



Malaysia to stay non-aligned, says Anwar

'Putrajaya supports rules-based multilateral system that ensures fairness, transparency and representation for all, particularly for Global South.'

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Some kindergarten operators are forced to increase fees due to rising operational costs, including the mandatory minimum wage of RM1,700. — BERNAMAPIC

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Rising kindy fees force parents to seek cheaper alternatives

Some resort to homeschooling while others enrol children in centres run by Community Development Department.

Cultural identity at risk as youth sideline native languages

Influenced by global culture through social media and education, new generation often prioritises English for communication, says ethnic studies expert.

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Living hell of job scam victims

Malaysians rescued from Myanmar syndicates recount excruciating electric shocks, brutal beatings and being confined naked in dark rooms for failing to complete phone scamming tasks.

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Maize seller apologises for racially insensitive signboard

KUALA LUMPUR: The maize seller who sparked controversy with a racially insensitive signboard has apologised to all Malaysians, particularly the Indian community for his action, said National Unity Minister Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang.

In a post on X, he said the trader also pledged not to repeat the act.

"Neighbourhood Watch leaders Encik Roseman and Encik Syawal acted as mediators in resolving this issue.

"Their role in addressing this matter has strengthened public confidence in Neighbourhood Watch as an agent of unity and conflict resolution. This also highlights the importance of cooperation between community leaders and authorities in preserving a harmonious and peaceful environment."

Aaron said the apology was made at a restaurant in Sepang on Sunday night, attended by representatives of the Indian community, influencers, local residents, officials from the National Unity and Integration Department and police.

"I wish to emphasise that we must always strive to ensure that our words and actions do not cause discomfort, tension or misunderstanding among people of different religions, cultures and ethnicities.

"Malaysia is a country rich in ethnic and religious diversity, and it is our shared responsibility to safeguard this harmony. National unity can only be achieved if every individual practises the values of understanding, respect and acceptance of differences."

Digital Minister Gobind Singh Deo said in a statement that racist behaviour, discriminatory remarks and divisive rhetoric have no place in society.

He said such actions are not only hurtful but also undermine racial harmony.

"Incidents like the recent case involving a stall owner using derogatory terms against the Indian community must be dealt with swiftly. At the same time, I call on community and religious leaders as well as all Malaysians to actively promote inclusivity and mutual respect.

"We must work together to build a society where every individual is treated with dignity, regardless of race, ethnicity or religion," said Gobind, who is also DAP national deputy chairman.

PKR vice-president Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, who

is also natural resources and environmental sustainability minister, expressed regret over the incident.

He said in a statement that such actions do not reflect the values of humanity and unity embraced by Malaysians.

"We live in a multiracial, multireligious and multicultural society. Every individual deserves to be treated with respect and without discrimination. Using derogatory terms to describe any race is unacceptable, and our words reflect both personal and societal values.

"This incident does not represent any particular race. In most cases, only a small group of people engage in extremist or racist behaviour. We must not allow the actions of a few to jeopardise the harmony among communities." – Bernama

M'sia to maintain its policy of non-alignment: PM

► "We will support a rules-based multilateral system that ensures fairness, transparency and representation for all"

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's position is clear on remaining non-aligned, and will not be drawn into great power rivalries, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said Malaysia rejects economic coercion and unilateral actions that undermine regional stability.

"We support a rules-based multilateral system that ensures fairness, transparency and representation for all, particularly for the Global South," he said in his keynote address at the China Conference: Southeast Asia 2025 yesterday.

He added that Asean's major foreign policy thrust is the principle of centrality to ensure it remains fiercely independent and thus able to engage with all countries, including traditional partners in the West and the new emerging force, particularly China in the east together with other countries in Asia.

Anwar said Asean must move beyond traditional trade and investment figures and focus on a partnership that is transformational and future-oriented.

"We must lead. Our success depends on how

well we integrate new technologies, develop robust economic frameworks and secure a more equitable and sustainable future for all."

He said China has been Asean's most significant economic partner for years, and this relationship would continue to be a cornerstone of regional stability.

"However, as global economic dynamics evolve, our engagement must also adapt to new challenges and opportunities."

Anwar said the next phase of Asean-China economic cooperation must be driven by strategic technological collaboration, sustainable growth and human capital development.

"We must embrace and support the integration of artificial intelligence into regional supply chains, ensuring that Asean remains at the forefront of the digital economy."

He said expanding cooperation in renewable energy, green industries and sustainable infrastructure is vital to fostering long-term resilience and environmental responsibility.

"Equally important is the empowerment of

Asean's workforce, equipping our people with the necessary skills to navigate and thrive in an evolving digital landscape."

He added that Asean's connectivity with China must extend beyond enhancing trade efficiency as it must drive shared prosperity.

Meanwhile in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday, Anwar said Petronas has spent over RM600 million on various education and human capital development initiatives in Sarawak over the past 10 years.

He said 680,000 Sarawakians have benefitted from scholarships and training programmes for educators while 4,300 individuals have secured employment with Petronas, Bernama reported.

"It should be remembered that the significant revenue generated over the years has allowed us to establish Petronas as the country's primary financial resource from the early days of nation-building, contributing to economic growth and national development.

"All this is thanks to Sarawak, the Land of the Hornbills, and the strong cooperation between the state and federal governments. That is why we have opted to provide some adjustments and recognition to the role of Petros (Petroleum Sarawak Berhad) in driving Sarawak's economic growth."

He was speaking during the prime minister's information session on petroleum activities in Sarawak involving Petronas and Petros.

M'sia to highlight issue of job scam rings as Asean chair

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia, as this year's Asean chair, will continue to highlight the issue of job scam syndicates operating across Southeast Asia, with the aim of combating the problem, said Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Mohamad Alamin.

He said the matter was recently discussed at the Asean Foreign Ministers' Retreat in Langkawi.

He added that cooperation among Asean countries to tackle the issue would also be strengthened through Aseanapol, the Asean police organisation.

"This issue will remain a key focus throughout Malaysia's Asean chairmanship. It will be discussed, and we will seek the best possible solutions to effectively combat job scams and fraud syndicates in the region.

"We know this issue has been raised previously in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia, and later in Vientiane, Laos. We will continue to bring it forward this year," he said in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

Mohamad was replying to a supplementary question from Datuk Mohd Isam Mohd Isa (BN-Tampin) on whether Malaysia, as Asean chair, would address the issue of job scam syndicates.

He cited Myanmar as one of the Asean nations that cooperated to combat job scam syndicates recently by rescuing over 320 foreign nationals, including Malaysians, who fell victim to such syndicates in that country.

"All these victims have been placed in Thailand through the National Referral Mechanism to verify their identities, assess their level of involvement and determine if any are our citizens.

"Once the process is complete, all victims will be repatriated to their respective countries." – Bernama

Boosting cooperation with Indonesia

JAKARTA: Malaysia and Indonesia are committed to strengthening bilateral relations by expanding cooperation at various levels, including government-to-government, business and community relations.

Malaysian Ambassador to Indonesia Datuk Syed Mohamad Hasrin Tengku Hussin said he had met Governor-elect Khofifah Indar Parawansa during a visit to Surabaya in East Java last week.

"We are committed to deepening cooperation at the provincial level, especially after Khofifah's appointment as governor."

Syed Mohamad Hasrin congratulated Khofifah on her victory in the 2024 gubernatorial election and expressed his determination to enhance cooperation between Malaysia and East Java.

He said Khofifah's appointment as East Java governor, scheduled for Feb 20, would be a significant milestone in enhancing bilateral cooperation. – Bernama



CORDIAL VISIT ... Youth and Sports Minister Hannah Yeoh with students during a National Sports Council event at the MySkills Foundation campus in Kalumpang, Hulu Selangor yesterday. – **BERNAMAPIC**

Schoolchildren in 11 states start new session

KUALA LUMPUR: Nearly five million children in 11 Group B states have returned to school for the new 2025/2026 academic year.

On Sunday, 632,268 in Kedah, Terengganu and Kelantan (Group A) began the new school session.

In Perak, Education Deputy Minister Wong Kah Woh said 329,344 from 1,105 schools, comprising 141,436 secondary students and 187,908 primary pupils, began the new academic year yesterday.

In Johor, State Education and Information Committee chairman Aznan Amin said 585,220 children from 909 primary and 285 secondary schools started the new session.

In Malacca, state education director Mahfudzah Mohamed Noor said 154,485 children including 87,266 pupils and 66,547 students from 318 schools, started the new academic year.

In Sabah, the education department deputy director-general for the school operations sector Zainal Abas said the 2025/2026 session involves 526,370 children and 43,763 teachers in 1,298 schools.

Meanwhile in Sarawak, students in five schools could not start the academic year due to floods and damaged facilities.

State education director Omar Mahli said the affected schools must carry out home learning for the students.

In Negeri Sembilan, 45,116 children comprising 7,582 preschoolers, 19,563 Year One pupils in mainstream schools, 279 Year One pupils in the Special Integration Education Programme, 17,352 Form One students in mainstream schools and 340 secondary special programme students started the new academic year.

In Pahang, 244,799 pupils and students returned to school, including 24,740 Year One pupils, 21,500 Form One students and 4,000 preschoolers.

In Perlis, 19,962 students and 26,982 pupils began the session yesterday at 30 secondary schools and 74 primary schools. — Bernama

'Follow guidelines on hot weather'

IPOH: School administrators nationwide must adhere to the Education Ministry guidelines in facing the monsoon transition phase next month, said Education Deputy Minister Wong Kah Woh.

He was referring to the "Guidelines for Educational Institutions During Hot Weather" dated April 28, 2023.

"Parents are also encouraged to provide sufficient drinking water for their children, while schools will ensure an adequate supply of drinking water for them.

"At the same time, the ministry, state education departments and schools must continuously monitor updates issued by the Meteorological Department, and take necessary action according to existing guidelines," he said after visiting Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina Chung Tack in Kampung Simee yesterday.

Department director-general Dr Mohd Hisham Mohd Anip said hot and dry weather would affect most areas, particularly in the northern peninsula from this month until May.

He added that the country is in the final phase of the northeast monsoon, which is expected to end by mid-March. — Bernama

Parents explore options to beat high education costs

■ BY KIRTINEE RAMESH
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PETALING JAYA: With the rising cost of early childhood education, some parents are looking for alternatives such as homeschooling or enrolling their children in more affordable kindergartens run by the Community Development Department.

Malaysia Association of Registered Early ChildCare and Development president Norsheila Abdullah said the rising cost of early education has placed significant pressure on parents and kindergarten operators.

"As kindergarten fees increase, concerns about accessibility and affordability continue to mount, prompting discussions on alternative solutions such as homeschooling and government intervention.

"Higher tuition fees often push families, especially those with lower incomes, to opt for less expensive alternatives that may not provide the same level of quality."

She said the trend is particularly

➤ Homeschooling and govt-run kindergartens popular alternatives due to benefits such as savings on expenses, spending quality time with child and control on learning programmes

concerning as children from disadvantaged backgrounds may miss out on crucial early learning experiences, leaving them less prepared for primary school.

Kindergarten operators are also facing rising operational costs, including the mandatory minimum wage of RM1,700 from this month.

Norsheila said many private kindergartens are forced to increase fees to cover expenses such as higher salaries, rental costs, maintenance and learning resources.

Universiti Teknologi Mara social and policy studies professor Dr Yarina Ahmad said while Malaysia began emphasising early childhood education in the 12th Malaysia Plan (2020-2025),

other countries had long prioritised it.

"Government-run early childhood education centres remain an option, but many parents are increasingly choosing private centres, which offer Islamic and international programmes.

"However, faced with financial constraints, many parents are also exploring homeschooling as a viable alternative," she said, adding that the availability of online learning platforms and digital curricula has made it more accessible with its flexibility and customisation.

For some parents, homeschooling is not just about cost but also being more involved

in their child's education.

My Online Schooling, a website affiliated with Cambridge International School, estimated that since 2026, some 5,000 Malaysian families have been homeschooling their children.

A parent, who requested to be known as Sharaniya said: "When we saw how much kindergarten fees were rising, we decided to explore alternatives and ultimately decided to homeschool our child. We also wanted to spend more time together during his early years and this option worked for us.

"Nonetheless, the cost was a factor. Beyond this, we felt that no one could nurture our child's learning better than us. Eventually, I decided to quit my job to focus fully on my son's education."

Sharaniya said her biggest challenge was balancing structured learning with play, but she follows a mix of educational programmes and hands-on activities such as painting and doing puzzles.

Norsheila added that despite its challenges, homeschooling also presents benefits.

"Parents, regardless of their educational background, can still provide quality early learning experiences at home.

"Play-based learning, encouraging curiosity, and modelling good behaviour significantly impact a child's development. Seeking reputable resources such as pedagogical guidance, local libraries and structured early childhood programmes can further support parents in fostering their children's growth."

However, some parents believe the benefits of structured early education outweigh the financial strain.

Nur Fatimah Ahmad, 34, a government nurse said enrolling her child in kindergarten was the best decision the family made.

"I chose a kindergarten run by the Community Development Department because it is located next to my workplace.

"We've had to cut some of our expenses, but seeing my child thrive, learn new things, make friends and develop confidence, makes it worthwhile."



BRIGHT MILESTONE ... Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil, Huawei Malaysia CEO Simon Sun (right) and Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission managing director Datuk Zulkarnain Mohd Yasin at a Digital Leadership Excellence event in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. — BERNAMAPIC

Settle salary, statutory contribution arrears: Minister

SERI KEMBANGAN: Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil has urged Petra News Sdn Bhd to hold discussions with its employees to immediately resolve the issue of arrears involving statutory contributions and delayed payment of salaries.

He said the publishers of news portals The Malaysian Insight, The Vibes and Getaran should resolve the issue immediately as the matter has been going on for a long time.

Fahmi said his ministry will also monitor the matter and wait for the

results of the meeting at the internal level, which is expected to be held soon.

"For the past few months, I have been in contact with the company because since last year, I have been getting information and trying to help journalists who are affected by the company's non-payment of salaries and so on.

"I am not sure why the meeting was not held before but I have stressed to the owner of the company to take care of (the issue) immediately," he said on Sunday after visiting the family of former

Utusan Melayu (M) Bhd journalist Muhammad Basir Abu Bakar, who passed away on Saturday.

On Saturday, 15 Petra News Sdn Bhd employees demanded immediate payment of Employees Provident Fund (EPF), Social Security Organisation (Socso) contributions and monthly tax deductions for the past year.

In a joint statement, they said a check with the EPF, Inland Revenue Board and Socso found that Petra News had failed to submit payments on behalf of employees and employers to the relevant

authorities, despite salary deductions being made for the statutory contributions.

Subsequently, the affected employees lodged a report at the Travers police station in Brickfields on Friday.

Meanwhile Fahmi said his ministry had also assisted in several other cases involving journalists who were affected by the decisions of their respective employers.

"There are also some other media agencies that have laid off their employees and I have helped them," he said. — Bernama



Fading of native languages imperils cultural identity

➤ Exposure to global English content overshadows local ones, leading to diminished fluency and confidence among youth: Academic

■ BY HARITH KAMAL
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PETALING JAYA: In a nation celebrated for its linguistic diversity, the voices of native languages seem to be fading, with experts warning that Malaysia's cultural identity is at risk as younger generations increasingly turn to English and leave Bahasa Melayu, Mandarin and Tamil behind.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Institute of Ethnic Studies senior research fellow Dr Ahmad Rizal Mohd Yusof said: "Younger Malaysians are influenced by global culture through social media and education, often prioritising English for communication (although many speak it poorly).

"In an interconnected world, English has become the *lingua franca* for professional and personal advancement. However, this comes at the cost to native languages, which are increasingly marginalised."

He said the dominance of English in digital media aggravates the issue.

"Exposure to global English content, such as movies, music and social media,

overshadows local language content, reducing the appeal of native languages and leading to diminished fluency and confidence among young Malaysians."

Addressing the declining proficiency in Bahasa Melayu, Universiti Teknologi Mara Academy of Language Studies senior lecturer Dr Rozaimah Rashidin said the younger generation's lack of interest stems from shifting identities and a weakened sense of cultural pride.

"Language is the soul of a nation. Bahasa Melayu is not just the official language but the language that unites Malaysians of all ages, races and religions."

On Mandarin proficiency, Universiti Malaya Faculty of Languages and Linguistics senior lecturer Dr Yap Teng Teng said English language dominance in education and professional settings has led many young Malaysians to prioritise it.

"English is the main language used in public schools for math and science while Mandarin is not always given equal attention. In the workplace, especially in multinational companies, English is the preferred language for career advancement."

He said while many speak Mandarin at home, some assume basic proficiency is sufficient and do not pursue advanced learning.

"Ironically, non-native speakers are increasingly learning Mandarin for business purposes while younger native speakers may not see the need to refine their skills."

"There is a need for more impactful cultural events, teacher training and parental involvement to promote Mandarin proficiency."

He said businesses could play a role by

providing language training opportunities and highlighting Mandarin's growing importance in commerce and regional economic partnerships.

Universiti Malaya Department of Indian Studies senior lecturer Dr Mohana Dass Ramasamy highlighted the declining proficiency in Tamil among Malaysian youth.

"Many Tamil families prioritise English and Bahasa Melayu for professional advancement and social integration, relegating Tamil to a secondary position."

He said Tamil's limited use in professional and academic settings reduces opportunities for younger generations to develop their skills.

"While Tamil is still spoken at home and at community gatherings, its absence in broader contexts diminishes its importance. Tamil is the world's oldest language and more than just a communication tool. It is a vessel for cultural wisdom, literature and traditions."

"Losing connection with the language means losing access to a rich heritage that has shaped Tamil identity for generations."

All three experts agreed that there is a need to preserve and promote native languages while embracing English for global competitiveness.

Ahmad Rizal said achieving such a balance is essential for maintaining cultural identity and heritage.

"The consequences of neglecting native languages include a loss of cultural identity, local knowledge and national pride. Malaysia's strength lies in its diversity. By cherishing our native languages, we not only honour our past but also strengthen our future."

Johor pilot school programme to be assessed in 6 months

JOHOR BAHRU: The implementation of the Bangsa Johor pilot school programme in four schools will be evaluated in six months to a year.

State Education and Information Committee chairman Aznan Tamin said the monitoring of the students involved would be carried out every month to ensure smooth and effective implementation.

"I am confident and believe that the teachers are committed to helping and mobilising the programme, in terms of making sure that monitoring is carried out every month."

"It does not only involve monitoring at the state Education Department level, but also my office. This is to ensure the programme is implemented well in the selected schools," he said after visiting Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK) Seri Kota Puteri 4 yesterday.

He said the implementation of the programme officially began yesterday, involving 2,574 students from Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (SMK) Tasek Utara, SMK Seri Kota Puteri 2 Masai, SK Tasek Utara Johor Bahru and SK Seri Kota Puteri 4.

"The first phase of learning will proceed as usual and will not interfere with the syllabus of the Education Ministry as some learning methods will be added."

"Only for this phase, an engagement session with parents will be held (on Feb 20) so that they understand what the state government's intentions are regarding the programme."

He said about 90 teachers from the schools involved will be sent to undergo training at the National Institute of Education, Singapore in April, Bernama reported.

He also said the programme places emphasis on mastering of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and English, with students required to complete at least 112 hours of classes in STEM subjects each year compared with at least 64 hours in other schools.

According to him, the state government's efforts to implement the programme are in line with the directive of Johor Regent Tunku Mahkota Ismail to improve the quality, system and facilities of education in the state.

Sarawak eyes further rise in revenue this year

KUCHING: Sarawak's revenue this year is expected to surpass last year's figures, enabling the state government to continue improving infrastructure and implementing beneficial programmes for its people.

Last year, the state recorded its highest revenue to date: RM14.2 billion.

Without specifying the exact revenue projection, Sarawak Premier Tan Sri Abang Johari Abang Openg said the state has been recognised by the World Bank and the auditor-general for its sound financial management.

"We have a clean certificate in managing our finances. I think our revenue this year may increase further," he said during his winding-up speech at the Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu annual general assembly on Sunday.

Abang Johari, who is also party president, said the increased revenue would be used to build more new infrastructure in Sarawak and improve healthcare facilities, which would not only benefit the people but also serve as a source of income generation.

"Medical tourists, people coming to our state for treatment, have increased. More hospitals will be developed through private sector investments. This is a sign that investors see Sarawak's potential to become a healthcare hub."

He reiterated that Sarawak would continue to assert its rights under the Malaysia Agreement 1963 within the framework of existing laws, particularly the Federal Constitution, while taking into account both national and state interests, Bernama reported.

He noted that party members now have a stronger understanding of Sarawak's rights within the federation based on the Agreement, making them more vocal in expressing their aspirations.



Abang Johari (second from right) and party leaders chanting the party slogan on the last day of its general assembly at Borneo Convention Centre Kuching on Sunday. — **BERNAMAPIC**

"We do not want conflict. We simply follow what is stated in the law," he said, referring to Sarawak's rights in managing its gas resources and continental shelf.

On the party's election results that were announced on Saturday, he said candidates who were not elected to the party's

supreme council would still be involved in the party's ongoing efforts.

"The fact that there are winners and losers means democracy is functioning in the party. But we are all together in this struggle, including those who lost. They will have roles and responsibilities to contribute to the party."

Malay reserve land nearly 5m hectares

KUALA LUMPUR: The total area of Malay reserve land (MRL) in Peninsular Malaysia reached 4,955,870.89ha as of June 30 last year, said Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Deputy Minister Datuk Seri Huang Tiong Sii.

He said the area has increased by 2,533,150.8ha compared with the earliest recorded data by the Office of the Federal Lands and Mines Department director-general in 1947, which stood at 2,422,720ha.

However, this figure does not include Penang and Malacca as they do not have MRL enactments, Bernama reported.

"Matters related to MRL fall under state jurisdiction. MRL-related issues are continuously discussed in National Land Council meetings at the federal level, which serve as a platform for negotiations on land matters between the federal and state governments," he said in Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

He said the Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Ministry acts as the coordinator for MRL data collection.

He added that this data would be used by the ministry to establish a centralised MRL database for future development reference.

M'sians recount ordeals at Myanmar scam centres

➤ Punishments for failing assignments include electric shocks, beatings and being locked up naked

TAK (THAILAND): "I was shocked with electricity more than 10 times and tortured almost every week during my captivity in their so-called office," recounted one of the Malaysians rescued from job scam syndicates in Myanmar.

The 45-year-old man from Johor, who wished to be known only as Teo, revealed that he had been tricked into believing he would be offered a translation job in Thailand with a salary of RM7,000 in August 2023.

Recounting his 16-month ordeal, he explained that he was drawn to a Facebook advertisement for a translator position in Bangkok with a trading company, which claimed he would only need to stay in Thailand for a week.

"I contacted a person named Alex from the advertisement, who assured me that someone would pick me up from the airport as soon as I arrived in Bangkok.

"But I started to suspect something was wrong when I was taken on a six-hour journey from Bangkok's airport, changing vehicles

three times, before arriving at Mae Sot near a river. Later, I was forced to cross into Myanmar and was trained to become a scammer."

Speaking at Fort Vachiraprasit military camp in Tak Province, northern Thailand, on Sunday, Teo described gruelling working conditions, where he had to work 14 hours a day sorting about 10,000 phone numbers for the syndicate, Bernama reported.

He received only a living allowance of 5,000 baht (RM650) for the first three months, while those who attempted to escape faced severe punishment.

"Anyone who failed to complete the assigned tasks would be punished by the supervisors, including being given electric shocks, beaten or confined naked in a dark room."

Another Malaysian, identified as Mohd Shahdan, 29, from Kuala Lumpur, recalled being assigned to search for phone numbers listed on social media.

"After obtaining phone numbers, I had to chat with at least 70 individuals daily from 10am until 3am before I was allowed to sleep.

"They gave me electric shocks and caned me when I failed to meet the target of obtaining details from potential scam victims," he recounted while showing his scars and bruised arms.

Shahdan, who had a calf amputated before falling victim to the job scam and relies on crutches, disclosed that workers were only

allowed to use mobile phones for 30 minutes once a month, with conversations strictly monitored by supervisors.

Meanwhile, one of the youngest Malaysians rescued, 19-year-old Ong from Penang, described how she was deceived into becoming a scammer through the sweet talk of a man who claimed to be Taiwanese.

She met him on social media, where he lured her with the promise of a well-paying job in Thailand.

However, she was later taken to Myanmar despite not having any travel documents.

"I arrived in Myanmar in October 2023. Like many others, we were forced to work according to their demands but were only provided with a place to sleep and food to eat.

"We would be punished with caning, forced to do push-ups or confined in a dark room for failing to meet the targets set by the scam company."

Teo, Shahdan and Ong were among the 15 Malaysians out of a total of 261 foreign victims rescued by Myanmar authorities from scam compounds in Myawaddy and transferred to Thailand for deportation last Wednesday.

On Sunday, the Malaysian Embassy in Thailand conducted a consular visit to the 15 Malaysians, aged 19 to 44, including three women who were among those rescued.

The embassy is working closely with Thai authorities to facilitate their travel documentation process to ensure their safe repatriation.

'No SOP breach in tourist's detention'

GEORGE TOWN: Penang police have clarified that no breach of standard operating procedures (SOP) occurred during the detention and remand of a British tourist arrested for vandalising a parking barrier in Batu Ferringhi.

Penang police chief Datuk Hamzah Ahmad confirmed that the 47-year-old man was held at the Bayan Baru centralised lockup, where all detainees are closely monitored by on-duty personnel.

"On Dec 8, a parking technician lodged a police report after a man damaged a parking barrier in Batu Ferringhi. The suspect broke the barrier with his hands after being unable to exit the area, and the incident was captured on CCTV.

"Following the report, police arrested the British national at 3pm on Dec 9. He was remanded for four days before being charged at the George Town Magistrates' Court on Dec 12 under Section 427 of the Penal Code."

The *Wales Online* portal reported on Feb 11 that British citizen Ahmed Hadi claimed he was "trapped" in Malaysia after the court seized his passport as part of his bail conditions for damaging the parking barrier.

He also alleged that eight weeks after the incident, his passport was still being withheld.

The article quoted him describing Malaysia as a "hell hole with no human rights" and claimed that 50 detainees shared a single toilet in the lockup.

Hamzah clarified that the tourist had been granted bail of RM12,000 with three local guarantors and that his passport was submitted to the court pending resolution of the case. - Bernama

Authorities foil smuggling of ornamental plants

KOTA BHARU: The Southeast Brigade of the General Operations Force (GOF) has foiled attempts to smuggle ornamental plants worth over RM4.3 million after detaining two lorries in separate raids in Rantau Panjang, Pasir Mas, last Saturday.

GOF Southeast Brigade commander Datuk Nik Ros Azhan Nik Ab Hamid confirmed that the first seizure took place when a 41-year-old man, believed to be transporting the plants to Malacca, was apprehended in Kampung Kedap, Rantau Panjang.

