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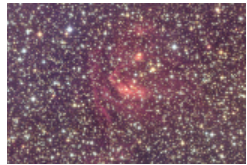
Govt insists Masela gas project on track, construction begins in 2027



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DR Congo to test Ebola treatments: WHO



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Euclid space telescope snaps best photo yet of Milky Way's heart

Free meals budget cut following pressure

Move seen as fiscal correction and positive signal for market

Deni Ghifari

The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

The government has decided to scale back President Prabowo Subianto's flagship free nutritious meal program after weeks of nationwide protests demanding a complete suspension.

Finance Minister Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa told reporters in a media briefing on Friday that he "did not propose" the cut and that the initiative had come from the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) running the program, whose leadership he had met earlier this week.

He said he approved the planned cut and that "it would be better if they cut even more".

"I actually want it to be zero, but that's not possible, the budget is out already, but stopping it altogether is not right either, because it's a good program. All that's left to do is improve the implementation," Purbaya said.

He refused to name the exact amount the program would be cut by but said "the reduction is significant, making our budget more secure" and replied with "maybe" when asked whether the amount was Rp 40 trillion (US\$2.2 billion).

The program that aims to feed 83 million schoolchildren, pregnant mothers and other recipients would cost the state some Rp 335 trillion a year when run at full scale. It received an original allocation of Rp 268 trillion in this year's budget.

Deputy BGN head Agustina Arumsari said on June 18 that the program's budget had been

cut twice this year by a total of Rp 39.62 trillion, bringing the total annual budget to Rp 228 trillion, according to *Detik.com*.

However, she said actual spending might be less than the allocation, because the BGN was "refocusing" the beneficiaries to make sure the meals go to "those who actually need them, so the benefits of the programs can be felt optimally".

Purbaya refrained from elaborating on what specific items might be scaled back and said he was leaving the detailed announcement to the BGN.

Reuters reported on Thursday that the government was weighing a \$2 billion cut in the program, but it remained unclear if that was the same plan Agustina announced last week or if it was on top of it.

The report said the BGN would achieve the savings by eliminating almost 13 million intended recipients, subject to change based on ongoing discussions. It cited an anonymous source within BGN saying that, out of 27,000 kitchens currently in operation, only around 21,000 were actually needed.

Purbaya said the BGN would report on the planned cuts to Prabowo.

"The fact that the previous [BGN] head was [imprisoned] means that *Pak* Prabowo is serious about fixing the governance and [the program's] efficiency as well as its the efficiency of budget usage. He's not messing about," Purbaya said.

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Antara/Bayu Saputra

All about the money: Finance Minister Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa (center) on Friday attends a media briefing at the Finance Ministry in Central Jakarta.

Drying up



Antara/Raisan Al Farisi

A resident buys clean water from a neighbor on Friday in Jatayu, Bandung, West Java. Residents in Jatayu have faced difficulties accessing clean water for daily needs during the past month of the dry season, forcing them to purchase water from neighbors.

Prabowo-Jokowi strains surface amid public discontent

Yerica Lai

The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

Fresh signs of strain have emerged in the relationship between President Prabowo Subianto and his predecessor Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, as the administration faces mounting public discontent over rising fuel prices and Prabowo's policies.

Prabowo's administration has come under sustained scrutiny over its spending priorities, particularly its costly free nutritious meal program, amid rising living costs, a weakening rupiah and broader economic uncertainty.

While Prabowo remained largely silent during weeks of nationwide student protests, Vice President Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Jokowi's oldest son, met student representatives at his office last week and later invited other university students to accompany him on working visits to eastern Indonesia.

The outreach quickly sparked controversy after a student union leader who attended the meeting admitted in a viral video that he had received money to cancel a planned protest near the Presidential Palace and instead attend the meeting with Gibran.

Without directly referring to the incident, Prabowo on Wednesday warned of individ-

uals he claimed were financing anti-government demonstrations for political purposes, saying some protesters might not fully understand the issues they were protesting and had been influenced or paid to participate.

"Beware, I am warning them. I know who is paying these protesters [...] Our country is competing with many other nations. The nation should be united," he said, likening Indonesia to a sports team whose supporters should not turn against their own side while the match is still underway.

Growing political distance

Prabowo also appeared to take an indirect swipe at Jokowi during a speech at Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) event this week, questioning why years of around 5 percent annual economic growth under the previous administration had failed to reduce poverty.

Political analyst Agung Bakoro said the recent developments reflected growing tensions between Prabowo and Jokowi, with both figures appearing to engage in "reciprocal pushback" as they increasingly pursue their own political interests.

"Gibran is now in a challenging position as he has to find a way to move beyond his constrained role in Prabowo's cabinet while building his own

political base," Agung said, noting there was no clear precedent for a president retaining the same vice president for a second term while many in the ruling coalition were already positioning themselves for the 2029 vice-presidential race.

"Meanwhile, Prabowo is paying close attention to whatever Jokowi's moves are because the former president still commands a loyal grassroots support base," Agung added, pointing to Prabowo's recently canceled trip to Russia and his increased domestic engagements as a preemptive effort to strengthen his own political standing.

Prabowo spent much of this week on back-to-back working visits to East Java and Gorontalo, where he inaugurated infrastructure projects, attended the NU meeting and joined a national gathering of farmers and fishermen.

Meanwhile, Jokowi, despite previously saying he would retire from politics, embarked on his first nationwide political tour since leaving office. Beginning in Lampung, one of his strongholds, on Friday, the three-day *blusukan* (impromptu visits) across the province also included an event organized by the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), chaired by his youngest son, Kaesang Pangarep.

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Businesses tap TikTok's creator economy to boost sales

Maudey Khalisha

The Jakarta Post/Badung, Bali

Southeast Asia's creator economy is transforming the way people shop online, as content commerce captured 32 percent of the region's e-commerce gross merchandise value (GMV) in 2025, according to *Momentum Works' E-commerce in Southeast Asia 2026* report.

The trend is especially pronounced in Indonesia, Southeast Asia's largest e-commerce market, which accounted for about 37 percent of the region's online transactions.

Christie Basil, a content creator and wedding gown designer, told *The Jakarta Post* on June 17 that the discovery mechanism on TikTok, which emphasizes creator-driven shopping, has transformed the way customers discover her brand.

Over the past five years, since she began creating content for her brand, her business has grown significantly. Her wedding gowns now command prices up to 10 times higher than before, and she estimates that TikTok accounts for 80 to 90 percent of her customer conversions.

TikTok's managing director of product partnerships Isaac Bess noted that the platform's business in Indonesia amounts to billions of dollars.

"We can see the commerce that happens on our platform and also the number of creators who build very viable businesses and lifestyles," Isaac told the *Post* on June 16.

"There's more than a million people in Indonesia who are simply existing as creators on TikTok," he said, adding that around 60 percent of Indonesian creators are identified as full-time creators.

With more than 160 million monthly active users in Indonesia and over 460 million monthly active users across Southeast Asia, Isaac said that one of the key shifts on the platform is the way businesses are increasingly adopting creator-style content instead of traditional advertising.

"SMEs [small and medium enterprises] of all sizes and varieties are increasingly starting to understand that their community already exists on TikTok. So rather than creating traditional ads, what would look like an ad, they're leaning into that creator content."

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Tourism, climate put Raja Ampat's 'walking shark' under pressure

Vidya Pinandhita

The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

The Raja Ampat epaulette shark, locally known as the "walking shark", is facing growing threats from tourism development and the impacts of climate change, prompting a push for concrete measures to protect the species' habitat and ensure its survival.

The shallow coastal waters of the Raja Ampat archipelago in Southwest Papua are home to the population of the shark (*Hemiscyllium freycineti*), one of 10 known "walking shark" species discovered worldwide, six of which are mainly found in eastern Indonesian waters.

While it is able to swim, the

small fish that has a recognizable spotted pattern on its body is known for moves using its pectoral and pelvic fins to "walk" across shallow reefs, a behavior earning it the moniker "walking shark".

A recently published study has found more biological and spatial ecological information about the shark, which has a population density of up to 2,462 individuals per square kilometer, the highest recorded globally for the genus.

The study, published in *Frontiers in Fish Science* academic journal on June 17, suggested coral reefs are mainly used by sharks as nursery habitats, or places where the juveniles are

produced. During an observation between February 2024 and April 2025, researchers for the study observed 69 percent of immature sharks between coral reefs.

Meanwhile, adults of the nocturnal fish were observed foraging among seagrass and mangrove roots.

Unlike many other marine animals, the Raja Ampat epaulette shark rarely travels far, with individuals tending to remain in the same area throughout their lives. The researchers found the maximum recorded movement of the shark was around 475 meters, with none observed moving between islands.

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Courtesy of Edy Setyawan

Stroll on: A Raja Ampat epaulette shark (*Hemiscyllium freycineti*) is captured on the seabed in the waters off Arborek Island in Raja Ampat regency, Southwest Papua in April as seen in this undated photo. The shark, which has developed an ability to "walk" on the seabed and land using an undulating crawling motion, relies on coral reefs as its nursery habitat.

Saving Tapanuli orangutan a test for Indonesia’s ESG claims

In the Batang Toru ecosystem of North Sumatra, the fate of the critically endangered Tapanuli orangutan has transcended wildlife preservation. It has become a crucial barometer for Indonesia’s development governance, its commitment to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles, and the maturity of its investment climate.

The central question is no longer merely saving a rare species, but demonstrating that the nation can grow without eroding the ecological foundations necessary for long-term prosperity.

The Batang Toru landscape is being squeezed by compounding pressures from energy and mining infrastructure, road expansion, smallholder agriculture, small-scale logging, ambiguous land tenure and intensifying climate disasters. Framing this issue as a binary clash between conservation and development misinterprets the crisis. The deeper problem is that institutional landscape governance has failed to keep pace with these converging forces.

A study published in *Biological Conservation* provides a sobering assessment of this decline. Between 2000 and 2023, Batang Toru lost 7,659 hectares of forest cover. After 2012, the annual rate of deforestation escalated sharply from approximately 177 ha to about 502 ha per year. Utilizing a counterfactual approach, the study estimated that the landscape lost 3,472 ha more forest than would have occurred without the post-2012 initiation of major infrastructure projects.

However, the findings also complicate public discourse. Deforestation in Batang Toru has not been driven exclusively by large-scale commercial projects; smallholder agriculture and small-scale logging accounted for roughly 70 percent of the total forest loss. This data must not be used by policymakers to minimize the risks posed by major industrial developments. Conversely, criticism of large-scale infrastructure must not obscure the quieter, cumulative pressures exerted by local farming. Both realities demand regulatory intervention.

This intersection is where Indonesia’s ESG agenda faces its truest test. A credible ESG framework must move beyond superficial sustainability reports and ceremonial tree planting. It must identify and mitigate the specific ecological risks that matter most, even when they defy simple metrics. For the Tapanuli orangutan, the primary concern is not merely the aggregate number of hectares cleared, but precisely where that loss occurs and which ecological functions are destroyed.

In an orangutan habitat, forest value is non-fungible. Losing a narrow corridor that connects two subpopulations is far more catastrophic than losing a larger tract of land on the periphery of the ecosystem.

For an arboreal species, canopy connectivity is a condition for survival. The Tapanuli orangutan relies on contiguous tree canopies for foraging, seasonal migration, and genetic exchange. Once a cor-



Insight

Onrizal

A researcher at the Center for Tropical Ecology and Biodiversity Conservation, North Sumatra University, Medan

ridor is severed, genetic diversity weakens, breeding opportunities drop, and isolated subpopulations become highly vulnerable to localized extinction. These systemic losses cannot be easily reversed.

Consequently, the regulatory baseline for Batang Toru must be absolute: No project or land-use activity should be permitted to compromise critical habitat connectivity. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) can no longer be confined to individual project concessions. They must evaluate the broader, cumulative landscape, factoring in orangutan subpopulations, migratory corridors, watersheds and concurrent development plans. Batang Toru cannot be managed as a fragmented collection of independent administrative permits; it must be governed as a single, contiguous ecosystem.

Project governance frequently falters by focusing strictly on direct impacts, such as immediate clearance footprints. Indirect impacts are more difficult to quantify but carry greater long-term consequences. Access roads penetrate previously remote forest interiors, altering local economies and inducing secondary migration. Infrastructure shifts local hydrology, causing sedimentation and habi-

tat fragmentation that manifest over years.

For investors, these represent hidden liabilities; for regulators, they are governance risks. A project may achieve technical administrative compliance while remaining ecologically hazardous if it fractures habitat connectivity or intensifies peripheral deforestation pressures.

The same rigorous scrutiny must apply to local land claims and small-scale timber extraction. All land-use activities within key orangutan habitats require transparent auditing. This includes operations under the Utilization of Timber from Private Forests (PKHH) scheme which permits logging through arrangements between local landholders and timber operators.

Furthermore, biodiversity offsets require stricter institutional skepticism. In standard ESG frameworks, offsets are frequently applied as a convenient compromise. Yet, for a canopy-dependent species, planting seedlings elsewhere does not compensate for a severed migration route. Lost connectivity cannot be offset by distant rehabilitation programs that fail to restore the precise ecological relationships between frag-

mented habitat blocks.

Simultaneously, conservation strategies must remain grounded in economic realities. Most forest conversion does not stem from an intent to destroy nature, but from household economic survival, market opportunities, and insecure land tenure. When global rubber prices fluctuate, smallholders pivot to cash crops like bananas. When timber offers immediate liquidity, small-scale logging becomes difficult to resist.

Therefore, conservation models built strictly on legal prohibition are unsustainable. Local communities must be integrated as central economic partners in landscape management through financially viable frameworks, providing tangible incentives such as profitable, shade-grown agroforestry models, direct payments for ecosystem services, and structured markets for non-timber forest products.

For the private sector, financing these initiatives is not corporate charity; it is a strategic ESG investment that mitigates operational risk. However, these programs must be strictly measurable, targeted and explicitly tied to verified habitat protection metrics.

Climate volatility has further heightened the urgency. The extreme rainfall, widespread flooding, and severe landslides that impacted Sumatra in late 2025 demonstrated the profound vulnerability of fragmented landscapes. When remaining forests are relegated to steep slopes, bisected by roads and surrounded by cleared land, a

single extreme weather event can cause irreversible habitat destruction within days.

This reality elevates Batang Toru above standard wildlife conservation. Its forests regulate vital regional watersheds, stabilize highly erodible soils, protect downstream villages and mitigate systemic disaster risks. Ecological corridors function as critical natural infrastructure. Consequently, species conservation must be integrated into broader provincial spatial planning, watershed management, disaster risk reduction, and national climate adaptation strategies.

Indonesia requires energy, infrastructure, and robust economic growth to meet its national development objectives. However, pursuing growth that sacrifices the last remaining habitat of the world’s rarest great ape sends a damaging signal to international markets. It implies that national ESG standards remain negotiable whenever short-term economic interests or strategic infrastructure projects are prioritized.

In this shifting global landscape, a failure to protect the Tapanuli orangutan is no longer just a domestic conservation failure; it becomes a material sovereign risk that can impact Indonesia’s broader investment climate.

Saving the Tapanuli orangutan requires resetting development priorities in Batang Toru, not by halting progress, but by ensuring that contemporary growth does not permanently foreclose the nation’s ecological future.

US loses 3-2 to Turkey after last-gasp strike

Agence France-Presse



Los Angeles, US

A heavily changed United States lost 3-2 to Turkey on Thursday in an action-packed dead-

rubber clash that coach Mauricio Pochettino vowed would not derail the World Cup cohosts’ considerable momentum.

Already crowned Group D winners, the US had arrived in Los Angeles seeking to extend a perfect start with a third win, but with more than an eye on next Wednesday’s last-32 meeting against Bosnia-Herzegovina.

For Turkey, already eliminated and without even a goal after disastrous losses to Paraguay and Australia, the only objective was to restore some pride.

Having gone ahead early and then clawed back an equalizer after two Turkey goals, the US fell to a Kaan Ayhan winner deep in stoppage time.

“We had other priorities. We did want to win, we wanted the victory, but there were other things that we need to balance out, and I made the very best decisions,” said Pochettino, who made nine changes to his lineup ahead of the Bosnia clash.

“What does it mean to win three [group] matches if you’re going to be losing the next one, and you’re not going to be winning the World Cup?” he asked a notably tense and spiky press conference after the game.

For the third game running the US had got off to a dream start. Backup center-half Austin Trusty scored unmarked at the far post from a corner.

It was the Celtic defender’s first international goal, and—at just under three minutes—the second-fastest by the US at a World Cup.

But Turkey did not surrender. Having not scored in 62 efforts across their first two games, it was 63rd time lucky for the Turks, and their star man Arda Guler.

The Real Madrid forward duped Mark McKenzie with a clever dummy, allowing the ball to run down the right flank to Baris Alper Yilmaz.

Yilmaz crossed it back into Guler, who smashed it past Matt Turner to equalize in the 10th minute. With Brad Pitt and Edward Norton among the Hollywood crowd, the game threatened to become a fight club, as Turkey’s bench rushed the field to protest a foul by the combative Sebastian Berhalter, who earned a yellow.

The Americans thought they had restored the lead, McKenzie the second US center-back to put the ball in the net, but the goal was ruled offside.

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Military-style drill claims two more lives

Latest fatalities intensify scrutiny of civilian militarization policies

Maretha Uli

The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

The mandatory military-style training for managers of President Prabowo Subianto’s Red and White Cooperatives and fishing villages initiatives has claimed two more lives, intensifying calls from lawmakers and civil society groups to review the program.

Just days into the 30-day basic military training conducted under the Defense Ministry’s reserve component (Komcad), four of more than 35,000 participants have died. Earlier this week, Anisa Muyassaroh died after suffering heat stroke during training in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan, while Yonanda Muhammad Taufiq died of cardiac arrest after introductory activities at a training center in Baturaja, South Sumatra.

The third incident was in Jakarta, where Novia Rahmadhani Sihotang, died after falling ill after developing what the ministry described as health complications, linked to tuberculosis.

The Defense Ministry confirmed on Friday that another participant, Muhammad Rifqi Renaldi Gunawan, died after having breathing difficulties on Thursday while undergoing training in an Air Force facility in Jakarta.

He received intensive care at a hospital but eventually died on



Antara/Indrianto Eko Suwarso

Drill, drill: Participants in the Indonesian Bachelors of Development Mobilizers (SPPI) program chant slogans on Thursday during basic military training for prospective managers of Red and White cooperatives at the 1st Marine Infantry Brigade headquarters in Cilandak, South Jakarta.

