

Sam meets Fujian Party chief, governor in Fuzhou to boost ties

Tony Wong

The 5th Fujian-Macao Cooperation Conference was held in the provincial capital of Fuzhou yesterday morning, the third day of Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai's four-day working visit to the province. Sam, alongside Communist Party of China (CPC) Fujian Provincial Committee Secretary Zhou Zuyi and Fujian Governor Zhao Long, led their respective government delegations. Both sides agreed that Fujian-Macao cooperation is grounded in deep roots, rich achievements, and broad prospects. They stated that the two regions will move in tandem to open a new chapter featuring complementary strengths and shared development, according to a statement released by the Macao Government Information Bureau (GCS) yesterday.

During the conference, Sam noted that Fujian and Macau share deep historical ties, common cultural roots, and close people-to-people bonds. Since the establishment of the Fujian-Macao Cooperation Conference mechanism in 2016, four prior meetings have advanced collaboration into an institutionalised and regular phase. Under the central authorities' guidance, Fujian-Macao cooperation has yielded fruitful results, Sam added.

Jointly supporting Mazu cultural activities

According to the statement, Sam highlighted that this conference marks the mechanism

闽澳高层会晤暨闽澳合作会议第五次会议

福建·福州

2026年8月4日



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (left) shakes hands with Communist Party of China (CPC) Fujian Provincial Committee Secretary Zhou Zuyi on the sidelines of yesterday's 5th Fujian-Macao Cooperation Conference in Fuzhou. — Photo: GCS

entering its second decade. Standing at a new starting point, both regions must consolidate existing achievements while seizing new opportunities. Across trade and investment, modern finance, innovation and technology, culture and education, and healthcare, Sam suggested promoting more practical cooperative projects, jointly supporting Mazu* cultural activities, and creating a new outlook

for coordinated development.

Sam also gave a presentation on the planning and development opportunities for Macau and the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin during Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan (2026-2030). He noted expectations for Fujian and Macau to join forces for global expansion, leveraging Fujian as the core area of the 21st Century Maritime

Silk Road, Macau's role as a trade service platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, and Hengqin's strategic "Macao + Hengqin" positioning.

BRI and GBA synergy

This synergy aims to connect the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), supporting the nation's high-level opening-up, Sam said.

According to the statement, Zhou noted that President Xi Jinping attaches great importance to Fujian-Macao exchanges, having issued key instructions on promoting mutually beneficial cooperation among the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, and Macau.

Zhou also said that Fujian and Macau share linked cultural ties, deep historical connections, and close economic cooperation alongside frequent people-to-people exchanges. As this year marks the beginning of the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030), Fujian remains committed to building a new provincial model characterised by dynamic mechanisms, superior industries, prosperous citizens, and a sustainable environment, Zhou underlined.

Zhou expressed hope that both sides would use the conference to build closer ties and write a new chapter of win-win development. Following the conference, both delegations signed several bilateral agreements across multiple sectors.

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A tourist takes a selfie beside Baiyin Chagan Lake, or "Milky Lake," in the Xilin Gol League of north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, yesterday. The lake is nicknamed "Milky Lake" because tiny mineral particles floating in the water turn it a creamy, milk-like white. — Xinhua



Iran says talks with Oman 'positive,' focused on designating safe routes in Hormuz Strait

TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei yesterday described the ongoing talks between Iran and Oman as "positive" at both technical and political levels, with a focus on designating safe routes for vessels' passage through the Strait of Hormuz, according to state-run IRIB TV. (More on p.10) — Xinhua



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HK-Macao police bust 100 million-pataca 'Fun Coffee' investment scam

The Judiciary Police (PJ), in conjunction with the Hong Kong Police Force, have busted a cross-border fraud syndicate that ran a coffee investment scam with total losses of HK\$94 million and 3.6 million patacas.

— Story on p.2

Defense spokesperson slams 'China threat' rhetoric in Japan's new defense white paper

A Chinese defense spokesperson yesterday refuted contents related to the Chinese military in Japan's new defense white paper.

— Story on p.7

EU nations patch things up after Ceuta migration discord

Spain and fellow EU nations moved to bury the hatchet yesterday after a mass influx of migrants into the North African exclave of Ceuta laid bare fault lines on migration within the 27-nation bloc.

— Story on p.12

PJ week-long youth campaign aims to deepen drug awareness

Ida Cheong

The Judiciary Police (PJ) launched a week-long youth drug abuse prevention campaign yesterday, with the aim of deepening drug awareness among young people and curbing youth involvement in drug-related crime at its source.

The campaign targets residential communities, areas surrounding school campuses, and popular youth hangouts across the peninsula and Taipa, including the Toi San, Patane, and Ilha Verde districts.

Speaking on the sidelines of yesterday's event at the Qingmao checkpoint, Cheong Kim Fong, a senior officer in the PJ Youth Concern Section, told reporters that the initiative features on-site patrols paired with interactive, face-to-face sessions to engage directly with young people. Cheong added that PJ officers are partnering with student trainees from their "Community Safety Youth Leader Programme" and "Youth Crime Fighter Programme" to educate the public on common tactics used in drug offences and telecommunication fraud, while equipping youth with actionable prevention strategies.

Cheong underscored that increased leisure time and

frequent social gatherings during the summer break significantly raise the risk of youngsters being enticed into drug abuse or illicit activities. To counter this, officers and student trainees are distributing anti-drug and anti-scam leaflets alongside promotional gifts along their patrol routes.

Cheong urged young people to exercise extreme caution at social events and avoid trying unknown substances out of curiosity. He advised young people to firmly refuse any drinks, snacks, or e-cigarettes offered by strangers, adding that if drug-related activities are suspected, they should prioritise their personal safety and immediately report the matter to the police.

Under Macau's latest Tobacco Control Act, e-cigarettes are classified as controlled items, making public possession illegal. Cheong noted that information regarding e-cigarette regulations and risks has been fully integrated into all standard anti-drug education efforts. Authorities will continue a dual approach of strict enforcement and public education to raise awareness among students regarding the illegality of e-cigarettes and the dangers of drug-laced e-liquids, he added. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) Youth Concern Section senior officer Cheong Kim Fong (first from left) and student trainees from their "Community Safety Youth Leader Programme" and "Youth Crime Fighter Programme" talk to a teenager (second from left) about common tactics used in drug offences and telecommunication fraud, at Qingmao checkpoint. – Photo: Ida Cheong

HK-Macau police bust 100 million-pataca 'Fun Coffee' investment scam



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers search the "Fun Coffee" shop in the over 100-million-pataca invest scam, near Avenida de Horta e Costa recently.

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ), in conjunction with the Hong Kong Police Force, have busted a cross-border fraud syndicate that operated a coffee investment scam with total losses of HK\$94 million (96.7 million patacas) and 3.6 million patacas, PJ spokesman Chao Teng Hin said during a special press conference at the PJ Headquarters in Zape yesterday.

According to Chao, police in Hong Kong and Macau have arrested eight suspects involved in the case. PJ officers arrested two local businesswomen, aged 52 and 64, surnamed Hoi and Ho respectively.

PJ spokesman Kou Peng Hong said that the coffee shop, Fun Coffee, opened in the Avenida de Horta e Costa area in November 2025, attracting customers by offering "free coffee tasting".

Hoi and Ho promoted a fictitious "AI Smart Coffee Ecosystem" investment project to guests, claiming high returns, Kou said. He added that the duo also used a pyramid scheme structure, encouraging participants to recruit others by offering a reward of 300 to 900 patacas for each successful referral.



Evidence seized from the coffee shop is displayed at the PJ headquarters in Zape recently. – Photos: PJ

Uplines* were also promised a one per cent return on investments made by their downline recruits.

Victims handed over cash to the suspects, which was converted into cryptocurrency and deposited into a mobile application, purportedly for investment in fictitious projects such as an AI-controlled allocation system.

On July 22, the application became inoperable and the coffee shop suddenly closed, leaving victims unable to withdraw their funds. Suspecting they had been cheated, victims reported the case to the Judiciary Police, Kou said.

At the time of the press conference, nine local residents – two men and seven women, all middle-aged or elderly – had filed complaints. The amounts they reported losing range from 52,000 patacas to 1.55 million patacas, with losses among this group amounting to around 3.6 million patacas. The investigation shows that there are at least 40 victims in Macau, and the exact total loss is still under investigation, Kou added.

According to Kou, the duo had been instructed by their upline to open the coffee shop. They had never met their upline in person

and only communicated via online platforms. Working capital and supplies were provided by the upline in cryptocurrency.

The duo have been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), with each facing charges of fraud and pyramid selling.

Kou said that, as of yesterday, in Hong Kong the police had received 225 complaints about the scam, involving HK\$94 million.

According to Article 28-A of Macau's Law No. 6/96/M:

Anyone who promotes or organises 'pyramid' sales faces up to three years' imprisonment.

For any of the offences referred to in the preceding paragraph:

a) if the crime involves property of high value, the perpetrator faces up to five years' imprisonment;

b) if the crime involves property of considerable value, the perpetrator faces two to 10 years' imprisonment.

Anyone who recruits people for "pyramid" sales faces up to 6 months behind bars. ■

*An individual who directly recruits or enrolls someone into a genuine or fraudulent business is defined as an online. – Gemini/MPD

Gongbei Customs seizes 4 cannabis cigarettes at HZMB

Armindo Neves

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized four cannabis cigarettes at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) Zhuhai Port (checkpoint) on July 25.

According to the statement, on that day, customs officers stopped and inspected a Guangdong-Hong Kong dual-plate vehicle. While talking to the driver, officers noticed that he was unusually nervous, the statement said, adding that upon further inspection, they discovered four suspected cannabis cigarettes in a tub of chewing gum hidden inside the driver's side centre console armrest box.

The net weight of the dried plant material was 1.1 grammes, and one of the cigarettes showed signs of having been burnt, according to the statement. Subsequent testing by a professional institution confirmed that all four cigarettes contained cannabis components, the statement said.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public that drugs refer to opium, heroin, methamphetamine (crystal meth, aka ice), morphine, cannabis, cocaine, and other

narcotics and psychotropic substances regulated by the state that cause addiction. Regardless of the quantity involved, the smuggling, trafficking, transportation, or manufacturing of narcotics is subject to criminal liability and criminal penalties. ■



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows 4 rolled cannabis cigarettes seized by its officers from a driver at the HZMB Zhuhai Port (checkpoint) on July 25.

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS.
A FEW SHOWERS AT FIRST.
FORCE 2 TO 3 SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 70% AND 95%.



25°C~31°C

Source: SMG

2026 Guangdong & Macao Branded Products Fair to feature record 459 exhibitors

Khalel Vallo

The 2026 Guangdong & Macao Branded Products Fair (2026GMBPF) opens tomorrow at Cotai Expo Hall A in The Venetian Macao, featuring a record 459 exhibitors and over 80 activities focused on the silver economy and healthy living, according to a press conference held yesterday by the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM).

The four-day fair, running from tomorrow through Sunday, covers nearly 13,000 square metres and showcases more than 10,000 products from Guangdong and Macau, as well as Belt & Road (B&R) countries and regions*.

Addressing yesterday's press conference, IPIM Acting President Sam Lei Chong Sam said this year's event has attracted the highest number of exhibitors in the fair's 18-year history, representing a 10 per cent increase over last year.

According to an IPIM statement released yesterday, the fair features 177 local exhibitors, 176 firms from Guangdong Province, and 106 businesses from the B&R. This year's edition introduces three new exhibition zones – the Smart Senior Wellness Experience Pavilion, the Healthy Living Zone, and an upgraded New Gourmet Tasting Zone – alongside the traditional Guangdong Branded Products Zone, Macao Featured Products Zone, and Belt and Road Products Zone.

The new zones will showcase eldercare technologies, including AI companion robots and non-invasive blood glucose testing, alongside healthy lifestyle products, and culinary experiences.

The opening day is designated as Trade Visitor Day, featuring business matching sessions, themed forums, and product launches. Highlights include the Macao-Hengqin Forum on the Integration of Cross-boundary Elderly Care Services, held in Hengqin. The remaining three days will be open to the public free of charge, featuring interactive workshops, cultural performances, and promotional discounts.

Visitors spending 300 patacas or more will be eligible for shopping rewards, while admission tickets double as entries for a lucky draw featuring prizes such as electric motorcycles and massage chairs.

Lei noted that since its launch in 2009, the fair has evolved from a traditional trade show into a comprehensive platform promoting industrial collaboration between Guangdong and Macao. He added that this year's event



Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) Acting President Sam Lei Chong Sam addresses yesterday's "2026 Guangdong & Macao Branded Products Fair" (2026GMBPF) press conference at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo.

– Photo: Khalel Vallo

places strong emphasis on developing the silver economy by showcasing smart eldercare products and facilitating targeted business matching.

The number of halal-certified exhibitors has more than doubled compared with last year, with businesses from Pakistan participating for the first time alongside returning exhibitors from Indonesia, Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore.

Additionally, IPIM will promote Macau's "first-store economy" by providing consultation services and hosting seminars for overseas brands interested in establishing their initial outlets in the city.