"An inspection uncovered more than 4,700 Puding plants, 800 Masjutik Batik plants, 1,000 Masjutik Hijau plants, 1,000 Thong Urai plants, 500 Olandor plants and 1,200 Sandpaper plants, with the total seizure, including a lorry, valued at RM1.8 million."

In a separate operation, GOF intercepted a 33-year-old man near Gual Tinggi, suspected of transporting plants to Jerantut, Pahang.

The haul included over 5,000 Keruing saplings, with an estimated total value, including a lorry, of RM2.5 million. - Bernama



Shahrum (right) showing the processed bags of e-waste at the factory. - BERNAMAPIC

RM1.3 billion illegal e-waste operation busted

SUNGAI SIPUT: The Ulu Kinta General Operations Force (GOF) has dismantled an illegal electronic waste (e-waste) processing operation, seizing assets worth RM1.3 billion, including machinery, in a raid on a factory in Jalan Sungai Siput-Kuala Kangsar.

Northern Brigade Commander SAC Shahrum Hashim described the operation, conducted on Saturday in collaboration with the Perak Department of Environment (DOE) under *Op Hazard*, as the largest seizure in five years.

"The raid covered 4.8ha following a month-long drone surveillance of the premises, which had been operating illegally for the past nine months.

"The seizure involved over 1,000 jumbo bags, each weighing one metric tonne, with an estimated total value of RM1.6 million. The bags contained various e-waste materials, including

copper, tin and aluminium."

Shahrum confirmed that 27 individuals were detained, comprising two locals, 14 Chinese nationals, 10 Myanmar nationals and a two-year-old child believed to be the offspring of a Myanmar worker.

"Those detained are aged between two and 60, while the two locals are believed to be the factory owner and supervisor.

"All foreign workers have been handed over to the Immigration Department for further action."

The e-waste was suspected to have been imported from Bolivia, Thailand, Oman, India and the US for processing at the factory before being re-exported for various uses.

Meanwhile, in Pahang, an illegal e-waste and scheduled waste processing syndicate - valued at RM410 million - was dismantled in raids on two separate factories in Pekan and Gebeng on

Saturday, Bernama reported.

The Southeast Brigade of the GOF revealed that investigations into the two facilities indicated that the materials had been imported from China for processing and resale to foreign markets.

"Dozens of sacks containing various types of e-waste and scheduled waste, such as black powder containing copper and nickel, over 670 tonnes of waste containing silver - both processed and unprocessed - mixed scheduled items, various machines and equipment for waste processing were found in the factory without valid documents from the DOE.

"The value of the seized goods is about RM410 million. The case is being investigated under the Environmental Quality Act 1974 and the National Land Code Act 828. The seized goods have been handed over to Kuantan DOE and the Pahang state enforcement unit for further action."

Police save driver before car bursts into flames

SHAH ALAM: The swift action of police officers involved in a crash between a car and a police truck in Jalan Bukit Cherakah, Klang, early yesterday saved the car driver from a fiery death.

Selangor Fire and Rescue Department assistant director of operations Ahmad Mukhlis Mukhtar confirmed that four individuals, including three police officers, were involved in the incident.

Emergency services received information about the crash at 6.40am and deployed six firefighters from the Kapar Fire and Rescue Station to the scene.

"The operations commander reported that the accident was believed to have resulted from a collision between the two vehicles.

"At the time of the incident, police officers rescued the driver, who was conscious, by breaking the window and pulling him out before the car was completely engulfed in flames," he said.

Ahmad Mukhlis reported that the 56-year-old car driver suffered a broken leg, while the police truck driver sustained a broken arm. - Bernama

Serunding maker achieves inroads regionally

TUMPAT: Food manufacturer Suzara Serunding has been established in Kelantan for over five decades, but only recently managed to expand its reach in Southeast Asia.

Its marketing manager Nor Fatin Nabila Sukri said the company is grateful for the opportunity to showcase its *serunding* (meat floss) at the Asean Tourism Forum in Johor Bahru last month.

"Alhamdulillah, all 50kg of *serunding* we brought were sold out. In fact, a delegate from Brunei contacted me to place an order," she said.

The forum, held in conjunction with Malaysia's Asean Chairmanship, focused on fostering sustainable, resilient and inclusive tourism in Southeast Asia.

Nor Fatin said the company sells four types of *serunding* – local beef (RM66 per kg), imported beef (RM56 per kg), chicken (RM57 per kg) and fish (RM45 per kg).

"The local beef *serunding* is my customers' favourite, but with Ramadan and Aidilfitri approaching, the demand for fish *serunding* has increased. Many customers use it as filling for *poppia simpul* (love knot spring rolls) and mini curry puffs.

"Sales usually surge up to six times during the festive season," she said, adding that Suzara also produces *dodol* (a toffee-like traditional sweet) and another sweet delicacy known as *gelembung buaya*.

Nor Fatin said the ingredients for the *serunding* are sourced from the Rural Transformation Centre in Tunjong, Kota Bharu, before they are processed in a factory at Kampung Laut in Tumpat, adding that a sales outlet near the factory opened recently, which sells more than 50 products from local entrepreneurs, such as *kuih kapit*, *kerepek* and *poppia gulung*. – Bernama

Luxury boarding for cats

► Five-star service includes individual CCTV access, air-conditioning, play area and inhouse feline specialists

■ BY T.C. KHOR
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

SEBERANG PERAI: A growing number of cat owners in Penang are turning to luxury services to ensure their pets are well taken care of when they are away.

Since Ufi's Premium Cat Hotel opened its doors in July 2022,

Nur Athirah Ahmad Nazri Rizal has elevated the concept of feline care to impressive levels.

Established at a cost of RM200,000 and located in Kepala Batas, the hotel is a cut above other cat boarding facilities. Apart from herself, there are two "cat specialists" to attend to the pets, CCTV monitoring, rooms equipped with a "toilet," contraptions for play and a

sleeping area. Prices for a night's stay are affordable, ranging from RM38 for an economy capsule to RM110 for a larger cubicle.

The largest enclosure can hold up to eight cats. There are a total of 60 boarding spaces, with four options.

Nur Athirah, 24, also known as Tiera, formed the idea of premium cat hotel when she could not find one that suited her needs.

"I used to travel and I needed a place for my beloved best friend, Ufi," she said of her seven-year-old grey British Shorthair, which the hotel is named after.

She said her hotel offers individual CCTV access for owners to view their

cats on their phones, in addition to 24-hour air-conditioning.

"We also installed 16 CCTV cameras for around-the-clock surveillance and security so that owners can have peace of mind," she said, adding that since 2022, more than a thousand cats have been boarded at the hotel.

Nur Athirah said it gets very busy during festive seasons, and owners need to book a month in advance just to secure a space.

"Cat owners may pack their cats' favourite food or allow us to feed them our high-quality kibble. The cats are fed three times a day and we also use filtered water for the pets."

She added that other services such as grooming and emergency visits to the veterinarian are available.

"Our specialists are trained and hold certifications in cat handling and grooming," she said, adding that the hotel does not accept cats that have not been vaccinated.

"The cats are also not allowed to play with other boarders."

Nur Athirah said every cat gets 30 minutes of playtime and while the duration depends on the number of cats present, it remains an integral part of the service so that the cats remain active.

"We let the cats play in a safe and enclosed environment that is equipped with toys and contraptions," she said, adding that new toys are introduced regularly.

The Universiti Teknologi Mara marketing degree student said she has ambitions to expand the brand nationwide.

"I receive mostly positive feedback and have many regular clients. Whenever I get suggestions to improve, I will try to meet their expectations."

The hotel operates daily from 9am to 7pm except on Tuesdays and Fridays, when it operates from 9am to 5pm.

Ufi's Premium Cat Hotel is situated at 66, First Floor, Jalan Dagangan 2, Pusat Bandar Bertam Perdana, 13200 Kepala Batas, Penang and can be contacted at 012-273 0040.



Ufi's Premium Cat Hotel has 16 CCTV cameras for around-the-clock surveillance and security with 24-hour air-conditioning. – MASRY CHE ANI/THE SUN

EDUCATION

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S'pore opposition leader fined for lying to parliament

➤ But Workers Party sec-gen allowed to contest in polls

SINGAPORE: Opposition leader Pritam Singh (pic) was fined yesterday for lying to parliament while helping a fellow party member cover up a false witness account, but narrowly avoided being barred from contesting national elections. Pritam, 48, secretary-general of the Workers' Party, was found guilty on two counts of lying to a parliamentary committee investigating a fellow MP.

The conviction comes as the Southeast Asian nation's struggling political opposition is seeking to challenge the overwhelming dominance of the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) in elections expected within months.

The PAP has ruled the wealthy city-state since 1959.

District court judge Luke Tan said that contrary to what Pritam told the committee, he had not done enough to get rookie MP Raeesah Khan to admit to her lie in parliament.

The judge also gave credence to Raeesah's testimony that Pritam had told her during a meeting to "take the lie to the grave".

Pritam told reporters outside court that based on "advice I have and that I've been given,

I will be running for the general elections".

"I have been advised that the law is quite clear," he said, adding he understood the elections department would release a statement later.

"It's not going to be an easy election ... we'll have to fight hard, and that's what we will do."

Pritam, who said he would appeal the court's decision, was fined S\$7,000 (RM23,136) for each charge.

"The path of choosing opposition politics is not for the faint-hearted," Pritam said.

Under the constitution, a person fined a minimum of S\$10,000 or jailed for at least one year, is disqualified from running for election or holding a parliamentary seat for five years.

"He will not be disqualified as the threshold of S\$10,000 fine per charge is not crossed. You can't stack up the fines," said Eugene Tan, who teaches constitutional law at Singapore Management University.

Raeesah, who resigned from the legislature following the scandal, had admitted to making up a story she told in parliament about a female rape victim she accompanied to make a police report.

The former MP confessed that she lied when



telling parliament in 2021 that a police officer supposedly made "insensitive comments" about the way the alleged victim was dressed and that she had drunk alcohol.

But Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam had said there was no record in the police files of such an incident and Raeesah eventually admitted to lying.

Pritam was then accused of lying to the parliamentary committee investigating Raeesah.

He allegedly told the committee that he was not aware that Raeesah had made up the story about the rape victim, in an apparent attempt to downplay his responsibility as party leader, court documents said.

But the judge tore through Pritam's credibility as a witness.

In the 2020 general elections, the PAP won 83 of the 93 seats at stake to retain its dominance.

The Workers' Party captured 10 seats, four more than previously held, in its strongest performance since independence in 1965.

Its leaders have said they hope to further increase the party's numbers in parliament in the upcoming elections, which will be new premier Lawrence Wong's first major political test. - AFP

Jumbo orphanage marks golden jubilee

PINNAWALA: Sri Lanka's main elephant orphanage marked its 50th anniversary on Sunday with a fruit feast for the 68 jumbos at the showpiece centre, reputedly the world's first care home for destitute pachyderms.

The Pinnewala Elephant Orphanage lavished pineapples, bananas, melons and cucumbers on its residents to celebrate the anniversary of their home, which is a major tourist attraction.

A few officials and tourists invited to the low-key celebration were served milk rice and traditional sweets while four generations of elephants born in captivity frolicked in the nearby Maha Oya river.

"The first birth at this orphanage was in 1984, and since then, there have been a total of 76," said chief curator Sanjaya Ratnayake, as the elephants returned from their daily river bath.

"This has been a successful breeding programme, and today we have four generations of elephants here, with the youngest 18 months old and the oldest 70 years," he said.

The orphanage recorded its first twin birth in August 2021 - a rarity among Asian elephants -



Visitors feeding the elephants at the orphanage. - AFP/PIIC

and both calves are doing well.

The home requires 14,500kg of coconut and palm tree leaves, along with other foliage, to satisfy the elephants' voracious appetites.

It also buys tonnes of fruit and milk for the younger calves, who are adored by visitors to the

orphanage, located 90km east of Colombo.

It is also a major revenue generator for the state, earning millions of dollars a year in entrance fees. Visitors can watch the elephants from a distance or get close and help scrub them during bath time. - AFP.

Dirty money fuelling Myanmar conflict, says Thaksin

KUALA LUMPUR: Former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra has revealed that illicit funds generated from scam centres along the Thai-Myanmar border, as well as in parts of Cambodia and Laos, are fuelling Myanmar's civil conflict.

Speaking to Bernama chairman Datuk Seri Wong Chun Wai in Bangkok recently, Thaksin described these scam networks as a source of "dirty money".

"It is this dirty money that is financing the fighting," he said, highlighting the complexities of the civil war.

The 75-year-old former prime minister said Asean countries are concerned about the gangs running transnational crime syndicates in the region.

To crack down on online scams targeting victims worldwide, Thailand has cut electricity, internet and fuel supplies to five border towns in Myanmar from Feb 5.

Thaksin said although the locals staying in such areas would be affected by disruptions it had to be done "as Thailand wants the local people to pressure these scam gangs to leave the place".

On Feb 13, the *Bangkok Post* reported that Chinese businesses had deserted Payathonzu, a Myanmar border town next to Kanchanaburi province in Thailand after power supplies were stopped.

The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army which controls the area, reportedly ordered illicit businesses to leave by Feb 28. The disconnection

of utility services from Thailand affected over 50,000 people in Payathonzu, the newspaper said.

Thaksin's daughter, Paetongtarn, the country's prime minister said Thailand is willing to work with other countries to put an end to scams, gambling fraud and other illicit activities.

She directed relevant agencies, including the Foreign Ministry, Interior Ministry, and Digital Economy and Society Ministry, along with security authorities, to expedite efforts in cracking down on transnational crimes and online scams.

Thai spokesperson Jirayu Houngsub said the relevant agencies and authorities were ordered to liaise with Chinese authorities to crack down on the call-centre gangs. - Bernama

No plan to remove Bank Indonesia governor, says official

JAKARTA: Some members of Indonesia's parliament plan to propose the president remove the central bank governor because they think he was not properly backing the government's policy, investigative magazine *Tempo* reported.

Earlier this month, parliament passed new rules for the evaluation and dismissal of public officials who are appointed by the legislature, covering judges in top courts and leaders of institutions such as the police, military and anti-corruption commission.

Deputy Speaker Sufmi Dasco Ahmad, who is also a senior member of President Prabowo Subianto's party, said there was no plan to remove the Bank Indonesia (BI) governor.

Tempo reported the new regulation would be used by some members to propose to the president that he remove Bank Indonesia Governor Perry Warjiyo, citing several members of Prabowo's coalition and a close aide, none of whom were named.

"Perry (Warjiyo) was considered to be not cooperative regarding 'burden sharing', or cooperating with the government to handle economic problems," *Tempo* wrote, without identifying a policy that the governor was said to be not supporting.

Warjiyo did not immediately respond to requests for comment. A spokesperson for the president said he has no information about such a plan.

Other lawmakers in the ruling coalition contacted by Reuters also did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

Prabowo has a commanding majority in parliament.

Warjiyo has been BI governor since 2018. He was re-appointed in 2023 and his term is due to run until 2028. He was nominated by Prabowo's predecessor, Joko Widodo, and gained parliamentary approval for the job without opposition. - Reuters

Mauritius former prime minister freed on bail

PORT LOUIS: A court here has released former prime minister Pravind Jugnauth on bail following his arrest on charges of money laundering, a magistrate said.

Jugnauth was arrested on Sunday after detectives from the Financial Crimes Commission searched his home, among other locations, to find and seize 114 million Mauritius rupees (RM11 million).

"He (Jugnauth) shall not interfere directly or indirectly with any witness or potential witness," said Rishan Chineah, the magistrate at the bail and remand court in the capital, Port Louis.

The magistrate also barred Jugnauth from communicating about the case with anyone, except for investigation authorities or the court itself, and ordered him to appear yesterday to complete the bail process.

Jugnauth's lawyer, Raouf Gulbul, told reporters his client denied the charges.

Jugnauth was provisionally charged with money laundering, the director of public prosecution told the court in a charge sheet.

In November, Mauritius' new Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam announced an audit of public finances days after questioning the accuracy of some government data compiled by the previous administration.

Last month, the country's former central bank governor was detained and released on bail after being charged with conspiracy to commit fraud.

An Indian Ocean archipelago, Mauritius is an offshore financial centre that markets itself as a link between Africa and Asia. - Reuters



Trump appeals to Supreme Court to fire watchdog head

► Case offers preview on how judiciary views actions to remake federal govt

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump's administration has asked the US Supreme Court to intervene in its bid to fire the head of an independent US agency that protects government whistleblowers, bringing its first legal battle involving Trump's actions to the nation's highest judicial body since he took office in January.

The Justice Department asked the court to immediately lift a federal judge's Feb 12 order that temporarily blocked Trump's removal of Hampton Dellinger as the head of the Office of Special Counsel while litigation continues in the dispute, according to a copy of the filing reviewed by Reuters. The case has not yet been docketed by the court.

The case could offer a preview of how the Supreme Court will view Trump's aggressive moves to remake the federal government, including by removing heads of independent

agencies. The court has a 6-3 conservative majority and includes three members appointed by Trump during his first term in office.

The judge's action blocking the termination is an "unprecedented assault on the separation of powers", Acting Solicitor General Sarah Harris said in the filing.

"This court should not allow lower courts to seize executive power by dictating to the president how long he must continue employing an agency head against his will," Harris wrote.

Appointed by former president Joe Biden, Dellinger's five-year term was set to expire in 2029. He sued after receiving an email on Feb 7 informing him that Trump had fired him from the watchdog role, "effective immediately".

Dellinger's lawsuit said Trump exceeded his power in purporting to fire him, given that federal law permits removal only for "inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office".

The Special Counsel's "ability to protect the civil service and investigate alleged misconduct is needed now more than ever", Dellinger's lawsuit said.

"Over the preceding three weeks, an unprecedented number of federal employees with civil service protections have been terminated without cause."

US District Judge Amy Berman Jackson in Washington, DC issued a temporary restraining order on Feb 12, restoring Dellinger to his position pending a further, preliminary order.

Jackson said Dellinger was likely to prevail in the suit given that the effort to fire him without identifying any cause "plainly contravenes" the Special Counsel's job protections under federal law.

"This language expresses Congress's clear intent to ensure the independence of the Special Counsel and insulate his work from being buffeted by the winds of political change," Jackson wrote in the order.

The District of Columbia US Circuit Court of Appeals threw out the administration's appeal in a 2-1 decision on Saturday, saying it was premature, given that Jackson's order was only temporary.

The Special Counsel Office allows whistleblowers to make disclosures about misconduct in federal agencies and probes complaints of retaliation. - Reuters

DeepSeek removed from S. Korea stores

SEOUL: Chinese AI app DeepSeek will not be available to download in South Korea pending a review of its handling of user data, Seoul authorities said yesterday.

DeepSeek's R1 chatbot stunned investors and industry insiders with its ability to match the functions of its Western competitors at a fraction of the cost.

But a number of countries have questioned DeepSeek's storage of user data, which the firm says is collected in "secure servers located in the People's Republic of China".

Seoul's Personal Information Protection Commission said yesterday DeepSeek would no longer be available for download until a review of its personal data collection practices was carried out.

The Chinese AI firm has "acknowledged that considerations for domestic privacy laws were somewhat lacking", the data protection agency said.

It assessed that bringing the app into line with local privacy laws "would inevitably take a significant amount of time", the agency added.

"To prevent further concerns from spreading, the commission recommended that DeepSeek temporarily suspend its service while making the necessary improvements," it said.

DeepSeek has "accepted" that proposal.

The app was removed from local app stores on Saturday and remains unavailable.

The AI chatbot is still in use for those who have already downloaded the app.

Seoul's data protection agency said it "strongly advised" people to "use the service with caution until the final results are announced".

That included "refraining from entering personal information into the DeepSeek input field", it said.

Analyst Youm Heung-youl said the firm was yet to lay out a privacy policy "specifically tailored" for users in South Korea.

"It has on the other hand disclosed a privacy policy for the EU and certain other countries, stating that it complies with the domestic laws of those nations," said Youm, a data security professor at Soonchunhyang University. - AFP

Nuclear security office sacks some 50 staff

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump and his adviser Elon Musk purged fewer than 50 workers from the agency that maintains the country's nuclear weapons arsenal, the Department of Energy said on Sunday, after far wider layoffs there were suddenly rescinded, causing chaos among staff.

On Friday, sources said 325 workers had been sent notice that they had been laid off from the National Nuclear Security Administration, part of the department which employs about 2,000 people and works around the world to secure dangerous nuclear materials, including in Ukraine as Russia's war continues.

Later that day, an uncertain number of those layoffs were rescinded, causing chaos in NNSA offices in Washington and other places in the country, as many workers were unsure of their employment, the sources said.

On Sunday, a department spokesperson said less than 50 were dismissed.

"These staff members were probationary employees and held primarily administrative and clerical roles," the spokesperson said.

NNSA will continue all of its protection of national security, the development and management of atomic weapons and non-proliferation work, the spokesperson said.

The NNSA cuts are part of a broader purge across the federal government as Trump and Musk cut thousands of workers at the departments of interior, energy, veterans affairs, agriculture, and health and Human Services.

Democratic lawmakers blasted the layoffs at NNSA, calling them "shocking". - Reuters



KEEPING HERITAGE ALIVE ... Artists performing during the Chinese Lantern Festival in Santiago, Chile, on Saturday. The Tianfu Festival showcases illuminated structures, traditional performances, cultural exhibitions, interactive activities and Chinese cuisine. - AFP/PC

Groups slam plan to transfer criminals to Nauru

SYDNEY: Rights groups yesterday denounced an Australian plan to send three violent foreign criminals, including a murderer, to live on the tiny Pacific nation of Nauru.

Canberra said on Sunday it had paid an undisclosed sum to Nauru, population about 13,000, in return for it issuing 30-year visas to the trio, who lost their Australian visas due to criminal activity.

"There has to be consideration of the lawfulness of banishing people when they've been living as part of our community," said Jane Favero, deputy chief executive of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.

"It's a complete disregard of people's human rights."

Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke said the three would be held in immigration detention

until they are put on a flight to Nauru or a legal challenge is lodged.

"When somebody has come and treated Australia in a way that has shown appalling character their visas do get cancelled, and when their visas are cancelled they should leave," Burke told reporters.

"All three, though, are violent offenders. One is a murderer," he said.

Once in Nauru, they would live in individual dwellings with a shared kitchen space and be allowed to work and move freely, Burke added.

Authorities have not disclosed the identities, gender or nationalities of the trio, or said whether they had served sentences.

Nauru is one of the world's smallest countries with a mainland measuring just 20 sq km.

Phosphate mining once made Nauru one of the world's richest countries per capita, but that boon has long dried up, leaving much of the mainland a barren moonscape and its people facing high unemployment and health issues.

Australia's government has been searching for a way to deal with migrants who have no other country to go to when their visas are cancelled.

The High Court ruled in 2023 that indefinite detention was "unlawful" if deportation was not an option, leading to the release of 220 people in that situation, including the three now destined for Nauru.

Burke said any decision to transfer others to the Pacific island would depend on the Nauru government. - AFP

Pope Francis in hospital for fourth day

ROME: Pope Francis was in hospital for a fourth day yesterday, with the Vatican saying he was being treated for a respiratory tract infection and was in stable condition.

The 88-year-old pontiff had a peaceful night on Sunday, the Italian news agency ANSA reported. The Vatican had not yet provided an update on the pope's condition yesterday.

Francis, who has been suffering from bronchitis for more than a week, was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital on Friday.

His doctors have advised complete rest, and Francis was unable to deliver his regular weekly prayer on Sunday to pilgrims in St Peter's Square or lead a special mass for artists to mark the Catholic Church's Jubilee Year.

The Vatican on Sunday described his condition as "stable" and said his treatment was ongoing. It said earlier he would remain in hospital for as long as required.

While in hospital over the weekend, the pope continued his recent practice of making phone calls to speak with members of a Catholic parish in Gaza, Italian broadcaster Mediaset reported.

One of the parish members said Francis had called on both Friday and Saturday and was in "good humour" but sounded "a bit tired".

The Vatican has cancelled the pope's planned visit to Rome's famed Cinecitta film studios, scheduled for yesterday.

"Thank you for the affection, prayer and closeness with which you accompany me in these days," the pope wrote on X on Sunday. — Reuters

Demonstrators in Istanbul take part in a protest on Sunday against Trump's plan to resettle Palestinians. — REUTERS/PC



Iran blasts Netanyahu pledge to 'finish the job'

Threat breach of UN Charter, says Tehran

TEHRAN: Iran yesterday condemned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's call to "finish the job" against the Islamic republic as a breach of the UN Charter.

"Threatening others is both a gross violation of international law and the United Nations Charter," Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei told reporters, adding Israel "can't do a thing" against Iran.

On Sunday, Netanyahu told a Jerusalem news conference with visiting US Secretary of State Marco Rubio that Israel would "finish the job" against Iran with the support of the United States.

Netanyahu also said Israel had "dealt a mighty blow to Iran's terror axis" during the past 16 months.

Over that period, Israel has engaged in conflicts with Iran-backed groups, including Hamas in Gaza, Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi rebels.

These groups form part of what Iran describes as its "axis of resistance" — a network of regional groups aligned against Israel in solidarity with the Palestinians.

President Donald Trump, who returned to the White House in January, has reinstated a "maximum pressure" policy against Iran, mirroring his approach during his first term.

Under this policy, the United States unilaterally withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, accusing Tehran of pursuing nuclear weapons.

Iran has repeatedly denied these allegations, though it has scaled back its commitments under the agreement and increased uranium enrichment levels.

On Sunday, Rubio said Iran would never become a nuclear power, labelling the Islamic republic the "greatest" source of instability in the Middle East.

Baqaei said Iran's nuclear activities comply with the safeguards protocol of the UN nuclear agency and emphasised Tehran's commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Netanyahu and Rubio presented a united front on Sunday against their common enemies, threatening to "open the gates of hell" on Hamas.

"Hamas cannot continue as a military or a government force ... they must be eliminated," Rubio said of the group that fought Israel for more than 15 months in Gaza until a fragile ceasefire took effect on Jan 19.

Netanyahu said the two allies had a common strategy.

The comments came a day after Hamas freed three Israeli hostages in exchange for 369 Palestinian prisoners — the sixth such swap under the ceasefire deal, which the United States helped mediate along with Qatar and Egypt.

Netanyahu's comment echoed one made by Trump ahead of Saturday's swap. Trump had said "all hell" would break loose and that he would call for the truce deal's cancellation if the hostages weren't freed on Saturday.

"We discussed Trump's bold vision for Gaza's future and will work to ensure that vision becomes a reality," Netanyahu said.

The scheme that Trump outlined earlier this month while Netanyahu visited Washington lacked details, but he said it would entail moving Gazans to Jordan or Egypt.

Trump said Palestinians had "lived a miserable existence" in Gaza.