Friday early morning.

Following the latest fatality, ministry spokesperson Brig. Gen. Rico Ricardo Sirait said on Friday the ministry would “continue a comprehensive review of the program. The review includes strengthening health screening procedures, early detection of medical conditions, participant monitoring and emergency response protocols”.

Expressing concerns over the latest death, rights group Amnesty International Indonesia

(AI) said the military training for cooperative managers was “a fatal mistake that must be stopped immediately.”

“The government must end this military training now and replace it with education focused solely on cooperative management and business skills,” All executive director Usman Hamid said on Friday, calling for an independent investigation to determine whether shortcomings in the training contributed to the deaths.

Usman argued the program reflected the growing militarization of civilian affairs under Prabowo’s administration, warning that it echoed the military’s dual function during the New Order.

He further criticized the training as incompatible with the principles of cooperatives, which emphasize democratic decision-making and collective participation rather than military-style hierarchies.

Lawmakers have likewise called for an evaluation, including members of House of Representatives Commission I, which oversees defense.

Commission I deputy chair Dave Laksono of the Golkar Party said lawmakers were closely monitoring the program to assess its implementation and help it improve.

While maintaining that the training was intended to instill discipline, leadership and nationalism, Dave said its methods and emergency response mechanisms should be refined to better safeguard participants.

“Constructive evaluations and improvements will further strengthen the quality of the training program, while ensuring that it is carried out professionally, accountability and by prioritizing safety,” he said on Friday.

House Commission VI, which oversees cooperatives, also urged

improvement. Commission member Imas Aan Ubudiyah of the National Awakening Party (PKB) stressed that participants should undergo more rigorous health screenings to ensure they are fit for the physically demanding training.

“Risk mitigation standards, health screenings, medical supervision and assessments of participants’ physical capabilities must be an integral part of the training process,” Imas said in a statement on Thursday, urging change in training curriculum and methods.

Meanwhile, Presidential Chief of Staff Dudung Abdurachman said on Friday that the government was still evaluating the deaths but that no evidence of negligence had been found so far.

“Based on the information I have received, there has been no indication of negligence. The training itself is not particularly strenuous. There may have been underlying health conditions or other factors, all of which are still being evaluated and investigated,” he said, stressing that future sessions must place greater emphasis on participant safety.

After completing the military training, participants will undergo 15 days of managerial instruction before being assigned to run the programs. The government aims to build 80,000 cooperative units and 5,000 fishing villages by 2029.

Indonesia on alert after Australia bird flu detection

The Jakarta Post

Jakarta

The detection of the highly pathogenic H5N1 bird flu virus in wild birds on mainland Australia has raised concerns across the Asia-Pacific, with experts urging Indonesia to strengthen surveillance and biosecurity to prevent cross-border transmission.

Australia, the last continent previously free of the deadly avian influenza virus, confirmed its first H5N1 case on Saturday after a migratory seabird was found sick in Esperance, Western Australia.

Authorities have since stepped up surveillance after two more infected wild birds were detected by Wednesday, one in Western Australia and another in South Australia, heightening concerns over the potential impact on the country’s poultry industry.

Bird flu can cause mass deaths among wild birds and poultry. Although human infections remain rare, outbreaks have led to the culling of hundreds of millions of birds worldwide, disrupting food supplies and driving up prices.

Following the detection,ingham’s, one of Australia’s largest poultry producers, locked down its breeder farms in Western Australia and restricted nonessential access as a precaution. Australian

authorities, however, stressed that the country remains free of avian influenza in commercial poultry.

The confirmed cases have prompted neighboring countries to step up vigilance. Papua New Guinea, Australia’s largest export market for poultry products, had earlier imposed restrictions on Australian poultry imports, according to Australia’s Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

But, Australia’s Agriculture Minister Julie Collins said Port Moresby had since eased some of the restrictions following discussions between the two countries, noting that no H5 virus had been detected in Australian poultry.

“There’s no evidence of [H5] in our poultry or agricultural systems [...] and there’s no mass mortalities or any evidence of it spreading into Australian wildlife at this stage. All of [the cases] are all migratory birds” Collins said on Wednesday.

Across the Tasman Sea, New Zealand said it was “well prepared” should the virus reach its shores.

“Since the H5N1 strain of bird flu started spreading around the world, New Zealand’s geographical isolation has protected us and given us time to prepare,” Biosecurity Minister Andrew Hoggard said in a statement last week.

He, nevertheless, urged the public to avoid contact with sick or dead wildlife, while advising farmers and bird owners to closely monitor flocks, prevent contact with wild birds and maintain strict hygiene practices.

Indonesia on alert

Indonesia, which shares maritime borders with Australia, should also strengthen preparedness, said Ronny Rahman Noor, a genetics professor at the IPB University’s Faculty of Animal Science.

The archipelago lies along major migratory bird flyways and has lived with bird flu for more than two decades, experiencing repeated outbreaks in poultry as well as fatal human infections.

“Indonesia should be on alert because another outbreak could significantly affect the country’s poultry industry, which is an important source of protein for the public,” Ronny said on Wednesday.

He called for stronger surveillance of wild birds and tighter biosecurity at poultry farms, including better sanitation, preventing contact between poultry and wild birds, and stricter controls on poultry movement.

Ronny also stressed the importance of educating farmers to recognize bird flu symptoms and promptly report suspected cases



Reuters/Handout/Esperance Wildlife Hospital and Sanctuary/Lori-Ann Shibish

Big bird: A northern giant petrel is brought in for care at the Esperance Wildlife Hospital on June 18 after it was found at Wylie Bay Beach and later tested positive for the H5N1 bird flu, in Esperance, Western Australia.

so outbreaks can be contained quickly.

The government has yet to announce any additional measures following Australia’s detection. *The Jakarta Post* sought comment from the Agriculture Ministry but had not received a response at the time of writing.

However, Indonesian Quarantine Agency (Barantin) animal quarantine risk management di-

rector Anes Doni Kriswoto said the agency had stepped up vigilance without imposing import restrictions.

“No imports of poultry or poultry products carrying bird flu have entered Indonesia from Australia so far,” he said on Thursday, adding that enhanced inspections would focus on passengers’ baggage.

—JP/MARETHA ULI

Pertamax price hike highlights Indonesia’s costly fuel subsidies

The government has finally approved the price increase for Pertamax, the widely used nonsubsidized gasoline with research octane number (RON) 92, after months of attempting to shield consumers from rising global oil prices triggered by the United States-Israeli war on Iran, particularly disruptions due to closure of the Strait of Hormuz. While the move is expected to ease pressure on public finances, it also creates new risks such as consumers shifting to subsidized fuels, increasing the government’s subsidy burden.

The episode has, once again, highlighted the long-standing issue of poorly targeted fuel subsidies that often fail to protect vulnerable groups.

PT Pertamina Patra Niaga, the commercial trading subsidiary of state-owned energy holding company Pertamina, announced on June 10 that it had raised the price of Pertamax from Rp 12,300 (69 US cents) per liter to Rp 16,250 per liter. It also increased the price of Pertamax Green, a RON 95 bio-fuel blend, from Rp 12,900 to

Rp 17,000 per liter.

The prices of other nonsubsidized fuel brands remained unchanged from earlier adjustments: Pertamax Turbo (RON 98) at Rp 20,750 per liter, Pertamina Dex diesel with cetane number (CN) 53 at Rp 24,800 per liter and Pertamina Dexlite (CN51) at Rp 23,000 per liter.

According to the Finance Ministry, the price hikes for Pertamax and Pertamax Green will have a limited impact on inflation because these products were not widely used by public transportation or freight operators. Meanwhile, National Energy Council (DEN) member Satya Widya Yudha said the adjustment was intended to reduce the government’s fiscal burden after months of absorbing higher energy costs as well as to restore the market-based pricing mechanism for nonsubsidized fuels.

However, the policy may ultimately create new fiscal pressures rather than alleviate them.

Following the price hike, motorists began switching from Pertamax to subsidized Peralite (RON 90), which remains at an af-

Analysis

By Tenggara Strategies

Jakarta

fordable Rp 10,000 per liter. The surge in demand has strained supplies in several regions, leading to long lines and temporary shortages at some gas stations.

Economists estimate that a broad shift to Peralite could add as much as Rp 19.5 trillion to the government’s subsidy bill, at a time when the fuel subsidies had absorbed 45.6 percent of the 2026 budget allocation by May.

Recognizing the potential impact on consumers, the government has signaled a readiness to strengthen social assistance programs. Social Affairs Minister Saifullah Yusuf said he was awaiting a presidential instruction regarding a possible midyear increase in aid or beneficiary coverage.

Economists have urged the government to focus on mitigation measures for vulnerable households, informal workers and mi-

cro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) through targeted cash transfers, food price stabilization measures and temporary support for public transportation and small logistics businesses.

The price hike also underscores the structural weaknesses of Indonesia’s fuel subsidy regime. According to the World Bank, the wealthiest 20 percent of households receive more than half of all fuel subsidy benefits because they own more vehicles and consume more fuel.

Despite costing around 1.6 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), the subsidy provides only limited support to low-income households. The World Bank has therefore recommended a gradual adjustment of fuel prices accompanied by targeted cash transfers to the poorest 40 percent of households to mitigate the impacts of subsidy reform.

Meanwhile, the energy shock appears to be easing.

At the peak of the crisis, disruptions to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz affected daily shipments comprising roughly 14

million barrels of oil, compared with around 20 million barrels per day that normally transit the waterway, according to the International Energy Agency.

Market sentiment has improved since the signing on June 17 of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Washington and Tehran, which extended the ceasefire and established a 60-day timeframe for negotiating a final agreement. Following the announcement, Brent Crude futures settled at \$79.55 per barrel, while West Texas Intermediate (WTI) closed at \$76.79 per barrel.

The Pertamax price hike has exposed deep structural flaws in Indonesia’s fuel subsidy system. While easing global oil prices following the US-Iran MoU may provide a window for reform, the widening price gap between subsidized and nonsubsidized fuels risks encouraging further shifts in consumer behavior and eroding potential fiscal savings.

This reinforces the World Bank’s long-standing recommendation that Indonesia gradually phase out regressive fuel subsidies

while expanding targeted cash assistance, a strategy that could improve both fiscal sustainability and social equity.

What we’ve heard

A source at Pertamina said the state energy giant had long planned price hikes for its fuels, in particular Pertamax, whose pricing was intended to follow market conditions. However, the source said the government had instructed the company to postpone any adjustments despite the surge in global oil prices.

According to this source, Pertamina’s immediate priority is ensuring sufficient Peralite supplies across the country. The company is recalculating supply allocations to fuel terminals to account for higher inventory requirements following the increase in Pertamax prices and subsequent shift in consumer demand.

The source also said Pertamina was preparing a mechanism to seek additional funding from the Finance Ministry to compensate for losses and to cover rising fuel subsidy obligations.

Tomato war



Farmers throw rotten tomatoes at one another on Friday during the 2026 Tomato War Festival in Cikareumbi village, Lembang, West Bandung regency, West Java. The traditional tomato battle, in which participants hurl rotten tomatoes at each other, symbolizes casting away misfortune, negative energy and ill will while expressing hope for a better life and a more prosperous harvest.

Lack of early screening leaves color-blind children behind

Vision influences 75 percent of child brain development

Apriadi Gunawan

The Jakarta Post/Medan

Despite the significant impact of color blindness on educational and career opportunities, the lack of early detection continues to prevent many Indonesian children from receiving timely support and reaching their full potential.

Dr. Antonia Kartika, president director of Cicendo National Eye Hospital, said the Health Ministry estimates that about 0.7 percent of Indonesia’s 280 million population, or around 2 million people, has color vision deficiency. However, several independent studies suggest the prevalence could be as high as 5 percent, or reaching 14 million people.

Antonia said most cases of color blindness are present from birth. Although the condition can affect educational and career opportunities, many people are not diagnosed until adolescence or adulthood.

“Public awareness about color blindness and early screening in

Indonesia remain limited,” Antonia said, as quoted by CNN Indonesia.

She further explained that color blindness may affect children’s development, noting that around 75 percent of brain development, including motor, emotional and cognitive functions, is influenced by vision. She said undiagnosed color blindness can therefore lead to difficulties in school.

“For example, a child is asked to read a colored chart. The teacher then asks which color represents the highest value on the graph. A child with color vision deficiency may give the wrong answer, not due to a lack of understanding, but because they perceive colors differently from other children,” Antonia said.

She said early detection of color blindness would help children adapt more effectively, develop their potential, and better anticipate future challenges.

“Early awareness helps children understand that color blindness is not a limitation to achievement, but a condition that can be

managed with the right knowledge and strategies. The earlier it is identified, the greater the opportunity for children to adapt, build confidence, and prepare for their future,” Antonia said.

“With proper awareness, education, and support, no child should lose opportunities simply because of a condition that can be identified and addressed early,” she added.

Founder of Bright Indonesia Children (ACI), Celine Winarta, said that a child is considered color blind when they have difficulty distinguishing specific colors, most commonly red and green.

She explained that color blindness is primarily caused by genetic factors inherited from parents. In some cases, however, it may also develop later in life due to eye diseases, optic nerve disorders, aging, brain injuries, or side effects of certain medications.

“Color blindness occurs due to abnormalities in the cone cells in the retina,” Celine said.

She added that boys are significantly more at risk of inher-

ited color blindness. Global data shows that about 8 percent of boys experience red-green color blindness, compared to only around 0.5 percent of girls. This inherited condition is linked to the X chromosome.

“Boys have only one X chromosome, which is why they are more likely to inherit color blindness,” Celine added.

Celine urged parents and teachers to be attentive to early signs of the condition, including children frequently misidentifying colors, struggling with color-coded learning materials, or having difficulty interpreting maps and graphs.

She added that early detection allows children to receive appropriate guidance and adapt more effectively.

“With the right support, children can learn to use alternative methods such as symbols, patterns, and labels instead of relying solely on color. Digital tools that assist with color recognition can also help improve learning and daily activities,” she said. **(nal)**

Girl who murdered mother sentenced to counselling

Apriadi Gunawan

The Jakarta Post/Medan

A court in North Sumatra sent a 12-year-old girl for five months of treatment and counseling on Tuesday for killing her mother in their home in Medan, North Sumatra.

The verdict, which was delivered during a closed trial session led by presiding judge Evelyn Napitupulu, was three months lighter than the sentence demanded by prosecutors.

“Sentencing the suspect to five months of treatment and counselling at the Social Affairs Ministry’s Medan Social Rehabilitation House for five months,” she said.

She said that the suspect identified only as AL was found guilty of Article 458 (2) of the 2023 Criminal Code (KUHP) and Law No. 11/2012 under the juvenile system, in accordance with the prosecutor’s indictment.

The judge said there were several mitigating factors in the light sentencing, such as the girl admitting her wrongdoing and showing remorse, her good demeanor during trial, having no prior offenses and the fact that she is still only 12 years old with a future ahead of her.

The panel of judges also considered her mother’s temperament, which resulted in frequent beatings and who often scolded the suspect, causing her depression.

Besides that, AL was also influenced by Roblox online games and the anime series Detective Conan, which led her to want to copy scenes from the games and the show. Conflicts between her parents were also noted to have disrupted AL, who is still mentally unstable.

Medan Prosecutor’s Office’s head of intelligence section, Valentino Harry Marpaung said that prosecutors respected the judges’ verdict, therefore the prosecution would think about the verdict.

“The prosecutor will consider the verdict while the lawyer is also considering the verdict,” Valentino told *The Jakarta Post* on Wednesday.

He said AL is still receiving treatment and counseling at the Medan Social Rehabilitation House because she was not detained during the trial process.

“She must continue receiving treatment and counselling,” he said.

The police have named AL as a child in conflict with the law, rather than a suspect, following the killing of her mother, Faizah Shoraya, at their home in the early hours of Dec. 10, 2025.

AL, who was sleeping in the same room as the victim, reportedly took a kitchen knife and stabbed her mother 26 times while she was asleep.

The father, who was also in the house at the time, called an ambulance, but the victim was declared dead upon arrival. **(nvn)**

River cleanup



Residents clean the Kedak River on Friday in Kediri, East Java. The river cleanup, event included several rivers and aimed to raise public awareness about keeping waterways free of garbage and household waste while marking World Environment Day.

Dust fallout chokes Balikpapan residents after Pertamina’s new refinery launch

The Jakarta Post

Jakarta

Operations at state-owned oil and gas holding company Pertamina’s new refinery in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan, have blanketed parts of the city in dust, prompting concerns among residents about potential health risks.

The phenomenon was first reported on Tuesday morning, when residents woke to find a fine layer of brownish dust, resembling volcanic ash, coating the terraces of their homes, vehicles and garden plants.

The dust fallout spread across several neighborhoods in central

and northern Balikpapan, baffling residents as the city is located far from any active volcano.

One resident, Dewi, said she had limited outdoor activities and kept her doors and windows shut over the past few days to prevent the dust from entering her home.

“The wind keeps blowing the dust particles into the house. Since I have a 3-year-old child, I’ve been keeping the doors tightly closed,” Dewi said recently as quoted by *kompas.com*.

She added that the dust irritated her throat when inhaled, particularly as several members of her family were already suffering from coughs.

Vice president of legal and relations at PT Kilang Pertamina Balikpapan, Asep Sulaeman, said the fine dust originated from operational activities within Pertamina’s Refinery Development Master Plan (RDMP) Balikpapan, which is located in Central Balikpapan and is a National Strategic Project (PSN).

“The company is currently in a critical phase of initial operations, involving the flow of feedstock into a new refinery unit,” he said.

While acknowledging that the industrial activity had resulted in fine particles settling on nearby residential areas, Asep said pre-

liminary assessments suggested the public should not be overly alarmed, as the dust fallout remains within safe limits and does not indicate a significant pollution risk.

“PT Kilang Pertamina Balikpapan remains committed to continuously monitoring the situation to ensure operational safety in the field,” Asep added.

Calls for investigation

East Kalimantan Legislative Council (DPRD) member Abdulloh has announced plans to summon Pertamina and relevant stakeholders, calling for full disclosure of field test results and a compre-

hensive scientific assessment of the dust, including its chemical composition and potential environmental impacts.

“People have an absolute right to know the environmental conditions around their place of residence. Transparency is essential to maintaining public trust,” he said on Thursday.