The 2026GMBPF runs through Sunday at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo, offering business networking opportunities, product exhibitions, and public activities aimed at driving trade, healthy living, and silver economy innovation. ■

*The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) encompasses over 150 countries and regions across Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, linked via specific land and maritime economic corridors. – Gemini

**The first-store economy (首店經濟) is an urban economic concept that leverages the opening of brand-new physical locations to boost consumer spending, upgrade commercial districts, and drive local economic growth. – China Youth Daily

Macau records wettest July since 1952

Khalel Vallo

Macau recorded its wettest July since weather records began in 1952, with monthly rainfall reaching 962 millimetres. Several other climate indicators also matched or set historical records, according to a statement released yesterday by the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG).

The bureau said that last month was affected by troughs of low pressure, active southwesterly airflows, and tropical cyclones, resulting in significantly above-average rainfall and lower-than-normal temperatures.

Total rainfall for July reached 962.0 mm – 2.3 times the climatological average and the highest July total on record. The high number

of rainy days also led to record lows for the average minimum temperature (25 °C), the month's lowest single temperature (21.9 °C), and total sunshine duration for July (116.1 hours).

Meanwhile, the mean monthly temperature of 27.5 °C equalled the lowest July average previously recorded in 1955, 2001, and 2013. The average relative humidity for the month reached 89 percent, matching the record July highs registered in 1959 and 1997.

The observatory added that the combination of persistent rainfall, lower temperatures, and reduced sunshine made last month one of the most unusual Julys in Macau's recorded weather history. ■

Submissão de pedidos através da
“Plataforma para Empresas e Associações”
 para usufruir da conveniência do
início imediato das obras

A plataforma electrónica para “licenciamento de obras de modificação/comunicação prévia de obras” da DSSCU foi alargada a **todos os procedimentos** relativos às obras de modificação e ao regime de comunicação prévia

Serviço igualmente disponível para mandatários!

O requerente pode delegar poderes a um mandatário para efectuar o pedido na plataforma, podendo a procuração ser descarregada e assinada através do “Serviço de assinatura de procuração” da “Plataforma para Empresas e Associações”.



Vantagens da plataforma



1 Emissão imediata da licença prévia de obra ou da aceitação da comunicação prévia, permitindo o **início das obras no dia seguinte**, sem necessidade de apresentar a notificação de início da obra.



2 Após a aprovação do projecto, é possível descarregar imediatamente as plantas carimbadas. Os procedimentos são mais **céleres e simples** do que os pedidos apresentados em formato papel.



3 **Serviços disponíveis 24/7**, sem necessidade de deslocação presencial; basta submeter o pedido, efectuar o pagamento e receber a licença ou comunicação prévia a partir de casa.

Maior conveniência para os cidadãos

As alterações ao Regime jurídico da construção urbana e ao respectivo regulamento administrativo entraram em vigor em 1 de Julho. Na sequência da actualização da plataforma electrónica para “licenciamento de obras de modificação/comunicação prévia de obras”, o âmbito dos serviços disponibilizados foi alargado, passando a abranger os pedidos de comunicação prévia para obras de modificação em fracções autónomas que não se destinem à finalidade habitacional, desde que tenham uma área bruta de utilização **não superior a 120 m²**, permitindo a **realização integral de todos os procedimentos por via electrónica**, com

vista a facilitar a vida da população, proporcionar maior conveniência e otimizar os serviços prestados aos cidadãos e ao sector empresarial.

Digitalize o código QR para consultar a página temática da plataforma



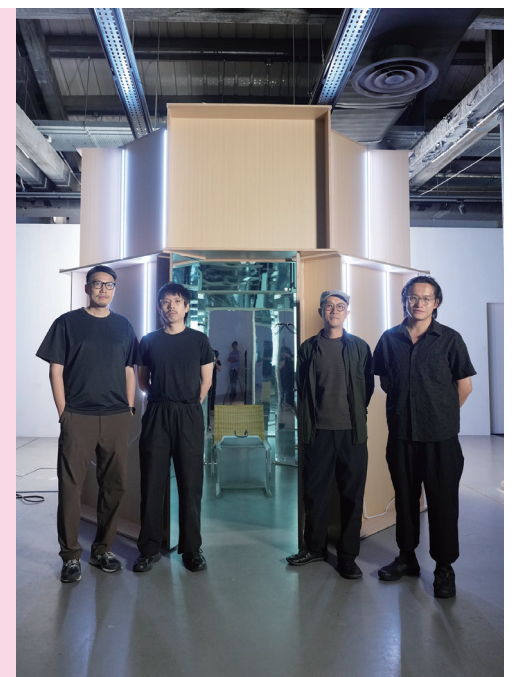
土地工務局
 Direcção dos Serviços
 de Solos e Construção Urbana



Curator Keith Lam addresses Friday's opening ceremony at Navy Yard near Barra Square. – All photos were taken on Friday and provided by Macao New Media Arts Association.



Damn! by Miracle Hao Tian Tian (right) and Johny Tam Chi Chun (left)



"Storage" by Karl Ng (centre-left), Casber U (left), Summer Ha (centre-right) and Mathew Hon Yun (right)

Where tech collides with heritage: Keith Lam brings FIRSTAGE to Navy Yard

Interview by William Chan

Nestled within the industrial textures of Navy Yard No. 1, Macau's historic waterfront is currently playing host to a bold fusion of electronic coding, artificial intelligence, sound design, and physical performance.

ProjectPlayaround Macao: FIRSTAGE – curated by Hong Kong media artist Keith Lam (林欣傑)* and hosted by Macao New Media Arts Association – unites 16 multi-disciplinary creatives to present a dynamic exhibition and performance ecosystem. As Lam explains, the initiative reflects a long-standing creative connection to the local art scene, one that began over a decade ago.

Lam's ties with Macau date back to around 2014 during a four-region exchange exhibition spanning Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and the Chinese mainland, though opportunities for formal exhibition work remained sporadic over the following years. The catalyst for bringing ProjectPlayaround to Macau finally arrived through Summer Ha, who is also a featuring artist at the exhibition. Together, they secured support to launch a series of foundational lectures and workshops over the past year, culminating in the regional debut of FIRSTAGE.

Choosing Navy Yard No. 1 as the primary site was both a practical and conceptual decision, according to Lam. Beyond its functional layout for hosting an exhibition-performance hybrid, the site's historical legacy as a former shipyard repair facility provides a compelling backdrop. As Lam notes in his curatorial remarks, placing cutting-edge technological art within a heritage space generates an inherent aesthetic tension. This sharp contrast allows the modern digital media to resonate intensely against the historical echoes embedded in the architecture.

At the heart of the project is a commitment to radical cross-disciplinary collaboration. Rather than treating interdisciplinary work as a transactional

arrangement – where one artist simply commissions another to provide audio or code – Lam underlined that ProjectPlayaround insists on bringing participants together to co-create a singular vision from scratch. In contemporary practice, cross-disciplinary creation is no longer an anomaly; it is an everyday reality. However, Lam pointed out that the true value of this approach lies in forcing artists out of their comfortable, isolated domains. When creators engage in deep dialogue across unfamiliar disciplines, they unlock unforeseen possibilities, steering media art away from mere displays of slick, high-tech apparatuses and toward richer, more open-ended territory.

This philosophy directly informs the title FIRSTAGE. As Lam noted, the term does not signify a rudimentary beginning, but rather refers to the primary site – the purest, most friction-filled space where different disciplines collide. "The tension generated when artists venture beyond their expertise creates a palpable energy that reshapes how the audience experiences technology."

Visitors are invited to move past a passive appreciation of glossy tech to confront works that directly engage human vulnerability. In pieces like Under the Gaze, algorithmic cameras strip away facial features to expose existential anxiety, while Damn! transforms the physical act of smashing objects into real-time granular soundscapes, drawing the public directly into the artwork's conceptual narrative.

ProjectPlayaround Macao: FIRSTAGE runs until August 23 at Navy Yard No. 1, open daily from 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. with free admission.

* Keith Lam is the co-founder and artistic director of the arts and technology studio Dimension Plus and an award-winning artist whose internationally celebrated work has been showcased at prestigious venues like the Ars Electronica Festival and the National Art Center in Tokyo



"Archive of Waterborne Deities" by Jay Lei Pui Weng (right), Jay Lee Shuk Man (left) and David Chung Siu Wing



"Under The Gaze" by Uly Chan U Lai (right, Franky Wong (left) and Clare Lo Hio Ieng (centre)



"I'm Looking at You, Looking at Me" by Raymond Nogueira



Govt repossess illegally occupied plot near Pier No. 6A

Ida Cheong

The Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) government launched an interdepartmental joint operation yesterday to repossess a plot of land and the structures thereon located near Pier No. 6A in the Inner Harbour, along Rua do Dr. Lourenço Pereira Marques (比厘喇馬忌士街內) on the peninsula, according to a Land and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) statement yesterday.

The plot covers an area of 1,128 square meters, the statement noted, adding that the site was previously issued a temporary occupation licence for public water areas which has since expired.

Due to the site remaining

occupied after the designated deadline expired, the government executed the joint operation to recover the property and its buildings, which have now been handed over to the relevant departments for management.

Under local maritime area management law No. 7/2018 and related executive dispatches, the boundary between Macau's land and maritime areas was clearly defined, placing coastal locations along the Inner Harbour under the scope of state-owned land subject to local law No. 10/2013, the statement said.

Given that the land no longer possesses a valid licence, the bureau had previously initiated eviction procedures, the statement added. ■



This handout photo released by the Lands and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) yesterday shows the illegally occupied plot at Pier No. 6A in the Inner Harbour, along Rua do Dr. Lourenço Pereira Marques (比厘喇馬忌士街內).

HK artist Cheung Kwan Ho showcases works at Cunha gallery

Rui Pastorin

Hong Kong artist and illustrator Cheung Kwan Ho is presenting a series of works in Macau for an 11-day exhibition titled "Searching For Views in Hong Kong" at the Rui Cunha Foundation (FRC) gallery.

Bringing his style of comic book creation to a Macau audience, Cheung, described by the organisers as someone with years of experience in the Hong Kong comic book industry, has published well-received books under his "Searching for Views" series.

His free-admission exhibition in Macau features a variety of works on display that are both in colour and black and white. It showcases Cheung's creative take on Hong Kong from its crowded and bustling streets to wet markets and characteristic landmarks to its dense cityscapes and tall skyscrapers.

Macau is also the subject of two pieces on display, particularly the piece featuring A-Ma Temple, the Ruins of Saint Paul's and the city skyline in one single frame.

Regarding his background, Cheung is the co-founder of "Firefly Production", which, according to its website, was established in 2018 and is an online platform dedicated to bringing together creative entities from Hong Kong, working with like-minded brands and working towards the development of local creativity in the neighbouring SAR (special administrative region). It also produces and sells apparel and cultural books, among other products.



Artworks for Cheung Kwan Ho's 11-day exhibition titled "Searching for Views in Hong Kong" are being showcased at the Rui Cunha Foundation (FRC) gallery.

— Photos: Rui Pastorin

Aside from his "Searching for Views" series and collaborative works with other creatives in the anthology series "FireFly" and its sequel, the gallery's statement singled out a major exhibition, titled "A Visual Voyage Hong Kong and Scenes", held at the Hong Kong

International Airport (HKIA).

The Cunha gallery on Avenida da Praia Grande is open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. from Monday to Friday, and from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturdays. It is closed on Sundays and public holidays. The exhibition closes on August 15. ■

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Ida Cheong

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frequent social gatherings during the summer break significantly raise the risk of youngsters being enticed into drug abuse or illicit activities. To counter this, officers and student trainees are distributing anti-drug and anti-scam leaflets alongside promotional gifts along their patrol routes.

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NOVA Mall unveils JOGUMAN-themed campaign

Rui Pastorin

Dinosaur characters from South Korea's popular character brand JOGUMAN* are at the forefront of NOVA Mall's latest summer campaign, with a themed installation set up at the mall's atrium, along with various activities.

The campaign is themed "JOGUMAN Macau Vacation - LEMONADE PLAYLAND @ NOVA Mall."

JOGUMAN BRACHIO, DIPLO, TRICERA, STEGO, ANKYLO and WOODY are all displayed at the themed area "LEMONADE PLAYLAND", being in line with the saying "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade", according to a recent statement by the mall.

Each character has a part to play in the various activities and sections.

Highlights include photo opportunities, including one with a four-metre-tall BRACHIO, and a flashcard dispenser featuring seven special edition items. The statement said that it also includes a themed game zone with three interactive challenges: "Lemon Maze", "Lemon Tic-Tac-Toe" and "Is There Lemonade?", with shoppers spending a certain amount until August 31 and during the weekend extensions on September eligible to redeem game

tickets for a chance to win gifts.

Meanwhile, outside of the mall, "SPEED SAILING" sees the IP in a collaboration with TurboJET for themed vessels, the statement said. TurboJET Super Class passengers can also take the themed "Super Plus Shuttle Services" to the mall.

NOVA Mall General Manager Paul Lee Yan Kwong was quoted by the statement as highlighting the first-time collaboration with IPX, which manages the global intellectual property business for JOGUMAN.

"Through JOGUMAN, we hope to turn the humorous and uplifting idea of 'When life gives you lemons,

make lemonade' into a series of photo spots and interactive game challenges for our visitors to enjoy a light-hearted day filled with smiles and moments of healing, while creating their own sunny summer memories with JOGUMAN", Lee said.