The international community, however, including Saudi Arabia and other Arab states, is largely in favour of a two-state solution, with a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on Sunday said establishment of a Palestinian state was "the only guarantee" of lasting Middle East peace. — AFP

BRIEFS

AIRSTRIKE KILLS ONE ON EVE OF LEBANON TRUCE DEADLINE

BEIRUT: Lebanese official media said one person was killed yesterday in an Israeli strike in the southern city of Sidon on the eve of a deadline in fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah. The raid came as Lebanese President Joseph Aoun urged sponsors of the deal to help pressure Israel to withdraw troops by today's deadline. "A body ... was retrieved from the car that was targeted by the Israeli strike" in the coastal city, "after firefighters extinguished the fire", the National News Agency said. The ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah has been in effect since Nov 27. A committee involving the United States, France, Lebanon, Israel and UN peacekeepers is tasked with ensuring any ceasefire violations are identified and dealt with. — AFP

RUSSIA FINES GOOGLE OVER 'SURRENDER' YOUTUBE VIDEO

MOSCOW: A Russian court has fined Alphabet's Google 3.8 million roubles (RM183,330) for hosting content on YouTube that included videos instructing Russian soldiers how to surrender, TASS news agency reported. Russia has for several years ordered foreign technology platforms to remove content it deems illegal, such as what it calls "fakes" about the war in Ukraine, issuing small but persistent fines when it sees failures to comply. Google did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment. President Vladimir Putin in December accused Google of being a tool used by the US government to score political points. — Reuters

SWEDEN NOT RULING OUT TROOPS FOR UKRAINE TRUCE

STOCKHOLM: Sweden said it would not rule out sending peacekeeping troops to Ukraine if necessary, after British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he was ready to deploy troops. "We must first negotiate a fair and sustainable peace that respects international law, that respects Ukraine and that ensures above all else that Russia can't just withdraw and regroup and attack Ukraine or another country within a few years. When we have such a peace, it will need to be maintained and for that our government is not ruling out anything," said Swedish Foreign Minister Maria Malmer Stenergard. — AFP

Putin sends top diplomat to meet Trump officials

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin has sent his foreign minister and a senior Kremlin adviser to meet US officials in Saudi Arabia to discuss restoring relations and possible talks to end the war in Ukraine, the Kremlin said yesterday.

President Donald Trump said after a call with Putin on Wednesday that they would begin talks aimed at ending the war in Ukraine immediately, and that they had also discussed the Middle East, energy, the US dollar and artificial intelligence.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio is due in Saudi Arabia to meet Russian officials alongside Mike Waltz, Trump's national security adviser, and Steve Witkoff, White House Middle East envoy.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Sergei Lavrov, Putin's foreign minister

since 2004, and Yuri Ushakov, a Kremlin foreign policy adviser, were flying to Riyadh at the request of Putin.

"They are expected to hold a meeting with their American counterparts, which will focus primarily on restoring the entire complex of Russian-American relations," Peskov said.

"It will also be devoted to the preparation of possible negotiations on the Ukrainian settlement and the organisation of a meeting between the two presidents."

Peskov declined to comment on a Reuters report that Kirill Dmitriyev, Russia's sovereign wealth fund chief, would also meet the US delegation.

He also declined to comment when asked if Putin and Trump would meet face-to-face in Saudi Arabia later this month.

In London, British Prime Minister Sir Keir

Starmer said he was ready to send British troops to Ukraine as part of any postwar peacekeeping force as he tried to show the US that European nations should have a role in the talks on ending the conflict.

Starmer said he had not taken the decision to consider putting British servicemen and women "in harm's way" lightly, but securing a lasting peace in Ukraine was essential to deter Putin from further aggression.

Rubio on Sunday said Ukraine and Europe would be part of any "real negotiations" to end Moscow's war, signalling that US talks with Russia this week were a chance to see how serious Putin is about peace.

The end of Russia's war with Ukraine "when it comes, cannot merely become a temporary pause before Putin attacks again", Starmer wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*. — Reuters



STARBUCKS®

COMMENT by Nahrizul Adib Kadri

True essence of love

I AM not going to go into arguments for or against the celebration or observance of Valentine's Day. However, this day often brings with it the usual fanfare come Feb 14 – red roses, heart-shaped chocolates and Instagram posts adorned with declarations of love.

There is nothing wrong with that but sometimes I wonder if we have reduced love to a fleeting sentiment, an aesthetic to display rather than an essence to embody. When in truth, love is not just a feeling – it is a verb.

It is the conscious choices we make every single day in how we treat those around us, whether they are our family, friends, colleagues or even strangers.

Viktor Frankl, in his 1946 book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, wrote, "Love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire." But this love he speaks of is not passive or indulgent; it is active and purposeful, a force that uplifts not just the one who is loved but also the one who loves.

Consider this: when you hold a door open for someone laden with grocery bags, that is love. When you set your phone aside to listen to your friend vent about their rough day, that is love. When you choose patience over anger, forgiveness over resentment and kindness over indifference, you are practising love.

Frankl's philosophy resonates deeply with me because it acknowledges love, not just as a lofty ideal but as a call to action.

He wrote of finding meaning in the smallest gestures, especially in the darkest moments. For him, love was not just a refuge but a duty – a way to honour someone's humanity, even in the toughest of times. I am reminded of this every time my wife wipes a stray crumb off my chin while we are eating, especially in public.

After my brain tumour surgery in 2016, the right side of my face was left partially paralysed, causing my mouth to droop slightly. Sometimes, without realising it, bits of food would slip down when I take a bite. And each



True love lies in its simplicity. It is not about grand gestures or elaborate displays but about the everyday actions that affirm someone's worth and make their world a little brighter. – AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THESUN

"Frankl wrote of finding meaning in the smallest gestures, especially in the darkest moments. For him, love was not a refuge but a duty – a way to honour someone's humanity."

time, without a word, she would reach over and brush it away – casually, instinctively. It is a small gesture, but in those quiet moments, it definitely speaks louder than any "I love you".

The beauty of love as a verb is that it goes beyond romantic relationships. For many of us, it is easy to focus solely on partners and spouses, but love, in its truest form, knows no boundaries.

It is just as present in a teacher who stays back after class to help a struggling student or in a colleague who quietly covers for you when you are having an off day.

Love is woven into the fabric of everyday life, waiting to be expressed through intentional, selfless actions.

We often underestimate the impact of these small gestures. Yet, think about the last time someone showed you an unexpected kindness – a stranger's smile, a friend's thoughtful text or a partner's simple "How was your day?" Such moments, though fleeting, have a way of lingering in our hearts far longer than we expect.

The next time you plan to show your love to that special someone, I invite you to look beyond the flowers

and gifts and instead focus on how you can embody love. Show it through words that uplift, deeds that heal or time that says, "I'm here for you."

Tell your spouse you appreciate them – not just for the big things but for the countless little things they do.

Reach out to an old friend you have not spoken to in a while. Thank the Bangladeshi waiter at your local *mamak* stall for wiping your table before taking your orders. Send that cute kitten video that sings the viral Rose and Bruno Mars' song.

The essence of love lies in its simplicity. It is not about grand gestures or elaborate displays but about the everyday actions that affirm someone's worth and make their world a little brighter.

As Frankl so eloquently put it, love is not something we merely aspire to; it is something we do.

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LETTERS
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Enforce harsher penalties to deter repeat offenders

EACH time the police arrest a lawbreaker, we often hear that the individual has a long history of past offences.

What is puzzling is why previous arrests and punishments have not been effective in steering these criminals onto a path of recovery and lawful behaviour.

This raises several questions. Were these criminals let off with a mere slap on the wrist? Are our laws and punishments not severe enough to deter repeat offenders? Or are these individuals simply hardened criminals beyond redemption?

Whether the suspect is arrested for drug trafficking, robbery, gangsterism, traffic offences or other crimes, news reports consistently highlight that the individual has multiple past run-ins with the law.

This pattern is concerning and points to a broader issue: repeat offenders seem to have little fear of facing consequences.

It is especially alarming to witness the increasingly audacious actions of criminals on the loose. Recent videos circulating on social media and in the news show a drug criminal turning the streets into a movie-like race track, a stunt that sends chills down the spine.

Similarly, commercial vehicle drivers, many of whom are booked for traffic violations, often have a string of past offences.

The same can be said for the infamous *mat rempits* – reckless riders who persist in dangerous stunts on the road despite numerous traffic operations. How many of them are repeat offenders?

Perhaps it is time for the Madani government to reconsider implementing tougher reforms to address the growing number of repeat lawbreakers.

Strengthening penalties and enforcement can help curb this escalating problem. Failing to address this issue will only continue to erode public confidence in the justice system.

J. D. Lovrenciar

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AI trends, challenges and the future

COMMENT

By Ts Dr Manivannan Rethinam

THE year 2025 marks a defining moment in the AI revolution as the technology transitions from an exclusive domain of deep-pocketed corporations to a force that is reshaping industries, economies and global power dynamics.

Once confined to high-cost proprietary models like OpenAI's GPT and Google's DeepMind, the AI landscape is now witnessing an unprecedented disruption driven by open-source innovation, cost-effective models and new challengers that are reshaping accessibility.

A standout example is DeepSeek, a model that has rapidly gained attention by delivering high-performance AI capabilities at a fraction of the cost of mainstream alternatives.

By leveraging low-tech hardware requirements and an open-source approach, DeepSeek has shattered the notion that cutting-edge AI development is reserved for industry giants.

This paradigm shift not only lowers the entry barrier for AI adoption but also offers new opportunities for startups, small businesses and developing nations to participate in AI innovation.

DeepSeek is not alone in this transformation. Other models like Mistral (France) and Llama (Meta) are also pushing the boundaries of customisable, transparent and democratised AI solutions.

Meanwhile, efficiency-driven models, such as Falcon (Technology Innovation Institute), are proving that AI can deliver high computational power with lower resource consumption.

The implications of this democratisation of AI extend far beyond technology. It challenges the dominance of traditional AI powerhouses, shifts the balance of AI governance and raises critical questions about the role of AI in economic development, ethical stewardship and international competition.

The focus is no longer solely on which AI model is the most powerful but rather on how AI can be developed responsibly, equitably and with global inclusivity in mind.

As we step into this new era, the challenge for governments, businesses and society is not just keeping up with AI's rapid advancements but ensuring that its growth is guided by ethical governance, transparency and sustainability.

The choices we make today will determine whether AI remains a tool for the privileged few or becomes a transformative force for all of humanity.

AI ecosystem: Key contenders

The AI landscape is a dynamic ecosystem composed of diverse models with distinct capabilities. Below are some of the leading contenders shaping AI's future:

Conversational AI models



By prioritising ethical development, responsible governance and inclusive access, we can shape AI into a force for global progress. – **REUTERSPIC**

➤ **ChatGPT (OpenAI):** A leader in conversational AI, excelling in tasks from creative writing to customer service, with ongoing challenges in cost management and contextual coherence.

➤ **Claude 3.5 (Anthropic):** Prioritises safety and ethical considerations, making it ideal for responsible AI applications, though its customisation options remain limited.

Multimodal and specialised models

➤ **Gemini 2.0 (Google DeepMind):** Processes text, images and video with high proficiency but struggles with real-time adaptability.

➤ **GitHub Copilot:** Enhances developer productivity with real-time code generation but raises concerns over potential bias in training data.

Open-source innovators

➤ **DeepSeek (China):** A cost-effective and open-source model democratising AI, though challenges remain in accuracy and bias mitigation.

➤ **Llama (Meta):** A customisable model empowering researchers, with ongoing efforts to enhance multimodal capabilities.

➤ **Mistral (France):** Committed to open-source collaboration, though securing competitive funding remains a challenge.

Global and real-time models

➤ **Qwen 2.5 Max (Alibaba Cloud):** Excels in multilingualism, with support for over 100 languages but faces challenges in global expansion.

➤ **Bard and PaLM 2 (Google):** Provides real-time information via Google search but struggles with misinformation and accuracy.

➤ **Grok (xAI by Elon Musk):** Integrated with X (formerly Twitter), offering unfiltered real-time responses, though its reliance on social media raises concerns over bias.

Efficiency-focused models

➤ **Falcon (Technology Innovation Institute):** Known for its efficiency, delivering high

performance with lower computational costs, though enterprise adoption requires greater transparency.

Navigating AI maze: Choosing the right tool

Selecting the right AI model depends on specific requirements:

➤ **Global businesses:** Qwen 2.5 max

➤ **Resource-constrained developers:** DeepSeek

➤ **General conversations:** ChatGPT

➤ **Multimodal applications:** Gemini 2.0

➤ **Safety-critical applications:** Claude 3.5

➤ **Software development:** GitHub Copilot

➤ **Customisation and research:** Llama

➤ **Real-time information:** Bard and PaLM 2

➤ **Efficiency:** Falcon

➤ **Open-source collaboration:** Mistral

➤ **Unfiltered real-time data:** Grok

AI arms race: Global perspective

AI development has evolved into a geopolitical contest, with key players shaping the landscape:

➤ **United States**

Home to OpenAI and Google DeepMind, the US leads in AI innovation, particularly in natural language processing and machine learning. However, concerns over ethical oversight and corporate dominance remain.

➤ **China**

China prioritises AI self-reliance, leveraging state-backed initiatives in quantum computing and automation. However, there are international concerns over data privacy and surveillance impact trust in Chinese AI models.

➤ **European Union**

The EU focuses on ethical AI, implementing robust regulations like the AI Act to balance innovation with societal safeguards, ensuring trustworthy AI development.

➤ **India**

India is emerging as a global AI hub, leveraging a strong talent pool in data science and software engineering. Government initiatives, such as the National AI Strategy, are fostering AI innovation. However, challenges remain in data accessibility and infrastructure development.

➤ Malaysia

Malaysia is positioning itself as a key player in Southeast Asia's AI landscape. Government initiatives, including the National AI Office (NAIO) established on Aug 28, 2024, underscore the nation's commitment to AI-driven growth.

Malaysia has the potential to accelerate its AI progress by leveraging open-source and cost-effective models like DeepSeek, which democratises AI development. Additionally, AI applications in fintech, healthcare and smart governance can help position Malaysia as a regional AI leader.

Future of AI: Challenges and opportunities

The trajectory of AI will be shaped by how we address key challenges and embrace emerging trends:

Ethical AI development

➤ Mitigating bias to ensure fairness and prevent discrimination.

➤ Enhancing transparency and explainability in AI decision-making.

➤ Strengthening privacy and data security to prevent misuse.

Regulation vs innovation

➤ Balancing regulation with innovation to foster responsible AI.

➤ Establishing clear frameworks that ensure ethical AI without stifling progress.

Democratising AI

➤ Ensuring AI accessibility across all societal sectors.

➤ Addressing AI-driven socio-economic inequalities.

Emerging trends

➤ Efficiency and sustainability: Developing AI with a reduced environmental impact.

➤ Multimodality: Enhancing AI-human interaction across text, image and video.

➤ Open-source growth: Encouraging global collaboration.

➤ Cross-technology integration: AI converging with quantum computing, biotechnology, and cloud computing.

The AI landscape of 2025 is evolving at an unprecedented pace, driven by technological advancements, geopolitical competition and ethical considerations.

Emerging players like India and Malaysia are contributing to this transformation, leveraging their unique strengths to carve a niche in AI development.

However, true progress hinges not just on innovation but on ensuring AI serves humanity responsibly.

By prioritising ethical development, responsible governance and inclusive access, we can shape AI into a force for global progress. The choices we make today will define AI's role in shaping the future. Now is the time to act decisively to ensure AI benefits all of humanity.

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Urgent need for national push to increase organ donations

LETTERS
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IREFER to the article headlined "Organ donations remain low, over 10,000 patients waiting for a chance of life", published in the *Sun* on Feb 7.

Malaysia records approximately 200,000 deaths annually, and global trends suggest that around 1% of these could be potential organ donors.

This means Malaysia has the capacity for about 4,000 cadaveric kidney transplants per year – enough to clear the current 10,000-person waiting list within just three years.

However, the reality is far different. The waiting period for a kidney transplant in Malaysia is 12 to 15 years, and on average, 22 kidney dialysis

patients die every day while waiting for a transplant.

The number of actual cadaveric organ donors remains critically low: just 46 in 2024 (including tissue donations), compared to 82 in the article, 43 in 2023, seven in 2021, 26 in 2020 and 16 in 2019.

Meanwhile, the number of Malaysians on dialysis has surged to 51,000 and is projected to double to 106,000 by 2040.

To reverse this trajectory, we must significantly increase the number of organ pledgers. The current 398,000 registered pledges are insufficient. To create meaningful change, we should target at least three million pledgers, ideally six million.

What is especially alarming is the sharp decline in new pledges: 51,729 in 2022, dropping to 28,363 in 2023, and further down to just 15,304 in 2024.

The situation worsened in January 2025, with only 884 new pledges. This downward trend underscores the urgent need for a fresh, innovative approach, involving collaboration with the private sector and NGOs.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Malaysia's first organ transplant, presenting a timely opportunity to reverse this decline.

A nationwide initiative is needed – one that integrates organ donation with solutions addressing other national challenges, such as the low insurance penetration rate (41%).

A staggering 60% of Malaysians lack insurance, leaving many families financially vulnerable. A potential pilot programme could link organ donation pledges with basic funeral coverage, supported through self-pay options or corporate social responsibility sponsorships.

We urge the Health Ministry to embrace bold and collaborative strategies. There is an urgent need to provide hope to the growing number of dialysis patients and their families. Beyond saving lives, a successful organ donation initiative also has economic benefits.

Dialysis treatment for 51,000 patients already costs RM2 billion annually, and this figure is expected to double to RM4 billion by 2040.

Studies indicate that increasing organ transplants could lead to RM1 billion in cost savings by 2040.

A concerted effort in conjunction with this historic anniversary could be the turning point in Malaysia's organ donation landscape. Let us seize this moment to make a difference.

Ravinder Singh



The winner from Malaysia, grand champion Azre, poses with first runner up from Indonesia, second runner up from Singapore and third runner up from Thailand.

BY **DHARSHINI GANESON**

INTERNATIONAL Islamic University Malaysia's (IIUM) Azre Nazerul Rahman was declared grand champion at CGS International Securities' (CGS International) annual ASEAN Investment Challenge 2024. The competition, with top teams from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand, collectively known as MIST, faced off in a grand finale held at Bursa Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur on February 13.

The ASEAN Investment Challenge (AIC) represents CGS International's flagship youth programme to empower students with knowledge in sustainable investing and also contribute to the building of strong capital markets in the future.

Contestants presented their investment strategies before a panel of judges comprising professionals from each country's stock exchange. The various judges also questioned the candidates on their stock analysis and finally chose Malaysian IIUM finalist Azre as the grand champion. He won a prize of SGD 20,000.

Azizah Mohd Yatim, CEO of CGS International, said: "Since the launch of AIC in 2023, it has made a tangible impact in improving investment literacy among youth in the MIST region. Through a series of initiatives, AIC has provided participants with real-world exposure to sustainable investing and capital market fundamentals."

"Currently, investment education is not sufficiently integrated into the curriculum of many educational institutions."

"This gap leaves many Malaysians unprepared to make informed investment decisions, which could potentially hinder their financial growth. Integrating investment knowledge into formal education would provide students with the necessary tools to understand and participate in the financial markets responsibly."

Kevin Lee, Group Head of Sustainability for CGS International, said: "AIC 2024 has once again highlighted the potential of our future leaders in finance. We hope their 8-month journey with AIC has provided them with a solid foundation in lifelong financial management skills, including the incorporation of ESG in their investment practices."

"Through initiatives such as AIC, CGS International is dedicated to empower the communities for a more sustainable tomorrow." The other winners were Ali Alexander from Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia, Team Scoop from Republic Polytechnic, Singapore, and Naradith Aparasith from King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang in Thailand.

Carol Fong, Group CEO for CGS International, said: "Looking at the talent here

Malaysia emerges winner at investment challenge

► Financial literacy the way forward for youth empowerment



The judges, comprised (from left) Lee, James McKeone from Nasdaq, Nareerat Santhayati from Thailand's stock exchange, Law Mei Chi from Bursa Malaysia, Emelia Tan Wai Yi from Singapore Exchange, Rory Suniyanto Djojomartono from the Indonesia stock exchange, Fong and Azizah.

today, I am reminded of the significance of AIC as a beacon to build the next generation of finance leaders.

"My heartiest congratulations to the four teams who made it to the finals. They stood out from over 5,000 participants with their thoughtful, innovative investment strategies - showing not just a sound grasp of market principles, but also a good knowledge of sustainable and responsible investing. In the end, Azre from Malaysia excelled with his holistic investment strategy and impressive presentation."

This year's challenge saw the participation of over 5,000 students from 500 institutions of higher learning in MIST

AIC is the only investment challenge backed by all four local stock exchanges, Bursa

Malaysia, Indonesia Stock Exchange, Singapore Exchange, and the Stock Exchange of Thailand.

A key highlight of AIC 2024 was the introduction of a new judging element, which evaluated participants' portfolio performance against benchmark returns, offering a fresh perspective on investment success.

CGS International aims to encourage sustainable investing among the new generation. The challenge imparts investment fundamentals, including ESG investing and risk management.

The participants received practical training in addition to theory lessons from CGS International's investment experts.

Winners are also offered internships with the group to put their new skills to practice, making it a truly holistic learning experience.

Grand champion Azre said: "Like so many of my peers, I have wanted to start investing but lacked the know-how. Hence, when AIC came to our school, many of us took the chance to learn."

"Throughout the challenge, CGS International provided us with many tools and resources to hone our investment skills. I really appreciated the opportunity to try our hand at investing without having to take on any actual risks. With the benchmark returns as part of the judging criteria this year, we could also tell how well our portfolios performed against industry benchmarks. This was immensely useful in our own performance evaluation."

The next AIC will be launched on 8 April 2025 at the ASEAN Investment Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.



Renewable energy capacity mix to be raised to meet data centre needs

KUALA LUMPUR: The government is committed to gradually and systematically increase the renewable energy (RE) capacity mix in the national electricity supply since access to green electricity supply is a "prerequisite" for data centre development, and to ensure that RE needs for data centre development can be met.

Energy Transition and Water Transformation Deputy Minister Akmal Nasrullah Mohd Nasir said this would not affect the overall energy supply or result in significant cost implications for electricity users.

"This effort includes a gradual rise in the composition of green electricity supplied from RE sources to 31% by 2025, 40% by 2035, and 70% by 2050," he said in the Dewan Rakyat's question-and-answer session in response to Datuk Ali Anak Biju's (PN-Sarawak) question on the measures needed to meet data centre renewable energy needs and its impact on future tariffs.

Akmal Nasrullah is confident that this can be realised via various programmes, including the Feed-in-Tariff, large-scale solar, Net Energy Metering, Self-Consumption, New Enhanced Dispatch Arrangement, Corporate Green Power, and Green Electricity Tariff programmes.

Additionally, to allow corporate companies, including data centres, easier access to green electricity directly from RE generators, the Corporate Renewable Energy Supply Scheme has been introduced. This gives data centres the option to obtain green electricity directly from RE generators via the use of utility grid network services. — Bernama

Bank Negara, BI and BOT harmonise local currency transaction guidelines

PETALING JAYA: Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM), Bank Indonesia (BI) and the Bank of Thailand (BOT) yesterday adopted harmonised Local Currency Transaction Framework Operational Guidelines (LCTF OG) and the expansion of eligible cross-border transactions under the framework.

In a statement, BNM said the harmonised LCTF OG enhances consistency, scalability and efficiency in facilitating local currency transactions across the three countries.

"It consolidates bilateral guidelines previously established between the countries and allows for streamlined processes with greater trans-

parency for participating financial institutions and their users. The harmonised LCTF OG sets out operating parameters that are applicable to all participating countries while accommodating specific local regulatory requirements of each jurisdiction," it said.

The latest framework includes

portfolio investments as eligible underlying transactions, in addition to trade in goods and services and direct investments.

The three central banks said they welcome additional qualified commercial banks to participate in and support the expanded framework.

M'sia welcomes FDI from all countries: Tengku Zafrul

■ BY JOHN GILBERT
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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia will continue to support and attract foreign direct investments (FDI) from any country, including the United States and China, despite concerns about US tariffs imposed on certain countries.

International Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz said the US remains an important trading partner for Malaysia, serving as the top export destination, followed by China.

"Over the past nine months, US companies have been the largest source of foreign investments in Malaysia. We continue to actively engage with key US stakeholders, institutions and agencies through various platforms.

"While there are always areas for improvement, our trade and investment relations remain stable and

➤ We remain committed to engaging with US on trade and investment, says minister

unchanged. Additionally, we have undertaken preparatory measures to address any potential policy changes, though none have been initiated at this time," Tengku Zafrul told reporters at the South China Morning Post China Conference Southeast Asia 2025 yesterday.

He said that while many believe it is inevitable, Malaysia remains committed to ongoing engagement with the US.

"We aim to understand their concerns and explore ways to mitigate issues such as trade deficits, technology challenges, and areas for closer collaboration. This remains the position of our ministry. In fact, I am planning a visit to the US to further engage with American investors and strengthen

trade relations between our two countries," Tengku Zafrul said.

Touching on Asean, he said despite the decline in global FDI, Asean has remained a net recipient of FDI from both China and the US, with investment flows into the region continuing on a positive trajectory.

This trend, he added, is driven by companies realigning their supply chains, often reflecting the evolving geopolitical landscape in today's diverse world.

"Malaysia firmly believes in multilateralism and the existing platforms that support it. Asean's continued neutrality is crucial, and we are committed to maintaining this balanced approach as a region. Regarding concerns such as US

restrictions on technology, Malaysia and other Asean countries have the legal frameworks to address these challenges," Tengku Zafrul said.

He also said Malaysia's strong trade relationships with Hong Kong, Asean and China present numerous opportunities for collaboration.

"Hong Kong remains a key trading partner for both Asean and Malaysia, and we are committed to maintaining and strengthening this engagement. With existing FTAs between Asean and China and between Asean and Hong Kong, we aim to enhance these ties further.

"As industries continue to evolve and shift, Hong Kong is well-positioned to play a crucial role in supporting and mitigating these changes. It remains a significant trading partner for the region and Malaysia alike," Tengku Zafrul said.

The conference took place in Malaysia as the country takes centre stage this year as the Chair of Asean.

SME Venture@Asean 2025 targets RM300 million in potential sales

■ BY AIMIE SHAZRIE
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KUALA LUMPUR: SME Venture@Asean 2025, set to take place from Oct 16 to 18 at the Malaysia International Trade and Exhibition Centre, is expected to generate RM300 million in potential sales over three days.

SME Corporation Malaysia CEO Rizal Nainy expressed confidence that actual transactions may exceed this target, given the strong participation of both local and international businesses.

"This event is not just about Malaysian entrepreneurs, it also involves Asean players and our international partners engaged in memorandums of understanding (MoUs)," he told reporters at the soft launch of SME Venture@Asean 2025, yesterday.

He said the event will feature 350 booths, comprising 200 for business-to-business (B2B) engagements and 150 for business-to-consumer (B2C) sales.

