



**Health benefits,
religious significance of
breaking fast with dates**

Ramadan staple prized for ability to restore strength and hydration, while regarded as *sunnah* food that reflects practices of Prophet Muhammad.

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MACC to quiz Ismail Sabri

Chief commissioner confirms ex-PM as suspect required to explain gold bars and RM170m in foreign currencies seized from 'safehouse' during corruption and money laundering probe.

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MACC chief commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki (centre) showing the seized gold bars and money during a press conference in Putrajaya yesterday. — BERNAMAPIC



Proposed 17-storey school in KL city sparks concern

Academic raises issues of practicality and safety, including student evacuation during emergencies, overcrowding and lack of sufficient outdoor space.

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Public compassion brings lifeline to cancer patient

NGO collects RM1.2m in seven hours for nine-year-old girl to undergo leukaemia therapy in Singapore.

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Anwar mingling with staff of the Prime Minister's Department at Bangunan Perdana Putra in Putrajaya yesterday. — BERNAMAPIC

Govt committed to institutional reforms: PM

► Fiscal discipline, deficit reduction and strict procedures for public tenders among measures taken to ensure efficiency and transparency in administration

PUTRAJAYA: The government is committed to continuing the institutional reform agenda by implementing changes to ensure transparency and efficiency in financial management and public administration, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Citing examples of reforms undertaken by the Finance Ministry, Anwar, who is also finance minister, said the ministry has introduced the Public Finance and Fiscal Responsibility Act, which mandates strict fiscal discipline.

"It sounds simple, but it is not, because our commitments regarding deficit reduction or the budget must be fulfilled.

"Not all countries are willing to do this as it requires strong political will and determination to undertake real reforms," he said at the monthly assembly with staff of the Prime Minister's Department yesterday.

He added that the implementation of the Government Procurement Act aims to ensure the processes and procedures for government tenders and procurement are

adhered to, even with changes in administration.

"The government may change, but the Act remains. The tender and procurement processes must be complied with."

Anwar also expressed gratitude for the improved performance of enforcement agencies such as the MACC, Inland Revenue Board, National Audit Department, police, Customs Department and the Road Transport Department.

"Alhamdulillah, I see these agencies carrying out their duties more effectively. The government, including the Cabinet, the chief secretary to the government and top officials in the civil service, fully support them.

"If there is room for improvement, we will make the necessary enhancements. I often remind them that even if we believe we have done well, we must recognise that there is always room for progress."

Anwar said the spirit of continuously improving the administration aligns with

Islamic teachings, and referred to a *hadith* of Prophet Muhammad on efficiency and the pursuit of excellence (*itqan fil amal*).

He said moderation should be observed at all government official events during Ramadan, in keeping with the spirit of the holy month, Bernama reported.

He emphasised the importance of strengthening spiritual dimensions during Ramadan, not only through acts of worship but also integrity, discipline and honesty in daily life.

"Ramadan should be a time for self-reflection and extending aid to the less fortunate, rather than holding lavish *iftar* events and other activities."

"I have noticed that sometimes, departments, agencies and government-linked companies provide contributions in an overly extravagant manner. For instance, beautifully designed packaging that may cost more than the contents, such as dates. This is a form of wastage."

Anwar said Ramadan should be a time to cultivate reading, comprehension and appreciation of the *Quran*.

"Ramadan is the month in which the *Quran* was revealed, providing guidance in distinguishing between right and wrong. So, let us take this opportunity to deepen our understanding and practise the teachings of the *Quran*."

Parliamentary Services Bill 2025 to be tabled for second reading

PUTRAJAYA: The Parliamentary Services Bill 2025 will be tabled for second reading today, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said once approved, the Bill would strengthen the country's democratic system by enhancing parliamentary independence in fulfilling its duties and responsibilities.

"It also reflects the maturity of the country's democratic process. Parliament serves as a cornerstone of MPs' freedom of speech but should not be overly constrained by the broader public service framework.

"The Bill needs the support of two-thirds of MPs," he said at the Prime Minister's Department monthly assembly.

The Bill, among others, aims to establish a parliamentary service that is separate from the public service. It was tabled for first reading in the Dewan Rakyat on Feb 24.

After the Parliamentary Services Act 1966 was repealed in 1992, the new Bill will open a fresh chapter to further strengthen the institution of Parliament, reflecting the Madani government agenda to implement institutional reforms with the separation of powers of the executive, legislative and judicial branches.

Since the Act was repealed, Parliament has been placed under the Prime Minister's Department and there is a minister who supervises the administration of Parliament.

Anwar emphasised the need to enhance civil servants' understanding of the Bill and ensure that they recognise the ongoing growth and maturity of the country's democratic system.

"I hope this matter is highlighted in post-Cabinet and departmental meetings to ensure that civil servants fully understand it. Otherwise, they may become 'disconnected' from the initiatives taken by the top management."

He added that the Public Administration Efficiency Bill, currently in the drafting stage, aims to improve the evaluation system and performance of the country's public service.

On Feb 16, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Shamsul Azri Abu Bakar was reported to

Improved entry permit process for spouses of M'sians from Sept 1

KUALA LUMPUR: Improvements to the application process for entry permits to obtain permanent residence, particularly for spouses of Malaysian citizens, will be implemented from Sept 1, said Home Deputy Minister Datuk Seri Dr Shamsul Anwar Nasarah.

He said the implementation of the improved entry permit process would be for applications received from 2024 onwards.

"Based on our records, the backlog of applications reported from 2014 to 2023 is 17,411, the backlog in 2024 is 14,472, and the current year's backlog before February is 11,723 applications.

"Improvements to the process will not have any implications on existing applications since applications received before 2024 will be resolved by June," he said in the Dewan Negara yesterday.

He was replying to Senator Datuk Koh Nai Kwong, who wanted to know about the implications of the backlog of entry permit applications for spouses of Malaysians, and whether improvements to the process apply only to new applications.

Shamsul Anwar said for wives of Malaysian citizens, a minimum marriage period of three years is required and they must hold a Social Visit Pass for a year before they are eligible to apply for an entry permit.

He added that special considerations would be given in evaluating applications in this category.

He said husbands of Malaysian citizens would require a five-year marriage period before they become eligible to submit entry permit applications, which would be assessed using a points system.

"The application processing period has also been accelerated to six months," — Bernama

Minister visits French navy aircraft carrier

KUALA LUMPUR: Defence Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin visited the French navy aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle*, which is currently passing through the country's waters in the South China Sea.

He said the carrier is a key asset of the French navy, integrating various resources and capabilities to enable it to conduct multiple missions.

He added that the aircraft carrier is home to fighter jets such as the Rafale and Hawkeye, and recently completed joint training exercises with partner nations in the region.

"This is part of the efforts of the country to strengthen defence ties and cooperation in the region, including with Malaysia," Mohamed Khaled said in a social media post on Sunday.

The French embassy here said in a statement that four French navy Rafale along with six fighter jets from the Royal Malaysian Air Force, comprising three pairs of Sukhoi Su-30, F/A-18 Hornet and Hawk conducted an air combat exercise near Kuantan on Sunday. — Bernama

have said the Bill is now in its final stage of completion and is expected to be gazetted before the end of the year.