More campaign details can be found on <https://www.nova.mo> ■

*JOGUMAN comes directly from the Korean adjective "jogeuman", which translates to "small" or "tiny". In the context of the Seoul-based character design studio JOGUMAN Studio, the name translates literally to "tiny little beings". — Gemini



This photo recently provided by NOVA Mall shows the JOGUMAN-themed area at NOVA Mall.

Sam meets Fujian Party chief, governor in Fuzhou to boost ties



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (front, second from left) yesterday visits the 30th Anniversary Achievement Exhibition for the “3820” strategy project – Fuzhou’s 20-Year Economic and Social Development Strategic Vision. – Photo: GCS

Continued from p.1

In addition to the conference, Sam met with Zhou and Zhao together yesterday morning, according to a separate GCS statement.

Sam expressed gratitude to Fujian Province for its long-standing support of Macau’s development. He noted that the Macau government will align its upcoming 3rd Five-Year Plan with the nation’s 15th Five-Year Plan, opening new opportunities for regional collaboration.

Sam pledged that Macau will advance its economic diversification and Hengqin’s high-quality development, adding that he expects more Fujian enterprises and individuals to share in these opportunities.

Zhou expressed gratitude to the Macau government for its care and support of the Fujian community in Macau. Highlighting the province’s development, Zhou noted that Fujian’s total economic output exceeded 6.0 trillion yuan last year, ranking eighth nationally. He also underscored Fujian’s status as a historic revolutionary site – having hosted the Party’s two Gutian Conferences – and its position as the nation’s leader in forest coverage rate for 47 consecutive years.

Furthermore, Zhou noted that Fujian is a frontier for the

nation’s reform and opening up, with Xiamen City serving as a key strategic platform, and highlighted the province’s strong ties with overseas Chinese communities.

‘3820’ strategy

Yesterday afternoon, Sam visited the 30th Anniversary Achievement Exhibition for the “3820”** strategy project – Fuzhou’s 20-Year Economic and Social Development Strategic Vision – formulated under Xi’s leadership during his tenure as CPC Fuzhou Municipal Committee secretary in the 1990s.

The visit aimed to review the city’s development planning and explore practical mainland practices that Macau can incorporate into its own development philosophy, the statement said.

Afterwards, Sam and his delegation visited Guling (“Drum Mountain”) to review the strategic deployment of local eco-tourism. In the evening, Sam visited the Sanfang Qixiang (“Three Lanes and Seven Alleys”) Historic and Cultural Block to study successful urban renewal and historical preservation cases that Macau could reference.

Sam and his delegation, including Secretary for Economy and Finance Dora Ng Wai Han, are scheduled to return to Macau today. ■

* Mazu (also known as A-Ma or Tin Hau) was originally a 10th-century historical figure named Lin Moniang from Meizhou Island in Fujian. Following her death, she was deified as a sea goddess and patron protector of seafarers, fishermen, and maritime traders. Mazu is formally canonised within the Taoist pantheon as the Queen of Heaven (Tin Hau) and is simultaneously revered in Chinese Buddhism. Mazu is foundational to Macau’s culture and identity. The A-Ma Temple—built in 1488 before the arrival of the Portuguese—is dedicated to her. Legend has it that the name “Macau” derives from A-Ma-Gok (“Pavilion of Mazu”). – Gemini, MPD

** The “3820” Strategic Scheme (3820战略工程) is a long-term urban, economic, and social development blueprint formulated in 1992 for Fuzhou, the provincial capital of Fujian. Initiated under the leadership of Xi Jinping during his tenure as Secretary of the CPC Fuzhou Municipal Committee (1990–1996), it established a structured, phased master plan designed to transform Fuzhou into a modernized international metropolis. The numbers stand for the 3-year, 8-year, and 20-year goals for economic and social modernisation. – Gemini

Govt completes converting 7 plots into temporary facilities

Tony Wong

The government yesterday briefed the Legislative Assembly’s (AL) Follow-up Committee for Lands and Public Concession Affairs about its latest progress in using 39 available plots across the city for various temporary purposes.

In January this year, the government announced details of its plan to use the 39 plots.

According to January’s announcement, the 39 plots comprised 13 for recreational and leisure purposes, 15 open-air public carparks, three recycling facilities, four sports facilities, and four for other purposes.

In a closed-door meeting yesterday, the government briefed the committee about the latest progress of its ongoing plan to convert these available plots into various facilities to be operated on a temporary basis.

Lawmaker-cum-unionist Ella Lei Cheng I, who chairs the committee, briefed reporters about the meeting, which was attended by officials including Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man, Lands and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) Director Lai Weng Leong, and Public Works Bureau (DSOP) Deputy Director Sam Weng Chon.

According to Lei, officials told the committee that the government will constantly adjust the use of some plots in line with opinions gathered from residents in the respective districts.

Lei quoted the officials as saying that among the 39 plots, seven projects have been completed—with some already in use, while the remainder will soon open to the public. The seven plots comprise five open-air public carparks, one sports facility, and one for other purposes: an electric vehicle (EV) charging station equipped with super-fast charging piles in Cotai.

The government has yet to announce the exact opening date of the EV charging station.

The other 32 plots fall into the following categories:

Projects currently underway;

Projects for which tenders have been launched;

Projects currently in the design phase.

Following the government’s slight adjustments to its original plan, according to Lei, the 32 plots now comprise 13 for recreational and leisure purposes, 10 open-air public carparks, two recycling facilities, four sports facilities, and three for other purposes. ■



Lawmaker-cum-unionist Ella Lei Cheng I (right), who chairs the legislature’s Follow-up Committee for Lands and Public Concession Affairs, and legislator-cum-scholar Joey Lao Chi Ngai, the committee’s secretary, look on during yesterday’s media briefing. – Photo: Tony Wong

China’s AI industry tops 1.2 trillion yuan in 2025, up 40 pct

BEIJING – The size of China’s artificial intelligence (AI) industry was estimated to exceed 1.2 trillion yuan (US\$176.7 billion) in 2025, up 40 percent year on year, according to a research institute under the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT).

The China Academy of Information and Communications Technology (CAICT) noted that China was home to more than 6,600 AI companies as of June 2026, representing 15 percent of the global total. The country has developed a complete industrial system spanning foundational infrastructure, models

and frameworks, and sector-specific applications, CAICT said.

The application segment accounted for 55 percent of the entire AI industry chain in 2025, up 22 percent year on year. The foundational segment accounted for 38 percent and grew 59 percent, while the segment covering models and frameworks made up 7 percent and grew 189 percent.

The industry is highly concentrated in just a few regions, with Beijing, Guangdong, Shanghai, Zhejiang and Shandong accounting for more than 80 percent of the national total, the academy said.

Large AI models, AI agents and AI chips are evolving rapidly, while AI products are diversifying and their use is expanding across traditional industries.

CAICT has led the drafting of two industry standards on defining the AI sector and identifying AI companies, aimed at providing unified standards for industry statistics, policy-making and business practice.

China will continue to advance its “AI Plus” initiative to promote the extensive and in-depth integration of AI into various sectors and fields of the economy and society. – Xinhua

HK June retail sales notch 14th month of growth

HONG KONG – Hong Kong’s provisional estimate of total retail sales value for June stood at HK\$31.5 billion, up 4.6 percent year on year, official data showed Tuesday.

In June, online sales came in at HK\$3.0 billion, rising 11.6 percent year on year and accounting for 9.4 percent of the total retail sales value, while the value of sales of jewellery, watches and clocks, and valuable gifts recorded an increase of 20.1 percent year on year, data from the Census and Statistics Department of the Hong Kong

Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government showed.

A spokesperson for the HKSAR government said that the value of total retail sales increased for the 14th consecutive month in June. Cumulatively, total retail sales value in the first half of the year was 9.6 percent higher than a year earlier.

Looking ahead, the spokesperson said that the continuing economic expansion, rising local incomes and a steady increase in inbound visitors are expected to provide support to the sector. – Xinhua

China slams Philippine defense department's statement as extremely vicious political provocation

BEIJING — A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson yesterday slammed a Philippine defense department statement issued last Friday as a political provocation of an extremely malign nature.

This so-called statement is full of disinformation and smears designed to interfere in China's internal affairs, said spokesperson Lin Jian, adding China firmly opposes it.

Lin said that a small handful of anti-China forces in the Philippines have engaged in massive political and public opinion manipulation, trying every means to mix right and wrong, in order to seek selfish political gains and cover up the Philippines' infringement activities at sea.

"Their attempts will not succeed," said Lin, adding that this small handful of individuals cooked up

this so-called statement, issued in the name of a governmental department, to take hostage and disrupt China-Philippines relations in violation of the Philippines' commitments made in recent diplomatic communication.

"We once again urge these individuals to stop making provocations and creating trouble, and stop attacking and smearing China. Otherwise, they will bear the consequence for their despicable acts," said the spokesperson.

"We'd like to stress once again that the implementation of the Ethnic Unity and Progress Promotion Law provides better protection for all ethnic groups' lawful rights and interests, and will serve as a solid legal safeguard for the cause of ethnic unity and progress," Lin added.

—Xinhua

Defense spokesperson slams 'China threat' rhetoric in Japan's new defense white paper

BEIJING — A Chinese defense spokesperson yesterday refuted contents related to the Chinese military in Japan's new defense white paper, noting that it is hyping up the so-called "China threat" rhetoric, which merely serves as an excuse for Japan to ease restrictions on its own military buildup.

In response to a relevant media query, Chen Xi, a spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defense, said Japan's false accusations against China are a classic case of "a thief crying 'Stop, thief.'" He expressed China's strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition to the white paper.

The remarks came after Japan's Defense Ministry released its "Defense of Japan 2026,"

which described China's military activities as Japan's "greatest strategic challenge ever." The report also criticized Chinese military activities in areas around the Taiwan region and portrayed an increasingly severe regional security environment.

Chen dismissed the white paper as being "filled with false narratives," saying Japan was using security concerns as a pretext to remove long-standing restraints on its military.

According to Chen, Japan's ruling authorities have accelerated the revision of the country's three key security documents, continuously increasing defense spending, expanding long-range strike capabilities, and attempting to embed military expansion into

its national institutions, industries and public opinion.

Chen warned that Japan's "new militarism" has become a serious challenge to the postwar international order and the real threat to regional peace and stability.

The spokesperson also reiterated that the Taiwan question concerns China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and matters to the political foundation of the relations between China and Japan.

"We urge Japan to earnestly reflect on its history of aggression, stop interfering in China's internal affairs, stop misleading the Japanese public and the international community, and refrain from going further down the wrong path of remilitarization," Chen said.

—Xinhua

Egypt, China committed to better future through mutually beneficial cooperation: Egyptian expert

Interview

CAIRO — Over the 70 years since the establishment of diplomatic ties, Egypt and China have remained committed to shaping a better shared future through mutually beneficial cooperation, an Egyptian expert has said.

In a recent interview with Xinhua, Ahmed Kandil, head of the International Relations Unit at Egypt's Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, said the Egyptian-Chinese partnership has evolved "from a historic friendship and traditional cooperation into a forward-looking comprehensive strategic partnership."

Kandil also serves as editor-in-chief of "The Strategic Report on Egyptian-Chinese Relations 2024-2025," which was released recently by the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies to mark the 70th anniversary of Egypt-China diplomatic relations.

According to the report, cooperation between the two countries has expanded far beyond trade and investment to include artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, space technology, green energy, and digital infrastructure.

"We are witnessing a qualitative transformation in bilateral economic relations," he said. "This is a shift from conventional trade toward value creation and the localization of strategic industries."

He highlighted Chinese investment in the Suez Canal Economic Zone, particularly the China-Egypt TEDA Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone, as a flagship example of mutually beneficial cooperation.

"Chinese investment is not confined to individual projects," he said. "It has become an investment in the foundations of Egypt's economic

strength, spanning industry, energy, technology, logistics, finance, and the green economy."

Recalling that Egypt became the first Arab and African nation to establish diplomatic ties with the People's Republic of China in 1956, Kandil said, "The relationship was never built on narrow interests ... It has always rested on profound political and civilizational foundations, including support for national independence, opposition to hegemony, and respect for state sovereignty."

The two countries today enjoy broad strategic convergence on major international issues, including reform of global governance, support for a multipolar world order, respect for diverse development paths and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states, he added.

Talking about the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the expert said Egypt is uniquely positioned to play a larger role in the BRI, citing its strategic location at the crossroads of Asia, Africa and Europe, and its extensive network of trade agreements providing access to Arab, African and European markets.

These advantages place Egypt in a strong position not only to participate in the BRI but also to become an active partner in jointly shaping the future of Egypt-China cooperation, said Kandil.

For countries of the Global South, including Egypt, China-proposed initiatives including the BRI offer broader opportunities for financing, technology transfer, investment, and infrastructure development, while providing greater strategic flexibility within an evolving international landscape, he added.

—Xinhua



An aerial drone photo shows the construction site of a pumped-storage power station in Zhangye, northwest China's Gansu Province, yesterday. Construction of the power station started in 2022, and all four 350,000-kW reversible pump-turbine units are expected to be fully operational by 2029. A pumped-storage power station is a type of hydroelectric energy storage system that acts like a giant, water-based rechargeable battery. It uses two water reservoirs at different elevations to store and generate electricity on demand.

—Xinhua

Closer ASEAN-China ties help region weather geopolitical shocks: Malaysian scholar

Interview

KUALA LUMPUR — Closer ties between ASEAN members and China can help the region better withstand geopolitical shocks, a Malaysian scholar says.