"The B2B section will focus on high-end industries, facilitating commercial deals between SMEs and major

industry players, while the B2C section will allow entrepreneurs to showcase and sell their products directly to visitors. This setup is designed to maximise business opportunities and create new export avenues for Malaysian SMEs." Rizal said the inaugural SME Venture@Asean has received official endorsement from Asean, marking it as a key initiative to strengthen regional trade.

"The exhibition aims to provide SMEs with greater exposure to international markets, encouraging them to expand their business footprint beyond Malaysia. We have also secured participation from key global markets, including Türkiye, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Georgia, and Kazakhstan, further broadening the event's commercial potential," he added.

Rizal noted that the outlook for Malaysian SMEs remain positive, with the sector expected to outperform the national gross domestic product growth of 5.1% in 2024.

"SMEs contributed 5% growth in 2023, and we anticipate an even stronger performance this year. Given that SMEs make up 97% of Malaysia's business entities, their success is



Ewon (second from left) officiating at the soft launch of SME Venture@Asean 2025. On the left is Rizal and second from right is Entrepreneur and Cooperatives Development Ministry deputy secretary-general (entrepreneur development) Datuk Zamri Salleh. — BERNAMAPIC

crucial in driving the nation's economic progress and achieving long-term sustainability," he said.

Entrepreneur and Cooperative Development Minister Datuk Ewon Benedick, who officiated at the soft launch, said SME Venture@Asean 2025 will be more than just an event, it is a platform specially crafted with a plethora of activities to provide

MSMEs with maximum opportunities to venture into the global market.

"To ensure the outcome of getting local SMEs to export to the Asean Market, 200 business matching sessions will be arranged.

"Aside from participation of Asean SMEs during the event, the Ministry, through SME Corp. Malaysia, is committed to bringing in anchor

companies and buyers not only from the Asean member states, but also from Malaysia's MoU partner countries such as Türkiye, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Georgia and Kazakhstan," he said.

He said SME Venture@Asean 2025 is expected to play a key role in Malaysia's push toward becoming a high-income nation.



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Malaysia's economy grows 5% in final quarter of 2024

► GDP expands 5.1% for full year, propelled by positive momentum in all key sectors except for agriculture, and mining and quarrying sectors: Statistics Department

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia's gross domestic product (GDP) in the fourth quarter of 2024 grew by 5% compared to 5.4% in the third quarter of 2024, the Department of Statistics Malaysia announced in a statement.

However, on a quarter-on-quarter seasonally adjusted basis, GDP contracted by 1.1% for the last three months of 2024 (Q3: up 1.9%)

In Q4 2024, the Malaysian economy grew at 4.7% and 4.9% in October and November, respectively, before accelerating to 5.4% in December. Hence, Malaysia's economy expanded 5.1% in 2024 compared to 3.6% in the previous year.

Chief Statistician Malaysia Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin said, "The economic growth of 5% was driven by the positive momentum of all key sectors except for agriculture and mining & quarrying sectors which declined in the fourth quarter of 2024. The substantial investment inflows into key sectors, coupled with easing inflationary pressure and improving labour market with near-decade low unemployment rates, have stimulate the domestic demand, thus strengthening the nation's growth trajectory."

The services sector expanded by 5.5% in the fourth quarter of 2024 (Q3: 5.2%). The performance was propelled by the wholesale & retail trade sub-sector at 4.4%, following growth in all segments namely wholesale trade (5.4%), retail trade (4.1%) and motor

vehicles (2.2%).

Additionally, the transport & storage sub-sector showed a better growth in this quarter at 10.7%. These gains were fuelled by resilience in consumer spending during the year-end festive season and school holidays that contributed to the continued recovery in tourism-related industries. On a quarter-on-quarter seasonally adjusted basis, the services sector fell 0.8% (Q3: up 1.7%).

The manufacturing sector's growth moderated to 4.4% (Q3: 5.6%) in the fourth quarter, driven by the growth in export-oriented industries such as electrical, electronic & optical products (7.3%) and petroleum, chemical, rubber & plastic products (3.2%) due to higher external demand.

Nonetheless, domestic-oriented industries grew at a slower pace, influenced by transport equipment, other manufacturing and repair following lower production in motor vehicles and transport equipment. On a quarter-on-quarter seasonally adjusted, the manufacturing sector decreased by 2.8% (Q3: 2.0% growth).

The construction sector accelerated further to 20.7% (Q3: 19.9%), marking its fastest expansion since the second quarter of 2021. All segments displayed robust growth led by non-residential buildings (23.9%), particularly data centre-related projects in Johor and Selangor. This was followed by

specialised construction activities (23.6%), residential buildings (30.3%) and civil engineering (9.1%).

The growth indicates ongoing demand for renovation, maintenance and specialised construction projects across residential, commercial and industrial segments as well as a surge in infrastructure development projects, such as offshore platform installation and highways. Quarter-on-quarter seasonally adjusted, this sector decreased 2.3% (Q3: 5.7% growth).

In addition, the agriculture sector declined 0.5% (up Q3: 4%), owing to a 5.3% decrease in the oil palm sub-sector. Nonetheless, the 3% growth in the livestock sub-sector and the strong 23.3% expansion in the rubber sub-sector helped eased the impact of the contraction in the agriculture sector. The sector registered a decline of 1.8% on a quarter-on-quarter seasonally adjusted basis (Q3: 0.5%).

The mining and quarrying sector declined 0.9% in the fourth quarter (Q3: -3.9%), influenced by a contraction in the crude oil and condensate sub-sector of 6.2%. Nevertheless, the natural gas sub-sector rebounded to 2.4% growth, supported by recovery in gas production during the quarter. This sector's growth expanded to 5.9% (Q3: -1.1%) in quarter-on-quarter seasonally adjusted terms.

Gross fixed capital formation or investment in fixed assets, registered 11.7% increase (Q3: 15.3%), extending its double-digit growth for the third consecutive quarter.

Malaysia's economy in 2025 is expected to remain resilient, driven by strong labour market conditions, robust exports in the electrical and electronics sector and implementation of key investment initiatives.

KAB partners Perak state agency to develop 29 RE projects

KUALA LUMPUR: Kinergy Advancement Bhd's (KAB) wholly owned subsidiary KAB Energy Holdings Sdn Bhd (KABEH) is collaborating with Perbadanan Kemajuan Negeri Perak (PKNP) for the development of 29 potential renewable energy (RE) projects with a total capacity of over 1,800MW.

The energy solution provider and the Perak state agency said in a joint statement that they would identify, evaluate and develop RE projects in Perak by utilising KAB's technical expertise to drive innovative energy developments.

"Aligned with Perak Sejahtera 2030 Flagship 12: Water Resources and Renewable Energy, this partnership not only enhances the energy resilience of Perak but also contributes to the broader national goals of sustainable and renewable energy development."

"The initiatives under this collaboration directly support the objectives of increasing water resources efficiency and promoting renewable energy usage, marking a significant step toward achieving Malaysia's long-term sustainability targets," it said.

KAB executive deputy chairman cum group managing director Datuk Lai Keng Onn said the partnership allowed the group to offer their expertise to drive sustainable development and collaboratively explore Perak's energy potential, with 50MW of power generation capacity projects currently in the pipeline.

"By partnering with PKNP, we can accelerate the development of sustainable energy infrastructure, strengthening Perak's position as a leader in Malaysia's renewable and clean energy transition."

"This collaboration will bring transformative benefits at both the state and national levels, paving the way for a more resilient future," he said.

Meanwhile, PKNP chief executive Datuk Redza Rafiq Abdul Razak said as the clean energy transition accelerates, it required urgent need for firm, flexible, and renewable power solutions and storage to balance supply and demand effectively.

"With KABEH's expertise in RE and PKNP's strategic role in driving state development, particularly in energy infrastructure and policy, we are confident that this partnership will unlock Perak's vast hydropower and solar energy potential," he said. — Bernama

Loob brings Tealive to India via tie-up with DIL

PETALING JAYA: Loob Holding Sdn Bhd has signed a master franchise deal with Indian quick service restaurant operator Devyani International Ltd (DIL) to introduce Tealive into India.

DIL is India's largest franchisee for Yum! Brands, operating KFC and Pizza Hut outlets, and the exclusive franchisee for Costa Coffee cafes in the country. In addition, DIL has its own home-grown brands, including Vaango, a popular South Indian vegetarian food destination, and The Food Street, a food court concept featuring multiple cuisines under one roof. DIL operates more than 2,000 stores across brands in India, Thailand, Nigeria and Nepal.

Loob Holding founder and CEO Bryan Loo expressed confidence that DIL's expansive network and food and beverage expertise would provide a solid foundation for Tealive to grow in India.

"Together with our partner, Tealive will bring our innovative lifestyle tea culture to the land of chai. Our partner knows the local market well and we're planning significant presence in India, beginning with outlets in the major cities this year," he said.

With over 950 outlets in Southeast Asia, Mauritius, Canada and, most recently, the Middle East, Tealive now looks to bringing its unique blend of tea and innovative beverage culture to India.

India presents a huge market potential for lifestyle tea among the young population. This gives Tealive a strategic advantage with its strong branding and Southeast Asian appeal. While India's tea scene is populated by local



Loo (fourth from left) and DIL president and CEO Virag Joshi displaying the franchise agreement. From Joshi's left are non-executive director Varun Jaipuria and the DIL senior management team. With Loo (from left) are Loob strategy and portfolio director Jeremy Tan, adviser Troy Franklin and financial controller Quah Seik Lee.

brands and individual stores, Tealive's diverse menu and innovative offerings will cater to evolving consumer preferences.

"Partnering with a strong local operator like DIL gives us the ability to adapt and thrive in India while also extending the Tealive lifestyle to millions of new consumers," Loo said.

DIL non-executive chairman Ravi Jaipuria said: "We are delighted to introduce Tealive, a strong Asian brand, into India, known to have a rich tradition of chai culture. Tealive's diverse lifestyle tea offerings perfectly align with

India's young and evolving consumer, who are increasingly drawn towards newer categories. Together, we are set to redefine and transform tea experience in the vibrant Indian market."

Loo said Tealive would continue its current regional strategy of starting small and scaling up fast with the right market conditions. "With our partners' local knowledge, industry experience, and extensive reach, we are well-positioned to rapidly expand and promote our unique lifestyle tea culture across India," he added.

Malaysia's current account surplus in Q4 highest in three quarters: Kenanga IB

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's current account surplus surged to RM11.4 billion or 2.3% of gross domestic product (GDP) in fourth-quarter 2024 (Q4'24), the highest in three quarters, up from RM2.2 billion (0.4% of GDP) in Q3'24.

According to Kenanga Investment Bank Bhd (Kenanga IB), the current account surplus widened slightly for the full year to 1.7% of GDP from 1.5% in 2023.

"The increase was driven by a higher goods surplus and a smaller services deficit, though wider deficits in both primary and secondary income partially offset the gains."

A slowdown in GDP growth in Q4 2024 (5% year-on-year; Q3 2024: 5.4%) also contributed to the widening surplus, the investment bank said in a note.

Kenanga IB said despite US President Donald Trump's tariff threats, Malaysia's exports are expected to continue outpacing imports, and strong tourism receipts may push the services account into surplus, supporting the overall current account balance.

It forecast the balance to reach 1.9% of GDP in 2025 compared to 1.7% in 2024. — Bernama

RichTech sizzles in market debut with 200% premium

► Share price opens at 75 sen, 50 sen above the IPO price

KUALA LUMPUR: RichTech Digital Bhd, a company involved in the distribution of electronic reloads and provision of bill payment services in Malaysia, made its debut on the ACE Market of Bursa Malaysia Securities Bhd yesterday.

The company opened at 75 sen per share, achieving a 200% premium over its initial public offering (IPO) price of 25 sen per share.

Established in 2010, RichTech is a provider of electronic reloads and bill payment services in Malaysia, powered by its proprietary SRS platform that enables electronic reloads for mobile airtime and data, prepaid digital TV, gaming credits, application credit, and e-wallet credit, as well as bill payments for postpaid mobile network, utilities, maintenance services of national sewerage systems, internet, postpaid digital TV, quit rent, assessment payment, and education loans.

Presently, it serves over 4 million users nationwide.

Through its IPO, RichTech successfully raised RM13.67 million. The proceeds will be utilised as: RM4.50 million for marketing, promotional and collaboration activities to expand the user base of end-users for its SRS App and SRS Portal; RM3 million for the acquisition of a new office, consolidating RichTech's headquarters and branch office under one roof for corporate profiling and ease of administration; RM3 million for working capital to support the growing digital transaction volume and platform scaling and RM3.17 million for estimated listing expenses.

RichTech non-independent non-executive chairman Wong Koon Wai said, "Today's listing on the ACE Market represents a significant milestone for RichTech as we embark on our next phase of growth. This achievement underscores our commitment to delivering innovative and reliable solutions for electronic reloads and bill payment services. We are excited about the opportunities ahead and remain focused on

driving innovation, expanding our market presence, and creating sustainable value for our stakeholders."

Meanwhile, KAF Investment Bank Bhd CEO Rohaizad Ismail said that RichTech's successful listing highlights the strong confidence in its vision and growth potential.

"We are proud to support the company in this transformative journey and believe this milestone will pave the way for RichTech to strengthen its leadership in Malaysia's fast-evolving electronic reload and bill payments industry," he added.

According to an independent market research report, the electronic reload and bill payment services industry in Malaysia grew at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 13.4% from 2020 to 2023 and is projected to grow at a CAGR of 11.5% from 2024 to 2026. RichTech is well-positioned to capitalise on this growth, supported by its advanced platform, strong supplier relationships, and extensive user network.

The listing on Bursa Securities provides RichTech with a strong foundation to accelerate its growth strategy and solidify its position as a key player in the digital payment ecosystem.



From left: RichTech senior independent non-executive director Koo Woon Kan, independent non-executive directors Yeoh Jie Hu and Tan Yeon Kieng, executive director Agnes Wong Eei Nien, managing director Lee Teik Keong, substantial shareholder Yau Ming Teck; Wong, KAF corporate finance co-head/director Ahmad Fazlee Aziz and corporate finance director Yap Chin Fatt.

Cape EMS named Top Employer 2025 for workplace quality

JOHOR BAHRU: Cape EMS Bhd (CEB) has been named Top Employer in Malaysia for 2025 by Top Employers Institute, making it the first EMS company in the country to receive this certification.

This milestone sets a new industry benchmark, reaffirming CEB's position as an industry leader committed to cultivating a world-class workplace culture within the electronic manufacturing services (EMS) sector.

CEB managing director and group CEO Christina Tee said, "We are deeply honoured to receive this recognition as a Top Employer for 2025. It reflects our dedication to creating a people-centric organisation that values the growth, well-being, and aspirations of our employees. At CEB, we believe that empowering our people is key to driving sustainable growth and achieving our vision as we expand globally."

The Top Employers Institute evaluates organisations through its HR Best Practices Survey, covering six critical domains and 20 topics, including People Strategy, Work Environment, Talent Acquisition, Learning, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, and Well-being. This rigorous assessment ensures certified organisations demonstrate excellence in shaping the future of work.

Additionally, it has recognised over 2,400 Top Employers across 125 countries and regions spanning five continents, all of which exemplify excellence in people practices that deliver proven business impact.

Top Employers Institute CEO David Plink said, "Cape EMS and other top employers are setting HR standards by prioritising employee growth and well-being, fostering resilience, innovation, and business success in today's evolving workplace."

Local Institutions support Bursa for 17th straight week

KUALA LUMPUR: Local institutions continued to support Bursa Malaysia for the 17th consecutive week, with net purchases totalling RM77.9 million in domestic equities last week, according to MIDF Amanah Investment Bank Bhd.

This was lower than the previous week's net purchases of RM194.2 million.

In its fund flow report for the week ended Feb 14, MIDF said local institutions net bought for two of the five trading days last week, with net inflows on Thursday and Friday totalling RM110.5 million and RM70.8 million, respectively.

It said local retail investors shifted to net selling last week on Bursa Malaysia, with a net inflow of RM125.3 million in equities, amounting to five weeks of net buying thus far in 2025.

"The average daily trading volume (ADTV) saw inclines across the board last week.

"Foreign investors saw an increase of 9.5% while local institutions and local retailers also saw a surge of 9.9% and 7%, respectively," it said.

MIDF noted that foreign investors extended their selling streak on Bursa Malaysia for the 17th consecutive week, registering an outflow of RM203.2 million.

Foreign investors were net sellers on Thursday and Friday, with Thursday experiencing the largest outflow of RM132.3 million.

On Monday and Wednesday, there were inflows of RM24.6 million and RM14.3 million, respectively.

"The top three sectors that recorded net foreign inflows were construction at RM64.9 million, consumer products and services (RM38.4 million) and financial services (RM17.3 million). - Bernama

Grab added RM9.9b to M'sian economy in 2023: Study

KUALA LUMPUR: A new report by local economic consultancy EconWorks revealed that Grab's on-demand services, including ride-hailing and delivery, facilitated a substantial economic contribution of RM9.9 billion to the Malaysian economy in 2023, approximately 0.5% of the country's GDP.

"Tech platform companies provide access to flexible earning opportunities and support the digital growth of small businesses. In its 12 years of operations in Malaysia, Grab has significantly contributed to the economic benefits for various communities across Malaysia. For every RM1 generated by Grab transactions, an additional RM1.50 of economic activity is created across the broader economy. This underscores the positive impact of the Grab ecosystem on millions of Malaysians in their daily lives," said

EconWorks managing director Dr Wan Khatina Nawawi.

The report quantifies the impact of Grab's operations and the downstream impact of its on-demand services on gig workers and businesses that earn an income and sell their products on its platform.

The study also found that 88% of this value added contribution comes from Grab's driver- and merchant-partners who operate across the different Grab services.

In 2023, driver-partners contributed RM4.6 billion in value added, accounting for 0.25% of Malaysia's GDP.

Grab's ecosystem supported up to 277,237 earning opportunities, providing income streams for driver-partners, merchant-partners, and workers in their combined supply chains. This means that 1 out of 64

individuals in Malaysia's labour force benefit, directly or indirectly, from Grab-related activities.

Earning opportunities enabled by Grab have contributed an additional RM3.7 billion to household incomes. This increase in earnings by driver-partners and merchant-partners translates into more money in the pockets of Malaysians.

"The report highlights the advantages of Malaysia's supportive business environment, which is now focused on the digital economy, enabling platform companies like Grab to thrive and contribute meaningfully to the economy. By quantifying these contributions, this study provides a comprehensive view of how Grab and its stakeholders interact with the broader Malaysian economy, facilitating economic growth," said Wan Khatina.



Xi holds rare meeting with business leaders

► Attendees include top brass of Alibaba, Huawei, Xiaomi, BYD and CATL

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday spoke at a symposium attended by business leaders including Alibaba co-founder Jack Ma, state media reported, as Beijing grapples with a slowing economy and growing tensions with the US.

Other private business leaders who attended the symposium included Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei, Xiaomi's Lei Jun, BYD's Wang Chuanfu, Unitree's Wang Xingxing, and CATL's Robin Zeng, a video published by CCTV showed.

Meituan's Wang Xing, China Feihe's Leng Youbin and Will Semiconductor founder Yu Renrong also attended, the video showed.

Tencent's Pony Ma was also there, a source familiar with the matter said, declining to be named as the meeting details were not public.

Xi delivered a speech after listening to representatives of private companies, official news agency Xinhua said.

The report did not provide any details about the symposium, held in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

Reuters reported on Friday, citing sources, Xi planned to chair a symposium that would be attended by the country's business leaders.

The symposium would be aimed at boosting private-sector sentiment, and Xi was expected to encourage company chiefs to expand their businesses domestically and internationally amid an intensifying China-US technology war, the sources had said.

The symposium also comes as DeepSeek's AI platform has triggered investor speculation about its potential to buoy China's broader tech sector, leading to calls for an upward repricing of Chinese assets.

Xi has long stressed the need for China to achieve self-sufficiency in semiconductors and wants the country to use AI to drive economic development.

But China's efforts have been hampered by export control measures on chips imposed by Washington which is worried Beijing could use advanced semiconductors to boost its military capabilities.

"It's a tacit acknowledgement that the Chinese government needs private-sector firms for its tech rivalry with the US," said Christopher Beddor, deputy China research director at Gavekal Dragonomics in Hong Kong.

"The government has no choice but to support them if it wants to compete with the US."

Investors yesterday were scouring pictures and footage of the meeting to spot top bosses and trading accordingly, with Baidu shares down more than 8% – the largest loser on the Hang Seng index – after no company representatives were spotted.

Tech shares in Hong Kong have roared higher in recent weeks on a combination of optimism about the DeepSeek AI breakthrough and a thawing of authorities' approach to internet giants.

The Hang Seng technology index hit a three-year high in morning trade yesterday but slipped in volatile afternoon trade.

Xi first chaired a high-profile symposium for the private sector in 2018, six years after he came to power.

At the time, he pledged tax cuts and a level playing field while reaffirming that private firms would have access to financial backing.

"Despite the rising opportunities in the case of DeepSeek, it is also about guiding the private sector in the government-led direction and containing the potential risks to compete with the US," said Gary Ng, senior economist at Natixis.

"Still, the regulatory environment is the black box. As most AI development happens in the private sector, we cannot entirely rule out the outcome of a tighter-than-market-expected regulatory environment than we see now." – Reuters



A view of the Keihin Industrial Zone, with Mount Fuji in the background, in Yokohama, Japan. – AFP/IC

Japan 2024 growth slows despite stronger Q4

TOKYO: Japan's economic growth slowed sharply last year, official data showed yesterday, although the rate for the fourth quarter topped expectations.

The figures come as Japanese companies fret over the impact of US President Donald Trump's protectionist trade policies, including import tariffs, on the world's fourth largest economy.

Gross domestic product expanded 0.1% in 2024, well down from 1.5% the year before, the data showed.

But the figures for October-December were brighter.

Quarter-on-quarter growth accelerated to 0.7%, from 0.4% in July-September, when a "megquake" alert and one of the fiercest typhoons in decades dampened activity.

The fourth-quarter figure was also more than double market expectations of 0.3% growth.

"On the surface, Japanese GDP growth in the final stretch of 2024 looks like a turning point," said Stefan Angrick of Moody's Analytics.

"But don't break out the champagne just yet."

"Japan's preliminary GDP figures are notoriously choppy, and sizeable revisions are common."

"The upbeat headline figure masks a domestic economy still stuck in the mud."

"Consumption is weak as pay gains have trailed inflation for the better part of three years," Angrick said.

"And given the worsening outlook for global trade, Japan won't be able to count on exports to pick up the slack in 2025."

Trump said last week that he planned to unveil tariffs on imported cars from around April 2, adding to a cascade of levies he has threatened since taking office.

Ahead of the latest GDP data, the Daiwa Institute of Research said "various growth factors are seen, including normalisation of production for motor vehicles."

"A strong appetite for capex spending on the part of corporations, and a comeback for inbound consumption" were also positive factors, the institute said in a report.

This time last year, Germany overtook Japan as the world's third-biggest economy, with India projected to leapfrog both later this decade.

The change in positions primarily reflected the sharp fall in the yen against the dollar, analysts said at the time. – AFP

Tencent's Weixin app launches DeepSeek search testing

SHANGHAI: Tencent said its Weixin messaging app, China's largest, is allowing some users to search via DeepSeek's artificial intelligence model, as firms race to link up with the AI startup that has grabbed global attention.

In a beta test, Weixin is testing access to DeepSeek for searches, Tencent said in an e-mail statement to Reuters.

The move by the Chinese tech giant is notable as integrating DeepSeek brings in an external AI platform, while tech firms compete fiercely in developing the most advanced AI.

Weixin uses Tencent's proprietary Hunyuan-Large language model to enrich its AI search, a spokesperson said.

Tencent is exploring the integration of multiple products with DeepSeek, including Tencent Cloud AI Code Assistant and Tencent Yuanbao, another AI assistant app, said a person with knowledge of the matter.

DeepSeek is being tested by Weixin, which serves domestic users, not its sister app WeChat, which targets overseas users.

The two had a combined 1.38 billion users at the end of September.

DeepSeek last month upended the AI world, launching a free AI assistant that it says uses less data at a fraction of the cost of incumbent services.

It quickly overtook US rival ChatGPT in downloads from Apple's App Store.

Among Chinese companies seeking to capitalise on DeepSeek's potential breakthrough, automaker Great Wall Motor and leading telecoms providers are integrating the AI model released by DeepSeek into their offerings. – Reuters

DKSH will benefit from tariffs on China, says CEO

ZURICH: Swiss expansion services provider DKSH, mostly active in Southeast Asia, expects to benefit from the new tariffs on China, its CEO said during a press call.

"We think that the whole tariff discussion with China is going to have the effect that more trading is happening with South East Asia," CEO Stefan Butz said after the publication of DKSH's annual results.

As a result, the Zurich-based company expects to see more investments into the region in the coming years.

DKSH, which helps companies expand into other markets, makes roughly 70% of its sales in Southeast Asia, a region of growing importance as some companies seek to shift their production away from China to avoid a hit from geopolitical spats.

Earlier this month, US President Donald Trump imposed new 10% tariffs on Chinese imports, which led to China filing a complaint at the World Trade Organisation.

DKSH reported annual core earnings before interest and taxes of 343.1 million Swiss francs (RM1.6 billion), in line with market expectation, with its healthcare unit making up the lion's share of its business.

The group also said it expected 2025 core earnings to be higher than last year, without giving a concrete figure. – Reuters

BANGKOK: Thailand's economy grew less than expected into the end of 2024, data showed yesterday, and analysts said hopes of an improving outlook for this year are clouded by concerns that the country's export engine could be hit with US tariffs.

Southeast Asia's second-largest economy grew 3.2% in the October-December quarter from a year earlier, up from a 3% pace in the previous quarter, the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) said.

That missed the median forecast of 3.9% growth in a Reuters poll but was still the strongest annual rate in nine quarters.

On a quarterly basis, the economy grew a seasonally adjusted 0.4% in the October-December quarter, below the poll forecast of 0.7% growth and the 1.2% expansion in the prior quarter.

"The momentum of the economy is likely to slow down," said Krungthai Bank economist Chamadanai Marknual.

"The government needs to quickly introduce measures to support industries, such as the automotive and real estate sectors, to stimulate the economy."

The main stock index dropped as much as 2.8% to its lowest level in more than four years after the data,

Thai GDP growth in Q4 misses forecast

➤ Potential American tariffs pose economic risk this year

while the baht fell 0.3% against the US dollar.

The economy has lagged regional peers as it struggles under high household debt and borrowing costs, and sluggish demand from China, which is also a key tourism market.

Full-year growth came in at 2.5%, the NESDC said, faster than 2.0% growth in 2023, while the growth forecast for this year was unchanged at a range of 2.3% to 3.3%.

NESDC secretary-general Danucha Pichayanan said government spending, private consumption and investment, tourism, and exports would support growth this year but Thailand's trade

surplus with the US was a risk as President Donald Trump imposes tariffs on trading partners.