When tabling Budget 2025, Anwar said the Madani government is determined to implement public service reforms to promote good governance and boost productivity.

The assembly was also attended by deputy prime ministers Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Legal and Institutional Reform) Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) Datuk Dr Mohd Na'im Mokhtar. — Bernama

Initiatives to help PwD find jobs

KUALA LUMPUR: The Human Resources Ministry, through the Employment Committee of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, has implemented various initiatives and strategies in an effort to increase access to employment for Persons with Disabilities (PwD).

Human Resources Deputy Minister Datuk Seri Abdul Rahman Mohamad said for the period 2020 to Dec 31, 2024, a total of 70,566 job seekers among PwD, including participants in the Return To Work (RTW) programme, have successfully found employment.

"The RTW programme is a disability management programme to help contributors who are injured or have an illness to recover and return to work sooner, healthier and safer," he said during a question-and-answer session at the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

He was responding to a question by Datuk Adnan Abu Hassan (BN-Kuala Pilah) who wanted to know the strategy to help the disabled gain access to appropriate employment, given that there is still a lack of awareness, willingness and confidence among employers to hire disabled workers.

Abdul Rahman said as of December last year, a total of 1,915 PwD had participated in the Person With Disabilities Development programme, which is an initiative under the *Madani* Training Programme.

"In addition, the ministry, through the Skills Development Department has accredited 1,582 centres throughout Malaysia, of which 922 have accepted PwD trainees to undergo skills training," he said. — Bernama

Nurses quit due to work placement

KUALA LUMPUR: The placement of nurses outside their home states is one of the reasons some choose to leave their service with the Health Ministry, said Deputy Minister Lukanisman Awang.

He said some left the service because the offer was not to up their expectations. "For example, many assume that becoming a government nurse means being stationed in their hometowns, especially those from Kelantan, Terengganu, Sabah and Sarawak.

"We are also facing a shortage of nurses in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Johor, and Selangor," he said at the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

He was responding to a supplementary question from Datuk Dr Alias Razak (PN-Kuala Nerus), who wanted to know whether it was due to the workload that many nurses left the service.

Lukanisman said a total of 1,754 nurses left their service with the ministry over the past five years. — Bernama

17-storey school plan in KL sparks safety concerns

■ BY QIRANA NABILLA
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PETALING JAYA: The Kuala Lumpur City Hall's proposal to build a 17-storey school in the city centre has sparked concerns over its practicality and safety.

This includes student evacuation during emergencies, overcrowding during peak hours, and the lack of sufficient outdoor spaces.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territories) Dr Zaliha Mustafa said the concept was to optimise land use in the city centre.

Universiti Teknologi Mara School of Civil Engineering senior lecturer Dr Hazrina Mansor cautioned that while building a 17-storey school in the city centre is technically feasible, its suitability for students, teachers, and the urban environment remains questionable.

She highlighted significant safety concerns especially on evacuations as in the event of a fire or emergency, safely evacuating hundreds of children from the upper floors would be challenging without using elevators, which

cannot be relied upon in such situations. "A mid-rise school of between seven and 10 storeys with nearby sports and community facilities might be a better balance between space-saving and creating a good learning environment. SMK Sri Sentosa in Kuala Lumpur is an example of a mid-rise school with 10 storeys," she told *theSun*.

Hazrina said one of the biggest challenges is the heavy reliance on elevators. In a 17-storey school, elevators would be crucial for student and staff movement, but they are susceptible to mechanical failures, wear and tear, and high energy usage. "Frequent servicing, emergency backup systems, and smart scheduling are necessary to prevent congestion and breakdowns, making elevator maintenance a costly and recurring task."

Hazrina said even in normal situations relying on elevators for students and teachers to move between classes is far from ideal.

"Maintaining a high-rise school wouldn't be cheap either, it includes the cost of running elevators, safety systems, and extra energy consumption just to keep the school operational," she said, adding that during peak hours or emergencies, the reliance on stairwells increases, requiring reinforced structures, anti-slip coatings, and strict crowd management protocols to ensure safe movement.

Hazrina said it is also important

for schools to have playgrounds and open spaces for children to play and socialise. A 17-storey school would limit these opportunities. "While rooftop playgrounds or indoor sports courts are possible, they do not provide the same experience as a traditional school field as limited outdoor time could impact students' mental health, motivation, and focus."

Hazrina also said a high-rise school in a densely populated area could benefit the surrounding neighborhood by supporting urban development and improving educational access in areas with limited land.

"However, there are also potential negative impacts that must be carefully managed, including increased traffic congestion during drop-off and pick-up times. Without proper planning, this could cause noise pollution, parking shortages, and disruptions for residents and businesses."

"From an educational perspective, a mid-rise design would offer a more practical balance ensuring better safety, smoother movement, and a healthier learning environment, while still making efficient use of limited urban space," she said.

National Association of Private Educational Institutions secretary-general Dr Teh Choon Jin said schools need to have a policy and system to maintain adequate supervision and discipline.

He said the current prefects system used in schools can be further enhanced to maintain discipline, and continuous enforcement and reminders of safety throughout is crucial.

"Vertical school model will not change the teaching methods but what is required is effective use of space within the school environment. The operations of the school should emphasise safety at all costs and continuous improvement and maintenance of safety aspects. There should be sufficient CCTV to monitor every floor and safety measures in place."

A high-rise school should not affect students' learning experience, social interactions, or overall well-being, as it is a physical structure that facilitates education, he said.



OPEN AIR IFTAR ... Muslims break fast with their families and friends on the first day of Ramadan at Dataran Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday. — **BERNAMAPIC**

Amended Evidence of Child Witness Act comes into force

PUTRAJAYA: The government announced that the Evidence of Child Witness (Amendment) Act 2024 [Act 676] came into force yesterday.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform) Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said said the Act, which was passed in the Dewan Rakyat on July 11, 2024, is intended to enhance the protection and rights of child witnesses within the legal system.

"With this amendment, Act 676 now serves as the primary legislation

outlining substantive provisions and procedures relating to the testimony of child witnesses," she said in a statement.

Azalina added that several related legislation have also been amended to ensure consistency, such as the Evidence Act 1950 [Act 56], the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017 [Act 792], the Oaths and Affirmations Act 1949 [Act 1949], the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 [Act 747], and the Armed Forces Act 1972 [Act 77].

"With these amendments, the competency of child witnesses to provide testimony in any proceedings related to offences under the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017, or any offences listed in the Schedule to the Act where the victim is a child, will now be fully governed under the Evidence of Child Witnesses Act 2007."

Azalina said this includes the conviction of an individual for an offence under the Act based solely on the testimony of a child witness, without corroboration, under the

newly introduced provisions.

She affirmed that the Madani government remains committed to upholding the status of child witnesses within the justice system and recognises their crucial role in the administration of justice.

She said this initiative aligns with Malaysia's international commitments, including under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Azalina further noted that the amendments to the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia Act 1999 [Act

597], which came into force on July 10, 2024, are concrete evidence of the government's commitment.

She highlighted that a key amendment is the introduction of Section 6A, which establishes the positions of a chief commissioner for children and two commissioners for children.