Lee Pei May, an assistant professor at the International Islamic University Malaysia, made the remarks in a recent interview with Xinhua.

According to Lee, the region faces immediate challenges like the Strait of Hormuz disruptions, which have affected energy security. She also warned of longer-term threats, including trade fragmentation and climate change.

"With the Super El Niño potentially disrupting regional food security and contributing to transnational haze, cooperation with China is essential," Lee said.

Lee commended China's

participation in ASEAN-led initiatives such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), calling it a sign of strong cooperative relations, particularly in the economic sphere.

Looking ahead, Lee suggested that China and ASEAN could strengthen cooperation in climate governance, an area where the region is particularly vulnerable.

"ASEAN continues to face recurring haze issues and flood issues, and has consistently experienced extreme weather in recent years," she said. "There is an opportunity for China to offer its expertise and experience in haze management and broader climate governance."

Lee also highlighted ASEAN's policy of non-confrontation and its centrality in the regional

architecture, which ensures that cooperation and tensions are managed through dialogue and consultation. "This is the hallmark of ASEAN...evidence suggests that it has fostered greater economic integration and cooperation among its member states," she said.

She added that ASEAN has gained recognition as an influential grouping, as evidenced by the growing participation of countries and international organizations in its meetings, demonstrating its strategic and geopolitical importance.

"As the discourse on the Global South gains traction and the Global South becomes increasingly vocal in demanding reforms, ASEAN's role, comprising primarily countries of the Global South, has become even more important," Lee said.

—Xinhua

Heatwave divides rich and poor of upmarket Seoul

Jihye Shin

SEOUL – A severe heatwave has changed the currency of cool in Seoul’s affluent district of Gangnam: access to air conditioning now defines the line between the haves and the have-nots.

The ritzy neighbourhood was made globally famous by K-pop star Psy’s 2012 hit single “Gangnam Style” – lauding the lifestyles of its ultra-rich residents.

But under million-US dollar luxury apartments chilled by whirling air conditioners, tenants in one of Seoul’s last shanty towns suffer headaches in the savage heat.

“It’s so hot it’s hard to breathe,” said one resident of Guryong Village, a settlement of crude wood and tarpaulin shacks hosting around 160 households according to officials.

The woman – asking to be identified by her surname, Jeong, for privacy reasons – said she could not afford to cool the one-room home shared with her husband and disabled daughter.

“The poor really suffer,” said the woman in her 60s, washing vegetables by the open door of her residence as temperatures outside soared up to 38C.

South Korea is sweltering in a streak of searing weather – new all-time highs were set three times



A general view shows the shanty village of Guryong on the outskirts of Gangnam district in Seoul yesterday, as a scorching heatwave continues to grip South Korea. – AFP

over the past week alone, peaking at 42.5C on Sunday.

Volatile weather

The capital was under a “severe heatwave warning” yesterday for the first time since the new category was introduced this year to alert citizens to increasing extremes.

Scientists say volatile weather events are becoming more intense and frequent owing to climate change, which is man-made.

But heatwaves are not experienced equally across the wealth divide.

In exclusive Gangnam, south of the Han River, homes near the Guryong Village sell for up to 5.4

billion won (US\$3.7 million) and boast all cutting-edge mod-cons.

Tree-shaded boulevards are lined with flagship Ferrari, Lamborghini and Rolls-Royce showrooms, as well as designer boutiques and Michelin-starred restaurants.

Jeong Eun-woo, who lives in one of Gangnam’s modern high-rises, has not found this summer particularly difficult.

“I’m keeping the air conditioning running full blast. I drink iced coffee and wear light clothes,” said the 20-year-old.

“So far, it’s been fine.”

But in Guryong Village, set among mounds of accumulated

refuse, access to air conditioning – or even a reliable supply of electricity – is far from guaranteed.

‘Just surviving’

Ko Jae-ok, 87, has collected handheld battery-powered fans discarded by wealthier Seoul citizens, but found they provide little relief.

“We’re just surviving,” she said.

South Korea’s economy is thriving amid a manufacturing boom in microchips vital to the AI industry.

But the country is also witnessing a widening wealth gap.

In 2025, the richest 20 percent of the population held average net assets 45 times those of the poorest 20 percent, according to official data.

Vladimir Tikhonov, Korean Studies professor at the University of Oslo, told AFP Guryong “symbolises the alienation of the urban poor from the mainstream of South Korean society”.

Not having access to air conditioning “puts their health into extremely grave, perhaps deadly danger” despite living in one of Asia’s richest cities, he said.

The makeshift settlement, long earmarked for demolition, was founded by residents evicted in Seoul’s redevelopment drive ahead of the 1988 Olympic Games.

Built without formal planning, it has proven vulnerable to floods and

fires – and now the record-setting heatwave.

Emergency shelter

Local authorities have converted a community centre into an emergency heat shelter and distributed 67 million won worth of cooling appliances to vulnerable households in Gangnam.

The summer temperature’s death toll reached 19 yesterday, a government health agency said.

The weather agency also warned yesterday of “life-threatening heat”, and Seoul residents received mass texts advising them to stay inside.

But Baek Su-hyun said that offers no respite in Guryong.

“If it’s 35 degrees outside, it’s over 40 degrees inside,” said the 65-year-old, complaining that ageing residents were being afflicted with increasing headaches.

Baek’s home burnt down in a recent blaze, evicting him to a life in temporary shelter.

But South Korea’s heatwave has made it uninhabitable, forcing him to seek refuge under a makeshift tarp just a stone’s throw from Gangnam’s gleaming skyscrapers, where the wealthy remain cool in their aloof abodes.

“We just lie outside under the shade because we can’t stay indoors,” Baek said. – AFP

South Korea’s women web sleuths fight AI deepfake porn

Hawon Jung

SEOUL – Under banners emblazoned “Solidarity” and “We stand together with victims”, a group of South Korean women digital detectives dredges the internet for a scourge of illegal AI-enabled pornography.

South Korea – home to the world’s leading smartphone and memory chipmakers – takes huge national pride in its tech prowess.

But the success story has a dark side: women suffer rampant “digital sex crimes”, rights groups say. Spycams film them in private while chat groups blackmail them for explicit content and share so-called “revenge porn” without consent.

AI-generated deepfakes are the newest threat. Using the generative technology and a picture of their victim’s face, harassers can fabricate invasive pornographic images portraying their targets.

At the National Center for Digital Sexual Crime Response – housed in an airy Seoul office – 23 women are tasked with turning the tide, trawling the web and filing delete requests backed by threats of legal action.

Last year, the group pulled down 318,000 videos and photos – deepfakes, spycam content and intimate imagery shared without consent – on behalf of 10,600 people, 75 percent of whom were women and girls.

“South Korea acted faster than others because not only digital sex crimes became common earlier

than elsewhere, but also women spoke out against them just as quickly and vigorously,” Kim Mi-soon, the head of the government-founded centre, told AFP.

Deepfake deluge

The centre opened in 2018, a year that saw tens of thousands of women demand action through anti-spycam protests.

The organisation’s headquarters and 17 regional hubs also offer counselling and legal advice and collect evidence for prosecutions.

One 33-year-old woman, who asked to be identified only by her surname Kim, said she had deepfakes shared in 2024 on encrypted apps beyond the reach of the centre’s specialists.

“The centre may not be perfect, but it can make a huge difference for victims going through this nightmare alone,” she said.

Kim, a member of the military, said she felt “healed” by their support – including financial aid to secure a trauma diagnosis for court evidence.

“It gave me a huge sense of relief and solace,” she said.

“Navigating the whole legal procedure alone while suffering trauma would have been impossible.”

Digital sex crimes are proving a mutable menace.

In 2020, the “Nth Room” scandal revealed men were exploiting dozens of women and girls they called “slaves” in pay-to-view “sextortion” chatrooms.



The photo taken on July 2, shows the head of the National Center for Digital Sexual Crime Response Kim Mi-Soon browsing through their internal website in Seoul. Under banners emblazoned “Solidarity” and “We stand together with victims”, a group of South Korean women digital detectives dredges the internet for a scourge of illegal AI-enabled pornography. – AFP

Since the 46-person national response centre was founded, sexual deepfakes have become the new trend.

Between 2019 and 2023, global deepfake circulation surged 550 percent, according to web safety firm Security Hero.

Nearly 98 percent of content was AI-generated pornography of women, with more than half the victims South Korean, according to company research.

K-pop stars are main targets, but ordinary women are increasingly ensnared in a country where police data show digital sex crimes account for 40 percent of all sexual offences.

‘Leading the way’

Deepfake pornography is illegal in South Korea, with possession punishable by up to three years in prison and creators facing up to seven years behind bars.

Penalties were increased in 2024, the year a series of Telegram deepfake chatrooms were found to be sharing AI-generated sexualised footage of female acquaintances, classmates, colleagues and relatives, sometimes created from photos taken from victims’ social media accounts.

Clare McGlynn, law professor at Britain’s Durham University and an expert in image-based sexual abuse, said Seoul is “leading the way on providing holistic support services and investing in the latest technology to try to reduce the harm”.

South Korea’s approach offers “an example for the rest of the world”, she told AFP.

Yet campaigners warn the problem’s root cause is a patriarchal culture that regards women as sexual objects undeserving of dignity.

Kim Yeo-jin, head of the nonprofit Korea Cyber Sexual Violence Response Center, told AFP the online problem needs an offline solution.

“Unless we tackle this fundamental cause by fostering more gender equality in wider society and strengthening gender equality education at school, no amount of removal efforts will be enough,” she said. – AFP

Myanmar ex-junta chief set for first Thailand visit as civilian leader

BANGKOK – Myanmar's ex-junta chief Min Aung Hlaing is expected in Thailand tomorrow, making his first trip there since becoming civilian leader as he seeks a return to the diplomatic fold for his pariah state.

The former general led a 2021 military coup that ousted democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi, triggering a civil war estimated to have killed more than 100,000 people on all sides.

He was installed as Myanmar's president in April following stage-managed elections that democracy watchdogs and Western nations called a sham intended to launder the junta's image.

Neighbouring Thailand has since been leading an effort to normalise relations with Myanmar, both bilaterally and through the 11-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The bloc has excluded Myanmar's leadership from high-level summits since the putsch, but its foreign minister attended an informal meeting with his regional counterparts last month in Thailand.



Myanmar's President Min Aung Hlaing arrives to attend his sworn-in ceremony during a session of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) in Naypyidaw on April 10.

– AFP

And Min Aung Hlaing has been on a diplomatic drive since swapping his military uniform for civilian dress, visiting India, key ally China, and ASEAN member Laos in turn.

In the run-up to his Bangkok trip, Suu Kyi – who remains under house arrest – was allowed to meet a representative of the International

Committee of the Red Cross on Monday, her first publicised meeting with a foreign official since her ouster.

Independent Myanmar analyst David Mathieson told AFP that Myanmar's campaign for re-entry into ASEAN was a matter of "pure status" for Min Aung Hlaing.

But Myanmar's leaders have

also refused to buy into the bloc's so-called "five-point consensus" to end hostilities through dialogue with all sides.

"He wants to be seen as a responsible member of ASEAN in one way, then paradoxically to totally reject the five-point consensus," said Mathieson, describing it as an example of "zero-sum logics".

Analysts say Bangkok has cause to pursue restored ties.

Fighting between Myanmar's military and myriad rebel factions has spilled over the long border with Thailand, which hosts millions of refugees from Myanmar.

Thailand also has to deal with the presence of cyberscam networks and illicit drugs traffickers in Myanmar's volatile borderlands.

'Legitimacy'

Thailand's Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow told reporters on Monday that Thailand believed Myanmar, as well as Cambodia, could "do a lot more" to combat scam networks, and the issue would be raised during Min Aung Hlaing's visit.

In a statement he also welcomed Suu Kyi's Red Cross meeting, hoping that authorities "will undertake further positive steps towards lasting peace and stability in Myanmar".

Min Aung Hlaing is set to be welcomed by an honour guard at Bangkok's Government House tomorrow and then meet one-on-one with Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, a Thai official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The Myanmar leader will also attend a business forum and state dinner, the official said, with the two sides expected to sign a memorandum of understanding on labour cooperation.

Critics say Bangkok should not be rolling out the red carpet for Min Aung Hlaing, who has been sanctioned by several Western nations and is wanted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity.

Campaign group Justice For Myanmar slammed Thailand for its diplomatic overtures, saying in a statement: "Min Aung Hlaing must be held accountable for his crimes, not awarded false legitimacy." – AFP

Suspected heatstroke kills three lions at Japan zoo

Kyoko Hasegawa

TOKYO – Three lions at a Tokyo zoo have died from suspected heatstroke and others are under treatment, a spokeswoman said yesterday, with the big cats struggling with high humidity.

Japan sweltered through its hottest summer on record last year and parts of the country have hit 40C in recent weeks, qualifying for the new designation "cruelly hot day", with thousands of people hospitalised.

Ten of the 16 lions in Tama Zoological Park have suffered symptoms such as "loss of appetite and decreased activity" since mid-July, and three lionesses died, the zoo said in a statement.

One three-year-old female died yesterday, another aged 11 died on Friday, and the third on Sunday aged 15.

The Tama Zoological Park said the lion enclosure, where visitors can normally be driven around in zebra-pattern "safari" buses, was closed to the public until further notice.