"It is undeniable that Thailand is also in the spotlight on this matter ... and that requires urgent attention to address and find ways to negotiate to reduce the impact on Thai exports," he said, as the agency upgraded its forecast for export growth this year to 3.5% from 2.6%.

Capital Economics said while economic growth has slowed, "we are expecting a better year ahead, with loose fiscal policy and further recovery in tourism spending set to be the key drivers."

The government is optimistic its

signature "digital wallet" stimulus scheme and other measures will stimulate the economy as it aims for 3.5% growth this year.

The NESDC maintained its forecast for 38 million foreign tourists to visit this year, below the record of nearly 40 million in 2019, the year before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite the lower-than-expected fourth quarter growth numbers, Danucha said the economy was expanding and there was no need to cut interest rates at the moment.

"We should be calm and wait and see," he added.

In December, the Bank of Thailand left its main interest rate at 2.25% following a surprise quarter-point cut in October.

Last month, the central bank governor said the current policy rate remained suitable, given the high household debt. - Reuters

Indonesia books US\$3.45b trade surplus in January

JAKARTA: Indonesia booked a US\$3.45 billion (RM15 billion) merchandise trade surplus in January, bigger than expected, amid surprisingly weak imports, official data showed yesterday.

A Reuters poll of analysts had expected a surplus of US\$1.91 billion for January. The country had a US\$2.24 billion surplus in December.

The trade data is among a series of economic indicators the central bank will consider at its monthly policy review this week.

Bank Indonesia (BI) has cut interest rates twice since September and

Governor Perry Warjiyo has said the bank has room to cut further, though most analysts polled by Reuters expect BI to keep interest rates unchanged tomorrow.

Southeast Asia's largest economy imported US\$18 billion worth of goods in January, down 2.67% from the same month a year earlier, in contrast with analysts' forecast for growth of 9.95%.

That marked the first contraction in imports in eight months.

Imports of consumer goods and raw materials for industry contracted

7.16% and 3.15%, respectively.

Statistics Indonesia chief Amalia Adininggar Widyasanti said the drop was likely due to industry activities affected by Chinese New Year holidays, compared with holidays in 2024 which fell in February.

Exports rose 4.68% on an annual basis in January to US\$21.45 billion, compared with 6.99% growth expected in the poll.

While shipments of its top commodities like coal, palm oil and nickel metals declined in value on a yearly basis, overall growth was

supported by exports of ships, jewellery and chemical products.

Miner Freeport Indonesia also stopped exporting copper concentrate this year after its permit expired at the end of 2024.

PermataBank economist Josua Pardele said the import contraction was unexpected, but likely to be temporary due to seasonal factors.

"The widening of current account deficit will limit the room for BI's rate cuts," he said, highlighting export challenges due to rising global trade tensions. - Reuters

Sri Lanka expects economy to grow at 5%

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka will focus on transforming its crisis-hit economy and prepare to resume debt repayments from 2028, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said yesterday, unveiling his first full budget after being elected to the top office last year.

The budget is expected to strengthen the South Asian island nation's recovery from a debilitating financial crisis in 2022 that led to its first international debt default, and align with a US\$2.9 billion (RM13 billion) IMF bailout.

The Marxist-leaning Dissanayake said that he expects the economy to grow at 5% in the medium term and aims to maintain low inflation, while also taking steps to keep exchange rates stable.

Sri Lanka will maintain a primary surplus of 2.3% of GDP and the budget has been formulated to meet that target, Dissanayake, who is also the finance minister, told parliament.

The government will ensure that Colombo repays all its debt, he said, foreseeing a steady reduction in poverty levels.

A severe drain in dollar reserves plunged the island nation into turmoil three years ago, sending inflation soaring, tanking its currency and forcing a US\$25 billion foreign debt default.

Since locking down US\$2.9 billion in emergency funding from the International Monetary Fund in March 2023, Sri Lanka has posted a faster than expected recovery. - Reuters

ePlane to supply air ambulances in US\$1 billion deal

MUMBAI: The ePlane Company, an Indian electric aircraft startup, said yesterday it has agreed to supply 788 air ambulances in a deal valued at more than US\$1 billion (RM4.4 billion), at a time when the country is grappling with worsening traffic congestion in busy cities.

Under the non-binding agreement, it will supply the electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft to ICATT, an air ambulance service provider, which plans to deploy them across all districts in India.

EVTOLs are seeking to revolutionise urban travel by developing battery-powered aircraft, which can take off and land vertically, giving commuters a chance to avoid traffic snarls.

India's nascent eVTOL market also includes companies such as Archer Aviation and Sarla Aviation.

ePlane is targeting commercial operations by the latter half of 2026, with an initial production of 100 units a year, its founder Satya Chakravarthy told Reuters.

"We can ramp up our production and put things into the market to good use much more effectively with an air ambulance than directly going to an air taxi."

"It's possible for us to ramp up air ambulances a lot more organically, compared to having to go to a rush with an air taxi." - Reuters



A saleswoman waiting for customers at an eyewear shop in Surabaya. - AFP/PIIC

Aussie insurance stocks slide after **breakup** threat

► Liberal Party leader vows to scrutinise industry practices if elected

CANBERRA: Australian insurance companies fell sharply yesterday after opposition leader Peter Dutton threatened to break them up, accusing them of exploiting customers, as the country prepares for federal elections due by May.

In an interview with Sky News, Dutton, leader of the Liberal Party, said that if elected in the federal election, his government would scrutinise insurance industry practices.

"In the insurance market, we will intervene to make sure that consumers get a fair go because at the moment people are paying too much for their insurance and what's resulting is that people aren't taking out insurance," Dutton said in the broadcast on Sunday.

The Australian insurance market is dominated by major players Suncorp Group, Insurance Australia Group (IAG) and QBE Insurance.

Suncorp shares slumped 21.3% and IAG fell 4.1%, while QBE dropped as much as 1%.

Suncorp shares slid to their lowest since May 30, 2024 and dropped the most since June 2020, while IAG's stock hit a more than three-month low.

Australia's opposition Liberal-National Coalition is leading the incumbent Labor, according to new opinion polls while a federal election looms large within three months, the latest indication of growing discontent with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's government.



A Suncorp sign adorns their office building in Sydney. – REUTERS/SPIC

Last week, IAG reported first-half earnings with its top-line growth and dividend missing estimates while Suncorp was trading ex-dividend yesterday.

"Peter Dutton's comments probably didn't do sentiment for insurance companies any favours either," said Tim Waterer, market analyst at KCM Trade.

"While at this stage it remains just an idea which has been floated, the comments did demonstrate that insurers and their practices have caught the attention of the opposition leader and therefore could come under closer policy scrutiny down the track."

Insurance premiums have spiked over the past year, with Australian Bureau of Statistics

data revealing a 16.4% increase, marking the largest rise in about thirty years.

Higher mortgage repayments amid a cost of living crisis have stretched household budgets.

"Insurance customers need to demand a better deal from state governments," said Andrew Hall, CEO of Insurance Council of Australia.

"State and territory governments collect more tax on insurance products than insurance companies make in profit."

"The abolition of state insurance taxes would reduce premiums by 10% to 30%, providing immediate cost of living relief." – Reuters

Delivery Hero Q4 growth above estimates

BERLIN: German online takeaway food company Delivery Hero reported stronger than expected growth for the fourth quarter, aided by strong order development and increasing basket size on its platform.

Quarterly gross merchandise value (GMV), which measures the total value of all goods sold, grew 8.2% to €12.81 billion (RM59 billion), beating analysts' average forecast of €12.31 billion.

The owner of Glovo also forecast GMV growth of 8% to 10% for 2025, compared with 8.3% last year.

"A solid set of results, in particular driven by MENA and LatAm," J.P. Morgan analysts said in a note to clients.

Delivery Hero reported a quarterly GMV of €3.7 billion in the Middle East and Northern

Africa, its second biggest market behind Asia.

The metric was €1.1 billion in the Americas region where it operates under the Pedidosya brand.

The company expects Pedidosya, which operates in 15 countries in Latin America, to reach the dimensions of its crown jewel Talabat in two or three years, CEO Niklas Ostberg told Reuters after the earnings publication.

"If we IPO it or not, that's probably another question. I think not, but the business itself is incredibly strong," Ostberg said.

Delivery Hero listed Talabat in Dubai in early December, while keeping an 80% stake in the subsidiary.

While governments and companies scramble to hedge the impact of US tariffs, Ostberg said he did not see a direct hit on Delivery Hero, which



he said was "fairly resilient" to inflation and other aspects that might affect it.

Delivery Hero said in a separate statement that it planned to buy back around €1 billion of convertible bonds, using the proceeds from Talabat's IPO. – Reuters

Barrick Gold beats profit forecasts, announces new share buyback

OTTAWA: Canada's Barrick Gold announced a new US\$1 billion (RM4.4 billion) share buyback programme as higher gold prices helped the company beat analysts' estimates for fourth-quarter profit.

The gold miner also more than doubled its free cash flow in the quarter.

Gold prices rose over 27% in 2024, their biggest yearly rise since 2010, driven by safe-haven demand, interest rate cuts and buying from central banks.

Higher gold prices have buoyed gold miners' earnings last year as they earned more on mining and selling the yellow metal.

Barrick said its average realised gold prices rose to US\$2,657 per ounce in the fourth quarter from US\$1,986 per ounce last year.

It scrapped its previous share buyback programme that was in place from Feb 14, 2024, having repurchased US\$498 million under it last year.

However, Barrick lowered its gold output forecast for the year to between 3.2 million ounces and 3.5 million ounces, from 3.9 million ounces in 2024, following the temporary closure of its Loulo-Gounkoto mine in Mali.

Barrick shuttered the mine in January amid an ongoing dispute with authorities in the West

African country over a new mining law that seeks to steeply raise royalty taxes and the state's ownership in mining projects.

CEO Mark Bristow said Barrick is still "open to a constructive engagement" with the government, adding that a mutually beneficial solution could still be found.

The company's 2024's gold output also came in below 2023's 4 million ounces, largely due to a slower-than-expected ramp up at the Pueblo Viejo mine in the Dominican Republic.

On an adjusted basis, Barrick posted a profit of 46 cents per share for the quarter ended Dec 31, compared with estimates of 41 cents. – Reuters

US sees UK in 'different light' on trade: Minister

LONDON: The United States views trade ties with Britain "in a different light" because it does not have a large deficit with the country, but difficult issues remain on tariffs, a senior British cabinet minister said on Sunday.

Since returning to power, President Donald Trump has sent shockwaves through global capitals by threatening or imposing high tariffs on imported goods into the US as part of his trade policy overhaul.

Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds told broadcasters Britain had a balanced trading relationship with the US and he reported "good engagement, good conversations" in his meetings with the Trump administration on the issue.

"They see us in a different light. It doesn't mean it'll be plain sailing for us. We've got some difficult things to agree upon, but they recognise the relationship is different."

Last week, Reynolds said Britain would seek to persuade the US government that its steel and aluminium products should avoid tariffs due to the sensitive role they play in the American defence sector and its manufacturing supply chains.

Trump said on Sunday he would introduce new 25% tariffs on all steel and aluminium imports into the US, on top of existing metals duties.

He said earlier in February, when talking about tariffs in general, that he thought something could be "worked out" with Britain.

Both countries report trade surpluses with each other – including goods and services – owing to measurement differences, according to Britain's Office for National Statistics.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer hopes this will work to his advantage in avoiding tariffs. – Reuters

Apple aims to bring AI features to Vision Pro: Report

NEW YORK: Apple is planning to add Apple Intelligence to its Vision Pro headset, along with an updated mode for guest users and a spatial content app as early as April, Bloomberg News reported.

The company plans to roll out the features as part of a software upgrade and they could be available in beta version for developers as soon as this week, the report added, citing people familiar with the matter.

Apple has been rushing to incorporate artificial intelligence into its devices to get ahead of rivals.

Reuters had earlier reported that the iPhone maker is in talks with Tencent and TikTok owner ByteDance about integrating their artificial intelligence models into iPhones sold in China.

Apple's Vision Pro starts at US\$3,499 in the United States.

Apple Intelligence on the Vision Pro would include features like the Writing Tools interface, Genmojis and the Image Playground app, Bloomberg said.

The move could be an effort at reviving the sales for the device which had been waning after initial enthusiasm following its launch in February last year, due to the headset's hefty price tag and competition from cheaper options including Meta Platforms' Quest. – Reuters

MARKET ROUND-UP: FEBRUARY 17

INTER-PACIFIC
SECURITIES SDN. BHD.
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A Participating Organisation of Bursa Malaysia Securities Berhad
A Trading Participant of Bursa Malaysia Derivatives Berhad

BURSA MALAYSIA TRADE STATISTICS - 17/02/2025

Most active traded	Vol (m')	Value (m')
RTECH	223.13	71.40
DIALOG	56.06	87.45
HM	55.62	8.34
INGENIEU	49.71	2.73
TWL	39.24	0.78

Preliminary stats (excluding trade amendments). For final data, please refer to www.bursamalaysia.com
Source: Bursa Malaysia

SUNBIZ presents a summary of the day's trading activity on Bursa Malaysia and other markets in an easy to digest format.

Sources: Bursa Malaysia, Bernama, shareinvestor.com and websites

DISCLAIMER: The data and reports are provided as a service to investors. Sun Media Corporation Sdn Bhd shall not be liable or responsible for any consequences resulting from usage of the information.

Bursa Indices		
INDEX	CHANGE	
FBMEMAS	12,045.10	-61.40
FBMKLCI	1,582.76	-8.84
CONSUMER PRODUCTS	526.34	-3.42
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS	163.92	-0.07
CONSTRUCTION	280.01	-4.39
FINANCIAL SERVICES	19,289.40	-53.10
ENERGY	798.29	-0.26
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	514.39	-3.54
HEALTH CARE	2,201.16	-12.40
TRANSPORTATION	1,060.00	-1.78
PROPERTY	1,059.17	-12.00
PLANTATION	7,432.94	-21.90
FBMSHA	11,773.80	-73.60
FBMACE	5,128.95	-5.83
TECHNOLOGY	58.20	-0.36
TURNOVER: 2.968 bil		VALUE: RM1.953 bil

Broadly lower on persistent selling by foreign funds

BURSA Malaysia's main index finished lower yesterday as selling by foreign funds persisted, amid the better performance in most regional markets.

At 5pm, the FBM KLCI fell 8.84 points, or 0.55%, to 1,582.76 compared with last Friday's close of 1,591.60.

The benchmark index opened 0.88 of a point higher at 1,592.48, marking its intraday high, and subsequently slid to a low of 1,580.94 during mid-afternoon session.

In the broader market, losers thumped gainers 715 to 313, while 465 counters were unchanged, 815 untraded and 10 suspended.

Turnover shrank to 2.98 billion units worth RM1.95 billion from 3.27 billion units worth RM2.40 billion last Friday.

UOB Kay Hian's Mohd Sedek Jantan said the FBM KLCI fell for the third day, led by losses in telecom and utilities.

"Despite the weaker local market, Asian equities edged higher on Monday, fuelled by strong performance in Hong Kong's technology sector, with continued investment following the surge in interest after DeepSeek.

"However, with the earnings season underway, Alibaba and Baidu are set to report their results this week, which could provide insights into the potential of artificial intelligence-driven revenue growth," he told Bernama.

Among the heavyweight counters, Maybank was flat at RM10.56, CIMB dropped five sen to RM8.30, Public Bank and IHH Healthcare decreased two sen each to RM4.47 and RM7.25 respectively. Tenaga Nasional added two sen to RM13.92.

ACE Market debutant Richtech Digital led the active counters, gaining seven sen to 32 sen with 223.13 million shares transacted, Dialog eased one sen to RM1.56, and TWL Holdings eased half-a-sen to two sen.

Top 20 Actives				
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
RTECH	0.320	0.070	28.00	2,231,345
HSI-PWB9	0.050	-0.010	-16.67	1,982,298
HSI-PWDV	0.110	-	-	805,542
HSI-PWDK	0.035	-	-	629,737
HSI-CWCA	0.190	-0.025	-11.63	590,607
HSI-CWCD	0.150	0.020	15.39	571,206
DIALOG	1.560	-0.010	-0.64	560,553
HM	0.150	-	-	556,222
INGENIEU	0.055	0.005	10.00	497,148
TWL	0.020	-0.005	-20.00	392,367
AIZO	0.100	-0.015	-13.04	377,169
GENM	2.440	0.030	1.25	322,714
YBS	0.505	-0.090	-15.13	312,507
HSI-PWDN	0.140	0.040	40.00	306,582
HSI-PWDP	0.075	0.005	7.14	305,991
HUBLINE	0.045	-0.010	-18.18	297,232
TOPGLOV-WA	0.385	0.080	26.23	296,103
GENINGC3H	0.025	0.005	25.00	276,364
ASIAPLY	0.165	0.010	6.45	261,857
GENM-C2Y	0.040	0.005	14.29	256,338



Top 20 Gainers (By RM)			
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
F&N	26.500	0.280	234
HSI-CWCO	0.930	0.255	120
UTDPLT	31.720	0.240	1,710
HSI-CWAX	0.610	0.160	10
CIHLGD	2.680	0.120	1
HSI-CWCH	0.765	0.120	360
HSI-CWCY	0.260	0.110	400
BYD-C31	0.555	0.105	300
PMETAL	5.100	0.100	121,549
XOX	0.500	0.100	108,122
TENCENT-C44	0.435	0.095	3,000
AEONCR	5.820	0.090	1,746
YINSON	2.250	0.090	97,494
CHUAN	0.390	0.080	46
LYSAGHT	2.680	0.080	107
NESTLE	91.120	0.080	33
TOPGLOV-WA	0.385	0.080	296,103
HSI-CWCF	0.160	0.075	5,395
TENCENT-C43	0.325	0.075	795
CHINHIN	2.190	0.070	504

Top 20 Gainers (By %)			
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
PERDANA-CH	0.015	200.00	1
GENM-C2Z	0.020	100.00	1
GIIB-WA	0.010	100.00	21
NEXGRAM-WD	0.010	100.00	3,375
YINSON-C40	0.010	100.00	7,234
HSI-CWCF	0.160	88.24	5,395
HSI-CWCH	0.260	73.33	400
GENM-C3C	0.050	66.67	60,500
LIONIND-WA	0.015	50.00	567
MNC-WC	0.030	50.00	14
MAXLAND-WB	0.015	50.00	8,825
MNRB-CH	0.015	50.00	2,500
MOBILIA-WB	0.030	50.00	289
PMETAL-CIC	0.015	50.00	86,100
TSH-C10	0.015	50.00	2,000
HSI-PWDN	0.140	40.00	306,582
PINGAN-C25	0.035	40.00	4,000
HSI-CWCO	0.930	37.78	120
HSI-CWAX	0.610	35.56	10
COMPUT	0.020	33.33	1,904

World Stocks/Commodities			
INDEX	CLOSING	DAILY CHANGE	DAILY CHANGE (%)
DJIA [US]	44,546.08	-165.35	-0.37
S&P 500 [US]	6,114.63	-0.44	-0.01
NASDAQ [US]	20,026.77	81.13	0.41
NYSE [US]	20,130.48	-50.81	-0.25
EURO STOXX 50 [EUR]	5,500.01	6.61	0.12
FTSE 100 [UK]	8,745.82	13.36	0.15
DAX [GER]	22,611.39	97.97	0.44
NIKKEI 225 [JPN]	39,174.25	24.82	0.06
TOPIX INDEX [JPN]	2,766.90	7.69	0.28
HANG SENG INDEX [HK]	22,616.23	-4.1	-0.02
CSI 300 [CHN]	3,947.40	8.39	0.21
MSCI ASIA PACIFIC	188.05	1.68	0.9
SHANGHAI SE COM [CHN]	3,355.83	9.11	0.27
KOSPI INDEX [SK]	2,610.42	19.37	0.75
SENSEX INDEX [IND]	75,807.25	-131.96	-0.17
ASX 200 [AUS]	8,537.11	-18.7	-0.22
ALL ORDINARIES INDX [AUS]	8,811.93	-13.16	-0.15
FBM KLCI	1,582.76	-8.84	-0.56
STRAITS TIMES INDEX [S'PORE]	3,904.85	27.35	0.71
WTI [US\$/BBL]	70.85	0.11	0.16
BRENT [US\$/BBL]	74.82	0.08	0.11
GOLD [COMEX] [US\$/T OZ]	2,915.40	14.7	0.51
SILVER [COMEX] [US\$/T OZ]	32.93	0.08	0.23
PLATINUM [US\$/T OZ]	985.49	1.54	0.16
COPPER [COMEX] [US CENTS/LB.]	469.3	-2	-0.42
COPPER 3MO [LME] [US\$/MT]	9,477.00	-8	-0.08
CORN [US CENTS/BU.]	508.75	2.75	0.54
WHEAT [US CENTS/BU.]	613.5	21.5	3.63
SOYBEAN OIL [CBOT] [US CENTS/LB.]	46.52	-0.16	-0.34
COCOA [ICE] [US\$/MT]	10,325.00	-213	-2.02
RUBBER [S'PORE] [US CENTS/KG]	202.8	-1.8	-0.88

As at 5pm, Feb 17

Top 20 Losers (By RM)			
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
PETDAG	19.200	-0.580	631
HEIM	27.300	-0.300	2,595
PETGAS	17.440	-0.300	8,275
ALLIANZ	18.960	-0.200	252
SUNCOR	4.180	-0.200	87,290
ALIBABA-C40	0.035	-0.195	1,000
HLIND	13.900	-0.160	575
UMS	2.100	-0.150	30
PPB	11.420	-0.140	2,779
TMK	1.490	-0.110	20,137
YTLPOWER	3.380	-0.110	66,617
AJI	15.240	-0.100	42
CAPITALA-LA	0.890	-0.100	449
CARLSBG	19.660	-0.100	1,239
MISC	7.240	-0.090	1,689
QUALITY	1.120	-0.090	10
YBS	0.505	-0.090	312,507
BURSA	7.890	-0.080	23,869
ECOWLD	1.840	-0.080	32,869
KHIND	2.320	-0.080	10

Top 20 Losers (By %)			
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
ALIBABA-C40	0.035	-84.78	1,000
GCB-C10	0.005	-80.00	14,300
KSL-CJ	0.010	-75.00	2,006
S&FCAP-WC	0.010	-71.43	4,196
IJM-C87	0.005	-66.67	200
MYEG-C7H	0.005	-66.67	3,400
GENM-HJ	0.020	-55.56	15,860
MRIY-C38	0.020	-55.56	2,000
99SMART-CU	0.015	-50.00	2,000
ANEKA-WA	0.005	-50.00	8,516
AXIATA-CIC	0.005	-50.00	20
CMSB-C57	0.010	-50.00	4,000
DIGISTA-WD	0.010	-50.00	16
FBMKLCI-CQ0	0.005	-50.00	5,200
HSI-CWAZ	0.015	-50.00	1,593
HSI-PWDA	0.005	-50.00	7,890
IJM-C91	0.010	-50.00	650
JAKS-WC	0.005	-50.00	96,988
OCR-WE	0.005	-50.00	13,427
PETGAS-C5	0.015	-50.00	4,330

MARKETS/FROM THE BROKERS

SUNBIZ presents extracts of a selection of commentaries and research reports received from stockbrokers on counters that could be of interest to investors.

Compiled by **SunBiz Team**

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HLIB: Malaysia can manage US trade tension impacts

KUALA LUMPUR: Hong Leong Investment Bank (HLIB) expects Malaysia to withstand the impact of renewed US trade tensions even as President Donald Trump moves to reintroduce tariffs.

In a research note yesterday, HLIB said although Trump has introduced new tariff measures, including an already-effective 10% tax on Chinese imports, Malaysia and other Asean nations could benefit from the trade diversion, similar to trends seen during his first 2017-2021 term in office.

During Trump's first term, Asean nations particularly Vietnam, benefited from the US-China trade war, with Vietnam's exports to the US growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15.9%.

"Malaysia also saw notable gains with a CAGR of 4.6% then," HLIB said.

Similar trade shifts could re-emerge, creating opportunities for export-driven Asian economies with Trump 2.0 and his new 10% tariff on Chinese imports, it said.

"Industries to potentially benefit include toys, sporting goods (with 66.5% of US imports dependent on China), and cell phones & appliances (57.3%)," HLIB said.

It estimated the overall US-Malaysia tariff gap at only 2.3%, based on potential reciprocal tariffs calculated using a simple average tariff gap metric, indicating no substantial imbalances.

"For now, we maintain our 2025 GDP at 4.9%, driven by strong domestic demand drivers," it said.

Given Trump's unpredictable trade stance, however, the risk of a blanket 10% universal tariff remains possible, it said.

The 2018-2020 US-China trade war led to a notable decline in Chinese exports, underscoring the role of trade elasticities in shaping trade flows. – Bernama

Ringgit firmer against dollar on sustained hope for Fed rate cut

THE ringgit ended higher against the US dollar yesterday, fueled by continued expectation that the US Federal Reserve (Fed) will cut interest rates.

At 6pm, the ringgit rose to 4.4300/4360 versus the greenback compared to Friday's close of 4.4310/4385.

Bank Muamalat Malaysia Bhd chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid said weak US consumer data such as lower retail sales and declining consumer sentiment suggest that the Fed interest rate cut thesis is still intact.

The latest US retail sales number came in lower than expected, falling 0.9% month-on-month in January against the consensus estimate of a 0.1% decline.

Following this, he said, the ringgit was generally stronger against the greenback during the day, touching as high as 4.4250 in the morning session before retreating thereafter.

"It appears that the ringgit attempted to break the immediate support level of RM4.43, and it did happen on several occasions during the day," he told Bernama.

The ringgit traded mostly higher against major currencies. It appreciated versus the euro to 4.6413/6476 from 4.6437/6515 at Friday's close and advanced against the British pound to 5.5765/5840 from 5.5769/5863 previously, but slipped vis-a-vis the Japanese yen to 2.9179/9221 from 2.9048/9099.

The local note also performed mostly better against a basket of Asean currencies.

The ringgit strengthened versus the Singapore dollar to 3.3025/3072 from 3.3055/3113 at the end of last week, increased against the Thai baht to 13.1349/1593 from 13.1761/2059 on Friday, and firmed vis-a-vis the Philippine peso to 7.63/7.65 from 7.66/7.68.