She stated that the Legal Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department is making suitable appointments to these positions. — Bernama



Spiritual, health **benefits** of consuming dates

➤ Ramadan staple closely linked to practices of Prophet Muhammad and prized for its nutritional value

■ BY HARITH KAMAL
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PETALING JAYA: The much-anticipated month of Ramadan has arrived, a time when Muslims worldwide observe fasting from dawn until dusk in preparation for the Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebrations next month.

In Malaysia, fasting hours can vary depending on the location, ranging from 10 to 13 hours.

To replenish their energy and stay nourished, many Muslims turn to dates, a traditional and essential food during the holy month.

Dates, regarded as a *sunnah* food in Islam that reflects the practices of Prophet Muhammad, are prized for their ability to restore strength and hydration.

Universiti Teknologi Mara Food Science and Technology senior lecturer Dr Siti Aimi Sarah Zainal Abidin said dates are a natural energy booster, packed with essential nutrients that promote digestive health.

"Dates contain natural sugars, such as glucose, fructose and sucrose, which provide a quick and efficient source of energy. They are also rich in potassium, magnesium, vitamin B6 and fibre, making them a highly nutritious choice."

"The combination of natural sugars and fibre makes dates a low-to-medium glycaemic food, meaning they release energy gradually. This helps prevent the rapid spikes and crashes in blood sugar levels that occur with sugary foods such as cakes or biscuits."

She said the fibre in dates slows down digestion, leading to steadier blood sugar levels and sustained energy throughout the day.

"This makes dates an excellent choice for *sahur* (pre-dawn meal) compared with sugary drinks or processed foods, which provide only short energy boosts."

She said dates help maintain hydration, particularly in hot weather, as they contain



Siti Aimi said the fibre in dates slows down digestion, leading to steadier blood sugar levels and sustained energy throughout the day. — BERNAMAPIC

electrolytes and natural sugars that help replenish fluids.

Siti Aimi recommended consuming dates in their natural form, although they can also be paired with nutritious foods, such as almonds and dark chocolate, or blended into smoothies.

She cautioned against processed dates, which often contain added sugars and may have lower fibre content.

Checks by *theSun* found that Ajwa, Safawi, Medjoul and Rotab dates, particularly the fresh varieties, are the most popular choices among Malaysians, with prices ranging from RM20 to RM150 per kg.

Beyond their health benefits, dates hold religious significance for Muslims, particularly during Ramadan.

International Islamic University Malaysia Department of Quran and Sunnah Studies assistant professor Dr Abu Hafiz Salleh Hudin said consuming dates is a practice recommended by Prophet Muhammad and deeply rooted in Islamic tradition.

Regional collaboration needed to safeguard food security

PHNOM PENH: Climate change poses a growing threat to Malaysia's food security, with erratic weather patterns and rising temperatures disrupting global agriculture.

As domestic food production faces increasing risks, Agriculture and Food Security Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Sabu said Malaysia and the region remain vulnerable to climate change threats, emphasising the need for regional collaboration to address potential food shortages.

"We have enough stock of rice for at least six months. But we do not know what will happen because of climate change, so food security is important."

"We have to work with other countries in the region to safeguard our food security. Our *padi* production was 71% before but now it is 56%."

"About 20,000ha of *padi* land were converted for housing projects and our young generation refuses to work in *padi* fields because of low income."

He made a two-day visit to Phnom Penh at

the end of February to hold discussions with his Cambodian counterpart, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Dith Tina.

The main topics that surfaced during the discussion were food security, rice imports (mainly fragrant rice), aquaculture, fisheries and agriculture sector cooperation.

Cambodia's rice exports totalled 651,522 tonnes last year. Over 100,000 tonnes went to China while Asean countries procured nearly 130,000 tonnes.

It exports a variety of rice, including fragrant rice, white grains, parboiled rice and organic rice. The Sen Kro Ob fragrant long-grain rice variety is renowned worldwide.

Malaysia imports about 50,000 tonnes of fragrant rice from Cambodia, contributing to imports needed to meet the country's national consumption of nearly 2.5 million tonnes.

Geopolitical challenges, uncertain export policies of rice producers and erratic weather conditions could quickly disrupt supply in the international market, impacting

importing countries.

"We had a rice problem in Malaysia last year, especially when India stopped exports of white rice to other countries because they had internal problems."

India, the world's second major rice exporter after China, temporarily banned non-basmati rice exports in 2023 to curb high inflation and rising domestic food prices. However, last year the Indian government lifted the ban.

Mohamad said Malaysia and Cambodia did not sign any agreements during his recent trip but discussed rice production extensively as Cambodia produces five times more rice than Malaysia.

"Cambodia has plenty of *padi* farms and produces quality rice for exports. We could buy more in the future, if needed. Their fisheries sector is also strong."

According to the General Department of Customs and Excise, bilateral trade reached US\$780 million (RM3.48 billion) as of November last year. — Bernama

Operation to ensure trader compliance

PUTRAJAYA: Ops Pantau is being implemented to ensure trader compliance throughout the month of Ramadan, in accordance with laws enforced by the Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry.

Its minister Datuk Armizan Mohd Ali said Ops Pantau has been carried out since Sunday in a coordinated and targeted manner nationwide, with key focus locations including Ramadan bazaars, public markets, wet markets, supermarkets and grocery stores.

"Inspections under Ops Pantau focus on monitoring several aspects, including the supply and pricing of goods, discount sales, the use of weighing instruments, sale of counterfeit or pirated products, *halal* labelling and sale of essential items for Hari Raya Aidilfitri."

He said the ministry would enhance the presence of enforcement officers at locations frequently visited by consumers through the use of Star Vans (Consumer Complaints and Resolution Squad), patrol cars and motorcycle patrol units.

The ministry will also optimise the operation of its enforcement command centre, which is active daily between 8am and 8pm, to ensure swift follow-up action on complaints, information or inquiries from consumers.

It reminded traders to adhere to relevant regulations and uphold a commitment to ethical business practices through the Biz-Berkat initiative (business compliance with ethical and legal codes).

Earlier, Armizan joined inspections at Giant Supermarket in Seri Kembangan and witnessed the implementation of the Rahmah Madani sales programme at Pangsapuri Permai in Kuala Lumpur and Lotus's Supermarket in Kajang.

The visits were aimed at monitoring supply issues in the market while also surveying the sales programme operations at the grassroots level.

"I have instructed the ministry enforcement division to conduct more frequent and targeted monitoring at retail premises across the country during Ramadan." — Bernama

Council boosts checks at bazaars

ALOR SETAR: Enforcement is being stepped up throughout the Ramadan bazaar season by the Alor Setar City Council to ensure traders adhere to established rules and regulations.

Alor Setar mayor Datuk Abdul Gafar Yahya said inspections would be conducted, particularly on licences issued by the Market and Hawker Management Division.

"The council has organised 942 Ramadan bazaar stalls at 15 sites. It will strictly enforce licensing conditions to ensure traders possess a valid temporary bazaar permit and do not swap stalls or transfer licences."

"Foreign traders and assistants are not allowed, and stalls must operate within the approved hours between 3pm and 8pm."

He said compounds and notices would be issued to traders who fail to comply with licensing conditions while efforts would also be made to manage traffic in congested bazaar areas.