"According to our veterinarian, the cause of the deaths is suspected to be heatstroke" because dehydration and multiple organ failure were observed, a spokeswoman told AFP.

"Even though lions are thought to be resistant to heat, zoo keepers have been strengthening countermeasures to cope with Japan's summer heat in recent years. Heat here comes with high humidity; that is different from heat with dry air in Africa," she said.

The spokeswoman said the heat "arrived suddenly" this summer

after the rainy season ended in late July.

"We are strengthening measures against the heat (further), sprinkling water, improving ventilation and installing spot air conditioners," she said.

Several lions are still being treated, she added.

'Profits'

Animal rights group PETA said the lions named Mugi, Ichigo and Luena "were born, lived, and died in confinement, deprived of everything that makes life worth living for a wild animal".

"Zoos are not rescues or sanctuaries; they exist to display animals for profit, not to put animals' needs first," PETA said in a statement.

Close to 18,600 people were taken to hospital for heatstroke between July 20 and 26, with 45 of them pronounced dead on arrival, according to the fire and disaster management agency.

Japan experiences about 1,300 heat-related deaths annually and is aiming to halve that number by 2030.

Scientists say human-induced climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme heat events in Japan and elsewhere.

Its highest recorded temperature of 41.8C was registered on August 5, 2025, in Isesaki, north of Tokyo.

Authorities have adjusted the timing of several cultural and sporting events in recent years because of the heat, including the World Cosplay Summit in Nagoya, which held its final summer edition last weekend.

– AFP



Thailand's Defense Minister Adul Boonthumjaroen (2nd left) and his Indonesian counterpart Sjafrie Sjamsuddin (left) inspect an honour guard during a welcome ceremony for his visit at the Defense Ministry in Jakarta yesterday.

– AFP

Bangladesh proposes death penalty for enforced disappearances

DHAKA – Bangladesh's government has proposed the death penalty for enforced disappearances after an official inquiry recorded more than 1,500 cases during deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's 17-year rule.

Hasina, who was toppled in a 2024 uprising, was accused of using the security forces to crush dissent, with many of those detained coming from her political rivals in the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami, the country's largest Islamist party.

A commission set up after her overthrow recorded at least 1,569

cases of enforced disappearances during her tenure, with 251 victims still missing and presumed dead.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, who leads the BNP, pledged during February 2026 elections to end the state-backed violence that marked Hasina's rule.

The bill, the Prevention and Remedies for Enforced Disappearance Act, must be passed by parliament.

"If the enforced disappearance results in death... the punishment may be extended to the death penalty", the cabinet statement read, after the draft was agreed late on Monday.

It proposes that families of victims be compensated from the property of convicted offenders.

While Hasina is a convicted fugitive in exile, rights groups say that political rivalries, weak law enforcement and a culture of impunity are driving continued violence in Bangladesh.

Hasina, 78, remains in hiding in neighbouring India. She was convicted in absentia by a Dhaka court of crimes against humanity in 2025 and sentenced to be hanged.

She told AFP last week she is determined to return home this year.

– AFP

US Treasury Secretary says chance of Hormuz deal with Iran by today

WASHINGTON — Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that the United States could reach a deal with Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz by today, adding that this would stabilize energy prices.

“We are in talks with the Iranians, and I think there is a chance we may have a deal today or tomorrow to open the strait and move towards a more normalized position in this

conflict,” Bessent said yesterday in an interview with CNBC.

Asked if a deal would allow Iran to charge a toll on shipping using the strait, Bessent said: “I think it would be freedom of movement.”

Bessent’s comments echoed those of US President Donald Trump on Monday, who insisted the waterway could reopen within hours after he pulled back from

threats of a massive military strike on Iran over the weekend.

Iran’s foreign ministry has denied that negotiations with Washington were taking place, and yesterday, an unknown projectile hit a cargo ship in the Strait of Hormuz, a key point of tension in the US-Iran conflict.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said yesterday the United States is

“involved” in negotiations between Oman and Iran on increasing traffic through the strait, through which around 20 percent of global oil shipments passed prior to the war.

“There’s been progress made in those talks but not finality yet; we’re hoping that will happen very shortly,” the top diplomat told journalists.

Bessent was upbeat on the impact a deal with Iran over the

strait would have on energy prices, where he said hundreds of ships are waiting to go out.

“Even though things are still a little dicey there over the past few days, we’ve (seen) quite a few ships coming out even now,” Bessent said.

“So you know, I’d expect the energy prices to settle back down, which, as I said, will be good for the entire world.” — AFP

Senate panel advances Blanche nomination to be US attorney general

WASHINGTON — US President Donald Trump’s former personal lawyer Todd Blanche took a key step yesterday towards becoming the top US law enforcement officer after a Senate panel approved his nomination to head the Justice Department.

The 12-10 vote in the Senate Judiciary Committee was along party lines and came after two Republican senators dropped their opposition to Blanche’s nomination.

Blanche’s Senate confirmation had been held up by concerns from senators John Cornyn and Thom Tillis over a US\$1.8 billion fund for alleged victims of politically motivated prosecution and a tax audit immunity deal with the Republican president.

Blanche issued a written order over the weekend scrapping the so-called “anti-weaponization fund” and said the audit immunity agreement with Trump, his two eldest sons and the Trump Organization would only apply “retroactively” to past tax years and not future filings.

The full Senate, where Republicans hold a majority, is expected to vote later this week to confirm Blanche as US attorney general. He has been serving as acting attorney general since Trump fired Pam Bondi in April.

Senate Democrats have been united in their opposition to Blanche amid concerns he has treated the Department of Justice as an extension of the Republican president’s legal team.

“Todd Blanche has no business serving as our nation’s chief law enforcement officer,” Senator Dick Durbin, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, said before yesterday’s vote.

“The attorney general is supposed to be the people’s lawyer,” Durbin said. “Mr Blanche continues to operate as the president’s personal lawyer, treating the Justice Department like a law firm serving one client — the president.”

‘Retribution’ campaign

Blanche has been closely tied to what Democrats have dubbed a “retribution” campaign by the president against his perceived political enemies and he helped negotiate the extraordinary legal settlement between Trump and the government he controls.

The out-of-court settlement stems from Trump’s US\$10 billion lawsuit against the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) over the illegal disclosure of his tax records by an agency contractor.

It proposed immunity from audits for past tax years and a US\$1.776 billion fund for people who say they were unfairly targeted by the Department of Justice, potentially including Trump supporters convicted over the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol.

Federal judges have separately blocked the fund and condemned the tax settlement, which according to US press reports could help the president avoid past liabilities of up to US\$100 million.

Blanche has also come in for criticism from victims of Jeffrey Epstein over his handling of the release of investigative files about the convicted sex offender, a one-time close friend of Trump.

Prior to joining the Department of Justice, Blanche represented Trump in his New York trial over alleged “hush money” paid to porn star Stormy Daniels.

He was also on the legal defense team in two federal cases brought against Trump by special counsel Jack Smith — for allegedly mishandling classified documents after leaving the White House and for seeking to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Both cases were dropped after Trump won the 2024 presidential election. — AFP

Hezbollah says Lebanon talks with Israel bring ‘shame, humiliation’



A motorcade delegation arrives for a new round of talks between the Lebanese and Israeli delegations at the US Embassy in Rome yesterday.

— AFP

Beirut, Lebanon

BEIRUT — Hezbollah’s chief said yesterday that direct talks between Lebanon and Israel would bring only “humiliation” for Lebanon and accused authorities of helping Israel, prompting Lebanon’s prime minister to hit back.

Lebanon and Israel were holding yesterday a fresh round of direct talks in Rome under US sponsorship, the seventh such meeting since Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war in March with rocket fire at Israel, which responded with heavy airstrikes and a ground invasion.

“All the direct negotiations will bring Lebanon nothing but shame, humiliation, disappointment and successive concessions,” Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem said in a televised address.

He said Lebanese President Joseph Aoun “has not acted as an arbiter, nor as a unifying figure, but has become biased and divisive, which is incompatible with his role and with Lebanon’s strength”.

The head of the Iran-backed group also accused Lebanese authorities of having “helped Israel instead of helping Lebanon’s sovereignty” by continuing with negotiations that he said had handed Israel “political gains”.

Prime Minister Nawaf Salam hit back on X, saying “the greatest help to Israel was provided by those who unilaterally drew Lebanon into the adventures of futile wars... and granted it pretexts to attack our country”.

“Those who unilaterally take the decision of war and try to continue to seize the state’s decision-making, and to tie Lebanon to foreign calculations and axes, ignoring the interests of

their community and the Lebanese in general, are not fit to lecture on patriotism, not to mention on sovereignty,” Salam added.

‘Patience’

“Lebanon has no sovereignty except for the sole independent decision of the state with one army which extends its authority over all its territory,” Salam added.

At negotiations in Washington in June, Israel and Lebanon agreed to a framework deal that involves the disarmament of Hezbollah, a gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon’s south and the deployment of the Lebanese army to the region.

Hezbollah has repeatedly rejected the direct talks and refuses to surrender its weapons.

Violence in Lebanon has decreased since the Lebanon-Israel deal, but Lebanon continues to report intermittent Israeli strikes, shelling and heavy demolitions in southern villages and towns.

“Shouldn’t the systematic destruction of southern villages and towns... be reason for the political authorities to say, ‘We don’t want dialogue with the Israeli entity’?” Qassem said.

He vowed “to make the utmost effort to provide the means for shelter, repairs and reconstruction”, cautioning however that this would require “patience”.

Salam instead reaffirmed the state’s commitment to end “the Israeli occupation... and secure the conditions for the dignified and safe return of people to their towns and villages”, and to rebuild. — AFP

Austria records all-time temperature high of 41°C

VIENNA — Austria set a new temperature record yesterday with 41°C measured in Vienna, the national weather agency said.

The reading was made in Stammersdorf in the northeast of the capital, GeoSphere Austria said in a statement, exceeding the 40.8°C which were measured earlier in the day.

The measurements break the previous record of 40.5 degrees on August 8, 2013, at Bad Deutsch-Altenburg in eastern Austria.

The spike comes during an exceptional spell of hot weather and low rainfall which have seen several local records broken.

Austria had suffered its fourth-

warmest July on record and “at some measuring stations, the precipitation deficit reached 90 percent”, the weather agency said.

Apricots have begun ripening roughly 20 days earlier than the average observed over the 1961–1991 period, illustrating the impact of global warming on crops, the agency said.

Agriculture minister Norbert Totschnig has warned it was becoming “increasingly difficult” for farmers to feed their animals as the drought dries up pastures.

In Vienna, restaurant owner Nasir Dis, 60, told AFP that “very few” people were coming to eat and called the weather “a

catastrophe”.

“We just wait for this heat to be over. What can we do? Nothing... No one wants to eat or drink anything. Everyone just wants to barricade themselves at home,” he said.

In neighbouring Slovakia, the capital Bratislava recorded its highest temperature ever at 40.8°C on yesterday, breaking the record set the previous day of 39.9°C, according to the weather service.

Climate change has intensified a drought across Europe this summer, with extreme heat driving the exceptionally dry conditions, according to experts.

— AFP

World Bank warns developing countries to embrace AI or be left behind

Asad Hashim

WASHINGTON — The World Bank yesterday called on developing countries to embrace artificial intelligence technology tools to deliver better governance outcomes, warning that they risked being left behind if they failed to do so.

“AI has thrown developing economies a lifeline, and they should seize it,” Indermit Gill, chief economist of the World Bank Group, said as the organization launched its annual World Development Report.

“They do not need large models or big data centers to reap its benefits,” he added, advocating for the adaptation of lower-cost AI tools to local conditions to deliver results in the health, education, justice and agricultural sectors.

Advanced AI models — largely developed in the United States and China — offer the ability to quickly analyze data and automate many tasks that otherwise take skilled humans longer to do.

These AI models, however, require huge data centers and large amounts of complex computing power, using massive amounts of electricity and water — with implications for climate change.

“Developing economies today are in the midst of their weakest average growth performance in three decades,” said a World Bank statement accompanying the report.

“AI could significantly boost that performance before the end of the 2020s while delivering tangible benefits to people.”

The report calls for countries to use AI to “help extend otherwise costly medical, legal, educational, and agricultural services to underserved billions — doing in a decade what might otherwise take a century.”

Shock after shock

Lower-income countries have struggled through the 2020s, hit by a series of successive shocks that saw the World Bank earlier this year dub it a “lost decade” for their economic growth.

The Bank has lowered its 2026 global growth forecast to its lowest level since the pandemic, with the economic fallout of the Iran war battering countries around the world.

The shock has hit low-income and developing countries hardest, with Asia the worst-affected region.

The Bank’s new report advocates for developing countries to start working with localized AI tools and solutions now, and to invest in electricity generation and distribution; expand access to computing power; and improve the availability of local data.

“The window to get this right is narrow,” said Gaurav Nayyar, director of the report.

“AI presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to solve problems that have resisted solutions for generations,” he added.

For the 6.8 billion people — 83 percent of humanity — who live in low-income and developing countries, AI tools will need to be adapted to meet their needs.

The report shares examples of AI applications in governance, such as to increase diabetes screening volumes in Bangladesh, or in reducing costs for Indian farmers through advanced weather forecasts.

The solutions, the report stresses, will need to meet people where they are.