He added that if laboratory findings later confirmed violations of environmental quality standards or evidence of negligence leading to pollution, legal action must be taken alongside concrete corrective measures.

Syafruddin, a member of House of Representatives Commission

XII overseeing energy, mineral resources and the environment, urged the Environment Ministry to immediately deploy a team to investigate the dust fallout in Balikpapan.

He warned that the situation could pose serious health risks, particularly for vulnerable groups such as young children, infants and toddlers.

“This is very dangerous and has a major impact on the community, especially young children, infants and toddlers. I ask the Environment Ministry to conduct an on-site inspection and comprehensively identify the source of the dust,” Syafruddin said. **(nal)**

EU, Indonesia eye deeper tech ties amid IEU-CEPA

Maudey Khalisha

The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

The European Union is seeking to deepen technology cooperation with Indonesia, highlighting opportunities spanning digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence and the country's vast natural resources to bolster competitiveness and expand economic ties.

Cyprus, which currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU, said enhancing the EU's relationship with Indonesia and ASEAN has been among its priorities, including preparations for the entry into force of the Indonesia-European Union Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IEU-CEPA).

"Our hope and aim is that through the implementation of this agreement, the EU-Indonesia economic relationship in all its facets will gain significantly in breadth and depth," Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus Nikos Panayiotou said in Jakarta on Thursday.

He added that technology and innovation were central to the EU's competitiveness agenda, citing the recently agreed AI Omnibus, which simplifies key aspects of the EU's AI Act, which provides greater legal certainty for businesses, innovators and investors.

EU Ambassador Denis Chaibi said the bloc sees four strategic reasons for expanding digital cooperation with Indonesia, namely to support the country's digital transformation, promote trusted digital infrastructure and governance, unlock economic opportunities under the IEU-CEPA and strengthen technological resilience through diversified partnerships.

"The diversity of the infrastructure we're proposing goes with standards but also rules," he said during the same event.

"We have developed a fantastically sophisticated model of governance and rules for tech, which is open, human-centric and secure."

Indonesia, meanwhile, said such partnerships would help

the country unlock greater value from its abundant natural resources through technology and innovation, with Deputy Higher Education, Science and Technology Minister Stella Christie saying Indonesia possesses at least 28 major natural resources whose economic potential could be significantly expanded through technological development.

"If we're thinking about technological innovation, a very important ingredient of this technology of innovation is definitely the market. And Indonesia is a really great market for technological innovation," said Stella on Thursday during the same forum.

"Our technology is not yet very well developed, but there is really huge potential."

Among the country's most promising opportunities, Stella highlighted seaweed, describing it as a future feedstock for the bioeconomy.

"Currently, the global seaweed market is valued at US\$12 billion. However, the prediction that it is going to grow about 10 times, \$120 billion at least, because of a very important technology and Indonesia is the second world's largest producer of seaweed. However, we have not developed the technology," she said.

Unlike conventional biofuel feedstocks, seaweed does not compete with food production, requires neither fertilizers nor fresh water and contains no lignin, making it easier to convert into fuel.

While the conversion technology already exists, Stella said the bigger challenge is developing farming technologies capable of producing seaweed consistently at scale.

Stella also highlighted patchouli as another example of value-added innovation, noting that Indonesia's essential oil exports reached \$260 million in 2024, with improved distillation technology helping local village cooperatives in Aceh produce higher-value patchouli oil and improve farmers' incomes.



Antara/Putu Indah Savitri

Race for energy: Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Bahlil Lahadalia (*third right*) attends the inauguration of PT Sumber Aneka Gas' Mini LNG Plant on Thursday in Tuban, East Java.

Govt insists Masela gas project on track, construction begins in 2027

\$20b project expected to operate in next three years

Divya Karyza

The Jakarta Post/Jakarta

The long-stalled Abadi Masela gas field project is on track, with construction slated to commence in 2027, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Bahlil Lahadalia said.

The announcement marks a significant turning point for the strategic project, which has faced decades of delays.

Speaking during his keynote address at the *INDEF Mid-Year Review* on Thursday, Minister Bahlil emphasized that the government is aggressively pushing to expedite the project "to prevent a recurrence of previous investment obstacles".

He noted that the project has cleared critical preparatory stages, with the Front End Engineering and Design (FEED) process showing positive progress.

"The Abadi Masela Block has been delayed for decades, never completed. Now that a decision

has been made and a study has been conducted, I have instructed Inpx to proceed immediately. Now, thank God, it's underway. Construction will begin in 2027," Bahlil said during his keynote speech at the event on Thursday.

The renewed momentum follows a state visit to Japan by Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto in March, where Bahlil received direct instructions to accelerate two key agendas: energy transition investment and the completion of the Masela project.

Minister Bahlil subsequently held high-level talks with INPEX Corporation CEO Takayuki Ueda to hammer out details for expediting the development.

The US\$20 billion project is among the largest energy undertakings currently promoted by the government. During those discussions, Ueda reaffirmed INPEX's commitment to fast-tracking the completion of the Abadi Masela Project.

Operated by Japan's Inpx Corporation, the Masela Block represents one of Indonesia's largest untapped natural gas reserves.

The government is targeting first production between 2029 and 2030, positioning the field as a cornerstone of national energy security.

"Production will begin between 2029 and 2030, and it will be one of Indonesia's largest gas giants," Bahlil added.

The government is putting pressure on oil and gas producers to make progress on stalled projects, warning that hundreds of abandoned areas risk losing their operating licenses.

Earlier this year, Bahlil noted that the government had previously tried a similar approach with investors, threatening them with ultimatums to push them to realize their investments.

The energy ministry is also looking to increase output by optimizing production at existing oil

fields using technologies such as fracking and horizontal drilling.

Additionally, the government plans to explore oil and gas potential in eastern Indonesia by expediting cooperation initiatives, offering attractive incentives and presenting 110 blocks for potential investment.

The country has experienced a long-term decline in oil production since nationwide output peaked at 1.5 million-1.6 million barrels per day (mbpd) in 1996-1997, gradually falling thereafter to 580,000 barrels per day (bpd) in 2024. Meanwhile, the government's oil lifting targets have regularly gone unmet since 2016.

Indonesia aims to gradually increase lifting to reach 1 mbpd in 2030.

Despite finally achieving the targeted oil output volume in 2025, to fulfil domestic oil demand currently ranges between 1.5 and 1.6 mbpd, the industry failed to deliver the projected state revenue.

Slowing down



Antara/Yulius Satria Wijaya

Online motorcycle taxi drivers transport passengers on Thursday in Depok, West Java. Ride-hailing giants GoTo and Grab have agreed to slash their commission on each ride from 20 percent to 8 percent, effective July 1.

Philippines' first nuclear power plant may only come online by 2038

Lisbet K. Esmael

ANN/Inquirer/Manila

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s dream of having the first nuclear-generated electricity may not arrive until 2038, much later than his target of 2032.

Based on draft guidelines crafted by the Department of Energy DoE, the Philippines' pioneer nuclear power plant would follow a 10-year staggered delivery program, which would not begin until 2038.

President Marcos Jr. hopes to revive the country's nuclear ambitions by mandating the inclusion of nuclear energy in the electricity mix. His father, the

late President Marcos Sr., led the construction of the mothballed Bataan Nuclear Power Plant in the 1980s.

However, the 2032 target may be out of reach if the government proceeds with the draft rules for the auction of the country's first nuclear power generation capacity.

The draft terms give prospective bidders time to prepare and familiarize themselves with key requirements, including capacity allocation, pricing, contracting, site selection, obligations and safety.

It would also lay out government support.

DOE Secretary Sharon Garin earlier said the agency had been

exploring some perks to entice more participants in the planned nuclear market. She did not provide more details, but noted these would help recover their investments.

Meanwhile, another notable point in the draft guidelines is the possibility of the government acquiring up to 10 percent equity or economic interests in the first nuclear project.

If approved, the Philippine National Oil Co. (PNOC), Maharlika Investment Corp., or another government entity may get a share of the nuclear development "subject to negotiation, due diligence, applicable laws, corporate and regulatory ap-

provals and fiscal rules".

Maharlika oversees the country's sovereign wealth fund, while PNOC leads the exploration and development of energy sources.

Given the project's massive capital requirements, the DOE said it may discuss sovereign support of guarantee arrangements after the award.

Manila Electric Co., backed by billionaire Manuel V. Pangilinan, is the most ambitious local power player vying for a foothold in the looming sector.

Coal remains the Philippines' main power source even as the government pushes to increase renewable energy.

Honda, Nissan eye standardizing components for future vehicles

ANN/The Japan News

Honda Motor Co. and Nissan Motor Co. are in the final stages of negotiations to adopt shared standardized electronic control units, or ECUs, which are the brain of software-defined vehicles (SDVs). The companies aim to reduce development costs through standardization and could begin installing the units in vehicles as early as 2029.

Although their proposed merger was scrapped, Honda and Nissan are seeking to strengthen their relationship by accelerating joint development of vehicle components.

SDVs are next-generation vehicles with software that can be updated over the internet, allowing manufacturers to improve performance and add features such as autonomous-driving capabilities and map apps. They are expected to eventually become the dominant type of vehicle in advanced economies.

The companies plan to jointly develop a central ECU that oversees the entire vehicle. They are also considering supplying the

unit to Mitsubishi Motors Corp., in which Nissan holds a 26 percent stake, and exploring whether they can standardize the underlying software platform.

Conventional vehicles typically contain dozens or even about 100 ECUs, each controlling a separate function such as the engine or brakes. SDVs, by contrast, require a central ECU capable of handling frequent updates. Such systems are difficult to design and extremely costly to develop.

Honda and Nissan hope to take advantage of economies of scale by standardizing the component, reducing development expenses and accelerating the introduction of SDVs because United States and Chinese manufacturers maintain an early lead.

In March 2024, Honda and Nissan announced that they would begin exploring cooperation in areas including vehicle intelligence. In December of that year, they reached a basic agreement to pursue a management integration. The plan was abandoned in February 2025, but negotiations over other forms of cooperation continued.



AFP/Kazuhiro Nogi

Side by side: The logo of Honda Motor (*left*) taken on Feb. 6, 2025, at the company's showroom in Tokyo and the logo of Nissan Motor displayed on Feb. 13, 2025, at the company's showroom in Tokyo.

Accelerating development

Honda and Nissan's cooperation on software-defined vehicles is intended to harness the economies of scale created by their partnership and accelerate development. It remains unclear, however, whether they will be able to catch up with their US and Chinese rivals.

According to sources familiar with the matter, the companies plan to jointly develop the ECUs

for their SDVs.

While Honda and Nissan would use a standard central ECU, each company would remain free to develop separate ECUs for areas that contribute to each manufacturer's identity, including autonomous-driving technology and in-vehicle apps for maps and entertainment.

Competition in the global auto industry has intensified with the rise of Chinese manufacturers,

eroding the advantages long enjoyed by Japanese automakers. Against this backdrop, longtime competitors Honda and Nissan rapidly moved closer together.

In March 2024, they announced that they would consider cooperation on vehicle electrification and other technologies. In December of the same year, they went a step further and reached a basic agreement to explore a management integration. Disagreements led them to abandon the merger in February 2025.

The companies nevertheless continued discussions on working jointly on advanced technologies, as both sides stood to gain substantially. The talks gained momentum after the companies determined they could standardize the high-performance semiconductors essential to the central ECU.

Nissan President and CEO Ivan Espinosa told *The Yomiuri Shimbun* this month that the companies may be able to standardize some of their software while preserving the fundamental principles and identity of each brand.

According to the Japan Elec-

tronics and Information Technology Industries Association, SDVs accounted for 3 percent of global vehicle production in 2025. That share is projected to rise to 67 percent by 2035.

The spread of SDVs is expected to transform the automotive business model. Drivers will be able to add features such as advanced driver-assistance technologies even after purchasing a vehicle. Automakers, meanwhile, will gain a new source of revenue beyond new car sales by charging customers for additional functions.

US and Chinese manufacturers currently lead the market. Tesla began commercializing SDV technology about a decade ago and now carries out more than 200 software updates a year. These updates can improve braking and autonomous-driving functions without the replacement of physical components.

Chinese manufacturers, including BYD Co., also sell SDVs. Among Japanese automakers, however, the only full-fledged SDV currently available is Toyota Motor's redesigned RAV4, released in December 2025.

IBM unveils chip tech for ‘landmark’ performance boost

Thomas Urbain

Agence France-Presse/New York, United States

IBM unveiled new semiconductor technology on Thursday that the company says could deliver computer chips with 50 percent better performance while dramatically lowering power consumption.

The technology developed by IBM is not yet ready for industrial use, but the Armonk, New York-based company said it “sees a path to production in as early as the next five years”.

The breakthrough could mean a major leap forward as the industry races to cram more computing power into smaller devices, but as worries grow over the tech industry’s huge energy needs.

Taiwan’s TSMC, the world’s leading chip manufacturer, has recently begun mass-producing “2-nanometer” chips, the current cutting edge of the industry.

IBM’s new “0.7-nanometer” technology would represent a dramatic step beyond that.

The nanometer, an atomic-scale unit of measurement, does not refer to the literal size of chips or their components, but to how densely transistors, the tiny electronic switches that make up processors, can be packed together.

The smaller the number, the more transistors can fit on a chip the size of a fingernail.

IBM’s breakthrough packs nearly 100 billion transistors onto a chip that size, nearly twice the density of the 2-nanometer chip.

More transistors mean faster and more powerful computing and can help drive advances like faster smartphones and laptops, more efficient data centers, better self-driving cars and more capable artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT.

IBM’s new chip is projected to offer “up to 50 percent more performance, or 70 percent greater energy efficiency than IBM’s 2-nanometer node chips”,

the company said.

This is considered a critical advantage as data centers worldwide grapple with artificial intelligence’s (AI) enormous power demands, with local communities expressing increasing worry over the consequences of the facilities.

Nanostack

IBM’s breakthrough uses a new three-dimensional architecture called “nanostack,” which stacks transistor layers on top of each other rather than arranging them in a single layer.

“IBM’s latest chip breakthrough marks a landmark moment in computing, pushing technology beyond the nanometer era to the scale of atoms,” said Jay Gambetta, director of IBM Research.

“We’re not just making smaller transistors, we’re reinventing how chips are built to deliver dramatically more power and energy efficiency.”

The technology also delivers a 40 percent improvement in SRAM memory chips, “something that we haven’t seen in decades”, said Huiming Bu, IBM’s vice president of semiconductors.

SRAM chips act like a processor’s short-term memory and are a critical component in electronic devices from gaming consoles to laptops.

IBM’s technology is not ready for mass production yet, with the company expecting to reach the manufacturing stage within five years.

Producing such chips is a highly complex process requiring advanced manufacturing equipment, deep technical expertise and billions of dollars in investment.

IBM does not manufacture chips itself, instead licensing its designs to companies like Japan’s Rapidus, with which it is working to scale 2-nanometer production.

TSMC is currently developing “1.4-nanometer” technology targeted for mass production around 2028.



AFF/Jung Yeon-Je

Global footprint: Visitors walk past the logo of Samsung Electronics on April 22 during the 2026 World IT Show in Seoul. Samsung Group is about to announce massive investments in South Korea, according to a media report.

Samsung to announce \$648b in South Korea investments: Report

Plan would cover chips, AI data centers, batteries, displays

Hyunjoo Jin, Joyce Lee and Heejin Kim

Reuters/Seoul

Samsung Group will unveil a sweeping decade-long investment plan on Monday, pledging 1,000 trillion won (US\$648 billion) to anchor South Korea’s next growth cycle, including a possible 300 trillion won push to build chip factories in the country’s southwest, a media report said.

The investment, which would include artificial intelligence (AI) data centers, batteries and displays, will be announced at a meeting with President Lee Jae Myung at the presidential office, the *Maeil Business Newspaper* said on Friday, without citing sources.

Top executives from heavyweights including Samsung Electronics and its rival SK Hynix will attend the meeting and lay out investment plans targeting regions beyond Seoul and its surrounding hubs, the report said.

The report did not say when the investment would be made.

At its core, the initiative appears designed to decentralize South Korea’s AI boom into a nationwide engine of growth, easing infrastructure bottlenecks while jump-starting jobs, innovation hubs and next-generation manufacturing across underserved regions.

The concentration of the chip-makers’ production facilities in areas around Seoul has long drawn political pressure, and has been amplified by Lee’s push for balanced regional development.

Lee had separate meetings with the heads of Samsung and SK this week, media reports said.

The presidential office said it will announce on Monday “three mega-projects” to drive a national leap forward, although it has not yet confirmed the content of the projects.

Samsung and SK Hynix de-

clined to comment.

Samsung Group is South Korea’s biggest conglomerate, with chip giant Samsung Electronics as its crown jewel, but also other affiliates such as battery maker Samsung SDI and IT services company Samsung SDS.

A presidential adviser said this week that it is in talks with Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix on the next phase of large-scale investments in semiconductor production facilities to meet exponential growth in AI-driven demand for chips.

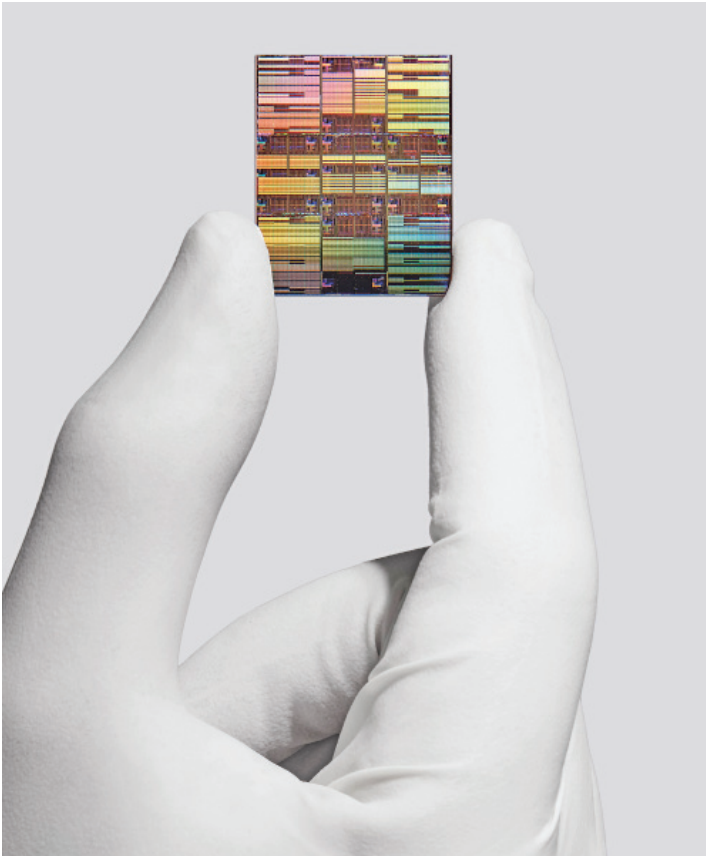
Presidential policy adviser Kim Yong-beom said on Wednesday that SK Hynix and Samsung may need to accelerate projects originally slated for the 2040s into the mid-2030s because AI-driven memory demand was growing faster than expected, leaving no room, power or water in the capital region for subsequent expansion.