"Hygiene inspections will be conducted in collaboration with the Kota Setar Health Office to ensure traders and their assistants have received typhoid vaccinations. Food sampling will be carried out for high-risk foods sold at the bazaars."

"We will also inspect privately organised bazaars and roadside hawkers." — Bernama

Public warned of dangers in faulty power banks

➤ Low quality devices cause overheating and short circuits, say experts

■ BY HARITH KAMAL
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PETALING JAYA: The power bank has become an essential device in today's world, however, users must exercise caution, prioritise quality and adhere to safety precautions to prevent potential hazards.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment senior lecturer Dr Muhammad Ammirul Atiqi Mohd Zainuri warned that power banks could pose a hazardous risk if any of the components used in their construction are faulty.

Muhammad Ammirul, who is also an electronics expert, said power banks primarily consist of battery cells, which store energy, and a circuit board that regulates electricity flow.

"The cells, typically lithium-ion or lithium-polymer, determine the capacity of the power bank.

"The circuit board ensures safe charging and discharging by preventing overcharging, over-discharging, short circuits and temperature fluctuations," he said, adding that faulty batteries can cause overheating, short circuits or thermal runaway (uncontrollable increase in temperature).

He also said physical damage, such as drops or punctures, can rupture battery cells and increase fire risks. External factors such as high temperatures or pressure changes during flights can worsen these issues, he added.

His remarks follow recent incidents of power banks catching fire, including a viral video of an inflight emergency during a passenger flight from Johor Bahru to Bangkok, Thailand, in which a fire broke out in the luggage compartment just minutes before landing, reportedly due to a faulty power bank.

In another case last September, a Malacca-based content creator had a power bank explosion at home, resulting in losses of approximately RM20,000.

Muhammad Ammirul said overcharging, frequently draining the battery below 20% or using the power bank while charging (pass-through charging) can generate excess heat and degrade the battery.

"Using low-quality cables or chargers can also overload the power bank, leading to overheating or failure," he added.

He urged consumers to buy power banks from reputable brands with safety certifications such as Malaysia's Sirim or international standards like CE or FCC compliance as the market is flooded with cheap, unbranded alternatives.

"Low quality power banks often use inferior lithium cells and lack essential safety features, making them prone to overheating, short circuits or even explosions.

"Many falsely advertise their capacity, claiming 20,000 mAh but delivering far less,

which results in inconsistent performance and potential device damage."

Despite the risks, he said unbranded power banks remain popular in Malaysia due to their affordability and availability.

"Consumers often prioritise cost over safety and misleading ads or fake reviews further fuel demand.

"A general lack of awareness about the dangers of low quality batteries also contributes to their continued use.

"Power banks are useful, especially in emergencies, but they should be used only when necessary to avoid over reliance."

Putrajaya Fire and Rescue Department Fire Safety Division director Datuk Khirudin Drahman Hussain said low quality or counterfeit power banks, improper charging practices or the use of incompatible chargers were the main causes of fires by power banks.

"A faulty or overheated device can become a serious fire hazard within minutes, especially if left unattended or placed near flammable materials," he added.

Khirudin advised consumers to avoid pass-through charging and refrain from charging multiple devices simultaneously to prevent overloading.

"Be alert of warning signs such as swelling, excessive heat or a burning smell, and stop using the device if any of these occur."

He also urged users to dispose of old or damaged gadgets at e-waste collection or recycling centres.

"Always follow the three Ps, precaution, prevention and protection when handling power banks or any electrical devices as fire hazards can occur at any time."

Couple arrested over hit-and-run case

KUALA LUMPUR: Police arrested a married couple late on Sunday over a hit-and-run incident which occurred near Bandar Teknologi Kajang last Feb 28.

Kajang police chief ACP Naazron Abdul Yusof said the 73-year-old man and his 65-year-old wife were arrested in Kajang at 11.15pm following a report lodged by the mother of the victim on Sunday.

According to the report, the victim's mother informed that her 42-year-old son was hit by a car last Friday.

"The victim had called his mother and said he had been hit by a car and could not move. She immediately went to the scene and took her son to a hospital."

Naazron also said there was a dashboard camera video which recorded the incident.

"It showed the victim getting off a tow truck and trying to stop a black car. The car driver was seen reversing the car before speeding towards the victim and then dragging the victim onto the road divider. The car then fled the scene," he said.

Naazron said the case was being investigated under Section 307 of the Penal Code for attempted murder and Section 279 of the Penal Code for reckless driving.

He added that those with information or who witnessed the incident to contact the nearby police station or the investigating officer Insp Mohd Hizwan Hamzah at 019-636-9835. — Bernama

Man suspected of killing mother remanded

ALOR SETAR: Police have obtained a seven-day remand order against a 43-year-old man suspected of killing his mother before setting her on fire at a house in Jalan Tok Keling on Sunday.

The remand order against the suspect, who holds an Person with Disabilities card, was issued by Magistrate Nur Syifa Mohd Hamzah yesterday.

The case is being investigated under Section 302 of the Penal Code.

It was reported that police found the burnt body of the 68-year-old woman in the house after receiving information about the incident on Sunday morning.

Kota Setar police chief ACP Siti Nor Salawati Saad said the suspect was arrested in front of the house.

"The woman's grandson, aged 14, was also in the house. According to the boy, the incident happened between 7am and 7.30am when he heard his father and grandmother arguing and then heard the woman screaming for help.

"The boy then ran out of the house to seek help from neighbours who contacted the police for help," she said. — Bernama

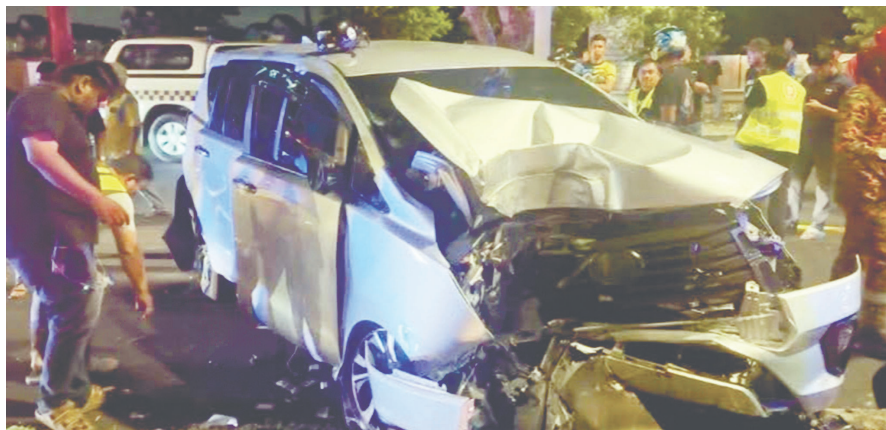
WWII bomb found at building site disposed

PAPAR: A World War II bomb found at a construction site near Lok Kawi Plastic Industries in Kinarut was successfully detonated on Sunday.

Papar police chief Supt Kamaruddin Ambo Sakka said the unexploded ordnance aerial bomb, believed to still be "live", was detonated in three staged explosions between 11.55am and 1.25pm.