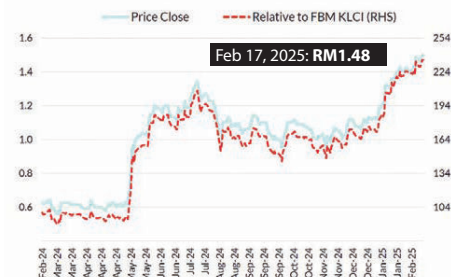
Exchange Rates

FOREIGN CURRENCY	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.4940	4.3610	4.3510
1 Australian Dollar	2.8760	2.7610	2.7450
1 Brunei Dollar	3.3550	3.2580	3.2500
1 Canadian Dollar	3.1670	3.0830	3.0710
1 Euro	4.7220	4.5700	4.5500
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.5870	2.4920	2.476
1 Singapore Dollar	3.3550	3.2580	3.2500
1 Sterling Pound	5.6660	5.4860	5.4660
1 Swiss Franc	5.0250	4.8120	4.7970
100 UAE Dirham	123.8000	117.4100	117.2100
100 Bangladesh Taka	3.7750	3.5170	3.3170
100 Chinese Renminbi	62.4100	59.7900	N/A
100 Danish Krone	64.8800	59.7200	59.5200
100 Hongkong Dollar	58.3700	55.4800	55.2800
100 Indian Rupee	5.2700	4.9500	4.7500
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0287	0.0260	0.0210
100 Japanese Yen	2.9680	2.8740	2.8640
100 New Taiwan Dollar	N/A	N/A	N/A
100 Norwegian Krone	41.5100	38.2000	38.0000
100 Pakistan Rupee	1.6400	1.5300	1.3300
100 Philippine Peso	7.8700	7.4200	7.2200
100 Qatar Riyal	124.6400	118.3200	118.1200
100 Saudi Riyal	121.1600	115.0200	114.8200
100 South Africa Rand	25.3700	22.9200	22.7200
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	1.5600	1.4400	1.2400
100 Swedish Krona	43.3500	39.4900	39.2900
100 Thai Baht	13.9300	12.3600	11.9600

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

PTT Synergy Group Bhd

Not Rated



Source: Bloomberg

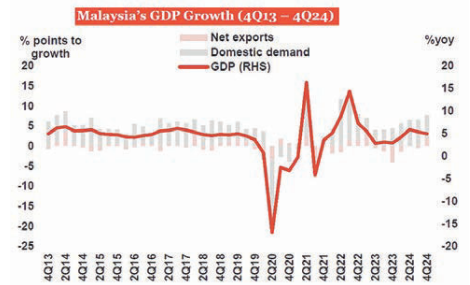
PTT is one of the largest earthworks contractors in Malaysia. It owns the largest heavy machinery and equipment fleet in the country. Its unbilled construction orderbook currently stands at RM628 million, of which 25-30% of jobs stem from Sime Darby Property (SDPR). SDPR's property sales have been one of the strongest among its sector peers. As such, as demand for its residential and industrial products grow, PTT is likely to continue securing earthworks contracts from SDPR over the medium term.

PTT has indirectly benefited from US-China trade tensions in recent years, as many companies in the region have expanded a part of their operations in Malaysia. Given the need for larger storage space to support operations, PTT is now playing an important role in this part of the value chain. The company now provides total intralogistics solutions, including the installation of an automatic storage retrieval system (ASRS) to its clients. In Oct 2024, it entered into a sizeable build-to-suit and lease contract with a multinational company in Penang that specialises in semiconductor manufacturing. The company now has five smart warehouse projects under negotiation, with a total warehouse capacity of 225,000 pallets and GFA of 1.57 million sq ft.

While investors may be concerned with PTT's high net gearing level (1.36x as at Sep 2024), we note that these are mainly the borrowings undertaken to fund all the warehouse projects. Management indicated that the financial risk is manageable, as the tenant, long-term lease commitment and potential exit (for PTT) are largely secured – just like PTT Hub 1, which was sold to Capitaland Malaysia Trust before it was completed. – **RHB Research, Feb 17**

Economy

2024 GDP growth at 5.1%



Source: DOSM, PublicInvest Research

THE Malaysian economy grew by 5% YoY in Q4'24 (Q3'24: 5.4%), higher than the advance estimate of 4.8%, driven by resilient domestic demand. Investment activity remained strong, supported by the continued realisation of new and existing projects. Private consumption was sustained amid a favourable labour market and ongoing policy support.

On the external front, exports of goods and services expanded, while growth in capital and intermediate imports moderated. On the supply side, services remained the key growth driver, led by both consumer-related and business-related segments.

Manufacturing growth was underpinned by the E&E and primary-related clusters. The construction sector maintained double-digit growth, supported by robust activity in the residential, non-residential, and special trade segments. However, growth was weighed down by a contraction in the commodities sector, reflecting lower oil palm output and a continued decline in oil production.

For full-year 2024, Malaysia's GDP expanded by 5.1% YoY (2023: 3.6%), supported by sustained domestic demand and a recovery in exports. Investment growth was bolstered by strong approvals and ongoing multi-year projects across the private and public sectors, including catalytic initiatives under national master plans such as the New Industrial Master Plan, National Energy Transition Roadmap, and National Semiconductor Strategy.

BNM expects Malaysia's economic growth to remain resilient in 2025, supported by strong investment activity, sustained household spending, and continued export expansion. – **PublicInvest Research, Feb 17**

Binastra Corporation Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM2.21



Source: Bloomberg

BNASTRA has clinched RM3.1 billion worth of new jobs in FY25 (Jan) – a record high compared to its job replenishment levels in FY22-24, which never exceeded RM1 billion. The substantial increase in new job wins in FY25 is mainly backed by key clients that have project pipelines of RM6-8 billion worth of cumulative GDV; these projects are expected to be launched annually over the next three years. Also, we note that the group has been gradually securing non-residential jobs such as data centres (DCs) and sewage treatment plants in FY25 worth a total of RM1.1 billion. As of early Dec 2024, its outstanding orderbook of RM3.7 billion provides an orderbook-to-revenue cover ratio of 8.7x, vs the industry average of 3-4x.

BNASTRA's key clients such as EXSIM Development and Maxim Global are expanding into Johor Bahru, with upcoming projects (located in the vicinity of the Bukit Chagar Rapid Transit System (RTS) station) potentially having a GDV of more than RM5 billion – translating into contracts worth at least RM2.5 billion that billionASTRA can eye for.

We project a 3-year (FY24-27) earnings CAGR of 161% for BNASTRA, largely in tandem with its anticipated orderbook growth. This is backed by the expansion of its key clients beyond the Klang Valley and its diversification into non-residential projects. BNASTRA's involvement in mixed development projects with multiple phases – which could translate to a higher likelihood of securing participation in the later phases – is estimated at RM4 billion, based on the group's current five mixed development projects.

BUY with RM2.21 TP. – **RHB Research, Feb 17**



the Sun **LYFE**

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WEEKLY **FOCUS**

MONDAY

Technology and
social media

TUESDAY

Travel
and leisure

WEDNESDAY

Fashion
and beauty

THURSDAY

Home
and living

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and beverage

Splendours of Sabah

Choice destinations to
check out in 2025 - **P22**

INSIDE

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Saudi art biennale shows
changing kingdom

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China pride over
animated film

p25

Castlevania: Nocturne
stumbles over focus



Experience Tamu Besar Kota Belud, a major cultural event in the town.



Admire the wildlife at the Utan Rainforest Lodge.



Kinabatangan River.

SABAH, the crown jewel of Malaysian Borneo, offers a captivating blend of cultural immersion, adventures and natural beauty. Whether you are a traveller from a faraway land or a local tourist looking to explore domestic destinations, Sabah offers something unique for everyone.

Here is a curated list of must-visit destinations and events that showcase the best of Sabah.

Maliau Basin

Nestled within the heart of Sabah lies a true natural wonder: Maliau Basin.

Touted as "The Lost World of Sabah", Maliau Basin is a vast, isolated, almost atavistic rainforest situated in Tawau. The saucer-shaped depression, surrounded by cliffs, creates within itself a self-contained ecosystem with exceptional biodiversity.

Maliau Basin is known for its seven-tiered waterfall the Maliau Falls and Lake Linumunsu, which is a crater lake hidden within the basin.

Thanks to its remoteness, Maliau Basin is also a haven for wildlife. Its dense rainforests are home to a diverse range of species including 300 species of birdlife, primates, reptiles and amphibians, as well as botanical wonders such as the towering Agathis trees and a myriad of orchids.

Utan Rainforest Lodge

A relatively new eco-friendly accommodation in Sabah, the Utan Rainforest Lodge is an eco-lodge situated at the Sungai Kapur Virgin Jungle Reserve, just outside the renowned Tabin Wildlife Reserve in Lahad Datu.

Opened in 2023, the Utan Rainforest Lodge offers an opportunity to immerse yourself in the beauty and biodiversity of Borneo's rainforest. Surrounded by dense vegetation and a lush mangrove forest, the lodge provides a serene and authentic retreat, where you can experience thrilling wildlife and birdlife encounters.

Mount Trusmadi

While Mount Kinabalu often steals the spotlight in Sabah, another majestic peak awaits those seeking a more rugged, challenging climb. Mount Trusmadi is a place once popular as a hunting ground for locals.

Soaring to a height of 2,642m above sea level, Mount Trusmadi is the second-highest mountain in Malaysia. The mountain presents a steeper and rockier ascent, as the challenge lies in its steep inclines and often muddy terrain, testing physical endurance and mental fortitude.

The trails of Mount Trusmadi

Discover Sabah

➤ Immersive experience of nature, culture in Borneo



Regatta Lepa, Semporna.



Mount Trusmadi.



Maliau Basin.



Borneo Cultural Village.



Diving in Sipadan Island.



Conquer the highest peak in Malaysia during the Mount Kinabalu International Climbathon.

wind through lush rainforests, offering glimpses of diverse flora and fauna. Its slopes are home to a variety of plant and animal life, including pitcher plants, colourful birds and elusive mammals.

Sipadan Island

A speck of land off the coast of Sabah, Sipadan Island is renowned as one of the world's premier dive destinations and adored by legendary oceanographer Jacques Cousteau.

Rising dramatically from the deep Celebes Sea, this oceanic island is a haven for marine biodiversity, attracting divers and underwater enthusiasts from around the globe. Sipadan's unique geological formation contributes to its extraordinary underwater world.

The island's underwater landscape offers a kaleidoscope of exciting colours and textures. Its coral reefs teem with life, hosting a myriad of fish species, including schools of barracuda, snappers and reef sharks. Divers may

encounter turtles, manta rays and even hammerhead sharks, making each dive an unforgettable experience.

To ensure the sustainability of Sipadan's underwater environment, divers are advised to have their Advanced Open Water diving licence before applying for a dive permit.

Kinabatangan River

The Kinabatangan River, the longest river in Sabah, winds its way through a vast floodplain, creating a vital ecosystem. This floodplain, once a vast expanse of pristine rainforest, is now a mosaic of forests, swamps and agricultural lands, offering a glimpse into the delicate balance between human activity and nature.

Kinabatangan is a haven for biodiversity, supporting an array of flora and fauna. Proboscis monkeys, clouded leopards, pygmy elephants and orangutans are among the wildlife that call Kinabatangan home. The river itself attracts a variety of fish,

reptiles and birds.

A cruise along the river allows you the opportunity to spot the Borneo Big Five wildlife: the Borneo pygmy elephant, orangutan, proboscis monkey, rhinoceros hornbill and saltwater crocodile.

Borneo Cultural Village

With over 35 ethnic groups and approximately 200 sub-ethnic groups in Sabah, it is impossible to experience its rich amalgamation of cultural heritage in a short time.

Therefore, the Borneo Cultural Village, Sabah's largest cultural village, offers an immersive experience into the diverse cultures of the state's indigenous people.

This living museum showcases the traditional houses, customs and lifestyles of Sabah's six distinct ethnic groups: Murut, Lundayeh, Rungus, Kadazan Penampang, Bajau and Dusun Papar.

This cultural village is designed to replicate the authentic living environments of each ethnic

group, complete with traditional longhouses, handcrafted tools and intricate decorations.

In addition to the guided tour, you will also be entertained with a cultural performance and have the opportunity to taste exotic food.

Mount Kinabalu International Climbathon

The Mount Kinabalu International Climbathon is an annual skyrunning competition that is a major event in the Calendar of Sabah Events. The Climbathon is known for its challenging course and stunning scenery, taking place on the highest peak in Malaysia.

Slated for October 2025, the Climbathon race covers a distance of 26km, with a significant portion of the climb involving steep ascents and descents on rugged terrain.

The event attracts elite athletes and amateur runners from around the world who are looking for an unforgettable challenge.

Turn to
page 23

Saudi art biennale projects openness

➤ Second edition continues effort to transform kingdom's ultraconservative image

UNDER a vast canopy of tents in the Saudi city of Jeddah, religious artefacts are on display alongside contemporary art pieces, which is part of the kingdom's bid to transform its ultraconservative image.

The second edition of the Islamic Arts Biennale, titled *And All That Is In Between*, features as its centrepiece segments of the *kiswa*, the black cloth embroidered with gold and silver that covers the Kaaba, the cubic building towards which all Muslims pray.

Hundreds more works are on display at the west terminal of King Abdulaziz International Airport in the coastal city, including valuable objects on loan from London's Victoria & Albert Museum and the Louvre in Paris, as well as rare artefacts from the Vatican Library such as a medieval Quran in Hebrew script.

"This bringing together of the contemporary and the past really emphasises the change that Saudi Arabia is going through," said exhibition curator and Saudi artist Muhammad Shono.

Home to Islam's holiest sites, the kingdom has long been dominated by Wahhabism, a strict interpretation of Islam that prohibits the representation of human and animal figures.

As a result of the prohibition of such depictions in most Sunni Muslim schools of thought, geometric patterns came to be widely prevalent in Islamic art.

But the biennale in Jeddah features medieval Persian illuminations, including royal portraits and a fountain designed by Yemeni-Indonesian artist Anhar Salem whose mosaic tiles, assembled by colour using artificial intelligence, are made up of avatars sourced online.

Traditional conceptions

"We have traditional conceptions of Islam and its history, which I feel we should begin to re-examine from a new perspective," said visitor Abdelelah Qutub, a 31-year-old architect from Mecca.

A few metres away, Franco-Lebanese artist Tamara Kalo had recreated the camera obscura, the precursor to the modern camera invented in the 11th century by Muslim philosopher Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen).

Kalo said her installation, made out of copper, sought to raise the question of "what it means to see and what it means to be a witness".

The exhibition has also encouraged artists to be bold with scale, as can be seen from a massive disc covered in petrol — a nod to Saudi Arabia's position as



Hundreds of works are on display at the west terminal of King Abdulaziz International Airport. — AFP/IC

the world's leading crude exporter — that spins endlessly.

Its creator Italian artist Arcangelo Sassolino said: "For me, it represents time. It is something that keeps evolving while we are watching the piece."

Under his "Vision 2030", de facto Saudi leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has sought to transform the kingdom's image, weighed down by decades of repression and ultraconservatism.

According to National University of Singapore honorary fellow James Dorsey, Saudi authorities are seeking to address what he described as a "reputation deficit", having long been

considered a secretive, ultraconservative kingdom.

Efforts to project openness, including the biennale, are key to the success of Vision 2030, he said.

Sharing space

Strategically located in a terminal adjacent to the one reserved for Muslims on a pilgrimage to Mecca, the Jeddah biennale attracts a mix of art enthusiasts and pilgrims.

"We had pilgrims coming from over the road here to see the Mecca and Medina pavilions last time," said art historian Julian Raby.

The first edition in 2023 attracted 600,000 visitors, approaching the Venice Biennale's 700,000 visitors in 2024.

Now, the Islamic Arts Biennale aims to exceed a million visitors, many from abroad.

"That internationalism is exactly the opposite of how many people consider Saudi Arabia. They look at Saudi Arabia and consider it as a cloistered country."

"The Islamic world has never been cloistered, it has been in dialogue, dynamic," said Raby.

In front of her monumental sculpture, a black steel bush of roses floating above a fountain, Jordanian artist Raya Kassisieh was proud to benefit from the platform provided by the biennale.

"We are able and at the level to converse and share space with the West," she said. — AFP

Exploring Malaysia's eastern pearl

Tanjung Simpang Mengayau

Kudat, situated in the northernmost part of Sabah, is famous for its scenic white sandy beaches.

Just a short trek from Kalamunian beach is Tanjung Simpang Mengayau, otherwise known as the "Tip of Borneo".

The most striking feature of Tanjung Simpang Mengayau is its dramatic location, where the Celebes Sea and the Sulu Sea converge.

This creates a unique landscape with rocky cliffs, pristine beaches and crystal-clear waters. Tanjung Simpang Mengayau also provides an astounding backdrop for sunset-watching.

Tamu Besar Kota Belud

The Tamu Besar Kota Belud is a larger event that takes place beyond the weekly Tamu Kota Belud.

Held in October annually, this event is a major highlight on Sabah's Calendar of Events, attracting thousands of visitors from near and far.

The Tamu Besar is a multi-day affair, overflowing with vibrant cultural performances, traditional sports and a bustling marketplace.

It is a time when the local Bajau community comes together to showcase their rich heritage, from traditional dances and music to intricate handicrafts and delectable cuisine.



Tanjung Simpang Mengayau.

Regatta Lepa, Semporna

The Regatta Lepa is a vibrant water festival held annually on Sabah's east coast of Semporna.

It celebrates the rich cultural traditions of the Bajau Laut ethnic group, also known as the Sea Gypsies.

This unique nomadic tribe has a deep connection to the sea, being excellent boatmen and fishermen who live mainly above the water.

The Regatta Lepa showcases their maritime heritage, cultural artistry and vibrant community spirit.

The Regatta Lepa's most

spectacular highlight is the parade of exquisitely crafted and colourful lepa boats.

These traditional sailing vessels, often decorated with intricate carvings and vibrant colours, glide gracefully through the waters, accompanied by the rhythmic and enchanting traditional Bajau dance known as *Igal-Igal*.

Sabah is a land rich in culture, nature and adventure offerings, making it ideal for those looking to explore destinations that are off the beaten path.

Bon voyage!

Wizard wonderland

CHINA'S first official Harry Potter Studio Tour is expected to open in Shanghai in 2027, US entertainment giant Warner Bros Discovery said last week, announcing an agreement with a local tourism and hotel group.

The franchise is popular in China, whose capital Beijing already has a large-scale Harry Potter-themed attraction at a Universal Studios resort.

The Studio Tour, which also has locations in London and Tokyo, takes visitors behind the scenes, displaying sets, costumes and props from the movies.

"This is the first landing of Harry Potter Studio Tour in China," Warner Bros Discovery said on Chinese social media platform WeChat.

It said the project is being implemented in partnership with Jinjiang International, a Shanghai-based tourism and hotel conglomerate, adding the joint venture agreement is still in the process of acquiring regulatory approval.

In its own statement, Jinjiang International said the new Harry Potter attraction will lead visitors to embark on an unsurpassed behind-the-scenes exploration and share various interactive experiences.

The future attraction will be located at an existing amusement park in Shanghai, the Jinjiang Action Park, which closed for renovation work on Jan 26 and is not expected to reopen until the 2027 launch. — AFP



The proposed site is expected to cover an area of 53,000 square metres.

— AFP/IC



Chinese animated hit stirs pride

➤ Based on traditional mythology, *Ne Zha 2* smashes multiple box office records

ANIMATED Chinese blockbuster *Ne Zha 2*, based on traditional mythology, has smashed multiple box office records and it is on its way to becoming the country's most successful movie ever.

The tale of a rebellious young deity who battles dragons is the first movie to earn over US\$1 billion (RM4.4 billion) in a single market, overtaking *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, which made US\$936 million in the US in 2015.

Released last month to coincide with the Chinese New Year holiday, a prime movie-going time in China, the film has reignited the country's movie industry after 2024 saw box office receipts slump 23% compared with a year earlier.

A sequel five years in the making, *Ne Zha 2*, which draws on the 16th-century novel *Investiture of the Gods*, has tapped into growing demand for products that draw from traditional Chinese stories and national pride in China's

technological progress.

"*Ne Zha* is deeply rooted in Chinese culture. We resonate with the characters and background," said 36-year-old Gao Zhen, who watched the movie with his child in Beijing.

Audiences have also pointed to the movie's special effects as evidence of China's film industry catching up with, or even surpassing, Hollywood's offerings.

"Foreign movies may have dazzling visuals, but Chinese cinema has also mastered those techniques now," Gao said.

"I used to prefer Western animation, such as Disney and Pixar. But now, Chinese animation is getting stronger and I prefer domestic productions more,"

26-year-old media worker Qu Peihong said.

Confidence booster

The original *Ne Zha* became China's highest-grossing animated film after it was released in 2019.

Ne Zha 2 surpassed all former domestic box office record holders, including the 2019 sci-fi hit *The Wandering Earth* and 2021's patriotic war film *The Battle at Lake Changjin*, in just nine days. After a barren spell for standout films in China last year, the return of *Ne Zha* has boosted people's confidence in the industry, Qu said.

According to local media reports, director Jiao Zi, whose real name is Yang Yu, said he originally tried to

work with international partners on the film but found the outcomes not up to standard and instead used an all-Chinese team.

Some fans have speculated the film also contains hidden geopolitical symbolism, suggesting the villain's palace is a reference to the US Pentagon or White House, though the filmmakers have not commented on these rumours.

"This film far exceeded my expectations, it was really exciting. When I exited the cinema, I felt a deep sense of pride as a Chinese person. I think there will be more in the future. I believe this is just the beginning," said 22-year-old Zhang Zhengfa.

Rebellion and nonconformity

The film's success proves Chinese animation has grown into a powerhouse and can rival Disney and Japanese animations in the Chinese domestic market, *Hollywood in China* author Ying Zhu.

The film has transformed a traditional folklore into a modern tale of individuality, which struck a chord with audiences, she said.

Audiences have chimed with the film's story of rebellion and nonconformity, similar to how they embraced the plot of hit video game *Black Myth: Wukong* last year, data company BigOne Lab CEO Robert Wu wrote in his newsletter.

Black Myth combines the classic 16th-century Chinese novel *Journey to the West* with cutting-edge graphics, and the main character is a fun-loving and defiant Monkey King who battles demons.

But while the game became an international best-seller, there is less certainty around how *Ne Zha 2*, based on a legend little known outside of China, will be received elsewhere, given the limited reception of the original.

"I do not think (foreign audiences) will understand it as deeply as we do. But I hope this movie will help them to understand Chinese culture," said moviegoer Qu. - AFP

Ne Zha 2 is the first movie to earn over US\$1 billion in a single market.
- AFP/PIIC



Genting SkyWorlds Theme Park tickets going for as low as RM36

RESORTS World Genting is inviting guests to experience the action and adventure at Genting SkyWorlds Theme Park, starting from RM36, in conjunction with its Diamond Jubilee.

Until Aug 31, guests will be able to enjoy theme park deals with the one-day standard ticket costing only RM36 (normal price RM84) for walk-in Pahang citizens and RM60 (normal price RM168) for other Malaysians and RM120 (normal price RM198) for non-Malaysians via online booking.

Connect with family and friends and create unforgettable memories on a budget-friendly adventure at Genting SkyWorlds Theme Park's nine exciting worlds, where a smorgasbord of thrills and wonders await.

If you fancy a trip with work buddies, Genting SkyWorlds offers team building and family day packages for fostering camaraderie among colleagues. The outdoor

theme park also caters for school groups with a newly-introduced school package now available for booking.

Genting SkyWorlds Team Building Package entitles participants to a specially-curated session inclusive of a standard day ticket, RM50 F&B credit and limited-edition merchandise at RM240 nett per pax, while the family day and school packages offer a standard day ticket with RM50 F&B credit at RM180 nett per pax. Early park entry and opening gambit are inclusive for bookings of 200 pax and above. These promo packages are valid until Dec 31, excluding eve of public holidays and public holidays with a minimum reservation of 50 pax per group.

Starting today, Genting SkyWorlds Theme Park will operate from 10am until 6pm daily with the exception of Tuesdays, but will remain open if it is a public holiday.



Experience spectacular sights via the Samba Glider at Genting SkyWorlds Theme Park.

Castlevania's brilliant, flawed return

BY MARK MATHEN VICTOR

➤ Wrongheaded focus weighs down animated series

A culmination of events from the previous season, *Castlevania: Nocturne*'s second season hits and exceeds many of the high notes set by its predecessor, upping the ante not only in storytelling but also animation and action quality.

Now wielding a portion of the power stolen from the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet, the vampire messiah Erzsebet Bathory (Franka Potente) begins her conquest of France as the country is gripped by the French Revolution.

Led by the human-vampire hybrid Alucard (James Callis), vampire hunter Richter Belmont (Edward Bluemel), Vodou magician Annette (Thuso Mbedu) and summoner Maria Renard (Pixie Davies) attempt to stop Erzsebet from finding Sekhmet's mummy, which would give her the ability to cause a permanent solar eclipse that would allow vampires to freely roam the world.

The variety of plot threads in *Nocturne*'s second season exceeds the previous one but show creator Clive Bradley does a decent enough job in stringing everything together, even if the pacing does lag at times due to the season being dedicated to a multitude of characters.

Bradley's inclusion of or choice to focus on certain characters certainly harms the pacing as well. Providing a backstory for Erzsebet and Drolta, her right hand in leading the vampire army, results in Alucard not receiving enough screen time.

The famous pale, silver-haired vampire is notably absent for most of the season, sans the final episode. Even then, Richter takes centre stage, particularly during the heroes' final, desperate push to stop Erzsebet.

As flashy and impeccably animated as the final action sequences were, there would have been adequate space for Alucard if *Nocturne* had just cut the unnecessary screen time that was dedicated to Erzsebet and Drolta. Their backstories change little of *Nocturne*'s overarching plot or how the audience views them.

Villains do not always need backstories and *Nocturne* is proof of this. Sometimes, it is just fun and more satisfying to see monstrosities get whipped, slashed and attacked by magic without knowing their entire life stories beforehand.

While game adaptations are not new, *Nocturne* shows the genre is enjoying a renaissance of sorts. The show's first and second seasons should be a benchmark for



(From left) Annette, Belmont and Alucard fight to liberate France and Europe from vampires.



Alucard is the son of Dracula and a human wife.



Erzsebet seeks more power to plunge the world into an endless night.

Western animation studios when striving to emulate what Japan has accomplished in the medium.

Though *Nocturne* leaves several doors

open for a potential third season or a brand new series, similar to how Warren Ellis's *Castlevania* set the foundation for this sequel in 2017, the future is murky for

Netflix's current best original animated series.

Castlevania: Nocturne is streaming on Netflix.

As streaming surges, traditional television remains popular

DESPITE the rise of video-on-demand platforms around the world, television still holds a special place in consumer habits, according to a GlobalWebIndex (GWI) study.

Although streaming is gaining in popularity, traditional TV is still a staple. According to the latest data shared by GWI, 89% of consumers worldwide watch traditional TV every day, while 76% watch streaming content or online TV every day.

But while TV is popular with the majority, streaming is certainly not suffering. This coexistence illustrates how the two modes of consumption need not be mutually exclusive.

On average, TV viewers spend 1 hour and 47 minutes a day watching traditional TV, compared with 1 hour and 22 minutes a day for streaming, which is 10 minutes less than in 2022.

In the US, this figure rises to 3

hours and 2 minutes per day for traditional TV. These figures show, despite the rise of streaming, traditional TV still plays an important role in viewing habits, especially in the US. The British follow with 2 hours and 42 minutes of viewing, according to GWI.