Regional development

The regional politics surrounding semiconductor investment became a flashpoint ahead of South Korea’s June 3 local elections, and debate over where the next wave of funding should go has intensified as Lee’s government has made AI a core economic policy priority.

Lee’s approval rating has fallen to 51 percent, the lowest since his inauguration in June last year, Gallup Korea said on Friday.

Candidates across multiple regions aggressively pitched their areas as the next semiconductor hub, promising to lure giants such as Samsung and SK Hynix. Proposals ranged from a 500 trillion won chip complex in the southwest to expanded clusters in Gyeonggi, Chungcheong and Gangwon, according to local media, underscoring a nationwide contest for strategic tech investment.



Courtesy of IBM

Smaller is better: In this image released by IBM, with no location or date provided, a prototype 0.7-nanometer chip developed by IBM is shown with transistors built in two layers to increase transistor density.

European economies suffer from heatwave

Martine Pauwels

Agence France-Presse/Paris

When the mercury rises so do the costs for an economy as productivity melts and growth becomes lethargic, providing an additional challenge to Europe as it struggles with high energy prices.

“Extreme heat is emerging as a structural economic risk, with Europe highly exposed,” wrote the trade credit arm of European insurer Allianz as the continent swelters under its second heatwave of the year.

Europe has a number of weaknesses: an aging population, dense urban centers with many buildings not built for extreme heat, and just 19 percent of households with air conditioning compared to 90 percent in the United States, the analysts noted.

Heatwaves are becoming frequent as Europe warms faster than other regions of the world, and many scientists consider human activity will cause more extreme weather events.

“France is working in slow mode,” recently observed Patrick Martin, head of Medef, France’s main employers’ organization.

“Inevitably, it disrupts work and leads to less work being accomplished,” he told BFM television.

Allianz Trade has identified “a critical threshold” of around 30 degrees Celsius beyond which productivity losses intensify rapidly.

According to AFP’s calculations more than 100 million people in Europe were set to experience temperatures in excess of 35 degrees on Thursday, and nearly two-thirds of Europeans living where temperatures would surpass 30 degrees.

Medium-term impact

In a blog post last year the European Central Bank said heatwaves in the spring, autumn and winter can boost economic activity, particularly construction, agriculture and outdoor dining.

“By contrast, heatwaves during the already warmer summers reduce economic activity, as physical exertion outdoors becomes increasingly impaired,” it said.

Drops in productivity, the need to shift investment to climate adaptation, and energy price hikes that dampen purchasing power all contribute to a drop in economic activity.

ECB research found that summer heatwaves reduce regional activity of around 1 percent.

And in contrast to traditional views of a temporary disruption,

the ECB found “the reduction in output is prolonged and even intensifies, reaching a trough of 1.5 percent lower after two years”.

The Banque de France’s new governor, Emmanuel Moulin, recently told France Inter radio that “there is clearly a negative effect on growth in the medium term”.

Extreme heat, which can provoke a hike in energy prices thanks to higher demand due to air conditioning, can also contribute to higher food prices and inflation over the medium term as it curtails yields and disrupts supply chains.

The ECB calculated that a 2022 drought caused European food prices to rise 0.7 percentage points. Olive crops were particularly affected, with the price of olive oil skyrocketing.

US cranks up pressure on China EVs with Polestar ban

Marie Mannes and David Shepardson

Reuters/Stockholm/Washington

Polestar said on Thursday the Donald Trump administration was forcing the electric-vehicle maker to stop selling vehicles in the United States beginning in the 2027 model year as Washington ramps up its crackdown on Chinese vehicles.

Shares of Polestar were down 6.3 percent on Thursday afternoon on the Nasdaq.

The US Commerce Department did not grant Polestar authorization to sell cars under the Connected Vehicles Rule, which restricts the import and sale of cars with connected-vehicle technology linked to China beginning with the 2027 model year.

Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, cellular connectivity and some satellite communications technologies are covered under the rules based on national security concerns linked to the ability of vehicles to collect sensitive data on American owners.

The rule was adopted in January 2025 under then-president Joe Biden, and has been kept in place under Trump.

The action marks the latest major move from the US toward banning cars manufactured and exported from China, as Washington pushes to strengthen the domestic carmaking industry.

Lawmakers have proposed legislation to tighten the restrictions further. Imports of Chinese EVs also face hefty tariffs.

The Sweden-based company, which is majority-owned by China’s Geely Holding, said it will continue to sell existing Polestar 3 and Polestar 4 vehicles in the US and will also provide access to its service network. Polestar said it would not appeal the denial.

The Commerce Department did not immediately comment.

Pivot to European market

Polestar had warned as early as 2024 that the connected vehicle rules would “effectively prohibit” the automaker from selling



Reuters/Temilade Adelaja

From China to Europe: A Polestar 4 electric car is on display on May 8 at the Everything Electric North show in Harrogate, the United Kingdom.

vehicles in the US, including cars made domestically.

“The automotive industry is entering a new phase, based on regional dynamics. Our strategy reflects that, with Europe being

our largest growth engine and our plan to manufacture Polestar 7 in Europe,” Polestar CEO Michael Lohscheller said.

Polestar has increasingly pivoted toward Europe as sales in the

US remain sluggish due to growing competitive pressures and slower consumer spending.

Only 6 percent of its first-quarter sales came from the US, compared with 78 percent from Europe.

Polestar has struggled to turn a profit and has required repeated capital injections from its owner Geely and chairman Li Shufu.

Its shares have fallen sharply, forcing the company to carry out a reverse stock split last year to maintain its Nasdaq listing.

Ford and other automakers are scrambling to obtain US government authorization to continue selling models that have been in US showrooms for years, but have recently come under fire as part of the ban.

Polestar’s sister brand and co-founder, Volvo Cars, said in May it received an authorization, though it said it still must meet the rule’s specifications across its lineup sold in the US. The company confirmed it needed a specific authorization because of its ownership structure.

Polestar 3 production uncertain

The decision raises questions about the future of the Polestar 3, its only US-manufactured model.

Volvo Cars, which makes some of Polestar’s cars, said in March it would consolidate production of the Polestar 3 at its South Carolina plant, rather than also building the model in Chengdu, China.

A Volvo spokesperson told Reuters on Thursday that production in China has not yet been halted. Volvo said it was too early to say whether Thursday’s development would alter those plans.

Amid tariff pressures, Polestar has opted to refresh aging models rather than launch entirely new ones.

It expects deliveries of a new Polestar 4 variant to begin later this year, followed by a revamped version of the sedan Polestar 2 in 2027.

The automaker’s next fully new model, the compact Polestar 7 SUV, is slated for production at Volvo’s planned factory in Slovakia.

EDITORIAL

Parks for all

Every time Jakarta opens a new public park, a predictable pattern unfolds. Within days, families flock to the space: Children fill the playground, joggers crowd the paths, and residents settle under trees. Yet, far from reflecting the novelty of a new attraction, these crowds expose a chronic, systemic shortage of accessible green space across the capital.

The overwhelming popularity of these parks serves as the clearest public opinion survey city planners could ask for. It demonstrates a profound demand for public areas where residents can breathe cleaner air, exercise, socialize and simply exist without the pressure to spend money. Access to safe, well-maintained green space should be regarded as a fundamental urban right.

Empirical studies consistently link public parks to improved physical and mental health, stronger social cohesion, and heightened resilience to climate change. In a megacity increasingly threatened by extreme heat, severe pollution and recurrent flooding, trees and open spaces are just as critical to urban survival as highways and bridges.

Yet, Jakarta remains one of Southeast Asia’s least green megacities. Green open space accounts for barely 5 to 6 percent of the capital’s total area, falling drastically short of the 30 percent target mandated by the country’s 2007 Spatial Planning Law. Meeting this legal obligation would require securing nearly 200 square kilometers of additional green space, an immense challenge in a metropolis where roughly 90 percent of the land is already developed.

However, structural density must not become an excuse for institutional inaction. Cities worldwide have demonstrated that expanding urban greenery no longer depends solely on acquiring vast, vacant tracts of land. Modern urban planning increasingly focuses on reclaiming underutilized spaces and integrating nature directly into existing infrastructure. Jakarta can achieve the same transformation, provided it musters the necessary political will.

Idle roadside lots, neglected alleyways, abandoned parcels beneath flyovers, canal embankments and unused government property can all be converted into “micro-parks” to serve surrounding neighborhoods. The same principle applies vertically: Canal walls, office towers, parking structures and pedestrian overpasses can accommodate green walls and vertical gardens. While these initiatives cannot replace mature urban forests, they can measurably lower local temperatures, improve air quality, and soften Jakarta’s stark concrete landscape.

Equally critical is accessibility. Parks should not function as isolated destinations requiring long car trips. Instead, they must connect seamlessly to Jakarta’s expanding MRT, LRT, commuter rail and bus networks, while remaining safe to reach on foot or by bicycle. Nature should be a staple of everyday life rather than an occasional weekend escape. Currently, proper parks equipped with modern facilities remain disproportionately concentrated in the city center.

To bridge this gap, the private sector must play a more substantial role. Green space can no longer be treated as a marketing afterthought; it must be classified as essential urban infrastructure. Stricter enforcement of zoning regulations, paired with municipal incentives for developers who incorporate publicly accessible greenery, would significantly expand the city’s ecological network.

Furthermore, Jakarta cannot resolve this environmental deficit in isolation. The metropolitan region functions as a single ecosystem. Protecting the forests, wetlands and river corridors in neighboring municipalities is just as vital to the environmental quality of Greater Jakarta as any localized initiative.

The 30 percent green space target is ambitious, but it is far from unattainable. Achieving it will require creativity, persistence and difficult policy choices. Above all, it demands leadership that recognizes access to nature as a basic right for every urban resident.

If Jakarta is to prepare effectively for a hotter, denser and more populous future, there is no better place to begin than by bringing nature closer to its people.

Freedom without accountability is not press freedom

A new term is making the rounds: homeless media. It refers to outlets with no “home” of their own: no website, living entirely on Instagram, TikTok, X and YouTube. Some command millions of followers and have become the primary source of news for young people. The issue peaked this past May, when the government, through the Government Communications Agency (Bakom), floated a plan to enlist them as communication partners, which immediately triggered a wave of denials from several of the very outlets it had named.

I do not dismiss their creativity or their speed. But as a member of House of Representatives Commission I, which oversees communications, I must state my position plainly: Indonesia recognizes no category called “homeless media,” and to this day there is not a single regulation that governs it. Leaving this vacuum unaddressed, let alone hastily granting these outlets the status of the press, is not press freedom. It is a path to informational chaos.

Our press, in fact, operates under clear rules. Law No. 40/1999 requires a press company to be a legal entity, to name a responsible editor, and to abide by the Journalistic Code of Ethics. The Press Council guards the dignity of the profession. The whole edifice rests on one word: accountability. When an outlet errs, there is a name that answers for it, a legal entity that can be sued, a forum where the public can complain. The press is protected by law precisely because it agrees to be bound by responsibility.

Imagine if anyone, armed with nothing more than a social media account, could claim to be the press, without registering, without knowing the code of ethics, without ever being answerable. What, then, is the point of the Press Law? What is the point of professional journalists laboring to verify facts and exercise restraint?

Many assume that as long as an outlet has its own website and a legal entity, it is automatically a protected member of the press. That is wrong. What determines an outlet’s legal fate is whether it is registered and verified with the Press Council. Without that, it remains outside the regime of the Press Law, and this is not a matter of mere administration; it decides whether the outlet is protected or not.

Under the Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation Agreement between the Press Council and the National Police, when a police report targets an outlet over its reporting, the po-



On the spot: Reporters interview State Secretary Prasetyo Hadi (center) on June 4 in the media room at the Presidential Palace complex in Jakarta.



By Abraham Sridjaja
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lice must first coordinate with the Press Council and seek an expert press opinion. Two things are examined first: whether the reported party is a legitimate outlet or journalist, and whether the disputed content is a journalistic work.

If the outlet is legitimate and verified and its content is a journalistic product, the reporting dispute is handled first through the mechanisms of the Press Law, namely the rights of reply and correction and complaints to the Press Council, before any criminal option is considered. This is the shield the Press Law provides.

The Magdalene case shows this clearly. Magdalene does have its own website and a legal entity, but the fact remains that it is not verified by the Press Council. For that very reason its position sits in a gray zone: When its content was challenged, the Press Council had no solid legal footing to extend the full protection.

Without entering the Press Council system, an outlet stands outside the protection of the Press Law and bears all the criminal consequences alone.

So the question is not whether someone may speak; of course they may. The question is this: When an actor claims to perform the function of the press

and wishes to enjoy its protection, has it been willing to enter the same system of accountability? Herein lies the unfairness of equating homeless media with the legitimate press: One bears obligations and responsibility, while the other merely enjoys the reach with no burden at all.

The evidence on the ground is abundant. As of late 2025, of roughly 2,326 media companies recorded by the Press Council, only about 60 percent were verified. That means thousands of entities operate under the name of “media” with no clear standard. Some have turned into instruments of extortion. Last year, police in Sumedang, West Java, arrested five people posing as journalists over the alleged extortion of a village head.

The argument that the digital world cannot be regulated is also false. Singapore requires online news sites to be licensed once their reach crosses a certain threshold. The Netherlands requires creators with more than 500,000 followers to register with the media authority. The European Union assigns content responsibility through the Digital Services Act.

So, should homeless media be regulated? My answer is yes, but in the right way. I am not propos-

ing that citizens be barred from speaking; that right is guaranteed by Article 28F of the 1945 Constitution. The distinction I draw is between a citizen’s freedom of expression and the bearing of press status together with its protections. The two must not be conflated.

Four steps are needed. First, clarify the line on status: Those who wish to claim press status and its protections must be a legal entity, must register and must be bound by the code of ethics. Second, scale obligations to reach, sparing the small and requiring transparency from those touching millions. Third, provide a persuasive path of transition, including simplifying the verification process long criticized as onerous. Fourth, deal firmly with extortion under journalistic cover; that is an ordinary crime, and punishing it actually protects legitimate journalism.

I am aware that such regulation could be abused into an instrument of state control. That concern is valid and must be guarded against, which is why any regulation must be transparent, proportionate and subject to accountable oversight, never imposed through vague, unilateral instruments.

But leaving this space lawless, in the name of freedom, is no different from entrusting the public’s trust to those least willing to be accountable.

Press freedom is a trust, not a freedom without consequence. And every trust, in the end, must be answered for.

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How ‘jedag-jedug’ subculture is shaping music scene

A musician sits on a stage in the middle of the crowd. In front of him is nothing but a keyboard. No laptop, no MIDI controller, none of the pricey drum machines usually tied to electronic music.

Yet, the moment his fingers strike up a rhythm, sub-bass frequencies slam through the speakers, and bodies on the floor begin to sway. The room erupts.

To the untrained eye, a performance powered by Southeast Sulawesi’s Alun Buutuni Sound System, a Southeast Sulawesi collective providing massive, custom-built speaker rigs for village celebrations, might look rudimentary. It is easily dismissed as a “budget” take on modern electronic music.

But what if Indonesia’s electronic music scene didn’t start in mega-clubs, but grew from arranger keyboards, homemade speakers and the vibrant pulse of village life, locally known as *organ tunggal* (one-man band or a solo keyboard player)

Throughout music history, some of the most revolutionary sounds have emerged from gear once written off as cheap or commercially unsuccessful.

Take the Roland TR-808 drum machine, an undisputed legend in electronic music. When it first hit the market, it was widely considered a commercial failure. A similar fate befell the Roland TB-303, the very machine that would later lay the foundation for acid house.

But after the market abandoned these machines, young underground musicians in the United States’ Chicago and Detroit picked them up and forged an entirely new sonic language, one that gave



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birth to techno and house.

This history of techno and house serves as a reminder that musical innovation rarely springs from cutting-edge technology alone. More often than not, it is born when communities find inventive ways to use whatever gear is close at hand.

A similar phenomenon is unfolding right now in Indonesia’s *jedag-jedug*, a local subgenre named after its heavy, pumping bass beats, and funkot scenes.

Rather than relying on complex electronic production setups, many performers treat the arranger keyboard as the absolute centerpiece of their live sets. With just a single instrument, they generate rhythm patterns, basslines, harmonies and transitional buildups in real time.

In this subculture, the keyboard has proven to be the ideal fit for the community’s social and economic realities. It is portable, relatively affordable, easy to repair and fully capable of delivering the raw musical intensity required for collective celebration.

Research on *organ tunggal* performances in West Sumatra has shown that the format took off because it met local entertainment needs in practical, highly flexible ways. A staple of weddings, parties and community gatherings across Indonesia, it is essentially a mobile, keyboard-

driven party setup.

Armed with just keyboards and synthesizers, solo musicians could replicate roles that once required a full band, creating what scholars dub a “travelling orchestra”.

Today’s *jedag-jedug* scene operates under that exact same logic.

The difference lies in the sonic output. While the traditional

pating subtle shifts, feeling the gradual accumulation of energy, and losing themselves in cyclical grooves.

From this perspective, *jedag-jedug* becomes compelling not through harmonic complexity, but through its ability to weaponize repetition into physical force. The longer a loop sustains, the more bodies synchronize with the beat.

In this sense, *jedag-jedug* shares a deep kinship with the history of rave culture. Both subcultures construct collective, sacred spaces using nothing but sound pressure, hypnotic rhythms and a shared, embodied experience.

While the traditional organ tunggal circuit revolves around dangdut (a popular Indonesian folk-pop genre) and party sing-alongs, jedag-jedug pushes into much harsher sonic territory, cranking up the tempo, thickening the bass pressure and locking into a rhythm-driven intensity.