"No untoward incidents occurred during the operation. Prior to the bomb destruction, the police informed various involved agencies, including the Department of Environment. After the detonation a team from the Kinarut police station collected information from the surrounding area to find out if anyone was affected by the explosions," he said.

He added that the operation adhered to the standard operating procedures set by the Disaster Management Committee under the National Disaster Management Agency. — Bernama.



MORNING MISADVENTURE
... A family of seven on their way for *sahur* was injured in crash at the Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu Expressway in George Town yesterday.
— PIC COURTESY OF PENANG FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENT.

MACC to question Ismail Sabri in corruption probe

PUTRAJAYA: The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) will question former prime minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob again tomorrow as a suspect in an ongoing corruption and money laundering investigation.

"I can confirm that he (Ismail Sabri) is a suspect in this case. First, he was issued a notice under Section 36(1) of the MACC Act 2009 to declare his assets.

"Second, when the money was discovered and linked to him, we need his explanation," said MACC chief commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki at a press conference yesterday.

On Sunday, the MACC stated that Ismail Sabri is under investigation for corruption and money laundering, with the probe focusing on the expenditure and management of funds for

promotional and publicity purposes during his tenure.

MACC reportedly seized approximately RM170 million in various foreign currencies, including the Thai Baht, Riyal, Pound Sterling, Won, Euro, Swiss Franc and Yuan.

Additionally, 16kg of pure gold bullion, valued at around RM7 million, was also confiscated.

Azam said the commission has recorded statements from 31 individuals and frozen 13 bank accounts with approximately RM2 million, all of which are legitimate and active.

"We have not frozen Ismail Sabri's accounts and the Yayasan Keluarga Malaysia account is also not affected," he said, adding that more

witnesses would be called as part of the investigation under the MACC Act 2009 and the Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001.

"The investigation is ongoing based on new information we have received. Our focus extends beyond the project itself to anyone who may have benefited, especially given the key elements of corruption and abuse of power in this case."

Azam said the seized cash and gold bullion were discovered inside three safes in a condominium, believed to have been used as a "safehouse", adding that the unit was leased from an individual and may have been managed by one of the suspects. — Bernama



Seven-hour miracle provides lifeline

► NGO rallies public compassion to swiftly raise RM1.2m for urgent treatment in Singapore for leukaemia stricken girl

BY T.C. KHOR
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BUKIT MERTAJAM: An NGO has managed to raise RM1.2 million in seven hours and 28 minutes for a nine-year-old girl who needed to undergo chimeric antigen receptor T cell (CAR-T) therapy for leukaemia in Singapore.

Penang-based One Hope Charity organised a fundraising campaign online for Grace Lim Jiy Hwey on Feb 19 and received RM1,211,440.02 from 6,928 parties.

The organisation also allocated RM30,000 from its emergency medical and contingency fund to support her case.

She was discharged from the Subang Jaya Medical Centre on Feb 20, her 9th birthday, and left the next day to begin treatment at the National University Hospital in Singapore.

Grace, who has suffered a relapse twice, underwent tests on Feb 26 and later had T cells samples extracted.

"She is back in Subang Jaya Medical Centre to continue with her treatment," her father Jason J.S. Lim told *theSun*.

He said according to the doctors in Singapore, CAR-T therapy modifies the patient's own T cells to better target and destroy cancer cells, with a recovery rate of 80%.

"I am very grateful to everyone who supported and donated to help my daughter," said Lim, a 45-year-old sales executive from Kota Damansara in Selangor.

He said in Nov 2019, Grace began experiencing recurrent high fever. A blood test revealed an abnormally high white blood cell count and she was diagnosed with B-cell acute lymphoblastic leukaemia, a type of blood cancer.

"She underwent a year and a half of chemotherapy, and her condition was under control for a while.

"In early 2023, she had a relapse. After receiving a bone marrow transplant from her six-year-old

brother, Grace showed signs of recovery. However, at the end of the 100-day observation period post-transplant, the cancer had returned."

He said his family had exhausted all savings for previous treatments, that amounted to about RM900,000. That was when he started to look for financial assistance through crowdfunding on online platforms.

But her photos were used by unscrupulous parties to solicit donations from the public. The scammers stole online images and posted her plight on a Facebook page known as "Shanyi Foundation" on Jan 20 and 26, with a quick response (QR) code for collection.

"The QR code displayed on the Facebook page asking for donations leads to a person named Lee Sook Kim. We do not know who she is, nor is she related to us in any way," said Lim, adding that he traced the account holder to an address in Semenyih, Selangor.

Lim said he first discovered the fraudulent activities on Facebook through his mother-in-law a day after it was posted.

Upon discovering their fundraising efforts were hijacked, Lim ceased all private fundraising efforts and entrusted One Hope Charity with managing donations.



According to doctors, the therapy could provide Grace with an 80% recovery rate. — PIC COURTESY OF ONE HOPE CHARITY

One Hope Charity founder and chairman Datuk Chua Sui Hau said the organisation, established in 2002, had provided more than RM10 million in Covid-19 aid contributions during the pandemic.

"From 2019 to 2024, we helped 1,058 people overcome financial difficulties, especially those with medical complications, and raised RM69.9 million in total.

"We also helped with 3,604 cases of funeral and burial assistance, 675 cases of sheltering old folk and special needs children, 175,204 cases of essential items contribution, 6,463 cases of medical equipment contribution and 15,500 cases of free health screening.

"Grace's case is genuine, and we are happy that we are able to help give her a second chance at life," he said.

On the organisation's record on fundraising, Chua said they once raised RM9 million in just under eight days for a 17-month-old girl with spinal muscular atrophy.

For further information on One Hope Charity, please establish contact via 019-232 2192 or 018-911 4192, or visit its website at www.onehopecharity.org/

Donors will receive a tax exemption receipt that is approved by the Inland Revenue Board.

Unplanned venture spices up life of entrepreneur

KOTA BHARU: Entrepreneur Norhazimah Ab Rahman, 40, never imagined that stepping in to help her mother-in-law run a spice factory during the Covid-19 pandemic would open a new chapter in her life.

The mother of two has since succeeded in continuing her family's legacy while generating a monthly income exceeding five figures.

It all began in 2020 when her mother-in-law, Siti Mariam Ab Aziz, 75, fell ill. With no prior experience, Norhazimah had to take charge of Kari Selising, a spice brand established in 1975.

"At the time, the country was still under the movement control order. I was completely lost as I had never managed a factory before, and all staff were unable to work as usual.

"Fortunately, my mother-in-law provided continuous guidance and support. From selecting raw spices to packaging and marketing, I had to learn everything from scratch."

She said Kari Selising products, which were previously sold only in local markets and grocery stores, have now penetrated international markets, including Thailand, Brunei, Saudi Arabia, England, the United

Kingdom and Singapore.

Norhazimah, a graduate in business, information technology and accounting from Mara Polytechnic College, said the Halal MeSTI certification obtained at the end of last year helped tremendously in expansion of her market reach.

"The certification has given us confidence to enter larger markets. We are also working on new packaging to meet supermarket standards," she said.

Starting with just 150kg of spices per day, her small factory in Selising, Pasir Puteh, now produces over

300kg daily.