“For example, AI solutions will need to be delivered through voice calls on basic mobile phones for those who cannot read or afford smartphones,” it says.

“Simply importing an AI model does not mean it will work well locally.”

Stark warning

The report calls for policymakers to also build public trust as they expand AI use.

“Improved public services and better learning outcomes in schools will reinforce trust — but if AI embeds bias in government decisions or erodes data privacy, that trust will be difficult to recover,” said the statement.

The report delivers a stark warning, too: “AI could widen gaps between countries, increase inequality within them, concentrate market power, weaken trust in public institutions, and create new risks for safety, rights, and social cohesion.”

And while risks to employment in developing countries are low at the moment, it warns that in the long run AI tools could cut off economic mobility by eliminating many of the middle-class jobs that enable it.

The report was written with the aid of several of the world’s most advanced AI tools, including offerings from OpenAI, DeepSeek, Google and Anthropic, according to a disclosure. — AFP

More than 170 migrants rescued after boat catches fire during Channel crossing

Emma Laune-Tereygeol and Joe Jackson

BOULOGNE-SUR-MER — Migrants wrapped in red blankets stepped off a rescue ship in France yesterday, an AFP reporter said, after French and British authorities saved 173 people whose boat caught fire as they tried to cross the Channel.

It was one of the largest rescue operations reported since records began in 2018 of such dangerous sea journeys from France to the United Kingdom.

“A small boat caught fire on the boundary between French and British waters, forcing its occupants to jump overboard” on yesterday morning, the prefect’s office in France’s Pas-de-Calais region said.

French maritime authorities later yesterday revised the number of people rescued to 173 from an earlier figure of 157.

Rescue services official Thierry Darras said some had sustained burns, grazes or bruises, but no serious injuries.

They had left the coastal village of Veules-les-Roses in Normandy on Monday, French maritime authorities said.

A spokesman for the British coastguard said UK vessels and a lifeboat were assisting after “a vessel caught fire earlier this morning” in French waters.

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution charity said it had launched a boat to help at 6:00 am.

France has long been a launchpad for migrants without visas hoping to cross the Channel to start a better life in Britain.

They pay smugglers thousands of dollars to board often overloaded rubber dinghies to make the sometimes deadly journey across one of the world’s busiest shipping routes.



Migrants disembark from the French rescue ship Minck following their rescue at sea after their boat caught fire during an attempt to cross the English Channel from France to Britain, at the Port de Commerce in Boulogne-sur-Mer, northern France, yesterday. — AFP

In recent weeks, witnesses in France have said they have seen dinghies larger than usual depart from French shores, reporting they seemed to be 12 metres long instead of the usual eight or 10 metres.

French maritime authorities have told AFP the average number of people piled on these small boats has risen — from 26 in 2021 to 65 since the start of the year.

A teenager from South Sudan appeared in court in England last week, accused of endangering lives by piloting one such overcrowded dinghy carrying 167 people earlier in July.

He has denied being in charge of the vessel.

‘Blind indifference’

Yesterday’s rescue was “a very visible reminder, both of the dangerous nature of those crossings, also of the blind indifference that human traffickers have for life on those boats”, said UK Justice Secretary Alex Norris.

So far this year, 14,526 people have landed on British shores after such journeys, according to British authorities.

Last year, more than 41,000 migrants landed on England’s southern coast — the second-highest annual number since 2018.

London and Paris last year inked a so-called “one in, one out” deal, which has been criticised by charities working with migrants.

Under the accord, Britain has forcibly removed 1,087 people who arrived on small boats who it says do not meet the criteria to be given asylum, in exchange for admitting 1,117 other migrants who had requested entry to the United Kingdom from France via a legal route.

Since the start of the year, 15 people have died trying to cross the Channel, according to an AFP tally based on official French and British sources.

At least 29 migrants lost their lives last year, according to a similar AFP count. — AFP

Italian garbagemen help recover lost 1 million euro lottery ticket

Joseph Toolan

ROME — A one-million-euro lottery ticket was recovered from the trash in Italy after the frantic winner called on garbagemen to help her retrieve it, the waste management company told AFP.

The instant win ticket was “miraculously still in one piece” after garbage workers combed through mounds of trash on their truck, said Roberto Nicola Toscano, the administrator of the SANB company in Italy’s southern Puglia region.

Toscano explained how when the winner went on Sunday to check her ticket at her local shop after the drawing, the machine indicated it was “non-payable”. That was because smaller retailers can only redeem small wins.

But the woman — who remains anonymous — didn’t realize she had

won the big jackpot.

“The winner always played the same numbers, as they were associated with a loved one,” Toscano said.

When she returned home from the store, a family member told her that her regular numbers had won. They immediately ran back to the shop, only to discover that the ticket had already been thrown away and the trash collected.

She called Toscano.

“We reconstructed the journey of the ticket, without much hope of finding it, as it had already been picked up by a garbage truck,” Toscano told AFP.

With a stroke of luck, however, they managed to identify the right truck and stopped it.

Given the risk posed by potentially dangerous material in the waste, they took the vehicle to

a specialist company equipped to do the search, he said.

The workers searched for over a day, finding various tickets and ticket stubs.

“Amongst them was the stub we were looking for, which was miraculously still in one piece,” Toscano told AFP yesterday.

When he told the winner they had found it, “she cried with emotion”, he said.

“I would have hugged her, but we were on the phone.”

The averted disaster did not come for free. SANB, located in Bitonto outside Bari, is a public agency, meaning that the cost of the search would have been borne by taxpayers.

Toscano said he had the woman sign a promise to “cover all of the additional costs” incurred — a gamble that certainly paid off. — AFP

EU nations patch things up after Ceuta migration discord



French police officers control vehicles at the Spanish-French border between Irún and Hendaye yesterday, to check non-European nationals arriving from Spain, following the illegal entry last week of some 70,000 migrants from Morocco into the Spanish exclave of Ceuta. – AFP

Camille Camdessus and Emma Charlton

BRUSSELS – Spain and fellow EU nations moved to bury the hatchet yesterday after a mass influx of migrants into the North African exclave of Ceuta laid bare fault lines on migration within the 27-nation bloc.

Addressing reporters following three hours of talks with the bloc’s interior ministers, EU migration chief Magnus Brunner said the crisis had “tested” Europe’s border security, its “resilience to disinformation” and “solidarity” among member states.

“Europe, I think, has definitely passed this test,” said the commissioner. “It was a crisis, but now fortunately, it has been resolved.”

Spain moved swiftly to send migrants back from Ceuta, confirming yesterday that of 72,000 people who entered the enclave from Morocco last week, all but 2,000 have returned.

Some 75 migrants died attempting to reach Ceuta, Spanish officials told AFP yesterday, raising the estimated toll from 72.

But the sight of tens of thousands of people streaming into Ceuta – with dozens dying in the attempt – was pounced on by right-wing voices on both sides of the Atlantic as evidence Europe is under siege from “uncontrolled” immigration.

And it left Madrid isolated on the EU stage, with 22 of 27 countries backing a joint call for firmer action against illegal

immigration – and suggesting Spain’s migration policies were part of the problem.

The government of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has backed a more open approach to migration than many EU counterparts, namely hardliners like Italy and Denmark which advocated suspending Spain from the Schengen free-travel area over the Ceuta crisis.

Madrid firmly rejected that notion – in any case impossible under EU law – with Sánchez writing to the heads of the EU’s institutions at the weekend to berate the “selfish” stance of fellow member states.

‘Communication’ falls short

The stage was set for an acrimonious showdown yesterday but ultimately capitals sought to play down their divisions, with Spanish Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska calling the tone “absolutely constructive”.

“All member states, without exception, affirmed their solidarity with Spain,” echoed French minister Laurent Nuñez – whose country had distanced itself from the 22-nation initiative it saw as exploiting the crisis for political ends.

In the hardline camp, Denmark declared itself “very satisfied” with Madrid’s crisis response, although its immigration minister Morten Bodskov warned “these events show that it is absolutely crucial that we have control over the EU’s borders.”

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has openly attacked Madrid’s migration policies, specifically a push to grant legal status to undocumented migrants already in the country.

But her interior minister Matteo Piantedosi began his address by expressing “sincere solidarity” with Madrid – before doubling down on a tough line.

Spurred by Italy among others, the EU has significantly tightened its migration rules in recent months, including by allowing member states to send failed asylum seekers to so-called “return hubs” located outside the bloc’s borders.

According to a transcript shared by his office, Piantedosi argued “the time has now come” for EU countries to set up return centres on the model of a deal between Rome and Albania.

And he suggested the EU should use trade measures to pressure Morocco – which he accused of “failing to cooperate on repatriation, enjoys significant advantages in its trade relations with Europe.”

A statement following the meeting said ministers commended Spain for its “swift and effective” response, noting that “there has been no onward movement to mainland Spain or other member states.”

But they also conceded “communication” at such moments could be made “more coherent”, in a tacit acknowledgement that on that front, the European response this time around fell short. – AFP

Morocco says it warned Spain after court ruling on migration

RABAT – Morocco had previously warned Spain that a recent Spanish court ruling that migrants arriving by sea would not face immediate removal was going to create “a problem,” a senior Moroccan official said.

Last week, at least 72, 000 people, mostly Moroccans, entered the Spanish exclave of Ceuta, on foot or by swimming from the nearby city of Fnideq.

This unprecedented influx quickly overwhelmed the Spanish exclave in North Africa, before leading to thousands of returns to Morocco.

Spain’s Supreme Court ruled on July 8 that migrants arriving by sea should not be returned as quickly as others and Madrid has blamed criminal gangs for spreading misinformation about the ruling.

“We started engaging with the Spanish side around July 22–23, when the networks began talking about this,” the Moroccan senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said on Monday.

“We discussed this ruling and its impact. We explained that this ruling was going to create a problem. And it did create a problem,” he said.

Spanish government spokeswoman Elma Saiz rejected the claim.

“At no point was there any evidence, any report that alerted us to the magnitude of this unprecedented event,” she told reporters in Madrid.

The Moroccan official argued the large movement of people into Ceuta was not a failure of Morocco’s security apparatus.

“It’s simplistic to say that Morocco should just have used force to stop them. That is to completely misunderstand this phenomenon,” he said.

“Could Spain, seeing them coming, have done something to stop them simply using weapons and security forces? That’s not possible.”

“At a certain point, the Moroccan law enforcement forces could no longer confront the migrants because the numbers were very large,” and because “the pull effect was very strong,” he said.

“It is not Morocco’s sole responsibility” to manage migration, he said, adding that the cost of migration management for the kingdom amounted to around 500 million euros (US\$576 million) per year.

He nonetheless said that Rabat and Madrid had acted “as reliable partners” and continued to work “in perfect coordination” on migration issues.

“Today, it is up to Spain to find answers to the challenges posed by this ruling,” he said.

“Morocco’s commitment remains the same. It accepts the return of those who manage to cross. It puts in place preventive measures to stop as many departures as possible, and it will continue” to do so, he said.

Saiz said Spain’s “exceptional response in such a short period of time” to the crisis would not have been possible without Morocco’s cooperation. – AFP



A young migrant gestures on the beach around the border barrier with Morocco en route to Spain’s north Africa’s Ceuta exclave last Saturday. – AFP

Brazilian police probe plot to carry out election attacks

SÃO PAULO – Brazilian police said yesterday they were investigating eight suspects accused of plotting attacks in the capital during October elections, in which President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is seeking a fourth term in office.

Intercepted communications showed the suspects, aged between 19 and 31 and living across five states, had made “repeated references

to Brasília as the destination of a planned mobilisation during the 2026 election period,” said a police statement.

The statement said the group had exchanged messages about travelling to Brasília, storming buildings, choosing targets, recruiting people from different states, and conducting tactical training.

They also allegedly shared

building plans and 3D models of government buildings in the capital, as well as “manuals for the manufacture of explosive devices”.

The investigation was triggered by information from a cybercrimes intelligence unit.

The operation included measures to seize electronic devices and police are investigating how organised the group was and how

far any plans had progressed.

The crimes under investigation are potential criminal conspiracy, incitement to crime, and glorification of crime, but the case is not currently being treated as terrorism.

In the October 4 presidential election, Lula will face off against right-wing candidate Flávio Bolsonaro, son of former president

Jair Bolsonaro.

The 71-year-old former leader is serving a 27-year sentence under house arrest for plotting a coup after losing a re-election bid in 2022.

Hundreds of Jair Bolsonaro’s supporters were convicted over the January 2023 storming of government buildings and the Supreme Court in Brasília, a week after Lula took office. – AFP

Infantino's problems mount as Wenger and key FIFA ally turn on him

FIFA

For the Game. For the World.

PARIS — Pressure on FIFA president Gianni Infantino intensified yesterday, with opposition emerging from within world football's governing body as well as from external critics over his since-abandoned proposal to open the World Cup to private investment.

Former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, appointed in 2019 by Infantino as FIFA's chief of global football development, said in a statement yesterday that "the decision to withdraw the project was absolutely necessary and beyond question".

His remarks followed hot on the heels of an extraordinary internal email to FIFA staff, seen by AFP, in which secretary-general Mattias Grafstrom appeared to distance himself from Infantino on the issue.

Previously seen as close to Infantino, Grafstrom describes the fiasco surrounding the plan as "a sad and reproachable series of events".

He adds: "Individuals, unstable moments and unfortunate episodes

come and go. The institution, its mission and its responsibility towards world football continue."