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Criticism of *jedag-jedug* often hangs on the lazy assumption that repetitive music is inherently simplistic. Yet, electronic dance music scholarship suggests quite the opposite.

Repetition in club culture should not be dismissed as a sign of musical poverty. Through repetition, listeners experience music as a living process: antici-

After nearly a decade researching ritual soundscapes in Central Kalimantan, I have found that local communities rarely view sound as an isolated esthetic object.

In the death rituals of the indigenous Dayak people along the Katingan River, for instance, the Gandang Ahung gong ensemble delivers far more than mere background accompaniment. Instead, sound acts as a vital conduit, binding people together, shaping the collective atmosphere and breathing life into a shared experience.

In my research on the Sasana Kayau oral tradition, ancestral singing performs a similar role.

What is preserved is not merely a melody or a text, but the social bonds forged through the very act of singing together.

Granted, *jedag-jedug* belongs to a world away. It is neither a funerary ritual nor an oral literary tradition. Yet an intriguing common thread remains: Sound still functions as a catalyst for gathering.

On small stages, at village celebrations, street carnivals and local clubs, *jedag-jedug* carves out social spaces where people meet, dance and experience a sense of belonging larger than themselves.

Jedag-jedug reveals how global technologies are continually reinterpreted to serve local needs.

Arranger keyboards engineered by multinational giants like Yamaha take on entirely new meanings the moment they enter Indonesian village parties. Homemade sound systems become the driving force of local carnival culture, a reality epitomized by the sound *horeg* (massive, earth-shaking mobile audio rigs) phenomenon in East Java. TikTok then loops these hyperlocal performances into a viral, interregional subculture.

Rather than dismissing *jedag-jedug* as a derivative clone of Western electronic music, it is far more productive to recognize it as an authentic form of vernacular musical modernity.

Identical technologies can yield radically different cultural practices when they collide with distinct social, economic and historical realities.

In that light, *jedag-jedug* is best understood not as an “imperfect” imitation of techno or EDM, but as a masterclass in grassroots ingenuity.

The next UN chief must rebuild, reconcile and heal

On Jan. 1, 2027, a new United Nations secretary-general will take office. The UN Charter describes the role as the organization’s “chief administrative officer”, but that definition is far too narrow for the fractured world the next leader will inherit. Today, the office demands a rare combination of diplomat, mediator, manager, advocate and guardian of the Charter.

This succession is not a routine personnel change. It is a critical test of whether the UN can still serve peace, development and human rights in an increasingly divided world.

The choice comes at a dangerous moment. Geopolitical rivalries are deepening, wars and humanitarian crises strain collective security and international law is too often invoked selectively. Unilateral sanctions, coercive measures and military actions increasingly bypass broad multilateral consent. Concurrently, climate disruption, debt distress, food insecurity and technological inequality are widening the gap between global promises and daily realities.

The UN is frequently criticized for failing to act, but many of its failures reflect the unwillingness of powerful states to accept common rules when those rules constrain their own choices. The next secretary-general must therefore

be more than an administrator of mandates; he or she must defend the Charter firmly while keeping diplomacy from degenerating into confrontation for its own sake.

This leadership transition also occurs alongside severe financial strain. The UN ended 2025 with a regular-budget cash deficit of nearly US\$400 million, while its 2026 budget reflected cuts of roughly 15 percent in resources and nearly 19 percent in staffing. Institutional reform will take place under intense pressure. Without clear, principled leadership, budget cuts can easily be disguised as “efficiencies”, even as programs serving the most vulnerable are gutted.

For Indonesia, this is not an abstract bureaucratic contest. The Preamble to the 1945 Constitution commits the country to contributing to a world order based on freedom, perpetual peace, and social justice. Indonesia’s *bebas aktif* (independent and active) foreign policy depends on a robust multilateral system that protects strategic autonomy rather than forcing nations into rival blocs.

Indonesia has a direct stake in the capability of the next secretary-general. Its national interests in peace, maritime stability, climate resilience, food security, development finance and technology cannot be secured through unilateral action alone.



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The same is true for much of the Global South. The UN remains one of the few forums where legal equality can create political space for developing nations, and where middle powers can help shape rules that might otherwise be dictated solely by the strongest states.

The question before member states extends beyond who will succeed António Guterres; it is whether the next secretary-general can make the UN useful again to those who rely on it most. The office requires competence, integrity, fidelity to the Charter, sharp political judgment and moral courage.

Article 97 of the Charter captures the central paradox of the position. The General Assembly appoints the secretary-general upon the recommendation of the Security Council, effectively granting each permanent member a veto. A successful candidate must be independent enough to challenge powerful states when they violate the Charter, yet acceptable enough to those same states to secure the appointment and maintain their diplomatic engagement.

While the selection process has become more open through vision statements and public dialogues, decisive bargaining still occurs largely behind closed doors in the Security Council. This makes external scrutiny by member states and civil society vital. A candidate who pleases major powers by asking too little of them may be convenient for capitals, but damaging to the institution.

Candidates should be pressed for specific, measurable plans. How will they defend the Charter when permanent members violate or selectively interpret it? How will they protect development and humanitarian mandates during financial austerity? How will they strengthen conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding? And how will they give developing countries a stronger voice in decisions shaping global security?

As of this writing, the field includes Michelle Bachelet, Rebeca Grynspan, Maria Fernanda Espinosa, Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett, Rafael Grossi and Macky Sall. Their biographies matter, but the central question is who possesses a credible strategy for sys-

temic renewal.

There is also a compelling case for appointing the first female secretary-general. In eight decades, every holder of the office has been a man. This does not mean a woman would automatically perform better, or that gender should replace diplomatic skill and managerial competence. Rather, an institution cannot credibly claim to draw on the world’s best talent while its highest office remains, in practice, segregated. Merit and representation are not opposing principles; at a time when the UN must rebuild legitimacy, representation is an element of credibility.

The next secretary-general will not begin from a blank slate. Guterres deserves credit for keeping climate justice, sustainable development, and the reform of the international financial architecture at the center of global debate. His Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Stimulus called for at least \$500 billion a year in additional financing, while the UN80 Initiative, launched in March 2025, seeks a more agile, coherent UN system.

Yet the credibility gap remains severe. Only 35 percent of SDG targets were on track or making moderate progress in the UN’s 2025 assessment, while 18 percent had regressed. Meanwhile, 3.4 billion people live in countries that spend more on debt interest payments than on health or education.

The next secretary-general cannot solve these crises alone. However, the office can shape priorities, defend principles, mobilize coalitions, and remind member states of obligations they have already legally accepted. The UN does not need a leader who merely survives the politics of appointment; it needs one who can use the office to restore the credibility of multilateralism.

Indonesia and its partners in the Global South must ask every candidate direct questions: What will UN80 deliver beyond budget savings? How will the SDGs be financed? And how will the next secretary-general protect the political space of countries that refuse to be absorbed into competing blocs? Strategic autonomy is not indifference, and non-alignment is not passivity; it is the sovereign right of states to act according to principle rather than obedience.

For Indonesia, this selection is an opportunity to advocate for reform without revenge, sovereignty without impunity, development without dependency and multilateralism without domination.

No secretary-general can repair the world alone. But the right leader can strengthen the habits of cooperation that keep multilateralism working as a shield for the many, rather than an instrument of convenience for the few.

The pope and the AI profiteers



By Antara Haldar
Project Syndicate/Rome
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The Tower of Babel is the biblical story of how humanity, united by a single language and ambition, attempts to build a tower to heaven. The project ends in collapse, with God punishing the builders for their hubris by fragmenting them into different languages and cultures.

This parable, which Pope Leo XIV explicitly invokes in his first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, bears an uncanny resemblance to artificial intelligence. Will this technology be humankind’s salvation, as its evangelists claim, or will it lead to damnation, as skeptics fear?

Human civilization is already well into an AI arms race to write the script of the future in code. Technology companies are spending billions of dollars to create systems that promise to transform knowledge, work, warfare, politics, and human consciousness itself. Public discourse oscillates between utopianism and panic. Now, one of the world’s oldest institutions has entered the conversation to warn about a race to the bottom.

This moment resembles previous periods of economic excess. The technology sector’s confidence is reminiscent of the financial sector’s before the 2008 crash, when a small group of insiders insisted they had mastered a transformative system that outsiders could not fully understand. Extraordinary fortunes were built on the promise of a radically improved future, while red flags were dismissed as ignorance or fear.

Yet the destructive potential of AI is far greater than the financial engineering of the 2000s. As the pope understands, the closest parallel is to the Industrial Revolution itself. When Cardinal Robert Prevost chose the name Leo XIV, he was making a statement. The previous Pope Leo made history by issuing a trenchant, wide-ranging encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, on the profound inequalities and social dislocations created by industrial capitalism.

Whereas Leo XIII grappled with the industrialization of labor, Leo XIV is grappling with the industrialization of intelligence. For years, the AI debate has been dominated by engineers, entrepreneurs, and investors speaking the language of “scale”, “disruption”, “efficiency” and “optimization”. But Leo XIV is intent on introducing a different vocabulary, focusing on the dignity of labor, war, monopolistic power, and the common good.

Hence, the word “dignity” appears 100 times in *Magnifica*

Humanitas’s more than 42,000 words. That emphasis reveals a fundamental difference in worldview. The central question for Silicon Valley is what machines can do. The central question for the Vatican is what human beings are.

To be sure, some leading figures in tech increasingly sound like theologians themselves. Silicon Valley has its own prophecies, missionaries, and promises of redemption. AI, they prophesy, will cure disease, eliminate scarcity, and perhaps even conquer death. But such promises cannot be divorced from the industry’s financial interests.

The Vatican, by contrast, offers a rival account of humanity’s future. It centers on the belief that human beings are more than information-processing systems, and that our affective attributes are as important as our cognitive abilities. We are unique creatures, capable of love, conscience, responsibility, and moral judgment.

This perspective has significant implications for the future of work. While Silicon Valley focuses on productivity gains, the Vatican asks: What happens when societies lose sight of the dignity embedded in meaningful labor?

Leo’s intervention is also timely in confronting “monopolistic control” and “digital colonialism”. It is simply a fact that a handful of firms increasingly control the models, computing infrastructure, and data upon which the future AI economy depends.

But perhaps the real target of *Magnifica Humanitas* is not the technology itself, but its unholy marriage with the market. Here, the symbolism gets even richer. The first American pope comes from Chicago, the city most associated with neoclassical economics. Yet Leo has directly challenged the assumption that markets alone can be trusted to shape society’s technological future. He recognizes that AI raises questions that prices and profits cannot answer.

These are not engineering questions; they are moral ones. Technological capability does not eliminate moral responsibility. AI is often presented as an unstoppable force sweeping humanity toward a predetermined future, but *Magnifica Humanitas* warns against such fatalism.

The battle is not between the Vatican and the Valley, but between the Chicago-born pope and the Chicago School of economics. Leo, ironically, is seeking to officiate a divorce—one between the world’s most powerful technology and the profit motive.



Why clarity of mind is the rarest strategic resource

Indonesia enters 2026 with its gross domestic product (GDP) growth holding steady at just above 5 percent. While this familiar figure signals macroeconomic continuity and resilience, the lived experience of many Indonesians tells a far more complicated story.

Prices continue to rise faster than wages, the cost of essentials creeps upward in ways official inflation metrics fail to capture, and businesses face an environment where input costs, regulatory signals, and global dynamics shift with little warning. Markets are persistently unsettled, reminding leaders that confidence is fragile. The result is a quiet but unmistakable paradox: macroeconomic stability alongside microeconomic uncertainty.

This tension is uniquely visible in Indonesia. A generation that grew up expecting steady upward mobility now confronts a landscape that behaves less like a predictable mechanism and more like a complex adaptive system.

Companies that once planned on linear expansion must now navigate a world where every decision carries heightened risk, ambiguity, and unintended consequences. Leaders are no longer managing isolated shocks; they are operating where structural forces interact, reinforce, and contradict one another simultaneously.

For much of modern management history, problems were divided into two neat categories: technical (tame) problems, challenges that could be solved through isolated expertise, linear planning, and clean execution, and strategic (wicked) problems, realities that resisted definitive solutions, demanding



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continuous negotiation, judgment and adaptation.

Today, leaders face both at once, often within the exact same decision. A supply chain disruption may begin as a tame logistical issue, but it quickly mutates into a wicked problem involving geopolitics, shifting consumer expectations, and technological constraints.

This is the defining feature of this great era of tension. It is an age where competing realities coexist and where leaders must manage contradictions rather than resolve them. Cost discipline is mandatory, yet underinvestment is fatal. Standardization offers efficiency, yet diverse consumers demand deep customization.

The instinctive corporate response to this volatility has been to accelerate. Strategy reviews multiply, transformation programs roll out in waves, and new technologies are adopted at breakneck speed. While each initiative appears rational in isolation, collectively they produce a corrosive side effect: strategic exhaustion.

Executives have become adept at initiating change, but far less skilled at allowing that change to mature. Agility, once a competitive advantage, becomes counterproductive when it hardens into an ideology. When leaders assume every external signal requires an immediate pivot, priorities shift faster than results can materialize.

Middle managers delay execution waiting for directions to sta-

bilize, and teams optimize locally because enterprise objectives feel permanently fluid.

Organizations are moving more, but progressing less.

Across ASEAN, this dynamic is amplified by the region’s sheer complexity. Consumer behavior is shaped simultaneously by economic pressures, deeply rooted cultural norms, demographic shifts and rapidly evolving digital ecosystems. Linear planning models simply fail to capture this interplay.

To survive this era, leadership requires something deeper than agility. It requires strategic mindfulness.

This concept is frequently misunderstood, reduced to personal well-being or stress management. While those practices have individual value, they miss the strategic point. Strategic mindfulness is not passive reflection or hesitation; it is the disciplined practice of directing collective organizational attention toward what is essential while actively resisting the impulse to react to every external stimulus.

Mindful leaders recognize that not every market fluctuation warrants corporate reinvention. They distinguish genuine signal from temporary noise. By cultivating organizational clarity, they ensure that external turbulence does not morph into internal confusion.

Paradoxically, this stability produces greater strategic velocity. True organizational speed

does not come from making faster, frantic decisions; it comes from reduced friction. When purpose and priorities are stable, thousands of daily, decentralized decisions align naturally. Execution accelerates precisely because the overarching direction holds steady. Operational flexibility and strategic consistency are not opposites, they are complements.

The strongest organizations in ASEAN today are neither chasing every passing opportunity nor retreating into defensive caution. They adapt operationally while remaining strategically anchored. Their advantage lies in superior coherence. They understand that in a complex environment, strategy is a living system rather than a static blueprint. It must evolve through continuous interpretation, disciplined learning, and purposeful action.

This approach demands a different profile of leader, one with the humility to accept that not all problems can be neatly solved, the discipline to focus strictly on what matters and the courage to hold the line when the surrounding environment becomes incredibly noisy.

It requires leaders to think in terms of systems rather than events, patterns rather than episodes, and relationships rather than transactional exchanges.

The “Great Tension Era” will not reward those who react the fastest. It will reward those who think the clearest. In a world captivated by speed, the ultimate competitive advantage is not how quickly your organization can change, but how deeply it knows why it exists. When every headline demands a new strategy, the greatest advantage of all is knowing what must never change.

UN urges strong checks on Iran nuclear pledge

IAEA chief seeks access to verify Tehran’s commitments

Agence France-Presse

Tehran
The United Nations nuclear chief said on Friday that Iran’s pledge not to build a nuclear weapon would need “very strong” verification, as the United States and the Islamic republic negotiate a permanent settlement to end their war.

Iran’s nuclear program is a key sticking point in talks to end the Middle East war, which began in late February with a massive US-Israeli campaign of strikes.

Iran and the US last week signed a preliminary deal to end the conflict, embarking on negotiations expected to address a host of disputes including the nuclear program.

But there has been contrasting information from Tehran and Washington on whether UN inspectors will have access to Iranian nuclear facilities.

“I think the objective of this agreement is to ensure that there is no development of nuclear weapons in Iran. The government of Iran has declared quite clearly that this is not their intention,” International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) head Rafael Grossi said on Friday.

“But of course intentions are not enough. We have to have a very strong verification system in place [...] as soon as is practicable,” he added.

Grossi said the UN’s nuclear watchdog had so far “barely initiated” talks with Iran following the agreement with the US.

The deal specifies that the country’s stockpile of enriched uranium should be “downblended” under IAEA supervision.

Before the war the IAEA estimated that Iran had 440 kilograms of uranium enriched to 60 percent, but the fate of that stockpile is unknown after the US and Israel bombed Iranian nuclear facilities last year.

Uranium enriched to 90 percent can be used to make a bomb.

“Initial conversations have taken place,” Grossi said of his agency’s contact with Iran. “We expect this work to pick up soon.”

‘Going to happen’

Iran’s nuclear program has long been a source of friction with Western powers, who suspect Tehran is building a bomb.

Iran has systematically denied the claim and says it has a right to a civilian nuclear program.

US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that Tehran had “fully and completely agreed” to allow UN inspectors to return to the country, while on Wednesday Grossi said inspections of Iranian nuclear sites were “going to happen”.

Iran however said this week it had no intention of admitting

the watchdog.

Tehran agreed a landmark nuclear deal with six big powers in 2015 that placed limits on its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief, but Trump walked away from the agreement during his first term as president.

Iran suspended cooperation with the IAEA last year after the US and Israeli attacks in June.

Grossi said an alternative to diluting the enriched uranium could be to ship it out of Iran.

“It would perhaps be more complicated, but there are a few technical alternatives to deal with the material,” he said.

‘Nothing has improved’

The dispute threatens to derail efforts to reach a permanent settlement between the US and Iran following months of war, with the other key dispute being the Strait of Hormuz.

The strait is a narrow stretch of water between Iran and Oman that leads to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, making it a chokepoint for crucial energy shipments out of the Gulf.

Iran closed the waterway during the war in retaliation for US-Israeli strikes, and its control of the strait has emerged as key leverage in the negotiations, as the world economy reels from energy shortages.

On Wednesday an attack on a ship in the strait led the UN to suspend an effort to evacuate trapped mariners, many of whom have been stranded on the water since the war began.

The British maritime security agency UKMT0 said a cargo ship was “hit on the starboard side by an unknown projectile, causing damage to the bridge”, but reported no casualties.

