tyres he had changed during his one and only pit stop on the 16th lap.

"I thought that the first time would feel like this and the second time wouldn't feel as special," said Leclerc as he basked in the cheers of fans who made the track a joyous, noisy sea of red after the race.

"But my god the emotions in the last few laps; Monaco and Monza are the two races I want to win every year and I've managed to win them this year. It is so, so special."

All of Leclerc's major rivals, apart from teammate Carlos Sainz

who ended up finishing fourth ahead of his Ferrari replacement Lewis Hamilton, pitted twice and McLaren were hoping that the Ferrari pair would do the same.

Instead Leclerc managed to keep his tyres in good enough condition to stay ahead and in the end finish the race comfortably in front of Piastri, who had taken the race lead early on after an overtake manoeuvre on Norris which was as daring as it was tactically questionable.

"Not going to lie it hurts a lot. I did a lot of things right today," said Australian Piastri.

"Happy with the race, the pace I achieved but when you finish second it hurts."

Verstappen woes

Briton Norris - who clocked the fastest lap right at the end - will be disappointed by his finish after starting on pole but he managed to chop Verstappen's championship lead to 62 points with eight races remaining as his Dutch rival's barren run continued.

"We considered [pitting once] the whole race but it was impossible with our graining. Just disappointed. Ferrari did a better job, so hats off to them," said Norris.

Verstappen has now failed to win any of the last six GPs after claiming the honours in seven

of the first 10, and his and Red Bull's dominance of F1 looks increasingly in question.

A fourth straight world title looked a near certainty when Verstappen won in Spain back in June, but since then he has only finished on the podium twice.

His teammate Sergio Perez finishing in eighth meant that McLaren are now only eight points behind Red Bull in the constructor's standings and look favourites to win it for the first time since 1998.

Argentine rookie Franco Colapinto, who replaced axed Logan Sargeant for Williams following his disastrous showing at the Dutch Grand Prix last weekend, finish in 12th in his F1 debut.

Earlier Leonardo Fornaroli became the first Italian to win the F3 title, the 19-year-old doing so without winning a single race in this year's championship.

Trident driver Fornaroli overtook Australian Christian Mansell on the final corner of the 10-race season to grab third place and snatch the title from Gabriele Mini by two points.

Gabriel Bortoleto won the F2 race in dramatic fashion after starting last on the grid, cutting Isack Hadjar's lead at the top of the stands to just 10.5 points with three races remaining in the season. –AFP

Updated at 2:30 a.m. today.

Order	NOC	G	S	B	Total
1	China	27	23	10	60
2	Great Britain	20	12	8	40
3	Brazil	8	4	13	25
4	USA	6	10	6	22
5	France	6	7	10	23
6	Australia	6	5	9	20
7	Netherlands	6	2	2	10
8	Uzbekistan	5	3	3	11
9	Italy	4	4	9	17
10	Ukraine	3	10	12	25
11	Türkiye	3	5	2	10
12	Spain	3	2	9	14
13	Colombia	3	2	4	9
14	Israel	3	1	2	6
15	Switzerland	3	1	1	5
50	Hong Kong, China	0	1	1	2
50	Chinese Taipei	0	1	1	2



Spain's Paula Badosa (right) shakes hands with China's Wang Yafan after winning during their singles match at the US Open tennis tournament at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York City, yesterday. Badosa won the game 6-1, 6-2. –AFP

Castrillo wins Vuelta stage 15 as Roglic closes on O'Connor

Cycling

MADRID – Spain's Pablo Castrillo emerged from the fog to cross the line at the top of the daunting Cuitu Negru climb and take stage 15 of the Vuelta a Espana yesterday, as Primoz Roglic took more time out of Ben O'Connor's overall lead.

The 23-year Castrillo (Kern Pharma team) had already won Thursday's 12th stage but this was the biggest victory of his young career.

He set off three kilometres from the finish and soloed to victory in the fog, holding off the late challenge of Roglic's Red Bull-Bora-hansgrohe teammate Aleksandr Vlasov.

"It's something I couldn't even dream of," said Castrillo, stunned by the victory.

"I didn't think it was possible to

achieve this (two wins) in this Vuelta."

After a punishing 143 kilometres of road and mountain, which included the Alto de Santo Emiliano and a double ascent of the Alto de la Colladiella as well as that vicious final climb, Roglic followed the young Spaniard across the line in fifth over a minute behind.

More significantly, the Slovenian clawed back another 38 seconds from O'Connor (Decathlon AG2R La Mondiale) to reduce the Australian's overall lead to just 43 sec as the race heads into its final week.

The riders have a rest day today before setting off on stage 16, a 181 kilometre route from Luanco on the Asturian coast to the iconic ascent to the Lakes of Covadonga which takes in two intermediate climbs.

–AFP

K-pop agency vows 'strongest legal action' against deepfake videos

SEOUL – A major K-pop agency has vowed to take the “strongest legal action” against deepfake videos depicting its artists, after local media reports exposing Telegram chat rooms for sharing AI-generated pornography sparked public outrage.