When it comes to streaming, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Egypt come out on top, with 1 hour and 52 minutes spent watching. Japan and South Korea come in last — with 20 minutes and 44 minutes, respectively — devoted to streaming.

Binge-watching remains a common practice that can boost audiences. Some 43% of viewers in the US admit to watching more than three episodes of a show at a time.

Although platforms such as Netflix and Disney+ have popularised streaming entire seasons at once, consumers do not shy away from slower-paced releases.

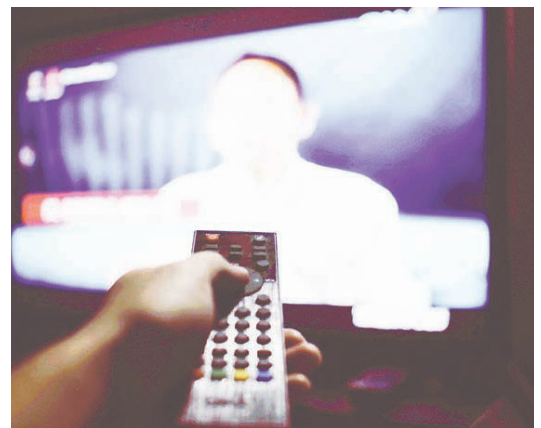
In fact, 19% of US viewers prefer streaming a show with scheduled weekly releases, appreciating the anticipation.

"Remember when everyone used to wait for a specific night of the week to catch the latest episode of their favorite show? Well, some folks are still all about that life," the research said.

When it comes to content, international shows are particularly popular in Brazil, where 46% of consumers say they love watching them, as do 35% of Filipinos.

On average, 24% of consumers watch international content via streaming. Dubbed content is most popular in Germany (60%), while Malaysia (73%) favours subtitles.

Although times are tough, TV addicts are not ready to part with their subscriptions as 75% of those surveyed have no plans to cut back. — ETX Studio



75% of those surveyed have no plans to cut back on their TV subscriptions. — PEXELSPIC

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Introduced and approved by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), APEL widens access to higher education for adult learners who are work-experienced yet lacking in academic qualifications.

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Otherwise, APEL (C) or accreditation of prior experiential learning via credit transfer allows assessment of credits against matching modules in a programme of study.

The APEL (C) pathway provides credit transfer for entry into diploma programmes right up to PhD. Once an APEL C applicant's competency level is determined, those credits can shorten his or her entire study duration considerably, saving time and money.

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also allows learners to gain exemptions when progressing into academic programmes at MSU.

The MSU APEL Centre is managed by MSU Academy (MA), established with the goal of providing exceptional continuing education that aligns with the evolving needs of society.

Being committed to promoting lifelong learning, MA offers programmes designed to cater to individuals who require flexibility in scheduling and the overall delivery of teaching and learning experiences.

For professional adults and those in self-managed careers, balancing work and study can be a daily challenge, whether financially, personally, or professionally. Now APEL provides a convenient pathway to higher learning.

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Sandaran-sandaran tersebut boleh dipergunakan dengan Pemegang Pajak Gadai berkenaan diatas pada 18th FEBRUARI 2025 sehingga 21th FEBRUARI 2025, pukul 10.00 pagi sehingga 4.00 petang sebelum tarikh jualan lelong itu.

Ikian Bertarikh 18-02-2025

CHONG KIAN CHONG
Pegawai Berlesen
011-40392589

NOTIS JUALAN SECARA LELONG AWAM
Akta Pemegang Pajak-Gadai (81) 1972
Sandaran-sandaran yang tidak dibayar Pemegang Pajak Gadai yang tersebut dibawah ini akan di-jual dengan Lelong Umum

Di-The YMCA Penang
211, Macalister Road 10400 Penang. Pada Hari 03th Mac 2025, Waktu 01.00 Petang

NEGERI PULAU PINANG

NAMA PAJAK GADAI
Pajak Gadai Emas Jaya Sdn Bhd
Pajak Gadai YS Sdn Bhd
Pajak Gadai Kah Hin Sdn Bhd
YMC Capital Sdn Bhd
Shun Chang Sdn Bhd
Sing Tai Foh Sdn Bhd
Pajak Gadai Lian Hin Sdn Bhd
Pajak Gadai Sun Heng
Pajak Gadai Zillion Worth Sdn Bhd
Yong Chang Dang Sdn Bhd
Sing Yee Li Sdn Bhd
Pajak Gadai Butterworth Sdn Bhd

ALAMAT PAJAK GADAI
29 Jalan Ushahwan 4 Pagar Pemangian 12000 Kepala Batas.
442 Jalan Penang 10000 Penang
6688 Jalan Bagan Ajam 13000 Butterworth
47 Jalan Permatang Rawa Bandar Perda 14000 Bukit Mertajam
228 Jalan Pasar 14000 Bukit Mertajam
716 Jalan Raya 14200 Sungai Bakap
1078 Jalan Che Ahmad 14300 Nibong Telal
16 Jalan Kenangan Kawasan Pemangian Simpang Ampat 14100 Simpang Ampat
2889 Jalan Baru Bandar Perai Jaya 13600 Perai
293 Jalan Burmah 10350 Penang
46 Jalan Todak 2 Pusat Bandar Seberang Jaya 13700 Perai
776 G Taman Keayaka Jalan Bagan Ajam 13000 Butterworth
313 Lebuh Chulia 10200 Penang
6679 Jalan MVI Sdn Bhd
6679 Jalan MVI Sdn Bhd

Sandaran-sandaran tersebut boleh dipergunakan dengan Pemegang Pajak Gadai berkenaan diatas pada 19th FEBRUARI 2025 sehingga 21th FEBRUARI 2025, pukul 10.00 pagi sehingga 4.00 petang sebelum tarikh jualan lelong itu.

Ikian Bertarikh 18-02-2025

CHONG YIM KEAT
Pegawai Berlesen
011-40392589

322 Notices

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT MUAR, JOHOR COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO. JA-20NC-2-01/2025

In the Matter of Section 456(1)(e) of the Companies Act, 2016

And

In the Matter of SAFWA GLOBAL BUILDERS (M) SDN BHD (201101000939 (929073)-H)

Between

SOUTHERN PREMIX SDN BHD (Company No. 58886-06)

...Petitioner

And

SAFWA GLOBAL BUILDERS (M) SDN BHD (201101000939 (929073)-H)

...Respondent

ADVERTISEMENTS OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a petition for the winding-up of the above-named company by the High court was on 15.01.2025 presented by the said company and that the petition is directed to be heard before the court sitting at Muar, Johor at 9.00 o'clock in the morning, on the 20.03.2025, and any creditor or contributor of the said company desiring to support or oppose the making of an order on the said petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his counsel for that purpose, and a copy of the petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributor of the said company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's address is at 8-05 & 8-06, Plaza Kelana Jaya, Jalan SST/136, Kelana Jaya, 47301 Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

The Petitioner's solicitors are Messrs Messrs Chor Poo Anwar & Company, Advocates & Solicitors of Bangunan Rashed-Chor Poo, No.64 (First & Second Floor), Ssuar 1, Jalan Tan Abdul Razak 80888 Ibrahim International Business District, Johor.

Sgd

Solicitors for the Petitioners Messrs Chor Poo Anwar & Company

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Sgd

Solicitors for the Petitioners Messrs Chor Poo Anwar & Company

DALAM MAUKAMAH SESYEN DI AMPANG DALAM NEGERI SELANGOR DARUL EHSAN, MALAYSIA NO. GILAMAH: RC-A520HC-23-10/2024

ANTARA
1. PARVATHY A/P SUBRAMANIAM (NO K/P: 740515-05-5184)
2. VASANTH A/P RAMAN (NO K/P: 660116-05-5518)
...PLAINTIFF-PLAINTIFF

(Majikan sebagai Petenda-Petenda bagi perkara: MELAYANAN A/L MANIMUTHU (s. mati))

DAN
1. PAUL JOHN A/L JOHN RUBON (NO K/P: 850305-14-6483)
2. LAWRENCE JOHN A/L JOHN RUBON (NO K/P: 816723-14-6025)
...DEFENDANT-DEFENDANT

NOTIS PENGIKHLAMAN
(Dalam perkara mengenai Pemisahan Kausa Tertulis dan Pemisahan Tertulis bertarikh 4 Oktober 2024 melalui Petintah Mahkamah bertarikh 20 Januari 2025) Kepada:

1. PAUL JOHN A/L JOHN RUBON (NO K/P: 850305-14-6483)
NO 17, JALAN MELOR 23 TAMAN MELOR 68000 AMPANG SELANGOR

2. LAWRENCE JOHN A/L JOHN RUBON (NO K/P: 816723-14-6025)
NO 17, JALAN MELOR 23 TAMAN MELOR 68000 AMPANG SELANGOR

AMBIK. PERHATIAN bahawa satu Writ Saman dan Pemisahan Tertulis bertarikh 4 Oktober 2024 ("Kertas-kertas kausa tertulis") dan satu Petintah untuk Pemisahan-judicial bertarikh 20 Januari 2024 ("Petintah tertulis") telah dikeluarkan terhadap kamu di Mahkamah Ampang dan kamu telah menerima salinan Surubahaman dan VASANTH A/P RAMAN yang mempunyai alamat petenda di 24, Jalan Ampang, 15, Taman Puchong Perdana, 47100 Puchong, Johor Darul Ehsan. Mahkamah telah memerintahkan supaya Kertas-kertas kausa tersebut dan Petintah tersebut dimasukkan ke atas kamu secara pemisahan ganti dengan menampalkan salinan Kertas-kertas kausa tersebut beserta dengan salinan Petintah tersebut di alamat terakhir Defendan yang diketahui, dan dengan mengiklankan salin Notis ini dalam akhbar tempatan "The Sun".

DAN BAHAWA penampalan dan pengiklankan tersebut hendaklah dianggap sebagai penampalan Writ Saman dan Pemisahan Tertulis yang sempurna dan memuaskan ke atas Defendan empat belas (14) hari selepas pelaksanaan terakhir terhadap penampalan-penampalan dan pengiklankan tersebut.

DAN AMBIK. PERHATIAN SALAH SATU bahawa Saman tersebut akan didengar di Mahkamah Sesean Ampang pada 20 Februari 2025, pukul 9.00 pagi secara atas talian e-Review, oleh Hakim Mahkamah Sesean Ampang, Datuk Fadiz Suraya bti, Datuk Mohd. Suah. Jika kamu gagal menghadiri pada pada tarikh tersebut, suatu pengiklankan ingkar boleh dikeluarkan terhadap kamu.

Salinan Writ Saman dan Pemisahan Tertulis tersebut dan Petintah tersebut boleh dipaparkan oleh kamu atau perantara di Mahkamah ini.

Bertarikh pada 18 hariabulan Februari, 2025.

PEMISAHAN PLAINTIFF-PLAINTIFF
NOTIS PENGIKHLAMAN ini telah dikeluarkan oleh Pejabat Loh Yee & Partners, Peguambela dan Peguambela, Peguambela bagi pihak Plaintiff-Plaintiff yang mempunyai alamat pemisahan di Unit A701, Tingkat 7 Blok A, Phileo Damansara 1, Seksyen 16, 46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan. No. Tel: 03-7317573 Email: khalid.parberry@gmail.com

NOTIS PENGIKHLAMAN ini telah dikeluarkan oleh Pejabat Loh Yee & Partners, Peguambela dan Peguambela, Peguambela bagi pihak Plaintiff-Plaintiff yang mempunyai alamat pemisahan di Unit A701, Tingkat 7 Blok A, Phileo Damansara 1, Seksyen 16, 46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan. No. Tel: 03-7317573 Email: khalid.parberry@gmail.com

NOTIS PENGIKHLAMAN ini telah dikeluarkan oleh Pejabat Loh Yee & Partners, Peguambela dan Peguambela, Peguambela bagi pihak Plaintiff-Plaintiff yang mempunyai alamat pemisahan di Unit A701, Tingkat 7 Blok A, Phileo Damansara 1, Seksyen 16, 46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan. No. Tel: 03-7317573 Email: khalid.parberry@gmail.com

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322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF FORMIN AUTO LINE SDN. BHD. Registration No: 198801005650 (173007-K) (IN MEMBERS' VOLUNTARY WINDING UP)

NOTICE OF FINAL GENERAL MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that in pursuant to Section 459(2) of the Companies Act, 2016, a Final Meeting of the Company will be held at No.1006-1, Jalan Kesidang, 2/24, Lorong Pandan, 75250 Melaka on 18 March 2025, 10.00 a.m. for the purpose of:-

1) To pay off before the meeting the accounts of the Company by the Liquidator for adoption and of giving any explanation thereof.

2) To resolve that under Section 518(3) of the Companies Act, 2016, all books and papers of the Company and of the Liquidator be destroyed within a period of five (5) years after the dissolution of the Company.

Chok Hui San Liquidator

Petaling Jaya

Dated this 18 February 2025

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KLANG VALLEY
PENANG KEDAH
PERAK / PERLIS
PAHANG / KELANTAN
TERENGGANU
MS. Shoba / MS. Balqish
TEL: 03-7784 8888
WHATSAPP: 018 261 6626

MALACCA
MR. Rajah
TEL: 012-628 2844
FAX: 06-764 2051

JOHOR BAHRU
MS. Anne Lim
TEL: 013-770 6699
FAX: 07-355 5459

322 Notices

NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR VOLUNTARY WINDING UP OF LIMITED LIABILITY PARTNERSHIP
(Section 50(4)(a) of the Limited Liability Partnerships Act 2012)

Notice is hereby given that HSM CORPORATE ADVISORY SERVICES PTL, LLP NO. 202404000204 (LLP0037678-LGN) will be making an application to the Registrar of Limited Liability Partnerships for a declaration of dissolution pursuant to Section 50(2) of the Limited Liability Partnerships Act 2012 within seven (7) days after the publication of this notice. Any partner or creditor of the LLP desiring to object to the application may do so in writing to the Companies Commission of Malaysia within thirty (30) days from the date of this notice.

Date: 18th February 2025

PERHATIAN JALAN ATAS PEMINTAH PEMEGANG GADAIAN 0755C2018001309
Jalan Pagar Sekoyen 257 Dan 263, Kamal Tanah Negeri, 1965

AMBAK (M) BERHAD (No. Syarikat: 8515-D)

DAN

MUHAMMAD AZZIN BIN HASHIM (NO. K/P: 910514-07-5337)

Menerusi Petintah Petenda/Tarikh Daerah Barat Daya, Pulau Pinang yang dipaparkan pada 05 September 2024, adalah diterbitkan bahawa Petenda/Tarikh Daerah Barat Daya dengan ingkar oleh Petenda/Tarikh Daerah Barat Daya akan mengikut secara:

LELONGAN AWAM
PADA HARI SELASA 25 FEBRUARI 2025, Jam 10.30 PAGI, DI PERAKARAN PELABAT DAERAH DAN TANAH, DAERAH BARAT DAYA, PULAU PINANG.

NOTA: Bakal-baki pembeli adalah dimarahkan agar membuat carian rasmi hakmilik di Pejabat Tanah dan

Wada 'completely broken'

WORLD NO. 5 Jessica Pegula believes the handling of high-profile doping cases involving Jannik Sinner and Iga Swiatek has shown that the "process is completely broken".

And top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka admits she cannot trust the tennis anti-doping system and has become "too scared" of it.

Sinner's long doping saga came to an end on Saturday after he agreed to a three-month ban from tennis, the world No. 1 admitting "partial responsibility" for team mistakes which led to him twice testing positive for traces of clostebol in March last year.

Sinner was facing a potential ban of two years after the World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) against his initial exoneration by the International Tennis Integrity Agency (Itia), announced in August.

Sinner affair 'leaves a pretty sour taste' for tennis players

In a surprising move, Wada withdrew its appeal and came to an agreement with Sinner to accept a three-month ban.

In a statement, Wada said "Sinner did not intend to cheat" but would serve his suspension as he is responsible for the actions of his entourage.

Swiatek accepted a one-month ban after testing positive for the banned heart drug trimetazidine (TMZ) late last year.

The 23-year-old Pole had pulled out of the WTA's Asian swing in September-October citing "personal matters".

Pegula, last year's US Open finalist and a member of the WTA Players' Council, said the inconsistencies in the way cases are being processed and judged is creating an unfair environment for all tennis players.

"I think my reaction is that, whether you think he did or you don't, or whatever side you're on, the process just seems to be completely not a process," the American told reporters in Dubai on Sunday.

"It seems to just be whatever decisions and factors they take into consideration, and they just make up their own ruling."

"I don't really understand how that's fair for players when there's just so much inconsistency and you have no idea."

Pegula added that any emails the players have been receiving regarding anti-doping cases contain explanations that are too easy to come up with, and are just ways for anti-doping organisations to justify their inconsistent rulings and processes.

"If you're clean or not, the process is completely broken," she stated.

"I think it needs to be seriously looked at and considered. I feel like they have so much power to ruin someone's career, as well. I think there needs to be something done about that because it just seems really unfair."

"I don't think any of the players trust the process at all right now. Zero. It's just a horrible look for the sport."

Sinner's three-month sanction was described as "ridiculous" by Australian firebrand Nick Kyrgios.

"Guilty or not? Sad day for tennis. Fairness in tennis does not exist," Kyrgios posted on X on Saturday.

And three-time Grand Slam winner Stan Wawrinka was equally damning of the deal, writing: "I don't believe in a clean sport anymore." - AFP

Raducanu ends losing run with win over Sakkari

BY PHIL CASEY

EMMA RADUCANU ended her losing run in style with a straight-sets victory over Greece's Maria Sakkari in the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships.

Raducanu came into the match on the worst run of results in her career, having lost four successive matches.

But the former US Open champion made the ideal start with a break of serve in the opening game and rounded off a 6-4, 6-2 victory in fine fashion with her third ace of the 90-minute contest.

"I just tried to stay really focused on the point in front of me," Raducanu said in a court-side interview.

"There were some momentum shifts throughout the match and when I got broken twice early in the sets I just regrouped really well and I managed to break back immediately both times."

"I was really pleased with how I fought and competed against Maria, she's a top player, been as high as three in the world. I'm just really proud of my performance."

Raducanu has now won all three of her matches against Sakkari without dropping a

set, including in the US Open semifinals in 2021 and last year at Wimbledon.

"I think in a way we play quite similar, she's really athletic," Raducanu said when asked about her 100% record.

"I'm not necessarily going to give all

my tactics away, it's just a very difficult match every time we play so I'm happy to have won on all these occasions in all big tournaments and very happy to get through to the next round."

Raducanu had failed to capitalise on wild card entries into tournaments in Abu Dhabi and Doha over the last two weeks, losing in the first round both times to Marketa Vondrousova and Ekaterina Alexandrova.

Those losses followed another first-round defeat to Cristina Bucsa in Singapore and a hammering by Iga Swiatek after she had reached the third round of the Australian Open for the first time.

The 22-year-old will face Karolina Muchova tomorrow in the last 32 after the 14th seed beat Suzan Lamens 6-2, 6-2. - The Independent



Emma Raducanu reacts during her round of 64 match against Maria Sakkari (not pictured). - REUTERS/SPIC

Fonseca captures Argentina Open title

BRAZILIAN teenager Joao Fonseca became the 10th youngest champion in ATP Tour history when he swept past home hope Francisco Cerundolo in the final of the Argentina Open yesterday.

The 18-year-old, ranked 99 in the world and playing in his first tour-level final, came through 6-4, 7-6 (7-1) against his 28th-ranked opponent.

Fonseca twice unsuccessfully served for the match but regrouped to claim victory in the tie-break in a frenzied atmosphere in Buenos Aires.

The 2024 ATP NextGen champion is the youngest male player from South America to win a tour title while his victory will also see him rise to 68 in the new rankings released yesterday.

"Unbelievable week, even in Argentina there are some Brazilians cheering for me," Fonseca said on court.

"That's just amazing. Every Brazilian, everyone from their country wants this support from your own country. For me, this moment that I'm living is just unbelievable."

He added: "Of course I want to be No. 1, of course I want to win Slams, titles, but my dream is just to play tennis, and I'm living it."

Cerundolo, seeking his fourth career title, was broken in the seventh game of the first set and fought off Fonseca when the teenager served for the trophy at 5-4 and 6-5 in the second.

However, the Brazilian impressively held his nerve in the tie-break and celebrated his triumph by collapsing in joy on the dusty, clay surface.

In all, he defeated four Argentinian players on the road to the trophy. - AFP

Rybakina coach ban should be 'respected': Swiatek

IGA SWIATEK believes the WTA's decision to ban Elena Rybakina's coach Stefano Vukov for breaching the tour's code of conduct should be respected and that the process behind it should be trusted.

Earlier this week, the WTA announced that the independent investigation into Vukov's potential breach of the code has concluded and that his suspension "remains in place".

The tour did not reveal the length of the suspension, nor the specific code of conduct that was breached.

However, sources told *The Athletic* that Vukov was reported for verbally abusing Rybakina, who has denied such claims and has repeatedly said she is

against the WTA's decision.

The former Wimbledon champion said earlier this month that she was still in contact with Vukov and has spent time with him, and her new coach Davide Sanguinetti, during a training block in Dubai.

"I guess everybody needs to respect the decision because we need to trust that the whole process was made with right rules," world No. 2 Swiatek told reporters at the Dubai Championship on Sunday.

"Every personal trainer, every coach, they need to kind of accept the code of conduct when they want to be on WTA. "So for sure I hope the WTA is doing everything to make it a safe environment."

American world No. 3 Coco Gauff did not feel comfortable discussing Vukov's suspension, given Rybakina's opposition to the WTA's decision, but added that she believes in the tour's right to protect its players.

"From my understanding, I know she doesn't like the decision. I know WTA also has the right to protect her," said the 20-year-old Gauff.

"Overall, I think it's nice that the WTA is making sure that they're out there to protect players."

The WTA has upped its safeguarding efforts since last year, and has been encouraging players, team members, personnel and travelling media that are within their environment, to report any

behaviour that can be construed as abuse.

The tour has offered ways for reporting to be done anonymously and has a safeguarding course on its platform that is mandatory for anyone in close contact with players on the circuit.

"I definitely think that that's important in our sport because a lot of times if you look, sometimes victims don't even know they are a victim," added Gauff.

"In this sport it's happened so many times. A lot of times you see former players speaking out years after their career ended how they were treated." - AFP

322 Notices

FUSI DIGITAL MEDIATISING MARKETING PLT 202204000704 (LLP0030976-LGN) (In Members' Voluntary Winding-Up)

NOTICE OF VOLUNTARY WINDING UP

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that pursuant to Section 50 of the Limited Liability Partnerships Act 2012, the partners would like to apply for voluntary winding up of the limited liability partnership - FUSI DIGITAL MEDIATISING MARKETING PLT 202204000704 (LLP0030976-LGN)

The limited liability partnership has ceased to operate and has discharged all its debts and liabilities, other than those owed to its partners.

The notice required under Section 50(4) of the Limited Liability Partnerships Act 2012 has been given to all the partners in accordance with this subsection

A written notice from the Inland Revenue Board stating that it has no objection to the Registrar making a declaration of dissolution of the limited liability partnership has been obtained

MOHD FUAD BIN HAMZAH (NRIC No. 730620-02-5191) Partner Dated this 18.02.2025

Champions Trophy will rekindle Pakistan's love of cricket

CRICKET fans in Pakistan are buzzing ahead of the Champions Trophy and hosting the elite one-day international tournament will rekindle the country's love affair with the sport, three former captains said.

The event, which features the sport's top eight sides in the ODI format, begins tomorrow with the hosts up against New Zealand in Karachi.

It will be the first major global tournament hosted by Pakistan in nearly 30 years and former batting great Inzamam-ul-Haq told *Reuters* there was no escaping the excitement in the lead-up to the event.

"Right now everyone is talking about the Champions Trophy, in schools, houses, markets, offices, everywhere," he added.

Pakistan spent nearly a decade in the wilderness after gunmen attacked the Sri Lankan cricket team's bus in Lahore in 2009, wounding six players.

Top teams shunned Pakistan after the 2009 attack and it took the Pakistan Cricket Board years to convince foreign counterparts that it was safe to visit.

"The events of 2009 feel like a bad dream," Inzamam said. "We were punished for 10 years. Our cricket went backwards."

The national team, captained for the bulk of those years by Misbah-ul-Haq, hosted its 'home' games in the United Arab Emirates and remained relatively successful until fixtures trickled back onto Pakistani soil in 2018.

"For fans and young cricketers to see the stars playing live is a big deal," said Misbah, Pakistan's most successful test captain. "Not having that meant the whole cricket machinery was jammed."

Former captain Aamer Sohail said the connection between fans and players was evident at last Wednesday's warm-up game against South Africa where Pakistan reeled in the visitors' 352 to complete their highest successful ODI run chase.

"What was heartening in yesterday's game is that people turned up and then the players turned up. It was kind of reciprocating, wasn't it?" added Sohail.

The Champions Trophy was discontinued by the International Cricket Council after the eighth edition in 2017, when Sarfaraz Ahmed's Pakistan beat India in the final.

Should both teams reach the title decider when it returns to the calendar, Pakistan will not have the advantage of playing at home as India are playing all their matches in Dubai due to political tensions. – Reuters

Three matches to watch at the Champions Trophy

Australia vs England

The Ashes rivals clash in Lahore on Saturday. World Cup holders Australia have had the upper hand against their old foes in recent 50-over matches and won their previous series 3-2 last year.

But both come into the Champions Trophy with question marks hanging over them.

Australia are without their "Big Three" pacemen – Pat Cummins (ankle), Josh Hazlewood (hip) and Mitchell Starc and all-rounders Mitchell Marsh (back) and Marcus Stoinis (retired), and half of their regular team is missing.

The depleted side suffered a heavy 2-0 series defeat in Sri Lanka on the eve of the tournament.

England, with Test coach Brendon McCullum now in charge, did no better and were whitewashed 3-0 in India.

India vs Pakistan

TV ratings rocket with millions tuning in to watch the arch-rivals any time they battle it out, owing to the deep rivalry between the nuclear-armed neighbours. The two teams meet on Sunday in Dubai.

India refused to visit Pakistan for the Champions Trophy, forcing the latter to agree to partially relinquish hosting rights to Dubai after a long stand-off.

On the pitch, India are favourites to win the tournament for a third time, in what is expected to be the international swansong for Rohit Sharma.

Afghanistan vs England

After England being well beaten in India last week, skipper Jos Buttler insisted that England can be "dangerous" at the Champions Trophy, even if recent evidence suggests otherwise.

Afghanistan have become a rising force in white-ball cricket in recent years, rising to eighth in the ODI world rankings, one place below England.

The Afghans beat Australia on the way to a historic semifinal place at last year's T20 World Cup, before losing to South Africa.

AFP

Frankfurt cruise past Kiel to tighten grip on third

GOALS from Hugo Larsson, Tuta and Can Uzun lifted Eintracht Frankfurt to a comfortable 3-1 Bundesliga home victory over Holstein Kiel yesterday, tightening their grip on third spot.