Iran has also said it plans to introduce fees for crossing the strait, a scheme vehemently opposed by Washington and most Gulf countries.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, visiting the Gulf on Wednesday, dismissed the idea of charges, saying it would open the door to “total chaos”.

Rubio said the US wants a deal with Iran but “we don’t want a deal at any price”.

In Tehran meanwhile, people told AFP that despite the diplomatic progress, there had so far been no tangible benefits in everyday life.

“Overall, nothing has improved,” said Amir, 28, a government employee. “Life has simply become more difficult.”

Mehdi, 35, a content creator, said that “until such changes are felt in people’s everyday lives, it is only natural that hope will remain accompanied by doubt, and that anticipation will give way to exhaustion and anxiety”.



AFP/Benediction Murhabazi

Race to respond: Healthcare workers carry an Ebola patient on Tuesday on a stretcher from an ambulance to the Ebola Treatment Center in Bunia, Ituri province, in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

DR Congo to test Ebola treatments: WHO

Agence France-Presse

Geneva, Switzerland

Trials of two separate potential treatments to fight the deadly Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo are expected to begin next week, the World Health Organization said on Wednesday.

A total of 1,048 Ebola cases, including 277 deaths, have been confirmed in DR Congo since the outbreak was declared on May 15, although many experts believe the true toll is significantly higher.

This outbreak is down to the rare Bundibugyo species of Ebola virus, for which there are no approved vaccines or treatments.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Wednesday that “preparations are now complete for a trial of two therapeutics that’s expected to start in DR Congo next week”.

The trial, he said, would evaluate whether the monoclonal antibody MBP134 and the antiviral drug remdesivir “can help to reduce mortality in patients with Bundibugyo virus, alone, or in combination”.

Tedros thanked the United States and Gilead Sciences for donating the doses needed for the trial.

The trials will start at a hospital in DRC’s northeastern Ituri province, where the vast majority of cases have been detected, Vasee Moorthy, who leads the WHO’s research and development blueprint arm, told AFP.

The numbers of patients required would depend of how effective the therapeutics appear to be: The more effective they are, the fewer patients who would be needed, Moorthy said.

Between 500 and 1,000 people were expected to take part, he added.

Moorthy said preparations were all but complete, and the trials should provide answers as to whether each treatment, as well as both in combination, were safe and effective.

Tedros said the WHO and its partners were working closely with affected communities “to inform and involve them in the trial”.

“We are also working to ensure the communities have access to the therapeutics, should

they prove safe and efficacious,” he said.

Tedros said the trial would be conducted by the WHO and a consortium of partners, including DRC’s National Institute for Biomedical Research, the Alliance for International Medical Action (ALIMA) and Oxford University.

Outbreak outpacing response

The WHO chief hailed the ramping up of the Ebola response.

Over the past five weeks, the number of treatment beds had gone up from 10 to more than 500, while testing capacity in the DRC has gone up from 30 a day to more than 3,000, he said.

But he stressed that efforts to rein in the virus still faced “major challenges”.

“The outbreak is continuing to outpace the response,” he warned.

Capacity at treatment and isolation centers was still insufficient, while financial support for fighting the outbreak was lagging, Tedros said.

Also proving difficult, he said, was ensuring safe and dignified burials of the highly infectious

bodies of those who have died from the virus, which spreads through close contact and infected bodily fluids.

Tedros voiced particular concern that contact tracing was still not at the level needed.

More than 8,200 contacts of cases have been traced, a rate of just over 70 percent, but still short of the 95 percent target thought necessary to get on top of the virus.

Tedros said one thing hampering contact tracing efforts was the “reduced incentive” of having no vaccine to offer people coming forward, unlike previous outbreaks with the more common Zaire strain.

Affected daily laborers for instance faced a stark choice, he said.

If they identify themselves as contacts, “they don’t get vaccines”, but still risk being placed in quarantine, so “they can’t have even [earn] their daily bread”, Tedros pointed out.

The WHO and the African Union’s health agency have a joint continental preparedness and response plan which is seeking US\$518 million.

New Zealand report warns of Chinese military forays in Pacific

Agence France-Presse

Wellington

Chinese ballistic missile tests and naval forays will become a “persistent” feature of the Pacific as Beijing expands its security presence, New Zealand officials said in an internal document obtained by AFP.

The warning was issued in a December 2025 report by New Zealand’s Defense Force and Ministry of Foreign Affairs while they were monitoring a People’s Liberation Army navy (PLA-N) flotilla in the Philippine Sea.

“New Zealand officials are in close contact with Australian counterparts and maintaining situational awareness of these vessels,” said the document obtained by AFP under freedom of information laws.

“More broadly we anticipate that Chinese actions, such as the PLA-N task group that transited the Tasman Sea in February and China’s launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile into the Pacific in September 2024, will be a persistent feature of our strategic environment.”

The 15-page report was sent to New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and his ministers for defense, foreign affairs and intelligence.

China has directed billions of dollars into defense in recent years, a trend that has unnerved some governments despite Beijing insisting its aims



AFP/Jam Sta Rosa

Tense seas: A vessel identified by the Philippine Coast Guard as a Chinese navy ship is seen near Scarborough Shoal in the disputed South China Sea on June 15.

are peaceful.

Beijing’s foreign ministry said on Friday that it was “not aware” of the document obtained by AFP, when asked about it at a news conference.

“China’s military development is for the purpose of safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests, and is not directed against any country,” ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told reporters.

‘Incremental expansion’

The navy in particular has expanded rapidly as Chinese leaders seek to grow their country’s reach in the Pacific, where the

United States has long been the predominant military power.

Wellington’s concerns over Chinese military movements had already been heightened by the February 2025 deployment of three Chinese warships to the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand.

Most of the report given to AFP was redacted, citing privacy, national security and confidentiality concerns.

But in the remaining sections, officials said China’s February 2025 deployment to the Tasman Sea was conducted in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention

on the Law of the Sea.

“This included the manner in which the task group notified its intentions to conduct live fire exercises, which we consider did not align with international best practice and caused several commercial airlines to change route,” the report said.

Beijing’s December deployment to the Philippine Sea “was consistent with China’s incremental expansion of its maritime security presence in the South Pacific over the past decade”, it said.

“Beijing has deployed a broad range of naval vessels to the region, including but not limited to hospital ships, large amphibious vessels in support of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, and outer space event support ships.”

Space support ships are designed to track rocket launches, satellites and intercontinental missile activity.

The New Zealand Defence Force did not identify the type of one of the naval vessels deployed by China to the South Pacific, saying it would “be likely to prejudice the security or defense of New Zealand”.

It declined to release details on how New Zealand would respond, for the same reason.

“In all scenarios, New Zealand’s response would be in accordance with international law,” the defense force said.

Malaysia seizes \$13m in AI chips at Kuala Lumpur airport

Reuters

Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia’s customs department said on Friday it had thwarted an attempt to smuggle advanced artificial intelligence chips worth 52.9 million ringgit (US\$12.93 million) through the country’s main airport this month.

Malaysia imposed export controls last year on the movement

of high-performance chips of United States origin, following pressure from the US to stem the flow to China of chips crucial for the development of AI.

On June 5, authorities carrying out an inspection at Kuala Lumpur International Airport found 72 server units containing advanced AI chips that had been flown in to the airport’s free trade zone, the airport’s customs director Zulkifli

Muhammad told reporters.

Initial investigations found that the servers were to be re-exported to another country in Asia, a move that would require a permit under Malaysia’s Strategic Trade Act, Zulkifli said.

The items had been falsely declared as “computer components” to avoid detection, with Malaysia listed as a transit destination to circumvent restric-

tions before they arrived at the destination country, he said, declining to divulge further details, citing an ongoing probe.

Authorities have confiscated the servers while a Malaysian company that facilitated the shipment has been called in to assist investigations, he added.

Malaysia had investigated reports last year that a Chinese company in the country was us-

ing servers equipped with Nvidia chips for AI development, but found no evidence of illicit trade in advanced semiconductors.

The US also charged two Chinese nationals last August with illegally shipping tens of millions of dollars’ worth of AI chips from their El Monte-based company to China via shipping and freight forwarding companies in Malaysia and Singapore.

In a separate case, Zulkifli said customs had also seized six boxes containing 4,760 cartridges of vape liquid worth 1.19 million ringgit, hidden in the casing of central processing units on June 10.

Checks showed that the vape liquid was laced with methamphetamine, with the shipment to be exported to a neighboring country, he said, without specifying details.

Europe heat wave overwhelms hospitals

Climate change fueled record-breaking temperatures, scientists say

Agence France-Presse

Paris
A deadly European heat wave that has saturated hospitals as temperatures soared to record highs was to shift east on Friday, with authorities warning of more misery on a continent not used to stretches of punishing heat.
At least 101 million Europeans have roasted for several days in temperatures of over 35 degrees Celsius, with an estimated few hundred people, including children, thought to have died as a result, many drowning as they sought respite from the inferno.
Scientists said in a study released Friday that climate change was “unequivocally” responsible for the heat that broke records in United Kingdom, France, Spain and Switzerland, while the Netherlands issued its first-ever red alert over heat.
With French hospitals overwhelmed, authorities took the rarely used step of banning evening alcohol sales and public consumption in Paris starting on Friday and into the weekend.
As temperatures were expected to ease in western Europe from Friday, eastern Europe was on red alert, with the mercury set to climb.
In Germany, where temperatures were expected to hit 40 degrees through the weekend, several outdoor events were cancelled and the rail operator advised avoiding travel.
French and British health services reported a surge in emergency calls and visits as the merciless heat struck the elderly and the ill.
“We are reaching a saturation point in hospital facilities,” Paris police chief Patrice Faure said. “The number of hospitalizations keeps increasing.”
France saw a fourfold increase in emergency room visits for heat-related reasons and a surge of cardiac arrests, authorities said.
London Ambulance Service said the extreme heat on Wednesday had led to the highest number of life-threatening emergency calls in a day.



Reuters/Abdul Saboor

Heat care: A nurse assists a patient on Thursday at Manhes Private Hospital in Fleury-Mérogis, near Paris, as a heat wave grips much of France.

vice said the extreme heat on Wednesday had led to the highest number of life-threatening emergency calls in a day.
Climate crisis
AFP calculations based on forecasts from the German weather service and 2025 population projections from the European Joint Research Centre indicated that more than 380 million people would face temperatures of over 30 degrees.
The UN’s climate chief Simon Stiell said the heat wave—made worse by buildings and infrastructure unsuited to such temperatures—“has the fingerprints of the climate crisis all over it.”
“Until humanity stops burning colossal amounts of coal, oil and gas, extreme heat will keep getting worse,” he added.
Scientists said Friday that human-caused climate change was “unequivocally” responsible for the intensity of the record-breaking heatwave, adding that it would have been “virtually impossible” for such exceptional temperatures to occur in June fifty years ago.
A similar heat wave would have been 3.5 degrees cooler during the day in June 1976, concluded the study by scientists from Europe, the United States and the UK.

Hundreds of deaths
A three-year-old boy was found dead in a car in the suburbs of Paris, where temperatures topped 40C on Wednesday, the latest such death. At least 40 people, many of them young, have drowned in France in the heatwave, according to the government.
In Spain, the MoMo monitoring system of mortality rates said 212 deaths between Sunday and Wednesday could be linked to the heat.
Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera reported five deaths from the heat wave including two farmworkers and a builder.
The deputy director of the EU’s Copernicus Climate Change Service, Samantha Burgess, said the hot weather was due to a “heat dome” of trapped air from north Africa in a low-lying high-pressure system, preventing cooler air from moving in.
Polly Turton, head of climate action at NGO Shade the UK, said the situation was “the new normal. The sleepless nights we’re all experiencing, we are going to have to adapt to,” she said.
“At the moment, we are not a well-adapted UK by any means.”

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Macron, Meloni seek united front in Riviera talks

Valerie Leroux and Fanny Carrier

Agence France-Presse/Antibes, France/Le Cannel
French President Emmanuel Macron and Italy’s right-wing leader Giorgia Meloni on Thursday kept a united front as they sought to deepen cooperation in defense, space and energy after years of often testy ties.
Meloni, fresh from her public fallout with United States President Donald Trump, met Macron in the resort town of Antibes for her first bilateral summit with the French leader.
The negotiations marked the first summit since a treaty on a strategic alliance came into force in 2021, elevating relations to a level comparable to that between France and Germany.
After talks at the Villa Eilenroc, a dazzling 19th-century residence overlooking the Mediterranean, the pair brushed aside suggestions of tensions, with Macron calling the Italian leader “Dear Giorgia.”
“We all live under the same climate—it is warm. And there is nothing glacial anymore,” Macron told reporters with a smile.



AFP/Manon Cruz/Pool

Mediterranean meeting: French President Emmanuel Macron (left) welcomes Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni at Villa Eilenroc during a Franco-Italian summit on Thursday in Antibes on the French Riviera.
Meloni played along, saying their relationship was that of “serious people who talk politics.”
Ties have often been strained between Macron, a pro-European centrist, and Meloni, who leads a coalition of right and far-right parties.
But while the leaders of the European Union’s second- and third-largest economies are far from natural allies, they have worked to ease tensions.
Meloni had also long sought to position herself as a bridge between Europe and Trump.
But following a recent Group of Seven summit in France, the Italian leader has distanced herself from Trump over what she called his “constant, unprovoked attacks.”
Macron indicated on Thursday

that they wanted Europe and the United States to remain close.
“We want to keep the Americans on our side,” he said, while acknowledging that “there will likely be changes, new twists and turns” in the relationship with Washington.
Lebanon mission
Macron and Meloni said France and Italy wanted to set up a multinational coalition to succeed the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon, UNIFIL.
“We want to launch a coalition for the post-UNIFIL arrangement, obviously in coordination with the European Union and the United Nations, to strengthen Lebanon’s sovereignty and that of its armed forces,” Macron said.
“Italy and France can absolutely make a difference,” the Italian prime minister added.
The UNIFIL force has been a buffer between Lebanon and Israel since 1978, although its presence has not prevented repeated outbreaks of conflict. Last August, the UN Security Council, under US pressure, decided to end the mandate of UNIFIL on Dec. 31, 2026.
The two countries’ delegations signed a five-year roadmap on defense, particularly regarding cooperation on Aster missiles and SAMP/T air defense systems.
France and Italy also reaffirmed their support for a planned European satellite powerhouse project to rival Elon Musk’s Starlink.
“In space, Franco-Italian cooperation is historic in Europe and must remain so,” Macron said.
With conflicts in Ukraine and Iran, “space has become absolutely central for the military,” added Herve Derrey, chief executive of Thales Alenia Space, speaking at a Franco-Italian economic forum in the nearby town of Le Cannel.
Macron and Meloni share common ground on some issues, including opposition to the European Union’s free trade agreement with South America’s Mercosur bloc.
But they remain divided on others, such as Italy’s push for migrant detention centers outside the European Union.
Unlike Macron, Meloni opposes sending Italian troops to Ukraine in a postwar scenario, to provide security guarantees to Kyiv.

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King Charles discloses 30m-pound tax bill

Joe Jackson

Agence France-Presse/London
King Charles III has paid more than 30 million pound (US\$39.6 million) in personal taxes since becoming monarch in September 2022, Buckingham Palace announced on Thursday, in the first such disclosure by a reigning British sovereign.
The palace, which had confirmed at the weekend that it would make the unprecedented release, said it was part of its “commitment to transparency” as royal finances come under increasing public scrutiny.
Charles’s eldest son and heir Prince William also for the first time revealed his personal tax information, having paid more than 20 million pound in taxes since inheriting the title of Prince of Wales when his father became king.
UK monarchs are legally exempt from paying certain taxes, though they have paid some duties voluntarily for decades, and they also have no obligation to disclose their private tax bills.
“The amount of tax payable by His Majesty since Accession is more than 30 million pound,” the palace said within a wider press release updating various aspects of royal finances.
It noted in the two full tax years since he acceded to the throne on Sept. 10, 2022, his personal bill was 24.6 million pound. That comprised 11.7 million pound in 2023-2024 and 12.9 million pound in 2024-2025. Tax years in Britain run from early April.
It did not give the figure for 2022 to 2023.
William, 44, paid more than 20 million pound in income and capital gains taxes since inheriting the title when Charles became king.
He stumped up 8.34 million pound in 2023-2024 and 7.76 million pound in the 2024-25 tax year.
Growing scrutiny
Charles began releasing his personal tax information as heir to the throne.
But he has broken with custom by continuing that as king—his mother and predecessor Queen Elizabeth II never did during her record-breaking seven-decade reign.
British monarchs get money from various sources.
They include the publicly-funded Sovereign Grant as well as private Duchy of Lancaster income worth tens of millions of pounds more which also helps fund personal expenses and some official duties.
The sovereign’s other private sources of income include their Balmoral and Sandringham estates as well as art, jewelry and stamp collections, investments and private savings.
Under United Kingdom law, monarchs do not have to pay income, capital gains or inheritance taxes.
However, since 1993 they have voluntarily paid the first two, following public pressure and scrutiny of the royals’ opaque finances after a Windsor Castle fire required expensive repairs.
That scrutiny has renewed amid recent scandals surrounding the disgraced former prince Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, and revelations he had been paying only a token “peppercorn” rent on a Windsor estate mansion.