South Korea is the country most susceptible to deepfake porn, according to a 2023 report by cybersecurity startup Security Hero, with singers and actresses from the rising cultural powerhouse accounting for 53 percent of the individuals featured in the content it reviewed.

“We are gravely concerned about the recent spread of deepfake videos involving our artists,” said a statement issued late Friday by K-pop agency JYP Entertainment, whose artists include the popular girl group TWICE.

“We are in the process of collecting all relevant evidence to pursue the strongest legal action with a leading law firm, without leniency.”

Earlier this week, President Yoon Suk Yeol called for an investigation into deepfake porn, with relevant agencies and police saying around 60 percent of victims were minors.

According to media reports, victims have included soldiers, teachers and students.

JYP's announcement comes about two months after fellow K-pop label ADOR said police were investigating the creators and distributors profiting from obscene

deepfake content depicting the firm's hugely popular girl group NewJeans.

Some of the offenders had already been convicted and sentenced, ADOR said at the time.

Activists say South Korea is plagued by an acute epidemic of digital sex crimes, including spycams and revenge porn, with inadequate legislation to punish offenders.

In 2019, K-pop star Goo Hara took her own life after falling victim to “revenge porn” – private sex videos filmed or shared non-consensually by exes – and threats by a disgruntled ex-boyfriend.

While South Korea is a leading technological power and increasingly a major exporter of its pop culture, it remains a socially conservative society with a poor record on women's rights.

In recent years, however, a new #MeToo generation has mobilised on a host of issues, including legalising abortion, triggering an online backlash against so-called “radical feminism”.

Before being elected, President Yoon had claimed South Korean women did not suffer from “systemic gender discrimination”, despite evidence to the contrary in the form of gaps in wages and workforce participation.

He won office in 2022 in part on a campaign pledge to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality, with some of his supporters going so far as to label the women's movement a “mental illness”. – AFP

US rapper Fatman Scoop dead after collapsing on stage

Gregory Walton

NEW YORK – US rapper Fatman Scoop has died, his family and manager announced Saturday, after the 53-year-old artist suffered a medical emergency while performing on stage, prompting a wave of tributes from the world of hip-hop.

Scoop, best known for the hit tracks “Be Faithful” and “It Takes Scoop,” collapsed on stage at Hamden Town Center Park, Connecticut and was taken to hospital where doctors were unable to revive him, US media reported.

Medical staff apparently attempted to administer CPR while he was still on the stage, according to a video of the incident obtained by celebrity news site TMZ. He was then carried away on a stretcher.

In a post on his Instagram account, his family wrote that “it is with profound sadness and very heavy hearts that we share news of the passing of the legendary and iconic Fatman Scoop.”

“Fatman Scoop was known to the world as the undisputed voice of the club. His music made us dance and embrace life with positivity,” they wrote.

Scoop's manager Birch Michael confirmed his death on Facebook, writing: “I love you Scoop. Thank you so much for everything you gave to me.”

'Want to dance'

Hip-hop star Missy Elliott wrote on X that Scoop's “voice and energy



US Rapper Fatman Scoop performs during a time out in the second half in game four of the Western Conference Finals between the Phoenix Suns and the LA Clippers at Staples Center on June 26, 2021 in Los Angeles, California. – AFP

have contributed to many songs that made the people feel happy and want to dance for over two decades. Your impact is huge and will be never be forgotten.”

Radio host Shelley Wade posted a photograph of herself with Scoop, writing: “We are losing too many of our hip-hop legends too soon. Rest easy, Scoop.”

Scoop briefly became embroiled in a political row in Australia in 2018 when the country's then-prime minister Scott Morrison posted a clip that featured his hit “Be Faithful.”

Morrison, a conservative evangelical Christian, deleted

the post after his critics said the entertainer's lyrics were inappropriate and unparliamentary.

“It's quite clear that that is not a song on my playlist,” he later told reporters in Sydney.

The uproar prompted a response from Scoop, who tagged Morrison in an Instagram post saying: “I am humbled to have my voice rocking in the highest offices of the Australian Government!”

The rapper defended his lyrics: “It's a fun PARTY SONG that has no NEGATIVITY or HARM in it!!” before extending Morrison a backstage invite to a festival appearance in Australia. – AFP

Long-awaited Ubisoft 'Star Wars' game hits shelves

PARIS – After more than four years in the making, French video game designer Ubisoft on Friday released its much-anticipated “Star Wars Outlaws”, an immersive spinoff from the famed saga.

The group's first foray into the universe created by George Lucas, “Outlaws” is an open-world adventure featuring Kay Vess, a young outlaw who travels the galaxy far away to pull off the heist of the century.

“This project is a childhood dream for many of us,” the studio's creative director Julian Gerighty told AFP.

The game crafted by Sweden-based Massive Entertainment allows players to explore cities and space stations in a fictional planet truthful to the sci-fi epic.

While “Outlaws” is not the first Star Wars-themed game, Gerighty says his teams managed to design dense cities and ultra-realistic vessels thanks to the advent of state-of-the-art, powerful consoles.