FIFA had floated the plan last Tuesday, saying it could raise up to US\$4.2 billion based on a valuation of US\$20 billion for a new commercial subsidiary, called the FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE), which it proposed would run events such as the World Cup and Club World Cup.

By Saturday it was dead in the water as Infantino announced the humiliating climbdown after widespread condemnation, as UEFA wielded the nuclear option of boycotting all FIFA competitions, including the World Cup.

Far from calming the waters or shoring up his presidency, Infantino has been swamped with criticism of his style of leadership and a previously smooth path to being re-elected unopposed to a fourth and final term next March in Rabat now looks a very rocky one indeed.

'Take immediate steps'

That is a problem down the road.

For now, he has others to confront.

Even though he had withdrawn the scheme, UEFA issued a letter through their lawyers in the US threatening legal action over what they had scathingly described as a "shabby, backroom, opaque deal".

Both Grafstrom and Wenger as well as chief operating officer Kevin Lamour, who had slammed the plan on Friday, are mentioned in the letter as being knowledgeable about the FFE and instructed to keep all "relevant materials".

"Dear Mr Infantino. UEFA hereby gives formal notice that it is actively considering legal action, arbitration, and/or regulatory complaints (together, the 'Proceedings') arising out of and in connection with the FFE plan proposed by FIFA and all related matters as further described below," their lawyer Andrew Levander said in the letter sent last Friday and seen by AFP.

"You and FIFA are required to take immediate steps to identify, locate, and preserve all documents and electronically stored

information described in this Notice that are in your or FIFA's possession, custody, or control.

"These obligations arise independently of any internal retention policy you or your organization maintain and supersede any routine document destruction or deletion policies that would otherwise apply."

Several of UEFA's member associations — Wales, Finland, Sweden and Serbia — have withdrawn their letters of support for Infantino and the English FA is strongly rumoured to be on the verge of also joining them.

The scant comfort for Infantino came from a handful of supporters, including 2030 World Cup co-hosts Morocco, as well as Kuwait, Qatar, where he has a house, and Lebanon, which granted him honorary citizenship in February.

However, it is the damning remarks by both Wenger and Grafstrom — who shadowed Infantino throughout the World Cup — that will twist the knife further.

Their criticism only adds to the impression that Infantino has lost the confidence of even his closest FIFA collaborators.

One of the most devastating blows to Infantino's plan was the resignation on Friday of his special advisor Carlos Cordeiro, who is also close to US President Donald Trump.

Despite what UEFA's lawyer wrote regarding keeping material pertinent to FFE, Wenger claims to have only learned about it through the media.

"I was not involved in this strategic plan," the 76-year-old Frenchman said.

Grafstrom, for his part, tried to cheer up the staff by congratulating them on their work while admitting it had been "an extraordinary and challenging week".

For Infantino, the challenge threatens to grow, and his stated purpose when he ditched the plan, to unite football, seems unlikely to be realised while he remains president.

— AFP

Amorim evokes spirit of Baresi as he bids revive AC Milan fortunes

Football

PERTH — New AC Milan coach Ruben Amorim vowed yesterday to honour the legacy of club legend Franco Baresi, who died last week, as he sets about reviving the fortunes of the ailing Italian giants.

Portuguese Amorim has returned to coaching after being sacked in January by Manchester United and faces a Milan derby against bitter rivals Inter in the Western Australia city of Perth today.

Amorim's reign began with a 2-2 draw in a friendly against Celtic in Glasgow last month.

The 41-year-old's immediate target will be a top-four finish in Serie A after AC Milan missed out on the Champions League on the final day of last season.

"I feel that the group is really together," Amorim told reporters in Perth.

"The important thing is to continue with this spirit when things become difficult.

"In this club you need to win every game, so we need to keep that spirit all season."

AC Milan were boosted in the close season by veteran midfield maestro Luka Modric agreeing a one-year contract extension.

Emotional occasion

Amorim said Modric would play against Inter, having just competed at his fifth World Cup where Croatia were knocked out in the last 32 by Portugal.

"We did a lot to get him back at least for one more year," Amorim said of

the former Tottenham and Real Madrid star, who turns 41 in September.

"I'm really pleased with him and he is ready to play some minutes tomorrow."

The match will be an emotional first match for AC Milan since the death of Baresi, who captained the club during a golden era in the 1980s and 1990s.

"When you talk with all the staff about Franco, you see the tears in their eyes," Amorim said.

"Franco was all about the team. The team is the most important thing in our club.

"I will not promise results, but I can promise that I will continue the legacy of Franco."

AC Milan will continue their pre-season against Chelsea in Jakarta on Saturday, while Inter Milan — who beat Manchester City on penalties in Hong Kong on Saturday — will remain in Perth to play Juventus on the same day.

Juventus round out the series of all-Italian Perth friendlies against Serie B team Palermo on August 11.

The week-long festival, dubbed "Calcio Italiano", comes after a proposed Serie A match between AC Milan and Como in Perth earlier this year was cancelled because of sanctions imposed by the Asian Football Confederation.

Inter Milan manager Cristian Chivu said he thought hosting a Serie A match in Perth would be a good idea "What I suggest is playing it at the start of the season," Chivu said.

"We should start promoting Italian football more, especially in this part of the world."

— AFP



Pallbearers carry the coffin of late AC Milan football player Franco Baresi outside the Sant'Ambrogio Basilica before the funeral in Milan yesterday.

— AFP

Cape Verde coach Bubista takes club job in Morocco

Football

RABAT — Cape Verde coach Bubista, who guided the small island nation to the knockout stage of the World Cup, has been appointed head coach of Morocco's RS Berkane, the club said yesterday.

The 56-year-old, whose real name is Pedro Leitao Brito, led World Cup debutants Cape Verde into the last 32 at the tournament

in the United States, Mexico and Canada.

The Blue Sharks held eventual champions Spain and Uruguay in the group stage before bowing out to Argentina after extra time.

Berkane said the decision to appoint Bubista reflected "the success of his previous experience at the head of the Cape Verde national team".

Bubista replaces Mouine

Chaabani, who recently took charge of the Tunisia national team.

The Cape Verde football federation has yet to announce if Bubista will continue in his role with the national team.

Berkane finished runners-up in Morocco's top flight last season and reached the semi-finals of the CAF Champions League.

— AFP

'No decision' on Mudryk future after Chelsea return: Alonso

Football

Matthew Walsh

Chelsea manager Xabi Alonso said yesterday "no decision" had been made on Mykhailo Mudryk's future but added the winger could play in pre-season after returning from a doping ban.

Ukrainian international Mudryk was suspended for four years after failing a 2024 drug test, but has won an appeal and was permitted on Friday to resume his football career.

The 25-year-old has not played since November 2024 and there have been rumours that Chelsea could sanction a loan move to bring him up to speed, or even a permanent transfer.

Asked about those possibilities in Hong Kong yesterday ahead of his side's friendly against Juventus, Alonso said: "No decision made."

"Everything has happened so quick, so the main thing is that we were thinking about the person, to feel that he was back in the group dynamic, part of the team."

"And we need to assess, but for

sure... it is a special case with him, so we need to be sensitive."

Mudryk's ban came after testing positive for a low concentration of the prohibited substance meldonium.

He filed an appeal with the Court of Arbitration for Sport, and rule changes in the interim mean that if his test produced the same result now, he would not have faced charges.

Asked if Mudryk could play in today's game against Juventus, Alonso answered in the affirmative.

"Yesterday [Monday] was more about the feelings, about the emotions to be back with the team, more than to assess the fitness level," the Spaniard said.

"But yes, he could play. Maybe 90 minutes (is) too early. But he can be selected."

Mudryk took part in an open training session at Hong Kong's Kai Tak Stadium yesterday evening, drawing a loud cheer from fans when he found the net in a drill.

Alonso said he was also "looking forward to welcoming"



Chelsea's manager Xabi Alonso (centre) attends a training session ahead of their football match against Juventus at Kai Tak Stadium in Hong Kong yesterday. — AFP

Jordan Henderson after the England midfielder signed from Premier League rivals Brentford on Monday.

However, "we need to assess because of the injury he had, how long it will take to be fit".

Henderson broke his arm in a freak injury sustained while celebrating England's win over Mexico at the World Cup.

The 36-year-old has followed international teammate Danny Welbeck, 35, to Stamford Bridge, in a shift from the Blues' long-held strategy of snapping up younger talent on lengthy contracts.

Juventus are looking to improve on last season's disappointing sixth-placed finish in Serie A and announced the signing of Bosnian

teenager Kerim Alajbegovic on Sunday alongside the return of French striker Randal Kolo Muani to the club.

"To have new players in our team, we are very (happy) about them. We have needed them for a long time," manager Luciano Spalletti told a news conference yesterday.

"We know they are strong, and we just need to make them settle," he said through an interpreter.

Chelsea's pre-season tour so far has comprised two friendlies in Australia — a see-saw 6-4 win over Western Sydney Wanderers and a 2-1 defeat to London rivals Tottenham.

After Juventus, they play Italian giants AC Milan in Jakarta and Johor Darul Ta'zim in Malaysia before heading home for a final warm-up against Spain's Real Sociedad.

They face Fulham at Craven Cottage in their opening league game on August 24.

Juventus travel to Australia for friendlies against fellow Italians Inter Milan and Palermo before kicking off the Serie A season with a trip to Frosinone on August 23. — AFP

Osaka out to improve Toronto fortunes with eye on US Open

Tennis

TORONTO — Naomi Osaka is hoping her success last year in Montreal, where she finished runner-up to Victoria Mboko, will translate as the WTA's 1000 event in Canada shifts to Toronto.

The four-time Grand Slam champion from Japan is coming off a semi-final run on the hard courts of Washington, where she fell to eventual champion Alexandra Eala of the Philippines.

"I did better than last year in DC, so I'm just hoping to keep the ball rolling," Osaka said.

"I haven't historically played super, super well here, so I'm just hoping to change that this year."

"I can try to recall Montreal, but I would like to kind of treat the cities separately," added Osaka, whose best run in Toronto — which alternates hosting duties with Montreal each year — was a quarter-final appearance back in 2019.

The former world number one is seeded 11th this year and aiming to build momentum as the August 31 start of the US Open approaches.

Osaka earned the last of her four major titles at the 2021 Australian Open and has yet to regain the heights she reached before taking an extended maternity leave in 2023.

But she made it to the US Open semi-finals last year and reached the last 16 at the French Open for the first time this year before a career-best quarter-final at Wimbledon.

"I would just hope to gain a lot of confidence leading into New York," she said.



Alexandra Eala (left) of the Philippines shakes hands with Naomi Osaka (right) of Japan after a women's singles match on day six of the Mubadala DC Open 2026 at William H.G. FitzGerald Tennis Center on Saturday in Washington, DC — AFP

"I lost my last match, but it's helped me figure out what I want to do exactly, or how I want to take my tennis."

Osaka is in the same quarter as second-seeded Australian Open champion Elena Rybakina and in the fourth round she could find herself up against fifth-seeded French Open champion Mirra Andreeva.

Andreeva, who suffered a shock second-round exit at Wimbledon, will face a tricky opening match against former world number one Karolina Pliskova, who beat Ukraine's Oleksandra Oliynykova 6-4, 6-4 on Monday.

Osaka will open against Hungary's Panna Urvady, who was up 2-6, 7-6 (7/3), 2-0 against Eva Lys when the German retired because of injury in a match in which she led the second set 5-2.

It was a jam-packed schedule on the second day of first-round play.

Among the winners, Poland's Magdalena Frech defeated France's Leolia Jeanjean 7-5, 6-3 to line up a meeting with third-seeded two-time champion Jessica Pegula.

Pegula beat Frech last week on the way to the final in Washington, where the American fell to Eala in the rain-delayed title match on Monday.

In other early matches, American Kayla Day beat Diane Parry of France 3-6, 6-3, 7-5 to book a clash with fourth-seeded Coco Gauff.

World number one Aryna Sabalenka is the top seed in the tournament.

After disappointing runs at the French Open and Wimbledon the Belarusian is aiming to reassert her dominance on hard courts, where her lone defeat this year was to Rybakina in the Australian Open final. — AFP

Defending champ Shelton finding tournament sweet spot in Montreal

Tennis

MONTREAL — Ben Shelton doesn't want to miss his chances on court as he begins the defense of his ATP Montreal Masters title with the goal of arriving in full flow at the US Open.

With the last major of the season starting on August 31 in New York, the American has programmed a full run-up schedule: Washington last week, Montreal and Cincinnati still to come.

"Three tournaments is the perfect amount. I'd like to get as many matches as possible," the fifth seed said on a rainy Monday that saw the start of play delayed several hours with more afternoon rain interruptions.

"I'm the type of player, the more matches I play, the better I play, as long as my body can hold up," Shelton added.

"It's a great three-tournament run before having a week off leading up to the US Open. I'm just kind of going for it."

Among first-round matches completed, French veteran Gael Monfils opened his last Montreal campaign with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over Poland's Kamil Majchrzak.

Monfils, playing his final season on the ATP Tour, energized the rain-weary late-night crowd, winning four straight games to take a 5-2 lead in the second set.

He was broken in his first attempt to serve out the match but made no mistake on his second, advancing to a second-round meeting with 12th-seeded Learner Tien.

"I felt like I played well," Monfils said.