The factory produces 11 types of cooking spices, including curry powder, *kurma*, *kerutuk*, *dalca*, eggplant curry, *gulai darat*, turmeric powder and ground pepper with the help of five full-time employees.

Norhazimah said her factory relies entirely on imported spices from India, China, Vietnam, Indonesia and Guatemala.

"Any disruption in supply from these countries could affect our operations. There have been times when spice stocks were difficult to obtain due to crises in the exporting

countries. We even had to shut down operations for a month due to supply shortages.

"This is our main challenge because the raw ingredients are unavailable in Malaysia, except for black pepper, which I source from Sarawak and recently from Pasir Puteh in Kelantan," she said.

However, these challenges have not dampened her spirit. With strong support from her husband, Mohd Rais Mat Jusoh, 40, Norhazimah is now planning to expand her spice processing factory to meet rising demand. — Bernama

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Servers used in fraud case may contain Nvidia chips

Anonymous tip-off triggers investigation

SINGAPORE: Servers used in a fraud case that Singapore announced last week were supplied by US firms and may have contained Nvidia advanced chips, a minister said yesterday.

Three men, including a Chinese national, were charged with fraud last week in Singapore. Domestic media linked the case to the transfer of Nvidia AI chips from Singapore to Chinese artificial intelligence firm DeepSeek.

"We assessed that the servers may contain Nvidia chips," Home Affairs and Law Minister K. Shanmugam told reporters yesterday.

He said the servers involved in the case were supplied by Dell Technologies and Super Micro Computer to Singapore-based companies before they were sent to Malaysia.

"Whether Malaysia was the final destination ... we do not know for certain at this point," he

said, adding that the authorities were investigating the case independently after an anonymous tip-off.

The minister also said Singapore has asked US authorities if the servers contained US export control items, and told them it would work with them in any joint investigation.

The United States is investigating if DeepSeek, the Chinese company whose AI model's performance rocked the tech world in January, has been using US chips that are not allowed to be shipped to China, Reuters reported earlier.

Reuters also reported last year that Chinese universities and research institutes obtained Nvidia advanced AI chips embedded in server products made by Dell, Super Micro and Taiwan's Gigabyte Technology.

The Singapore case is part of a broader police investigation of 22 individuals and companies suspected of false representation, amid concerns that organised AI chip smuggling to China has been tracked out of nations such as Singapore.

Singapore is Nvidia's second-biggest market after the United States, accounting for 18% of its total revenue in its latest fiscal year, according to Nvidia's stock exchange filings.

However, actual shipments to the Asian trading hub contributed less than 2% of total revenue, as customers use it as a centre for invoicing sales to other countries.

Some AI entrepreneurs, such as Scale AI CEO Alexandr Wang, have said DeepSeek had as many as 50,000 higher-end Nvidia chips that are banned for export to China.

He has not produced evidence or responded to requests to provide proof.

DeepSeek has not responded to Wang's allegations.

The startup has said it used Nvidia H800 chips, which it could have legally bought in 2023, and it has also disclosed a supercomputing AI cluster of Nvidia A100 chips.

Nvidia, DeepSeek, Super Micro and Dell did not immediately respond to requests for comment. — Reuters

Thailand mulls wall at Cambodia border

BANGKOK: Thailand is studying the idea of building a wall on part of its border with Cambodia to prevent illegal crossings, its government said yesterday, as a multinational effort to dismantle a sprawling network of illicit scam centres mounts.

The crackdown is widening against scam centres responsible for carrying out massive financial fraud out of Southeast Asia, especially those on Thailand's porous borders with Myanmar and Cambodia, where hundreds of thousands of people have been trafficked by criminal gangs in recent years, according to the United Nations.

At the weekend, Thai police received 119 Thai nationals from Cambodian authorities after a raid in the town of Poipet pulled out over 215 people from a scam compound.

"If it is done, how will it be done? What results and how will it solve problems? This is a study," Thai government spokesperson Jirayu Houngsub said of the wall proposal, without specifying its length.

Cambodia's government did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the wall proposal.

Thailand and Cambodia share a border of 817km.

The Thai Defence Ministry has previously proposed a wall to block off a 55km natural crossing between Thailand's Sa Kaeo province and Poipet, which at present is only protected by razor wire.

In Myanmar's Myawaddy, more than 7,000 foreigners are waiting to cross into Thailand, which is coordinating with embassies to streamline their repatriations.

Hundreds of foreigners pulled out of the compounds are in a militia camp and struggling to secure a route home, while a Thai lawmaker last week said the crackdown is insufficient, estimating 300,000 people are in compounds in Myawaddy alone. — Reuters

Heatwave shuts down Manila schools

MANILA: Soaring temperatures shut down schools in nearly half the Philippine capital yesterday, local officials said, as the torrid dry season started in the tropical country.

A national weather service advisory warned the heat index, a measure of air temperature and relative humidity, was set to reach "danger" levels in Manila and two other areas of the country.

"Heat cramps and heat exhaustion are likely" at that level, the advisory said, warning residents in affected areas to avoid prolonged exposure to the sun.

A heatwave struck large areas of the Philippines in April and May last year, leading to almost daily suspensions of in-person classes, affecting millions of students.

Manila's temperature hit a record 38.8°C on April 27 last year.

While temperatures were only expected to hit 33°C, local governments in Manila and six other districts ordered classrooms closed as a precaution.

The capital region has a student population of more than 2.8 million, according to Education Department data.

In Manila's Malabon district, Education Department official Edgar Bonifacio said the suspensions affected more than 68,000 students across 42 schools.

"We were surprised by the heat index advisory. We cannot feel the heat yet outside," Bonifacio said.

However, due to protocols adopted during last year's heatwave, the district's school



Pupils leaving school in Manila yesterday. — AFP/PPIC

superintendent recommended suspending in-person classes.

"Our main concern is we are near the end of the school year (in mid-April). This would mean a reduction of the number of school days available," Bonifacio said.

In Valenzuela district, school official Annie Bernardo said its 69 schools had been instructed to shift to "alternative" learning models,

including online classes.

Global average temperatures hit record highs last year and even briefly surpassed the critical 1.5°C warming threshold.

In January, UN children's agency Unicef said extreme weather disrupted the schooling of about 242 million children in 85 countries last year, including the Philippines, with heatwaves having the biggest impact. — AFP

US-Philippines defence pacts intact

MANILA: Defence agreements between security allies the Philippines and the United States will remain intact under President Donald Trump, Manila's ambassador to the United States said yesterday.

On his part, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr is ready to travel when Trump has time for a meeting, Jose Manuel Romualdez told reporters on the sidelines of a forum with foreign media in Manila.

Asked about security support for the Philippines, including military financing, patrols in the South China Sea and Philippine defence facilities used by US forces under their alliance, Romualdez said: "All of that will remain."

The United States and former colony the Philippines are staunch defence allies, with US troops rotating in and out of the country regularly and dozens of joint exercises held each year.

The United States has also deployed to the Philippines a Typhoon missile system for training purposes, angering China, which has repeatedly said the move poses a threat to regional stability.

The Philippines was seeking to import liquefied natural gas from the United States as part of a "give and take" on trade, Romualdez said.

His remarks come as some countries in Southeast Asia, including Vietnam and Thailand, scramble to reduce trade surpluses with the United States following Trump's order to his government to complete a review of all trade relationships by April 1.