“We created new planets, new moons, and characters that enter this universe,” said Gerighty.

“Outlaws” is the product of a partnership struck with the company LucasFilms, the video game branch of the Disney-owned franchise.

Its creators were granted access to the entertainment giant's

“exclusive library with all the details and design documents” of Star Wars – the key to rendering an authentic atmosphere.

An odyssey without Jedis

Fans however should not expect Jedis – members of the saga's mystical knightly order. Rather, “Outlaws” brings the galaxy's underworld into the spotlight.

The world features iconic characters and legendary locations, with planet Tatooine, where original hero Luke Skywalker was born, as its setting.

The “incredibly ambitious” project inserts itself between the events of the “Empire Strikes Back” and “Return of the Jedi”, said Gerighty.

Some of the adventure's protagonists could appear in other productions, he added, as Disney in recent years has scaled up spinoffs from the franchise.

“Outlaws” will be the first Star Wars game to be developed by a publisher other than Electronic Arts (EA), since an exclusivity contract between the brand and the US firm ended in 2021.

Some gamers who were granted early access reported a few bugs, which the creators have pledged to fix.

'A plethora of adaptations'

EA since 2013 has rolled out a number of titles, from shooting

multiplayer “Star Wars Battlefront” to laser sabre combat “Jedi: Fallen Order” and “Jedi Survivor”.

“These games have been key successes,” said Mat Piscatella, an analyst for the industry-tracking firm Circana, who says Disney terminated its deal with EA to “maximise” revenue from the franchise.

The latest Star Wars video games have all ranked among the top 10 best-sellers in the US, according to Piscatella's figures – the likely trajectory for “Outlaws”.

“There has been a plethora of adaptations” since the late 1970s, said Thibaut Claudel, the author of “Star Wars – Disney and the legacy of George Lucas”.

“As an entrepreneur and an artist, George Lucas has always been interested in gaming,” which explains the “insane range” of games in the early 2000s, when the second trilogy came out, said Claudel.

“It's a lot of pressure on the creators,” he added, pointing out that fans with high standards dissect every fresh release.

Once the “Outlaws” frenzy dies down, connoisseurs will shift their attention to “Star Wars Eclipse”, a space epic by French studios Quantic Dream, who have yet to announce a release date. – AFP



A fan uses a smart phone to access an on-line ticket sales website to purchase tickets for Oasis' “Live ‘25” tour taking place in 2025, at home in Marsden, northern England on Saturday. Millions of Oasis fans queued online early Saturday to buy tickets for the British legends' eagerly-awaited reunion tour next year, but many were frustrated after booking websites appeared overwhelmed. – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 16°C~28°C	Manila 25°C~29°C	New York 13°C~25°C	Lisbon 15°C~25°C
Shanghai 26°C~36°C	Bangkok 23°C~32°C	London 16°C~23°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~26°C
Hong Kong 25°C~31°C	Tokyo 24°C~34°C	Frankfurt 18°C~29°C	Luanda 19°C~27°C
Taipei 24°C~39°C	Singapore 24°C~32°C	Vancouver 14°C~21°C	Maputo 14°C~25°C
Guangzhou 23°C~34°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~33°C	Paris 17°C~25°C	Dili 23°C~32°C
Nanjing 25°C~35°C	Jakarta 24°C~34°C	Moscow 12°C~27°C	São Tomé 24°C~30°C
Guilin 23°C~33°C	Seoul 21°C~25°C	Las Vegas 27°C~40°C	Praia 22°C~31°C
Xi'an 22°C~33°C	Sydney 10°C~23°C	Monte Carlo 21°C~27°C	Bissau 24°C~30°C



▲ In this handout photograph released by The International Olympic Committee (IOC), Singapore's Muhammad Diroy Noordin competes in the Para Athletics Men's Shot Put - F40 Final during the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games at Stade de France in Saint-Denis, north of Paris yesterday. - AFP



▲ Putharet Khongrak (first right) of Thailand falls during the men's 5000m T54 final of para-athletics at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris, on Saturday. - Xinhua



▲ China's athlete Fengqi Liu competes during the men's 100m backstroke - S8 final at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games, in the Paris La Defense Arena, Nanterre, west of Paris, on Saturday. - AFP



▲ China's Qu Zi Mo plays a shot as he competes in the Badminton Men's singles WH1 semi-final at La Chapelle Arena in Paris yesterday, during the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games. - AFP



▲ Great Britain, (from front to back) Italy, China, Spain and Germany compete in the PR3 mixed coxed four with coxswain heat 1 rowing event of the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games at Vaires-sur-Marne Nautical Centre in Vaires-sur-Marne, east of Paris, on Friday. - AFP



▲ Namibia's Lahja Ishitile (right) is embraced by her guide Sem Shimanda after winning the Women's 400m T11 Final at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games, in the Stade de France, Saint-Denis, north of Paris on Saturday. - AFP

▲ Denmark's Daniel Wagner competes during the Men's Long Jump T38 final at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games in the Stade de France, Saint-Denis, north of Paris, in the Para Athletics, on Saturday. - AFP