Red or green? For Brazil, the politics of World Cup kits matter

Rodrigo Almonacid

Agence France-Presse/Morristown, United States
When Brazil faced Scotland in the World Cup on Wednesday, the South American team’s goalkeeper Alisson Becker was dressed in a green kit, not the red one originally approved by FIFA.
In any other country, such a wardrobe change might have gone unnoticed, but not in Brazil where the national team’s colors have become the subject of a deep political dispute.
The Selecao’s iconic yellow and green jerseys were co-opted years ago by conservatives aligned with far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro, who is serving time for plotting a coup after losing the 2022 elections to Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.
And while Lula has set out to

reclaim the colors of Brazil’s flag in his push to reelection in October, red—not typically part of Team Brazil’s gear—is the color of the left and his party.
When FIFA unveiled the group stage kits for each team’s goalkeepers before the tournament began on June 11, it said Alisson would be in a completely red uniform for the team’s final Group C match.
The Liverpool shot-stopper wore black and pink kits in the first two games against Morocco and Haiti.
But before the five-time world champions try to secure their place in the round of 32 in Miami, the change came down on the goalkeeper’s dress code: The red kit was dropped in favor of the green.
Prioritizing Brazil
After Brazilian sports media reported on Tuesday that the president of the country’s football federation (CBF) Samir Xaud had “vetoed” the red kit, he told ESPN the change was long-planned.
“I asked for it because it’s something we already talked about some time ago. We’re prioritizing the colors of Brazil’s flag,”



Reuters/Paul Childs

Safe hands: Brazil goalkeeper Alisson Becker celebrates on Wednesday after Brazil’s Group C victory over Scotland at the 2026 FIFA World Cup at Miami Stadium in Florida, the United States.
Xaud told ESPN.
Last August, Xaud asked US sportswear brand Nike, which has outfitted the team since 1996, to cancel the red kits—saying then that the move was not because of “political reasons” but to exalt national colors.
In a message to AFP Tuesday, the national federation denied any “veto”, and said FIFA chose the red kit “without knowing” it was not part of Brazil’s clothing collection for the games.
“FIFA stipulates that each team must present four goalkeeper jersey options. We included the red one as the fourth option but it has not been released on the market and is not part of Nike’s current collection,” CBF said.
FIFA declined comment to AFP and Nike did not immediately respond to a request for comment.
‘Bolsonaro’s jersey’
The politicization of the Selecao’s uniforms has permeated the football-mad country.
Some avoid the green and yellow jerseys to avoid any association with Bolsonaro and his movement, while others on the left wear unofficial red merch emblazoned with the CBF’s crest or communist symbols.
“We need to wear green and yellow and add ‘Not a Bolsonaroist,’” the 80-year-old Lula said at an event in Rio de Janeiro earlier this month.
“During the World Cup, we should wear in yellow and green so we don’t let Brazil’s colors be taken over by any fascist.”
Lula and Senator Flavio Bolsonaro, son of the former president, are leading in the polls ahead of the October elections.
Jair Bolsonaro used to say his country’s flag “will never be red”, and his son calls the traditional green and yellow shirt “Bolsonaro’s jersey”.

China’s 360 unveils answer to Anthropic’s Mythos

AI tool is strategic cyber capability China cannot afford to lack: Founder

Eduardo Baptista

Reuters/Beijing
Chinese cybersecurity firm 360 Security Technology has developed what it calls a domestic answer to Anthropic’s Mythos, it said on Wednesday, casting the United States model as a strategic cyber capability that China could not afford to lack.
Mythos, previewed in April, is a system that detects software vulnerabilities, but cybersecurity experts have warned that it could supercharge cyberattacks. The US this month ordered Anthropic to suspend exports of a less powerful version of the program, citing national security concerns.
Speaking at the ISC.AI 2026 cybersecurity conference in Beijing, 360 founder Zhou Hongyi unveiled two artificial intelligence (AI) security tools under the banner “Yitian Tulong”, a name drawn from a classic Chinese martial arts novel meaning “Heavenly Sword and Dragon Saber”.
Zhou said one tool, “Tulong-feng”, was designed to automatically discover software vulnerabilities, calling it “China’s version of Mythos”, while a second sys-

tem, “Yitianzhen”, was built to automate cyber defense and incident response.
“This kind of powerful weapon that can change the landscape of cyber offense and defense cannot be held only by others,” Zhou said in a speech, according to a transcript published by 360.
He described vulnerability-finding AI as a national strategic asset that could be used both to defend critical infrastructure and to gain offensive advantage.
Cyberattacks
China and the US have a long history of accusing each other of conducting offensive cyber operations on critical infrastructure.
360’s release marks the most high-profile Chinese answer yet to Anthropic’s Mythos model, which has triggered alarm in Washington and other capitals, as well as across the cybersecurity industry, over its ability to discover vulnerabilities in sensitive systems.
Anthropic said in April that Mythos Preview had found “thousands” of major vulnerabilities in operating systems, web browsers and other software.



Reuters/Aly Song

Cyber showcase: Visitors browse the Qihoo 360 display at the Appliance and Electronics World Expo in Shanghai, China, on March 23, 2021.
The US government has ordered the company to suspend exports of a less powerful version of Mythos to destinations worldwide and all foreign nationals due to national security concerns.
Zhou argued that China faced a risk of “one-way transparency” if US entities could use Mythos-like models to scan software and

360 said Tulongfeng had found 3,432 software vulnerabilities, including 105 confirmed by Chinese authorities. Reuters could not independently verify the claims.
Zhou said 360 would not simply copy the US approach, which he described as relying on “the strongest model, the strongest computing power and the strongest chips”.
US export controls
Tightening US export controls on China’s access to cutting-edge US chips since 2022 have prevented domestic models from catching up to American rivals including Anthropic, though the gap has narrowed since last year.
The US has justified these restrictions by arguing these chips would allow the Chinese military to turbocharge its capabilities with AI.
“Objectively speaking, domestic models still have a 20 percent–30 percent gap in base capability,” Zhou said. “China cannot wait until model capabilities have fully caught up before starting vulnerability discovery, because we cannot afford to wait.”
Instead, Zhou said his compa-

ny was taking an “agent” route, combining models with security expertise, vulnerability databases and automated tools, an approach he claimed only 360 had successfully deployed, giving Tulongfeng “Mythos-equivalent capabilities”.
“If Mythos is a top-end chip, what we are building is a complete machine that can run stably, work 24 hours a day and make fewer mistakes,” he said. “If the US route is to cultivate a genius hacker, 360’s route is to organize a professional attack-and-defense team.”
Last year, Anthropic said that hackers exploited vulnerabilities in its Claude AI to attack around 30 global organizations. Moreover, 67 percent of the 1,000 executives surveyed in an IBM and Palo Alto Networks study said they had been targeted by AI attacks within the past year.
Zhou, a veteran Chinese internet entrepreneur and outspoken technology commentator, founded 360, which became one of China’s best-known cybersecurity companies through antivirus software and later expanded into enterprise and government security.

Australia weighs stricter teen social media ban

Byron Kaye

Reuters/Sydney, Australia
Australia’s prime minister said on Friday he was keen to make sure the country’s social media ban for children was as strong as possible, as a new study found that the measure, the first of its kind and now six months old, had little impact on teen use.
The government plans to stress-test the law which bans platforms like Meta’s Instagram and Google’s YouTube from giving under-16s accounts.
“What we want to do is to make sure that the laws are as strong as possible and that they will withstand any legal challenges which are made,” Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told the Australian Broadcasting Corp.
He added that one key focus would be making sure that the eSafety Commission, the country’s internet regulator, was sufficiently empowered to do the job.
Albanese did not give further details about what steps the government would take and the regulator declined to comment.
Australia’s groundbreaking experiment is being closely watched with countries around the world seeking to emulate it amid concern about youth mental and physical health. The United Kingdom, for example, this month announced planned restrictions that go further as gaming and live-streaming platforms will also be affected.



Reuters/Hollie Adams

Social scroll: Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook, Twitch and Reddit applications are displayed on a mobile phone in this picture illustration taken on Dec. 9, 2025.

The eSafety Commission and Communications Minister Anika Wells have said they are preparing legal action against multiple platforms, which face a maximum fine of A\$49.5 million (US\$34 million) if they are found to have systemically failed to uphold the ban.
Reddit has launched a High Court challenge of the ban, which is still in preliminary hearings. Reddit was not immediately available for comment on Friday.
When Australia’s ban went live last December, there were early reports that it had shut down millions of accounts, but parents have said and studies have shown that teen social media use is little changed.
A paper published in the *British Medical Journal* this week said 85 percent of Australians aged 12 to 15 were still using social media three months after the ban took effect, according to a study of 408 adolescents.
Two-thirds of underage users stayed online by self-declaring an age over 16 or posting a selfie that the platform accepted as over 16, the paper said.
“Despite the intent of the [ban] to delay access to social media platforms and reduce the potential for online harms, little evidence was found of immediate substantive reductions in reported social media use by adolescents,” it said.



AFP/European Space Agency/Handout

Galactic heart: A handout image released on June 23 shows the center of the Milky Way galaxy. The composite combines 26 hours of observations taken on March 23, 2025, by the Euclid space telescope’s VIS optical camera with color data captured in the summer of 2025 by the Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope’s MegaCam in Hawaii.

Euclid space telescope snaps best photo yet of Milky Way’s heart

Frédéric Bourigault

Agence France-Presse/Paris
The Euclid space telescope has captured the largest and most detailed photo ever taken of our galaxy’s crowded heart, a dazzling image packed with 60 million stars, the European Space Agency said on Wednesday.
The new photo of the Milky Way’s bright center will help in the search for planets beyond our Solar System, the agency added.
At the center of our spiral galaxy “lies the bulge, a large bubble containing billions of stars”, French astronomer Jean-Charles Cuillandre, who works on the Euclid mission, told AFP.
Euclid launched in 2023 on

a mission to chart one-third of the sky in the hopes of shedding light on the enduring mysteries of dark matter and dark energy.
“Now we’ve decided to point Euclid at the brightest area of the sky, and it works superbly, it’s extraordinary,” Cuillandre said.
Euclid, which is hovering 1.5 million kilometers from Earth, captured the image with its visible light camera over 26 hours in March 2025.
The mosaic is composed of nine photographs, each covering an area of the sky larger than the Moon.
The original image was captured in black and white, but color was added using observations from the Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope located in Hawaii.

However, “we didn’t do this just to produce a beautiful image”, Cuillandre emphasized.
In recent decades, scientists have identified thousands of planets outside our Solar System, which are known as exoplanets.
New exoplanets are unlikely to be identified within the Euclid image, but it will help the scientists measure the mass of planets already spotted, and those that will be discovered in the future.
It can do this via a process called microlensing, which happens when one-star crosses over another.
The closer star “acts like a cosmic magnifying glass, bending and brightening the background star’s light”, the ESA explained in a statement.

If a planet is orbiting the closer star, its gravity also slightly bends this light. This tiny change in brightness allows scientists to track the planet down.
“During the last 20 years, almost 300 exoplanets have been discovered using this technique, all with ground-based telescopes and all towards the center of our galaxy,” French astronomer Jean-Philippe Beaulieu said in the statement.
For example, Beaulieu said he led the team that discovered an icy planet “a bit like Hoth from Star Wars” 20 years ago.
The new image from Euclid “includes 51 known planetary systems, and it will assist in studying many more that will be found”, he added.

SpaceX plans ‘Starpipe’ gas pipeline to fuel Starship

Joey Roulette

Reuters/Washington
SpaceX plans to begin next month building a 13-kilometer natural gas pipeline called “Starpipe” to its Texas launch facilities, in the United States, according to county filings, as Elon Musk’s company seeks to ramp up launches of its next-generation Starship rocket.
Starpipe, which will end at SpaceX’s Texas company town of Starbase, is expected to be in service by Jan. 26, next year, according to a document filed last month with the Texas Railroad Commission by SpaceX affiliate Lone Star Mineral Development and reviewed by Reuters.
The pipeline plan, previously reported by *Rio Grande Valley Business Journal*, signals Musk’s intent

to accelerate Starship’s development and lay the groundwork for a faster flight rate. The 40-story rocket is central to SpaceX’s push to expand its Starlink broadband network, deploy orbital artificial intelligence (AI) data center satellites, and eventually carry astronauts to the Moon and Mars.
Designed to be fully reusable, Starship uses about 2.4 million liters of liquid methane per launch, currently delivered by hundreds of tanker trucks in an hours-long process incompatible with Musk’s expansion plans. Starship has completed 12 test launches since 2023, but Musk aims to ramp up to dozens, hundreds and eventually thousands of launches a year.
SpaceX did not respond to a request for comment.

Big gas plans
Though it is unusual for a space company to build its own natural gas pipeline for launchpad fuel, Starpipe might only be an initial step in a longer-term plan for SpaceX, which has spent years exploring its own drilling operations near Starbase and throughout Texas, according to a Reuters review of Cameron County land records.
SpaceX president Gwynne Shotwell told CNBC on June 12, when the company went public, that the company planned to build pipelines and process its own propellant, and was looking into drilling its own natural gas.
Extracting natural gas would be a challenging pursuit for a company with no oil and gas experience, said Stan Lindsey, an oil

and gas consultant in Texas.
“I’m not saying it’s beyond the realm of possibility [...] it’s possible they got a really nice prospect,” Lindsey said. But if those drilling plans fall short, he added, “they’ve got a fallback position” with Starpipe.
SpaceX has signed over 100 paid-up oil and gas leases with Texas property owners since 2023, the land records show.
Starpipe would begin on a 34-hectare piece of land at the Port of Brownsville that SpaceX is in talks to lease from the city for 50 years, a port official told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity because the negotiations are private.
Engineering plans SpaceX filed with the US Army Corps of Engineers, included in a public notice issued last August, show SpaceX

wants to build a liquefaction facility at Starbase to process the piped-in natural gas into liquid methane.
“Certainly, that would make the most efficient sense,” said William Farrar, a longtime oil and gas lawyer in Texas and geoscientist.
The company could tap into Enbridge’s Valley Crossing Pipeline expansion project that would run close to Starpipe’s start point, Lindsey said.
Enbridge did not immediately respond to a request for comment.
Supply chain
SpaceX’s move into gas infrastructure, typically the domain of energy and pipeline firms, underscores its longstanding strategy of controlling as much of its supply chain as possible, a capital-intensive approach that has helped the

company outpace rivals in rocket and spacecraft development.
The effort positions SpaceX to manage an unusually broad chain of resources, stretching from natural gas deep beneath Earth’s surface to the moon, where Musk wants to use lunar material for AI-focused satellite production, an ambitious and untested goal.
The pipeline’s 406-millimeter diameter suggests fuel demand exceeding what Starship would require for 25 launches, the annual cadence currently approved by the Federal Aviation Administration.
SpaceX ultimately aims to deploy thousands of solar-powered, AI-focused satellites whose combined energy output could approach one-fifth of the US power grid, according to its initial public offering prospectus.

UN halts escort of ships through Hormuz after vessel attacked

Move reignites fears over preliminary pact to end Iran war

Jonathan Saul, Gram Slattery and Tala Ramadan

Reuters/London/Manama/Dubai, UAE

The United Nations International Maritime Organization paused its operation to escort ships through the Strait of Hormuz on Thursday after a vessel reported an attack, reigniting concerns about whether a preliminary deal to end the Iran war will hold.

Taiwan’s Evergreen Marine said on Friday its ship was hit close to Oman by an “unknown object” while on a route recommended by the British navy agency UKMTO. The agency said earlier a vessel had been struck by a projectile hours after Tehran warned vessels against taking routes it had not approved.

Two United States officials told Reuters that Iran had fired on the ship, while Iran’s Persian Gulf Strait Authority, which Tehran established to manage requests for ships to travel through the strait, said vessels outside routes it has set will not be guaranteed safe passage.

“Consequences arising from passage through unauthorized routes shall be the responsibility of the owner, operator, and vessel commander,” the Iranian authority said.

Evergreen said its Singapore-flagged Ever Lovely was hit on the starboard side and initial inspections showed damage to the bridge windows. “The crew, vessel and cargo are all safe,” the company said in a stock exchange statement. “The vessel has safely departed the Strait of Hormuz.” A security source said it was probably targeted by a drone.

There was no immediate comment from the US government. US President Donald Trump claimed earlier this month that if



Reuters/Stringer

Passing through: Vessels are seen on Thursday in the Strait of Hormuz. The picture was taken from Musandam, Oman.

Iran did not honor an agreement aimed at ending the war and re-opening the strait the US would probably go back to bombing the country.

The IMO was helping to get hundreds of stranded ships and thousands of seafarers out of the strait where they had been stranded for months since the start of the war on Feb. 28.

It decided “to temporarily pause its implementation in order to reconfirm that the necessary safety guarantees continue to be in place for the ships on our evacuation list and all those in the region”, IMO Secretary General Arsenio Dominguez said in a statement.

The IMO said the ship in the suspected attack was not part of its evacuation initiative, a voluntary option it launched on Tuesday to enable ships and their crew to sail out of the Gulf using two routes—one via Iranian waters and the other via Omani waters, with US oversight.

The Oman incident is likely

to refocus attention on the extent of Iran’s future control over the Strait of Hormuz which, before the conflict, handled a fifth of the world’s daily oil and liquefied natural gas shipments.

Iran took effective control of the waterway when the war began, disrupting oil flows and rattling global energy markets, but oil prices dipped again on Friday and were headed for steep weekly losses as more stranded oil tankers exited the strait.

South Korea’s President Lee Jae Myung said on Friday three South Korean ships would leave the Strait of Hormuz over the weekend after the Oceans Ministry reported eight more South Korean vessels had exited.

There were also signs that Middle Eastern producers were pushing forward with plans to boost exports.

Shipping data from LSEG showed Saudi Aramco resumed oil loading at its Ras Tanura terminal in the Gulf on Friday after a near four-month halt.

Two Very Large Crude Carriers controlled by Saudi Arabia’s shipping arm Bahri were seen loading crude at Ras Tanura, the world’s biggest oil port, while another waited nearby, the data showed. Each VLCC is capable of loading 2 million barrels of oil.

Saudi Aramco could not be immediately reached for comment outside office hours.

Before the incident, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio—wrapping up a tour of the Gulf to reassure states about the interim pact—told reporters that if Iran threatened or blocked ships in the strait, “then we’re going to have a problem”.

Iran, though, has signaled it would continue to assert control over the strait.

Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said on Thursday that safe passage would only be possible through routes designated by Iran, adding that it would take action against vessels that failed to comply.

The Revolutionary Guards also ordered two Panama-flagged ships to change course on Thursday, British maritime security company Ambrey said.

The war is weighing heavily on Trump ahead of November midterm elections that will determine control of Congress. Just one in four Americans believes the war was worth the cost, a Reuters/Ipsos poll showed.

Conflicting accounts have emerged over elements of the framework ceasefire deal, which has prompted criticism of Trump at home and abroad.

Disagreements persist over financial incentives for Iran, nuclear inspections, control of the Strait of Hormuz and Israel’s war in Lebanon.

The deal sets up 60 days of talks to tackle thornier issues, including Iran’s nuclear program.

Free meals budget cut following pressure

Continued from page 1

The announcement comes after student-led protests erupted across Indonesia for two weeks running. The demonstrators demanded an immediate cessation of the free meals program that they described as wasteful spending.

President Prabowo has brushed aside criticism of the program that is dear to him ever since it dominated his election campaign, even as pressure has been mounting to scale it back amid competing fiscal spending needs.