"I was serving really good, tried to be very accurate with my first serve and then second serve tried to be super aggressive and then use my forehand. I felt more and more I could hold his pace."

Monfils, coming off a first-round exit at Roland Garros, needed one hour and 38 minutes to dispatch Majchrzak, who won his first ATP title at s-Hertogenbosch in June.

Italy's former top 10 contender Matteo Berrettini, coming back from an abdominal injury, played his first match since Wimbledon and lost 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3 to Argentine Mariano Navone.

The 12-day event is missing world number one Jannik Sinner and 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic.

Roland Garros champion and Wimbledon finalist Alexander Zverev is the top seed ahead of Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime.

Shelton, the ATP number 10 who reached last week's Washington quarters, is not bothered by the extra length of the tournament which continues to spark criticism.

Shelton's best swing

"The two-week tournaments — I think there's a lack of sustainability, for sure, but I don't know if there's a different way to go about it," he said.

"Jannik knows himself. Novak knows himself. Maybe I would do the same thing if I had won Wimbledon — I didn't."

"It's tough to criticize those guys for the decisions that they make throughout the season when they're trying to sustain a level and maintain their health. — AFP

Millions ofThais banish the booze for Buddhist Lent

Sébastien Duval and Watsamon Tri-Yasakda

SAMUT-SAKHON – With her palms pressed together and her head bowed, Wassana Nak-umma vowed to give up alcohol for three months, joining millions of Thais in an abstinence campaign blending public health with spirituality.

The 42-year-old housewife, who took the pledge at a Buddhist temple in Samut Sakhon, west of Bangkok, admitted she used to be a “heavy drinker”.

“I used to get so drunk that my kids had to clean up my vomit,” she told AFP candidly.

But a concerned relative persuaded her to join a campaign to give up alcohol during Khao Phansa, a three-month period of reflection observed by Buddhists akin to Christian Lent.

“I still craved it. Whenever I saw people buying liquor or beer at stores, I would look at them and want to drink like them,” she said.

“But I held back, telling myself it was only three months. After that

three-month period, I realised, ‘Hey, I can do this! Next year, I must do it again’.”

That was in 2024. Wassana went back to drinking, but in moderation, and this week joined hundreds in Samut Sakhon to pledge abstinence for her third year.

Avoiding drugs and alcohol is a key precept of Buddhism.

But Thailand, where more than 90 percent of the population identify as Buddhist, has the third highest per capita consumption of alcohol in Asia, according to 2024 data from the World Health Organization (WHO).

It was to address this paradox that the so-called Buddhist Lent campaign began in 2003, and last year it claimed more than eight million adherents.

Spiritual anchor

The start of Khao Phansa last Thursday was a joyous affair in the rural province of Samut Sakhon, featuring offerings to monks and traditional dances.

Dozens of people also paraded through the village on “salengs” – scooters with sidecars used locally to transport coconuts – brandishing placards featuring images of healthy, smiling livers.

Phayom Raksa solemnly recited a pledge that touched on the teachings of the Buddha, and mentioned Thailand’s king and the well-being of the nation.

The 66-year-old former coconut farmer stopped drinking entirely after participating in the campaign for the first time six years ago.

“My kids were ashamed of me – their dad got drunk every day and didn’t care about them,” he told AFP, saying that he also spent all his money on alcohol.

But he now urged others to follow his example, saying: “I’d like everyone to try doing what I dida to think and look at positive things.”

Abstinence campaigns have gathered ground in many countries in recent years, notably the trend to pursue a “Dry January” after

Christmas and New Year’s Eve excesses.

They are often linked to an increased focus on healthy behaviour.

But Ubolwan Kongsawang, a regional volunteer with Thailand’s Stop Drinking Network, said the Buddhist Lent campaign provides a “spiritual anchor” that boosts motivation.

“When individuals take a pledge before a Buddha image, at a temple, or within their community, they feel bound to honour their word,” she said.

‘Beyond Lent’

Organisers of the campaign have revamped their messaging this year, emphasising how giving up or even cutting down alcohol consumption can result in improved health, better relationships – and crucially, save money.

“Our goal is not necessarily total abstinence for everyone,” said Dr. Pongthep Wongwacharapaiboon, director of the Thai Health

Promotion Foundation, a government agency.

“Many reduce their consumption and discover the health benefits, which is already a success.”

Thailand in December relaxed decades-old restrictions on selling alcohol in the afternoon, which were originally intended to stop government employees drinking on the job.

But it remains banned on religious public holidays and around elections.

One advertisement for the Buddhist Lent campaign focuses on the social pressure to drink, in a culture where alcohol is everywhere, from funerals to festivals.

“We are trying to transform the drinking culture itself, not just reduce individual consumption,” says Teera Wacharaprannee, head of the Stop Drinking Network.

“Our strategy is to continue beyond Lent, supporting villages and communities to reduce alcohol in daily life.”

– AFP

‘Spider-Man’ breaks record for domestic box office debut



(From left to right) Sadie Sink, Jon Bernthal, Tom Holland, Zendaya and Jacob Batalon pose on the sidelines of the Los Angeles Premiere of Columbia Pictures’ “Spider-Man: Brand New Day” at Dolby Theatre on July 27, 2026 in Hollywood, California. – AFP

LOS ANGELES – “Spider-Man: Brand New Day” had the biggest debut weekend of all time at the domestic box office, updated figures for the United States and Canada showed on Monday.

The latest entry in the Marvel superhero franchise – with British actor Tom Holland once again in the titular role – earned US\$360 million, up from Sunday’s estimate of US\$355 million, production company Sony Pictures said.

That haul put “Brand New Day” ahead of the previous record-holder, Disney’s “Avengers: Endgame,” which debuted in 2019 with US\$357 million – not adjusted for inflation.

The updated domestic figures also bring the film’s total global debut to US\$932 million, still in second-place to the gargantuan US\$1.2 billion earned by “Endgame.”

Directed by Destin Daniel Cretton, “Brand New Day” sees Peter Parker (Holland) living in isolation after he erased his identity from the world and struggling with changes to his mutant powers.

As he tries to reconnect with former girlfriend MJ (played by Zendaya, who is Holland’s real-life wife) and best friend Ned (Jacob Batalon), Spider-Man must go toe-to-toe with a new force threatening New York City.

Mark Ruffalo, Florence Pugh, and Sadie Sink also join in the film, which precedes the release of “Avengers: Doomsday” in December.

Variety called the “Brand New Day” opening “mind-boggling,” while noting it and “Endgame” are the only two movies to ever earn US\$300 million in a single weekend.

The Spider-Man debut is also notable given its competition with Christopher Nolan’s latest blockbuster “The Odyssey,” which had dubs on IMAX screens.

“Brand New Day” is set to begin its IMAX run this coming weekend.

– AFP

Spotify reaches 777 million active users

STOCKHOM – Streaming giant Spotify said Tuesday that it had 777 million monthly active users at the end of June, 16 million more than in the previous quarter but a million fewer than forecast.

The Swedish company also warned that it expected its growth to slow in the third quarter, saying it anticipated around 11 million new net subscribers.

That cooled investor sentiment, with Spotify shares down 2.6 percent in opening trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

Spotify registered 300 million paying subscribers in the quarter, as opposed to people who listen free but with ads – seven million more than in the previous quarter and one million more than expected.

The group’s quarterly operating profit jumped by 61 percent from a year earlier, to 655 million euros (US\$754 million). Revenue rose by 14 percent to

4.8 billion euros, in line with the group’s expectations.

The earnings reflect “a business that is healthy and compounding, and opportunities only we are positioned to pursue,” Alex Norstrom, the group’s co-chief executive, said in a statement.

“Spotify lives across your whole day – the commute, the workout, studying, gaming, the dinner table, and sleep. At our scale, that is rare... Our position gives us an opportunity space as wide as our users want it to be,” he said.

The company frequently refreshes its offerings to attract new users, and recently launched “Personal Podcasts”, short AI-generated podcasts tailored to individual users.

Spotify will also allow artists’ most dedicated fans, who are paying subscribers, to buy concert tickets before official ticket sales begin.

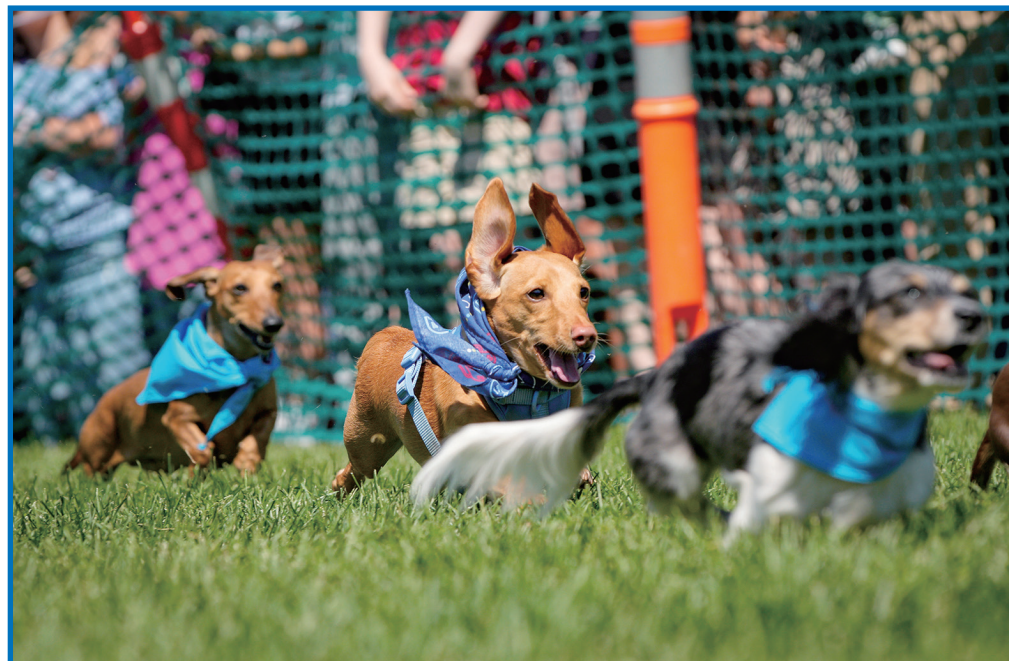
– AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 25°C~36°C	Manila 25°C~29°C	New York 23°C~28°C	Lisbon 18°C~29°C
Shanghai 26°C~35°C	Bangkok 26°C~34°C	London 13°C~25°C	Rio de Janeiro 20°C~30°C
Hong Kong 23°C~30°C	Tokyo 23°C~31°C	Frankfurt 18°C~33°C	Luanda 19°C~22°C
Taipei 24°C~35°C	Singapore 25°C~33°C	Vancouver 16°C~28°C	Maputo 13°C~29°C
Guangzhou 23°C~32°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~35°C	Paris 14°C~28°C	Dili 18°C~35°C
Nanjing 23°C~34°C	Jakarta 23°C~33°C	Moscow 18°C~28°C	São Tomé 24°C~30°C
Guilin 23°C~30°C	Seoul 26°C~37°C	Las Vegas 28°C~44°C	Praia 23°C~31°C
Xi'an 19°C~25°C	Sydney 6°C~18°C	Monte Carlo 23°C~31°C	Bissau 23°C~30°C



40 DAYS OF MOURNING

An Iranian woman burns coal and esfand (wild rue) seeds in a traditional ritual as Shia Muslim devotees take part in a mourning procession marking Arbaeen in Tehran yesterday. Arbaeen, which means 40 in Arabic, marks the 40th day of mourning following the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and a key figure in Shia Islam. – AFP



BADGER DOG RACE

Dachshunds race during the BC Fast & Furriest at Town Centre Park in Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada, on Monday. A dachshund ("badger dog") is a breed of hound dog characterized by short legs, a long body, paddle-shaped paws, and large ears. Colloquially known as a wiener dog, sausage dog, or doxie, the breed originated in Germany. Originally bred to hunt badgers and other burrow-dwelling animals, their low-slung, elongated build allows them to scent, chase, and follow prey directly into narrow underground tunnels. – Xinhua



FIREFIGHTING CHOPPER

Bystanders watch as a Royal Netherlands Air Force CH-47 Chinook helicopter collects water from the River Meuse in Geijsteren, to battle a wildfire sweeping through the Boschhuizerbergen nature reserve near Oostrum, in the Dutch municipality of Venray, south-eastern Netherlands, yesterday. – AFP

ARTISTIC SWIMMING

Maltese artistic swimmer Zea Montfort competes in the women's solo technical final during the European Aquatics Championships at the Olympic Aquatics Centre in Saint-Denis, in the north-eastern suburbs of Paris, yesterday. – AFP



'BULL RIVER RIDGE' PARK

Tourists visit the Niuheiliang National Archaeological Relic Site Park in Chaoyang, Liaoning Province, yesterday. The park was built at the Niuheiliang (牛河梁) site – a large-scale prehistoric ritual and burial complex featuring a goddess temple, altars, and stone tombs. Dating back more than five millennia, the site has yielded stone tools, pottery, and jade artifacts with dragon, phoenix, and human motifs, reflecting the rituals and beliefs of the Hongshan culture. The name of the park translates literally to "Bull River Ridge," referring to the three mountain ridges situated along the banks of the Mangniu ("Bull") River where the archaeological complex was discovered in 1981. – Xinhua