Bochum's 2-0 win over Borussia Dortmund on Saturday means Kiel finish the weekend in last place, eight points from safety.

The victory sent Frankfurt five points clear of fourth-placed RB Leipzig with 22 games of a 34-game season played.

The Eagles are on track to qualify for the Champions League for just the second time

in their history, with their first appearance coming courtesy of winning the Europa League in 2022.

"Right now, things look pretty nice in the table but what matters more is how things look on the 34th matchday," Frankfurt goalkeeper Kevin Trapp told *DAZN*.

With a trip to Bayern next week, followed by hosting Leverkusen, Frankfurt face the Bundesliga's top two in the coming fortnight.

"The next two weeks we've got the two top teams ahead of us. In Munich you know how hard it is – you almost need a perfect

day, but we won't hide," added Trapp.

"After that we've got the defending German champions – and we won't be hiding for that one either, we know our qualities."

Mainz won 2-0 at Heidenheim in Sunday's late game to move up three places to sixth.

Hoffenheim took a major step away from the relegation zone, winning 3-1 away at Werder Bremen.

Hoffenheim now sit seven points clear of Heidenheim, who occupy the relegation playoff spot. – AFP

Inter denied top spot

Juventus defeat Inter Milan to make it four wins in a row

JUVENTUS stopped Inter Milan from replacing Napoli at the top of Serie A on Sunday by beating their fierce rivals 1-0 and moving into Italy's Champions League positions.

Francisco Conceicao made sure that Napoli would stay two points ahead of reigning champions Inter by classily tucking home the winning goal 16 minutes before the end of an entertaining contest in Turin.

Portugal attacker Conceicao netted his fourth goal of the season in all competitions after brilliant work from Randal Kolo Muani to give Juve a third straight league win.

Juve are in fourth place on 46 points, ahead on goal difference from Lazio who had done wasteful Inter a favour by holding Napoli to a 2-2 draw on

Saturday.

But Napoli stay at the summit with Antonio Conte's team and Inter facing off in Naples in a fortnight, a match which could well be key to the destination of the *Scudetto*.

"The win tonight gives us confidence and an awareness of what we're capable of," said Thiago Motta, whose first season in charge of Juve has been difficult.

"They deserve it for the effort they put in during training and the fact that they give everything in every match."

Juve now turn their attentions to Thursday's return leg of a Champions League playoff with PSV Eindhoven, with Motta's side leading 2-1 following the first leg in Turin.

"We're really disappointed but the boys played well tonight," said Inter coach Simone Inzaghi.

"Obviously we needed to be better in front of goal and we should have been ahead at halftime, but the approach in the second half wasn't quite as good as in the first."

Earlier Como pulled away from the Serie A relegation zone with a convincing 2-0 away win at Fiorentina.

Cesc Fabregas' team are five points above Parma, who sit just inside the relegation zone after losing 1-0 to Roma, after a deserved win at the Stadio Artemio Franchi.

Alessandro Nesta began his second spell as Monza manager with a goalless draw with Lecce which did little to boost their survival hopes.

Monza stay rock-bottom and seven points behind Empoli, who sit just outside the drop zone and were beaten 3-0 at Udinese. – AFP



Inter Milan's Lautaro Martinez (right) vies with Juventus Renato Veiga during their Serie A match. – AFP/IC

Rodgers urges Celtic to be bold against Bayern

CELTIC manager Brendan Rodgers urged his underdog side not to die wondering in tomorrow's must-win Champions League second-leg away at Bayern Munich (4am Malaysian time).

Bayern are in the driver's seat for a spot in the last 16 after a 2-1 win at Celtic Park last Wednesday.

Under this season's new Champions League format, Celtic made it out of the group stage for the first time since 2012-13, finishing 21st in the table.

But their progress has come in spite of poor away form in Europe.

Two scoreless draws at Atalanta and Dinamo Zagreb were bookended by thrashings at Borussia Dortmund and Aston Villa, with Celtic conceding 11 and

scoring three.

Six-time Champions League winners Bayern may have struggled away in Europe this season, losing three of five, but are dominant at home.

Bayern have not lost in Munich in the Champions League since April 2021, a run of 20 games including battles against Real Madrid and Manchester City in the seasons they won the competition.

Matches against Europe's best have spotlighted the gulf in quality Rodgers' 'Bhoys' must overcome should they progress further in the Champions League.

Wednesday's loss to Bayern was Celtic's first defeat on home soil in 33 games dating back to December 2023, once more highlighting the scope of the

challenge tomorrow.

On Saturday, Rodgers praised his side's "mentality and focus" as they continued to develop and improve on the European stage.

"We've made great strides this season from last season in the competition."

"We've been competitive. I wanted us to show our level throughout the competition and we've done that."

Bayern were in control for the first 70 minutes on Wednesday but late lapses in concentration allowed Celtic to cut the deficit through Daizen Maeda, giving them hope.

With away goals no longer worth more, Celtic need a one-goal win to take the game to extratime – or a two-goal win to progress. – AFP



SHORTS

Bellingham outburst
'disrespectful', says Flick

BARCELONA coach Hansi Flick accused Jude Bellingham of being "disrespectful" after the Real Madrid star was sent-off in the 1-1 La Liga draw with Osasuna.

The England international was dismissed for dissent after just 39 minutes on Saturday following a heated exchange with referee Jose Munuera Montero.

Bellingham insisted it had been a "misunderstanding" and that he had not insulted the referee.

"It was disrespectful, it's not for me to decide (what exactly Bellingham meant) but I tell my players not to waste time or energy talking to the referees," said Flick on Sunday.

"Only the captain is supposed to talk to the referee and picking up a red card like that is bad for his team."

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said Bellingham should not have been dismissed.

"I think with Bellingham's red card (the referee) didn't understand the English well... I don't think it's something offensive," Ancelotti told reporters.

Bilbao vs Espanyol
match halted early

ATHLETIC BILBAO missed out on the chance to close the gap on the top two in La Liga as they were held to a 1-1 draw at struggling Espanyol on Sunday in a match that was temporarily stopped because of racist chanting.

In the 16th minute, referee Cuadra Fernandez was forced to activate the anti-racism protocol for insults to Bilbao forward Maroan Sannadi which were reported by his teammate Inaki Williams.

The match was interrupted for three minutes and a message was communicated over the public address system for fans to stop shouting expletives. The referee warned that the next time the match would be stopped.

"This type of thing shouldn't happen. This is not the first time this has happened here. The referee acted very well. We must punish the culprits," said Williams.

When the game restarted, Roberto Fernandez put Espanyol ahead in the 62nd minute but Oihan Sancet, who scored a hat-trick in the win over Girona last weekend, levelled 15 minutes later.

It was hardly a satisfying result for either side.

On Saturday leaders Real Madrid and second-placed Atletico Madrid were both held to draws.

Bilbao's own draw means they remain fourth, three points behind Barcelona and six behind Real.

Real Betis eased to a 3-0 win over Real Sociedad who finished the match with nine men. Sevilla defeated rock-bottom Valladolid 4-0.

Lille's Bentaleb scores on return from heart attack

NABIL BENTALEB scored four minutes into his first appearance since suffering a heart attack to inspire Lille to a 2-0 victory at Rennes yesterday with his coach hailing the player's "incredible story".

The win allowed Lille to reclaim fifth place in Ligue 1 that Lyon had briefly grabbed earlier in the day by thrashing last-placed Montpellier.

Nice won 3-1 at struggling Le Havre to climb back into the top three.

Bentaleb, a 30-year-old Algerian international midfielder, suffered a heart attack last June.

He has since been fitted with a defibrillator, club sources told AFP.

The French Football Federation medical

commission last Wednesday cleared him to play.

He returned to the pitch after 76 minutes yesterday, four minutes after the hosts had been reduced to 10 men when Christopher Wooh was sent off.

"It's really an incredible story and we're all happy to experience it," said Lille coach Bruno Genesio.

"He hung on, he believed in himself, he believed in the people who took care of him."

"There were periods where we all wondered if he was going to play again or not. As time went by, we all had more and more confidence in him and in his ability to play again."

Genesio added: "Obviously, it was already a real victory for him, because he went through terrible times."

On a day when all five away teams won, Nice seized control with a 3-1 win over Le Havre. Nice regained the final guaranteed Champions League slot on goal difference from Monaco, who had hammered Nantes 7-1 on Saturday.

Lyon took revenge for a home defeat earlier in the season with a 4-1 win at Montpellier. Next up Lyon host league leaders Paris Saint-Germain.

Strasbourg rose to seventh as they won 2-0 at Lens. Farid El Melali scored the only goal as Angers won 1-0 at Reims. - AFP



ARNE SLOT hailed Liverpool's fighting spirit as the "fatigued" Premier League leaders survived a tense 2-1 win against Wolves on Sunday.

Slot's side moved seven points clear of second-placed Arsenal thanks to Luis Diaz's early opener and a Mohamed Salah penalty before the interval at Anfield.

It wasn't easy for Liverpool despite that strong start as fourth-bottom Wolves hit back impressively.

Matheus Cunha's blast reduced the deficit and Liverpool had to hold on in the closing stages before they could celebrate a first win in three games in all competitions.

Indebted to Alisson Becker for some crucial saves, Liverpool boss Slot said: "This one is big. We needed to fight and we needed Alisson."

"Wolves took a lot of risks. In a season where you want to achieve something, you need to have wins like this as well."

"It's never the game-plan never to create anything at all. They got better and better, we got worse and worse."

"We had to show a different mentality and got it over the line. If this is what it takes to win a game then I'm happy the players could do that again."

Slot admitted Liverpool were running on fumes at times after Wednesday's emotionally draining 2-2 draw at Merseyside rivals Everton, which featured a stoppage-time equaliser for the Toffees, and last weekend's embarrassing FA Cup exit at second tier Plymouth.

"Fatigue comes from running a lot and a bit of mental fatigue a lot. We were mentally tested today. We thought we'd scored a third and then a penalty for the third but both were correct from the referee," he said.

"Maybe it did lead to us being a bit tired. I did see for the first time this season that

players were more tired than they have been.

"If you want to achieve something it is not only about bringing the ball out from the back or Mo scoring goals, it is also about defending."

Liverpool's ability to grind out a fourth win in their last five league matches kept Arsenal at bay in the title race.

Chasing a record-equalling 20th English title and their first since 2020, Liverpool are 13 games away from the trophy.

They face significant clashes with Aston Villa, Manchester City and Newcastle in their next three league games.

And Slot knows Arsenal - who have finished runners-up for the last two seasons - will do everything they can to take the race to a dramatic conclusion.

"If you look at the last few seasons it has mostly been a battle between two teams. As things stand now it mostly looks like between us and Arsenal," he said.

"You can never breathe in this competition. I saw Arsenal's 15-game unbeaten run and the gap has always been the same so that shows that we do."

"If you want to compete for something special then you have to win a lot of games in this league." - AFP

'My job is so hard', says Amorim as United lose again

MANCHESTER UNITED boss Ruben Amorim said his job is "so hard" after defeat at Tottenham left his side 15th in the Premier League.

The Portuguese coach oversaw an eighth loss in 12 league games as James Maddison's 13th-minute goal gave Spurs victory.

The Red Devils once again struggled, although Amorim is having to contend with a 12-man injury list that led to him having to fill his bench with youngsters.

Amorim, 40, has provided a number of honest post-match news

conferences since joining United and was once again in trademark form on Sunday.

"I have a lot of problems," he told Sky Sports. "My job is so hard but I am here to continue my job to the next week with my beliefs and I will try to win again."

Despite his side being behind for more than 70 minutes, Amorim did not make a change until the first minute of stoppage time, when he brought on 17-year-old Chido Obi.

The forward was one of eight teenagers on the bench and Amorim

suggested after the game that he did not send more on during the game as he did not want to hinder their development.

"It is the hardest competition in the world," he told BBC Sport.

"I am trying to be careful with them. I felt the team was pushing for the goal and I felt I don't want to change. But they will play."

"I am here to help my players. I understand my situation, my job, I am confident on my work and I just want to win games."

"The place in the table is my

worry, I am not worried about me."

Former United defender Gary Neville feels there has been little sign of things improving since Amorim succeeded Erik ten Hag in November.

"The club will have to be patient but I would like to see the performance levels getting higher," he told Sky Sports.

"This is a very average level that United are performing at week in, week out. The best thing about it (Amorim's time in charge) has been his press conferences. This is a really poor United team." The Independent/Agencies

RESULTS & STANDINGS

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE: Liverpool 2 (Diaz 15, Salah 37-pen) **Wolves 1** (Cunha 67), **Tottenham 1** (Maddison 13) **Manchester United 0.**

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	25	18	6	1	60	24	60
Arsenal	25	15	8	2	51	22	53
Nottm Forest	25	14	5	6	41	29	47
Man City	25	13	5	7	52	35	44
Bournemouth	25	12	7	6	44	29	43
Chelsea	25	12	7	6	47	34	43
Newcastle	25	12	5	8	42	33	41
Fulham	25	10	9	6	38	33	39
Aston Villa	25	10	8	7	35	38	38
Brighton	25	9	10	6	38	38	37
Brentford	25	10	4	11	43	42	34
Tottenham	25	9	3	13	49	37	30
Crystal Palace	25	7	9	9	29	32	30
Everton	25	7	9	9	27	31	30
Man Utd	25	8	5	12	28	35	29
West Ham	25	7	6	12	29	47	27
Wolves	25	5	4	16	35	54	19
Ipswich	25	3	8	14	23	50	17
Leicester	25	4	5	16	25	55	17
Southampton	25	2	3	20	19	57	9

LA LIGA: Espanyol 1 (Fernandez 62) **Athletic Bilbao 1** (Sancet 77), **Real Valladolid 0 Sevilla 4** (Juanlu Sanchez 5, 67, Isaac Romero 45+1, Lukebakio 84), **Mallorca 3** (Muriqi 7, 28, Dani Rodriguez 35) **Las Palmas 1** (Bajcetic 62), **Real Betis 3** (Antony 51, Marc Roca 64, 69) **Real Sociedad 0.**

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	24	15	6	3	52	23	51
A. Madrid	24	14	8	2	39	16	50
Barcelona	23	15	3	5	64	25	48
A. Bilbao	24	12	9	3	37	21	45
Villarreal	24	11	8	5	47	35	41
R. Vallecano	23	9	8	6	27	24	35

SERIE A: Fiorentina 0 Como 2 (Diao 41, Paz 66), **Juventus 1** (Conceicao 74) **Inter Milan 0, Monza 0 Lecce 0, Parma 0 Roma 1** (Soule 33), **Udinese 3** (Ekkelenkamp 19, 65, Thauvin 90) **Empoli 0.**

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Napoli	25	17	5	3	41	19	56
Inter Milan	25	16	6	3	58	24	54
Atalanta	25	15	6	4	54	26	51
Juventus	25	11	13	1	42	21	46
Lazio	25	14	4	7	47	34	46
Fiorentina	25	12	6	7	41	27	42

BUNDESLIGA: Heidenheim 0 Mainz 2, Eintracht Frankfurt 3 Holstein Kiel 1, Werder Bremen 1 Hoffenheim 3.

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
B. Munich	22	17	4	1	65	19	55
B. Leverkusen	22	13	8	1	49	27	47
E. Frankfurt	22	12	6	4	49	29	42
RB Leipzig	22	10	7	5	36	29	37
Freiburg	22	11	3	8	29	36	36
Mainz	22	10	5	7	35	24	35

FRENCH LIGUE 1: Montpellier 1 Lyon 4, Le Havre 1 Nice 3, Lens 0 Strasbourg 2, Reims 0 Angers 1, Rennes 0 Lille 2.

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Paris SG	22	17	5	0	59	20	56
Marseille	22	14	4	4	50	26	46
Nice	22	11	7	4	44	27	40
Monaco	22	12	4	6	44	29	40
Lille	22	10	8	4	36	22	38
Lyon	22	10	6	6	40	27	36

SHORTS

Faizal Saari eyes TNB Cup glory

TERENGGANU Hockey Team (THT) player Faizal Saari dreams of seeing his team lift the TNB Cup, which kicks off today, as the perfect ending to the 2025 season.

The prolific 34-year-old striker, who just led THT to their seventh league title on Sunday, believes that winning the cup would further cement THT's dominance in the Malaysia Hockey League (MHL).

"For me, it's historic to go unbeaten in nine league matches. The year 2025 is already sweet,

Medal target set for ATC, says Harnizam

MALAYSIA have set themselves a modest three-medal target for the Asian Track Cycling Championships (ATC) 2025 that will be held at the National Velodrome here from Feb 21-27.

National track cycling head coach Harnizam Basri said they are banking on medals from the men's and women's team sprint events as well as women's keirin rider Nurul Izzah Izzati Mohd Asri.

"Realistically, I am targeting just three medals, whatever the colour," he told reporters after the ceremony to announce the official broadcast host for the ACT here today.

National track ace Datuk Mohd Azizulhasni Awang is skipping the championships while the number of events Muhammad Shah Firdaus Sahrom will be competing in has yet to be determined.

"Shah Firdaus suffered a knee injury two weeks ago and we just received the result of his

MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) today. We are relieved that he won't need to take any jabs (for the injury), but we must decide on how many events he will compete in.

"We will discuss after this... whether he will compete in the keirin event only or also take part in the sprint event. He also wants to compete in the ACT to maintain his top-10 ranking in the world, even if it means having to ride in pain," he said.

Muhammad Shah Firdaus is listed with Muhammad Fadhil Mohammad Zonis for the men's keirin event and will also compete in the sprint event with his brother, Muhammad Ridwan.

Meanwhile, Muhammad Fadhil and Muhammad Ridwan will combine with youngster Mohd Akmal Nazimi Jusena in the team sprint event.

Harnizam said Japan are expected to field

their strongest team and will be Malaysia's main threat while China are expected to send their young guns this time.

Meanwhile, Malaysian National Cycling Federation (MNCF) Datuk Amarjit Singh Gill is confident that the presence of home fans to witness some of the world's best track cyclists in action will make up for the disappointment of two-time Olympic medalist Mohd Azizulhasni's absence this time.

"I think the supports will turn up to give their support because Datuk Azizulhasni himself has called on them to turn up in droves via social media and even he might show up. The fans must also give their support to our rising stars who are our hope for the future," said Amarjit.

In last year's edition in New Delhi, India, Malaysia bagged two gold medals, two silvers and a bronze to finish third overall behind Japan and China. - Bernama

JDT eyeing home win

Pohang Steelers ready to put up a fight in final group match

WITH just a point needed to all but confirm their place in the last-16, Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) will be going all out for a win when they take on Pohang Steelers in their final group match of the East Zone Elite Asian Champions League (ACLE) today (8pm Malaysian time).

JDT head coach Hector Bidoglio (*pic*), however, expects a stern test from Pohang Steelers as the South Korean club are also still in the running for a top-eight finish and advance to the last 16.

"My opinion is that tomorrow will be another difficult game, but we have a good chance to qualify (for the round of 16)... it is important to win and earn the best position in the standings.

"Initially, our goal was simply to qualify for the last 16 and now that we are very close to achieving it, we need to become even stronger to advance further.

"The players have a good feeling for tomorrow's match and we need to work and grow together. We need to continue to roar, take our intensity level to a higher level..." he told reporters at a press conference yesterday.

For the record, JDT are fifth in the East Zone group stage with 11 points, while Pohang Steelers are in eighth place with nine points.

One thing in JDT's favour is that all their



players seem to be in the best shape and the return of Juan Muniz and Murilo Henrique from suspensions is the icing on the cake for the Southern Tigers.

Bidoglio said that although Anselmo Moraes only joined them two days ago, he expects the 35-year-old to be a useful addition.

But they had better be wary of Pohang Steelers, whose head coach Park Tae-Ha has sounded a warning by declaring that his men are bent on getting all three points against JDT today.

Tae-Ha is confident that his men can put on a strong performance despite playing in front of more than 30,000 JDT supporters at the Sultan Ibrahim Stadium in Iskandar Puteri.

"Our goal is to be among the top eight teams. We want to focus on the next match after a good pre-season training. I believe that if we play our best, we can win.

"... I need to keep an eye on their (JDT's) number 9 (Bergson da Silva) and number 30 (Natxo Insa), who are their key players. Both these players always make an impact and spark JDT's resurgence," he said when asked which JDT players he is wary of. - Bernama

Sports minister to meet Azizulhasni regarding track cyclist's plans

YOUTH and Sports Minister Hannah Yeoh was scheduled to meet national track cycling ace Datuk Mohd Azizulhasni Awang yesterday to discuss the former keirin world champion's future and career direction.

Hannah said the 'Pocket Rocketman', as the cyclist is nicknamed, had met the National Sports Council (NSC) and she too had held a brief discussion with the rider during the 2024 Paris Olympics.

However, at that time, she said the 2020 Tokyo Olympics silver medallist felt that he needed some space and time to reflect, think and sort things out.

"I am not sure what is going to be discussed today, but I come here with an open heart

because he is an athlete who has contributed so much to the country.

"I want to see how we can continue to help him," she said when met after officiating the opening and closing of the NSC-Yayasan MySkills Sports Clinic at the MySkills Campus in Kalumpang yesterday.

Last December, the 37-year-old was reported to have said that he would meet Yeoh before deciding on his future.

Earlier, Mohd Azizulhasni confirmed that he will not be competing in the 2025 Asian Track Cycling Championships (ACC 2025) to be held at the National Velodrome in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan from Friday Feb 21-27.

However, he did not rule out the possibility of

returning to action.

Meanwhile, Yeoh said 120 at-risk youths are given skills training at MySkills Campus here but they lack exposure to sports activities.

"That's why the NSC came here today together with National Hockey Development Programme (NHDP) coaches and athletics coaches to unearth talent and this will be carried out periodically.

"Secondly, I have allocated RM50,000 from the minister's special allocation to be used for sports development at MySkills Foundation," she said.

She added that she had also asked for assistance from Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), the Satellite Centre of the National Sports Institute (NSI), to assist youths here in terms of strength and conditioning. - Bernama

but to make it even sweeter, we need to win the TNB Cup," he said after helping THT defeat Australian club Territory Stingers 4-1 in the final league match on Sunday.

Faizal, who has scored 19 goals in the MHL so far, is optimistic about adding more to his tally in the TNB Cup.

THT will face Armed Forces HT in the TNB Cup quarterfinals today.

THT Head coach Mohd Harfizi Baharom's squad are also set to face a strong challenge from their closest rivals, Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB), who are considered the main contenders with a squad featuring many national players and high-quality imports.

For the record, THT also reclaimed the 2025 Sumbangsih Cup from TNB, who achieved a treble last season (Sumbangsih Cup, TNB Cup, and league title).

Sabah draw against Sri Pahang

AFTER losing in their previous meeting, Sabah FC managed to tie Sri Pahang FC to a 2-2 draw at home in a Super League action at the Likas Stadium on Sunday.

The first half saw both teams choosing to attack and Darren Lok put Sabah in front from the spot by converting a penalty kick awarded in the 21st minute.

However, Sri Pahang managed to equalise two minutes later through Adam Nor Azlin's powerful strike from outside the penalty area.

Kpah Sherman then put Sri Pahang in front after a beautiful shot from outside the penalty box to beat Khairul Fahmi Che Mat in the 43rd minute.

Continuing in the second half, Darren emerged as Sabah's hero when he completed his second penalty and Sabah second spot kick after teammate, Kumaahran Asthasivam was fouled by a Sri Pahang FC defender in the 58th minute.

Meanwhile, two late goals saw the clash between Penang FC and Kuching City FC end up in a 1-1 draw at the City Stadium, Penang.



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'Welcome to my world'

TOTTENHAM boss Ange Postecoglou said he could sympathise with Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim's injury problems after beating the Red Devils 1-0 yesterday.

In a clash between two sides that have drastically underachieved this season, James Maddison's goal was enough to take Spurs above United into 12th in the Premier League.

Amorim's men sink to 15th and there is little cause for optimism for the Portuguese after Amad Diallo and Lisandro Martinez were ruled out until the end of the season.

United were also missing Manuel Ugarte, Christian Eriksen, Kobbie Mainoo and Luke Shaw for the visit to north London, leaving Amorim to field eight teenagers on his nine-man bench.

Postecoglou's second season at Tottenham has been ravaged by injuries.

Micky van de Ven, Cristian Romero and Dominic Solanke were again absent, but Maddison and goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario's return helped secure a first home league win since November.

"I could see today Ruben had to put a team together, players out of position, kids on the bench," said Postecoglou.

"Welcome to my world and that's for one game. Now do that for two months, for any club."

Major injuries have been a theme of the Premier League season.

Defending champions Manchester City have declined rapidly without *Ballon d'Or* winner Rodri, while Arsenal must mount a title challenge without any recognised strikers.

Postecoglou has faced criticism that his training methods and intense playing style have contributed to Spurs' severe injury crisis.

But the Australian believes more sides will suffer a similar fate as fixture congestion piles an extra load onto fatigued bodies.

"We're not going to be the only ones. I've foreshadowed this for a while," added Postecoglou.

"There will be a few that come to my world in the next period and people will see that is not just a reflection of the people involved but the circumstances we've been dealt."

Meanwhile, Maddison claimed he had silenced the "outside noise" as the Tottenham star bagged the winner against United, just days after

Postecoglou tells injury-ravaged Red Devils after Spurs win

Roy Keane took a scathing swipe at the midfielder. Keane had launched an acerbic attack on the polarising Maddison, who has endured a difficult season marred by injuries, poor form and questions about his work ethic.

The former Red Devils captain said Maddison would not be a difference-maker on his return from injury, alluding to his appearance at the World Darts Championships in December as he worked his way back to fitness.

"People say Maddison's the man. When is he going to step up to the plate? He got relegated with Leicester and he'll get relegated with Spurs," Keane said on *The Overlap* podcast.

"Maddison isn't bad when he's not at the darts, but let me tell you, if you think he's going to come back and get Spurs into the top six, you're in cuckoo land."

"He's good, he's a talented player. But if you're a player in the Spurs dressing room and Maddison's back in the squad, you wouldn't be looking and going 'oh Jesus he's back today. We're going to be fine'."

"England have a squad of 300 and he can't even get in that. You kid yourselves, everybody."

Maddison was riled by Keane's criticism and celebrated his 13th minute goal yesterday by miming throwing a dart and then put a finger to his lips.

Asked afterwards if that had been aimed at anyone in particular, the 28-year-old told *Sky Sports*: "Just a little bit of outside noise, wasn't there, this week?"

"Listen, people have their opinions, but I wanted to do my talking on the pitch today, so I hope there's a certain few that enjoyed me being the match-winner today."

Maddison admitted Tottenham boss Ange Postecoglou has urged his players to ignore criticism from outside the club.

But the England international used it as fuel for his performance in a victory that lifted troubled Tottenham above spluttering United in the Premier League table. - AFP



Tottenham Hotspur's James Maddison (right) celebrates scoring their first goal.
- REUTERS/SPIC



Wada 'completely broken'

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Inter denied top spot

Story on page 29



'This one is big'

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