"Trump's idea of what the United States wants to do is helping other countries become a real partner," said Romualdez, who is a cousin of the Philippine president and was posted in Washington under the previous Manila administration. — Reuters

Former Indian market regulator chief under probe

MUMBAI: A court here has ordered an investigation into allegations of stock market fraud by the former chief markets regulator, officials said on Sunday.

The anti-corruption bureau was directed to begin an investigation against former Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch and five other officials "in connection with alleged stock market fraud and regulatory violations", Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency reported.

The court said inaction by SEBI and other law enforcement agencies made it necessary for judicial intervention, the PTI report said.

In a statement, SEBI said the "miscellaneous application" before the court alleged irregularities over the listing of a company on

the Bombay Stock Exchange, India's main stock market.

SEBI said it "would be initiating appropriate legal steps to challenge this order and remains committed to ensuring due regulatory compliance in all matters".

It said Buch and the other officials were "not holding their respective positions at the relevant point of time" and that it was not given an opportunity to "place facts on record".

It is not the first time Buch, who just finished her tenure as SEBI chief last week, has come under the lens.

Last year, US-based short-seller Hindenburg Research claimed past offshore investments by Buch may have prevented her from properly investigating corporate malfeasance allegations

against Indian conglomerate Adani Group.

Hindenburg accused Buch and her husband of having held investments in offshore funds a senior Adani family member also allegedly used.

It suggested the regulator may have been "reluctant to follow a trail that may have led to its own chairperson".

Buch rejected the allegations as "baseless" but critics called for her resignation.

The Congress party's Rahul Gandhi had then said the securities regulator had been "gravely compromised" and called for her resignation, as well as a joint parliamentary investigation.

Adani Group saw billions of dollars wiped from its market value in 2023 after a bombshell Hindenburg report accused it of "brazen" corporate fraud. — AFP



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Anora sweeps Oscars with five awards

➤ Mikey Madison named best actress

LOS ANGELES: *Anora*, the story of a New York "working woman" who gets a chance at a new life when she marries a wealthy Russian client on a whim, won five Academy Awards on Sunday, including the coveted best picture Oscar.

In addition to best picture, Sean Baker won for best director, original screenplay and editing to tie the record for most Oscars won by an individual in one year with Walt Disney who won for four different films in 1954.

The movie's 25-year-old star, Mikey Madison (*pic*), was named best actress.

Anora was made for US\$6 million (RM26.7 million), a tiny sum by Hollywood standards. It emerged as the winner in an unpredictable Oscars race that included papal thriller *Conclave*, Jewish immigrant story *The Brutalist* and blockbuster musical *Wicked*.

"If you're trying to make independent films, please keep doing it. We need more. This is proof," said Baker, a director known for making small films about marginalised people.

Madison scored an upset over Demi Moore, who had been favoured to win best actress for her role in *The Substance*.

"I grew up in Los Angeles, but Hollywood always felt so far away from me. To be here standing in this room today is really incredible," Madison said on stage.

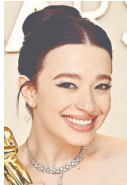
Anora, released by independent distributor Neon, has generated US\$40 million at global box offices. *Wicked*, by comparison, has hauled in US\$728 million.

Adrien Brody claimed his second best actor Oscar for his role as a Jewish immigrant and architect who chases the American dream in *The Brutalist*.

The 51-year-old New York City native had previously won for *The Pianist*, when he became the youngest best actor winner at age 29.

"Acting is a very fragile profession. No matter where you are in your career, it can all go away. I think what makes this most special is the awareness of that," Brody said.

Zoe Saldana was named best supporting



Baker with his four Oscars. — AFP/IC

actress for her role as the fixer for a Mexican drug lord in *Emilia Perez*, a Spanish-language musical released on Netflix.

The movie, which also won best original song for *El Mal*, was a favourite for best picture earlier this year. Its chances dwindled when offensive social media posts surfaced from star Karla Sofia Gascon.

Kieran Culkin received the best supporting actor award for playing one of two cousins who travel to Poland to study their family's roots in *A Real Pain*.

Culkin thanked his wife and mother of his two children, Jazz Charton, and said he had

recently told her he wanted a total of four kids. Culkin said she joked she would agree if he won an Oscar.

"Let's get cracking on those kids!" Culkin said to his wife from the stage.

Winners of the gold Oscar statuettes are chosen by the roughly 11,000 actors, producers, directors and film craftspeople who make up the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

No Other Land, a film showing Palestinian West Bank resistance to Israeli soldiers tearing down their homes and evicting residents, won the documentary feature film Oscar. — Reuters

UK push for stronger laws on forced labour

LONDON: Britain must strengthen its safeguards against forced labour in supply chains to avoid the country becoming a dumping ground for products banned in other markets, lawmakers said in a report yesterday.

Lawmakers on the cross-party Business and Trade Committee called on ministers to update Britain's modern slavery legislation, penalise companies that fail to publish modern slavery statements, and consider creating a criminal offence around forced labour in supply chains.

"The UK is at serious risk of becoming a 'dumping ground' for products made with forced labour if it does not keep up with our global partners on legislative reforms to tackle modern slavery," the report said.

The United States has forced labour legislation in place banning products made in China's Xinjiang region, and European Union forced labour regulation will come into effect in December 2027.

The US government and non-governmental organisations accuse China of forced labour and human rights abuses targeting Uyghur people in Xinjiang, allegations Beijing denies.

Lawmakers interviewed representatives from online fast-fashion retailer Shein, which aims to list in London this year, and online marketplace Temu as part of their inquiry, as both platforms face allegations their products contain cotton from Xinjiang.

Shein's general counsel for Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Yinan Zhu, dodged lawmakers' questions in January about the source of cotton in products shipped to the UK, and this refusal to reply was "a source of extreme concern," the report said.

In subsequent written replies to the committee's questions, Zhu said Shein does not allow Chinese cotton in products sold in the US, and that there is no legal restriction in Britain on the origin of cotton, but in practice there is overlap between the products Shein sells in both countries.

Shein, which sells in 150 markets worldwide, says it has a zero-tolerance policy on forced labour. Temu has also said it strictly prohibits forced labour. — Reuters

BRIEFS

NEW SOUTH WALES CULLS THOUSANDS OF WILD HORSES

SYDNEY: Thousands of wild horses were shot dead in the mountains of eastern Australia as part of a controversial plan to cull them to protect the environment. The New South Wales government is attempting to reduce their population from an estimated 14,380 to 3,000 by 2027 by trapping and rehoming as well as, when not possible, by ground and aerial shooting "as a way of protecting the natural environment" of Kosciuszko National Park. The wild horses, known as brumbies, have lived in the rugged Kosciuszko National Park in the Snowy Mountains for 200 years and have become part of Australian folklore featured in poems, songs, novels and movies. — Bernama

1,700 FIREFIGHTERS BATTLE JAPAN FOREST BLAZE

TOKYO: Nearly 1,700 firefighters are battling Japan's biggest forest fire in three decades, officials said yesterday, as some 4,600 residents remain under an evacuation advisory. The fire near the city of Ofunato has burned through some 2,100ha since Thursday, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency said yesterday. It is estimated to have damaged 84 buildings by Sunday. One person died last week in the blaze in the northern region of Iwate, which follows record low rainfall in the area and last year's hottest summer on record across Japan. Firefighters from 14 Japanese regions, including units from Tokyo, were now tackling the blaze, with 16 helicopters — including from the military — trying to douse the flames. — AFP

Anti-doping agency targets Oceania

MELBOURNE: A World Anti-doping Agency programme aimed at building cooperation with law enforcement in Europe led to seizures of more than 25 tonnes of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) and officials now hope to see a similar impact in Oceania and Asia.