“There is nothing more urgent than hunger. If someone is hungry and it is not immediately addressed, they can die,” Prabowo said on Wednesday, urging skeptics to speak directly with beneficiaries to better understand the program’s impact.

Syafruddin Karimi, an economics professor at Andalas University, told *The Jakarta Post* on Friday that the protests had created political pressure and “forced the government to explain the effectiveness” of the program.

He said the cut was meaningful for the budget and would be a positive signal for the market

since it meant that “the government is beginning to correct the less efficient spending”.

Syafruddin said that, rather than the recent protests, the stronger pressure had come from investors’ and sovereign rating agencies’ concerns about Indonesia’s governance, financial management and fiscal pressure.

Investors have been punishing Indonesia since the beginning of the year by pulling funds out of the bond and equity markets, making the rupiah one of the worst-performing currencies in the region and plunging the stock market index.

Some rating agencies have also downgraded the country’s sovereign rating outlook from stable to negative, even though they kept the ratings themselves unchanged. The next big assessment to come is from S&P Global Ratings, scheduled for July.

The agency had recently been conducting assessments on Indonesian soil, Purbaya said on Friday, including meeting the finance minister himself.

He added that impression was that “they have a certain fixed mindset that renders them unable to see the reality of what we do, which I cannot change”.

Tourism, climate put Raja Ampat’s ‘walking shark’ under pressure

Continued from page 1

The lack of inter-site movement may leave the species more vulnerable to the smallest disturbances to their habitat, as the shark is unable to relocate when its home environmental conditions deteriorate, said Edy Setyawan of the Elasmobranch Institute Indonesia, the study’s lead author.

He was most concerned with the rapid growth of tourism infrastructure in Raja Ampat, particularly the construction of overwater accommodation in areas that serve as important feeding grounds for the shark, including in Arborek village, one of six study sites for the study in the Dampier Strait in Raja Ampat.

“With the development of tourism in Raja Ampat, many homestays are being built above seagrass beds,” Edy told *The Jakarta Post* on Wednesday.

“Those seagrass ecosystems are important habitats where ‘walking sharks’ forage for food. When they are damaged, the sharks lose their critical resources.”

The sharks also face threats from climate change, especially from the rise in seawater temperatures.

Edy’s study suggested the fish are able to tolerate water temperatures up to 36 degrees Celsius, but scientists are concerned global heating may increase the frequency of marine heat waves that could affect the shark’s health and long-term survival.

The walking shark also faces less visible threats of nutrient pollution from untreated wastewater generated by tourism activities in Raja Ampat, said marine ecologist and conservationist Agustin Capriati.

“Excess nutrients accelerate algae growth and damage coral reefs,” said Agustin, who was not involved in Edy’s study. “If coral ecosystems deteriorate,

‘walking sharks’ will gradually lose their habitats.”

Protection questions

A 2023 Maritime Affairs and Fisheries ministerial regulation designated “walking sharks” as a fully protected species. The International Union for Conservation of Nature put the species in the “nearly threatened” category.

But Edy argued the regulation only prohibits people from catching or consuming the fish, while not being supported by a clear plan to conserve the species on the ground.

“In practice, people know the species exists,” Edy said, “but conservation efforts remain limited because the fish is not viewed as having economic value.”

Sarminto Hadi, the ministry’s director of species and genetic conservation, said the protected status was intended to prevent direct commercial exploitation of the species in its natural habitat.

The policy, he added, was based on scientific assessments highlighting the species’ vulnerability due to its inability to migrate when its habitat is disturbed.

Agustin noted that conservation regulations remain poorly enforced in most marine protected areas across the country, including in the Dampier Strait.

Further monitoring is needed, she added, to ensure the long-term survival of “walking sharks” with tourism development in Raja Ampat continuing to expand.

Raja Ampat made headlines in May 2025 following protests from environmental group Greenpeace about nickel mining on Gag Island, located about 50 kilometers from Arborek Island, and its threat to marine biodiversity in the region.

The government suspended the mining operations following the outcry, before allowing them to resume last September.

Prabowo-Jokowi strains surface amid public discontent

Continued from page 1

“Jokowi has little reason to be satisfied with the way the post-Jokowi period has shaped up. Gibran has been mostly isolated from government, and Prabowo has quietly overturned many of Jokowi’s policies,” Marcus Mietzner, a political scientist at the Australian National University, told *The Jakarta Post* recently.

“The polling data that is available show that Gibran’s standing with the electorate is weak [...] Jokowi’s decision to now start a nationwide tour and strengthen his party PSI, must be seen in this light, but it is far from certain that he will succeed,” added Mietzner, author of *Ruling Indonesia: Jokowi’s Presidency in an Age of Democratic Crisis and Great Power Competition*.

Speculation over a growing rift has persisted in recent months as Prabowo and Jokowi have appeared together less frequently than during the early months of the administration. *Tempo* magazine recently reported, citing unnamed sources, that Jokowi had repeatedly sought private meetings with Prabowo, but the requests had reportedly gone unanswered.

Bambang Haryadi, a member of Prabowo’s Gerindra Party, dismissed reports of a rift between the two figures. “Gerindra always supports the Prabowo-Gibran administration, and the relationship between the two is very good,” he said on Tuesday.

State Secretary Prasetyo Hadi, who is also a Gerindra politician, has welcomed Jokowi’s political tour as a sign that the former president remains in good health after previously being reported to be in poor health. “As a public figure and statesman, I think there is no problem with the tour,” he said on Friday.

War against drugs



AFP/Sai Aung Main

People take photos on Friday as they attend a destruction ceremony of seized illegal drugs to mark the United Nations’ International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking” in Yangon, Myanmar.

Businesses tap TikTok’s creator economy to boost sales

Continued from page 1

As a result, the line between businesses and creators is becoming less distinct. Brands and sellers are scaling content production through both in-house teams and external partners, prompting platforms to foster a broader ecosystem of creators tailored to different audiences.

“Discovery happens on TikTok in a way that is unprecedented in many ways,” he said.

“What that leads to is that because that discovery is not driven by social contacts, it’s driven by interests. What’s exciting is that then you can build a community based on that interest.”

For TikTok, the next stage of growth in Indonesia lies in bringing more small and micro businesses onto the platform and helping them understand how to engage audiences effectively.

“If there is a challenge for this market, it is that it’s moving very fast and we have to keep up with the pace

of what’s going on here,” he added.

Indonesia’s e-commerce market was estimated at US\$57.7 billion in GMV in 2025 according to Momentum Works, dominated by Sea Group’s Shopee at 54 percent market share, followed by TikTok Shop at 38 percent, while Alibaba’s Lazada and Djarum Group’s Bliibli trail at 6 percent and 3 percent, respectively.

Reseller push

Wedding gown designer Christie recalled experimenting with different video formats, lengths, music and opening hooks in the early days before breaking through with a video featuring a hijab-cheongsam design that attracted millions of views. That experience taught her that videos lasting 30 to 45 seconds with a compelling opening in the first three seconds delivered the strongest audience retention.

“Once we figured out the formula, we kept applying it. For the past five years, almost every piece

of content has reached millions,” she said.

Initially targeting a domestic audience, she said that after about a year of creating content, international customers have started pouring in due to the broad content reach.

Today, international clients account for 30 percent of her overall clients, including those from countries such as the United States, Australia, Singapore and Malaysia, to order her custom wedding gowns.

Kenneth Cia of Arutala Coffee, meanwhile, said the affiliate ecosystem has also become an important sales channel. The scheme allows creators to earn commission by promoting products without purchasing inventory upfront.

“They become our affiliates and create content two or three times a day. We also start with a relatively small budget,” he told the *Post* on June 17.

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Popular pick: A shopper selects packages on May 8 of natto, fermented soybeans, from a Japanese grocery store in New York City's Manhattan, the United States.

Tomohiro Osaki
and Sarah Lai

Agence France-Presse/Kamakura, Japan/Los Angeles, United States

Sticky, translucent strings dangle from Wesley Smith's chopsticks as the American tourist relishes his natto, the loved-and-hated Japanese fermented soybean superfood going global one slimy mouthful at a time.

The latest trade statistics show Japan's exports of the highly nutritious gooey beans tripled from 2017 to 5,248 tons in 2025, with China and the United States topping the list of destinations.

The delicacy infused with beneficial bacteria remains a traditional Japanese breakfast staple, but their pungent aroma, viscous texture and yeasty taste divide even in their homeland.

"I thought it was a little funky at first," Smith told AFP during his recent lunch at Sendaiya, a Tokyo restaurant that serves all-you-can-eat natto menus, an idea of hell for some people, though heaven for others.

But over the years, the mushy yellow-brown legumes "became an acquired taste like a strong cheese can, because you know how cheese can smell like dirty socks," the 47-year-old Arizonan said.

Recent years have seen natto join a series of fermented foods, from kimchi to kombucha, that have surged in popularity worldwide as Americans in particular seek better digestive health following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regular consumption of the high-fiber, protein-packed snack is often linked to stronger immune systems, improved digestion and greater bone density.

In China, too, the "trend toward health-consciousness especially among the middle and upper-income classes" is igniting interest in Japanese foods, the Japan External Trade Organization said in a recent report.

Curious in California

In Los Angeles at Japanese restaurant Suehiro, owner Kenji Suzuki has noticed more non-Japanese clients taking the plunge.

"When social media started talking about natto and that it's a superfood, I think then more and more people wanted to see what it is, wanted to taste it, 'Is it as bad as people say it is?'" Suzuki told AFP.

"Some people maybe don't like it, but other people, you know, they love it," the second-generation owner said.

During her lunch in Tokyo, tourist Smith's wife Maya Bourdeau, 46, likened natto to "natural wine" with "that slightly different taste".



Sticky bite: United States tourist Wesley Smith examines natto dangling from his chopsticks as he eats lunch on June 8 at Natto Kobo Sendai-ya restaurant in Tokyo.

Japan's natto wins fans, one bite at a time

Exports of the pungent fermented soybeans have tripled since 2017 as growing interest in gut health helps the polarizing Japanese staple find fans abroad.



Natto know-how: Kenji Suzuki, second-generation owner of Suehiro Japanese Restaurant, lifts natto from a bowl with chopsticks on May 14 in Los Angeles, California, the United States.

While she vigorously stirred her bowl of bibimbap topped with natto, Smith knew that this would only make it even stringier.

"Subconsciously, I didn't want to have natto just dripping from my beard," he said, laughing.

Whisking, he said, also "really maximizes the sliminess", which he believes is so off-putting for many Americans. He doubts natto, for all its recent hype, will ever go mainstream.

"I can't think of anything in American cooking that's common with that slimy texture."

Proud

But Daisuke Tsujimoto is all for it, having travelled hundreds of kilometers from Osaka to Tokyo to fill his boots at Sendaiya.

"It really is a food culture Japan can be proud of," the 31-year-old told AFP.

"I truly hope people around the world will continue to eat it."

Aside from its supposed health benefits, natto, dubbed the "star student of pricing", has long been loved in Japan for its stunning

affordability.

A pack of three natto cups, each 40 to 50 grams, typically sells for around 100 yen (US\$0.60) or even less at supermarkets. Each typically contains little plastic sachets of mustard and soy sauce.

Even the perennial budget champion, however, hasn't evaded a "wave of price hikes", Yoshihiro Noro, former head of the Japan Natto Cooperative Society Federation, told AFP.

This is because of shortages of naphtha, a byproduct of oil, caused by the Middle East war, he said.

At the same time, Noro sees the price rise as natto's chance to outgrow its reputation as "poverty food" deemed "unsellable if priced at more than 100 yen".

"Very few foods can be called as truly healthy a superfood as natto is," said Noro, also the 72-year-old owner of his family-run business.

"I hope an era will come when people will collectively see high-quality, high-end natto as worth

shelling out their money on."

Stringy in Singapore

And that is exactly what his company's Kamakurayama Natto, touted as "extremely stringy" but minus "stinkiness and bitterness", seeks to achieve.

At his factory west of Tokyo, workers wash, steam, and lavishly spray bacteria on, soybeans that machines then meticulously assemble in cups, before fermenting them for 18 hours.

While around three times more expensive than average, Kamakurayama Natto has in recent years secured international orders including from Hong Kong, China's Shanghai, Singapore and even Norway.

"I've heard that in some countries, people have been told natto is good for their health, so they force themselves to eat it even though they strongly dislike the taste," Noro said.

"But keep eating it, and you will definitely get hooked."

— PHOTOS BY AFP/FREDERIC J. BROWN

K-food's hottest new export is ice cold

No Kyung-min

ANN/The Korea Herald/Seoul

The Korean food craze has been red-hot. Now it's cooling palates with frozen treats.

Korean ice cream is turning up in summers around the world as the latest beneficiaries of the K-food boom, with exports surpassing the US\$100 million threshold for the first time last year.

Frozen dessert exports continue that climb this year, rising 14.1 percent on-year to \$49.8 million in the first four months, according to Korea Customs Service data. The United States remained the dominant market, taking more than 40 percent of shipments, followed by China, Canada, the Philippines and Vietnam.

One standout is Binggrae, best known globally for Banana Flavored Milk. Its melon-flavored, chewy-textured Melona bar has become one of Korea's most recognizable frozen dessert exports, alongside Samanco, its fish-shaped ice cream sandwich.

The company opened a US subsidiary in 2016 and began local production the following year, helping Melona capture an estimated 70 percent of the Korean ice cream market in the US. The brand is now sold in more than 30 countries, with Europe, the Middle East and Australia emerging as newer growth markets.

According to the company, growing interest in Korean cuisine has driven Melona's rise, with its varied flavors and gela-to-like texture setting it apart from local favorites. Binggrae has since broadened the lineup with regionally tailored flavors and plant-based versions for the European market.

"We're expanding our footprint through both new markets and wider distribution, from Asian grocers to mainstream retailers," a Binggrae official said. "Halal certification and international food exhibitions are helping support that growth."

Industry officials expect Binggrae's overseas growth to gain momentum after it finalized the Haitai Icecream acquisition in April, enabling the company to leverage its international distribution network more broadly.

Overseas sales now account for a growing share of Binggrae's ice cream business, rising to 21.9 percent of division revenue in the first quarter from 9.3 percent in 2020.

Another major player is Lotte Wellfood, whose exports of brands such as Tico, Sweet Corn and World Cone more than doubled to 29.1 billion won (\$19.1 million) in 2025 from 13.7 billion won in 2021.

Though not reflected in those export figures, the company has been building a much larger presence in India, where it entered through the acquisition of local ice cream maker Havmor in 2017.

Revenue at its Indian ice cream operation more than tripled since 2020 to 196.5 billion won last year, with Krunch, a bar featuring a crunchy cookie coating and strawberry filling, surpassing 1 million units sold within three months of launch.

The company made clear it intends to bring more of its Korean ice cream brands to Indian consumers.

"This year, we are focused on ensuring stable product supply through our newly opened ice cream plant in Pune, in the western state of Maharashtra," said a Lotte Wellfood official, adding that the company is eyeing southern India as its next frontier.

The trend of Korean ice cream making inroads overseas is likely to continue, industry officials suggest, especially as Korea's domestic ice cream market has contracted by more than 30 percent over the past decade amid demographic decline and market saturation.

"With K-food drawing more global attention, foreign consumers are discovering Korean ice cream, and we expect that momentum to continue," said one industry official. "Success overseas increasingly depends on localization."



ANN/The Korea Herald/Binggrae

Cool classic: Assorted flavors of Melona, Binggrae's flagship fruit-flavored ice cream bar, are pictured in this undated file photo.

'Great American State Fair' kicks off US 250th anniversary celebrations

Kanishka Singh

Reuters/Washington

With a 53.5-meter Ferris wheel, a rodeo demonstration and an eye-popping array of junk food, "The Great American State Fair" opened on Washington's National Mall on Thursday to start a 16-day celebration of the country's 250th anniversary.

Much of the 2.5-kilometer promenade linking the United States Capitol with the towering Washington Monument was fenced off for the event, which President Donald Trump kicked off on Wednesday night with a campaign-style rally organized after many of the performers who had been scheduled to appear dropped out, citing concerns about the event taking on a partisan tone.

"We are here to just celebrate America, a long journey that she has had," remarked Ashley, who said she was visiting from Ohio but declined to give her last name. "My kids have been wanting that aerial view from the Ferris wheel. They are excited."

The event, a tribute to the state fairs across the US each summer that star homemade quilts, butter

sculptures and pumpkins the size of small cars, is one of a series of events across the nation leading up to the July 4 Independence Day holiday, which commemorates the American colonists' Declaration of Independence from Britain in 1776.

The pavilions set up along the Mall, between the museums of the Smithsonian Institution, are temporary, unlike some of the more permanent changes Trump is in the midst of making to Washington, including tearing down the East Wing of the White House to make way for a massive ballroom, a hasty renovation of the National Reflecting Pool facing the Lincoln Memorial and a proposed 76-meter arch near Arlington National Cemetery.

Anniversary politicized

Thursday's crowds were dotted with supporters wearing the red hats of Trump's Make America Great Again movement, a common sight in Washington. A Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted this month found that a majority of Americans, including three-quarters of Democrats and half of Republicans, think that the events celebrating the country's



Reuters/Elizabeth Frantz

Roping in: An audience member tries a lasso on Thursday during a rodeo at the opening of The Great American State Fair on the National Mall in Washington D.C.

250th anniversary have grown too political.

Seven US states, all with Democratic governors, declined to send official delegations to the

fair, though the event's Freedom 250 organizers said all 50 would be represented.

Freedom 250 is a public-private partnership created by the

White House to coordinate celebrations of the US 250th anniversary alongside federal agencies.

Among the states boycotting was Oregon, where a spokes-

man for Democratic Governor Tina Kotek said: "The State of Oregon will not be participating in the Great American State Fair due to both the cost of participating in the Fair and growing concerns that the event in Washington, D.C., is shaping up to be a more partisan affair than originally presented."

Trump has faced criticism for promoting what civil rights advocates say is a revisionist history that downplays critical parts of the country's past such as slavery, the abuse of Native Americans and the negative impacts of US foreign policy.

That was evident at the fair which hardly had any mention of those chapters of US history. Trump has said that before his presidency, there was excessive focus on those issues.

Still, attendees on the first day said they were less focused on the politics than their efforts to enjoy the weather, the music and the attractions.

"It's a good family time on a nice summer day is how I see it," said Sarah Parker, who was visiting with her husband from neighboring Virginia. "It's a good way to get a feel of the country."