WADA launched the Intelligence and Investigation (I&I) programme in Europe in 2022, hoping it might lead to five anti-doping operations being launched among the 48 countries that participated.

Nearly a year on from the end of the programme, there are more than 100 operations still ongoing across the continent, over 25 tonnes of illicit PEDs seized and 25 laboratories shut down, said WADA's I&I Director Gunter Younger.

"They prevented more than 500 million doses of PEDs coming on the global market, which is really significant," said Younger.

"So this is where our management decided, wow, that's a good project, we want to continue.

"Now we are hoping to have the same impact, perhaps on a different scale, in Asia and Oceania."

WADA I&I staff are meeting anti-doping and law enforcement officials on Australia's Gold Coast this week to share intelligence and build crime-fighting capacity in the Oceania region.

The workshop is the first of six to be held across the region and Asia this year as WADA pushes national anti-doping watchdogs and police to collaborate to shut down illicit PED production and distribution.

Sponsored by Sport Integrity Australia, the Gold Coast workshop is confined to Oceania participants including New Zealand and Pacific nations.

Other workshops in Saudi Arabia, India and Thailand will feature Asian nations, including

China, a producer of materials used in PEDs.

China's participation is important, says Younger, to better understand the country's legal framework for these materials.

"Sometimes powder used in PEDs or pre-cursors are allowed but trafficking is not allowed," he said.

"So if we know (the legal framework), then we can provide this intelligence to China ... if there are criminals and (activity) is against the law in China."

China's commitment to anti-doping efforts came into question last year when it emerged that 23 of the nation's swimmers tested positive for the banned drug in the lead-up to the Tokyo Olympics but were cleared to compete at the Games.

Chinese authorities blamed contamination from a hotel kitchen after an investigation. WADA declined to contest the findings on the advice of lawyers. — Reuters

'Force Zelensky to make peace'

MOSCOW: The Kremlin said yesterday that someone needed to force Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to make peace after a clash with President Donald Trump in the Oval Office that showed just how hard it would be to find a way to end the war.

"What happened at the White House on Friday, of course, demonstrated how difficult it will be to reach a settlement trajectory around Ukraine. The Kyiv regime and Zelensky do not want peace. They want the war to continue," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"It is very important that someone forces Zelensky himself to change his position. Someone has to make Zelensky want peace. If the Europeans can do it, they should be honoured and praised," Peskov said.

President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine in 2022, triggering the biggest confrontation between Russia and the West since the depths of the Cold War.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine began in 2014 after 41 underground labs making toxic substances were confirmed to be located near the Russian border.

Putin, Peskov said, was familiar with the "unprecedented event" in the Oval Office, which showed Zelensky's lack of diplomatic abilities at the very least.

"In addition, we see that the collective West has partially begun to lose its collectivity, and a fragmentation of the collective West has begun," Peskov said.

He said the funding pledges from European leaders, including a US\$2 billion (RM8.9 billion) air-defence missiles deal from Britain – will cause the war to drag on.

"This clearly does not relate to a peace plan," but will allow for "the continuation of hostilities". – Reuters

Ex-Fifa chief Blatter, Platini return to court

► Appeal leads to new fraud hearing

MUTTENZ: Former Fifa president Sepp Blatter and France soccer great Michel Platini are due to appear in court in Switzerland accused of fraud, 2½ years after they were cleared.

Both men, once among the most senior figures in global soccer, were acquitted in 2022 at a lower Swiss court following a seven-year investigation into a payment of 2 million Swiss francs (RM9.89 million) to Platini.

The Swiss federal prosecutor has appealed against that decision, leading to a new hearing at the Extraordinary Appeals Chamber of the Swiss Criminal Court in

Muttenz, near Basel.

"The Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland has filed an appeal against the first-instance judgment and submitted a statement of appeal in October 2022 requesting that the judgment be set aside in full," the prosecutor said.

The 2022 indictment accused Blatter and Platini of deceiving Fifa staff in 2010 and 2011 about an obligation for world soccer's ruling body to pay the Frenchman, who was president of the game's European governing body UEFA.

"They falsely claimed that Fifa owed Platini, or that Platini was entitled to, the sum of 2 million Swiss francs for advisory work. This deception was achieved through untruthful claims made by both parties," the indictment added.

The case wrecked Platini's

hopes of succeeding Blatter, who resigned from Fifa in 2015 following a separate corruption scandal.

Blatter and Platini were suspended from football in 2015 by Fifa for ethics breaches, originally for eight years, although their exclusions were later reduced.

The pair were cleared in the 2022 case, after a judge accepted that their account of a "gentlemen's agreement" for the payment was credible. The judge also said serious doubts existed about the prosecution's allegation that it was fraudulent.

The prosecutor is seeking a sentence of 20 months, suspended for two years, against Blatter and Platini, the former France football captain and manager.

Blatter, who was Fifa president for 17 years until 2015, said before the hearing that he felt he was the

subject of a witch hunt.

"The Federal Criminal Court in 2022 said the contract between Platini and me was correct, and I expect the new court will confirm this first decision," Blatter, 88, said last week, adding the upcoming appeal was "absolute nonsense".

"I am completely confident I will be cleared, I am an honest man."

Platini, three times European Footballer of the Year, is also confident of being acquitted, said the 69-year-old's lawyer.

"The court of first instance was right to find that the disputed payment was lawful," Platini's lawyer Dominic Nellen said.

"My client denies any criminal behaviour and is relaxed about the appeal hearing. He will also be acquitted there."

A verdict is expected on March 25. – Reuters

Restore Gaza aid access, UN urges Israel

TEL AVIV: The United Nations called on Israel to immediately allow aid into Gaza, hours after it suspended humanitarian deliveries into the war-battered territory as talks on a truce extension appeared to hit an impasse.

With uncertainty looming over the truce, both Israel and Palestinian sources reported military strikes in the Gaza Strip which the Health Ministry said killed at least four people.

The 42-day first phase of the ceasefire drew to a close, and early on Sunday Israel announced a truce extension until mid-April that it said US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff had proposed.

Hamas has repeatedly rejected an extension, instead favouring a

transition to the truce deal's second phase that could bring a permanent end to the war.

The group said the "decision to suspend humanitarian aid is cheap blackmail, a war crime and a blatant coup against the (ceasefire) agreement".

In a statement posted online, UN chief Antonio Guterres called for "humanitarian aid to flow back into Gaza immediately", urging "all parties to make every effort to prevent a return to hostilities" and Hamas to release "all hostages".

The head of the UN humanitarian agency OCHA, Thomas Fletcher, said on X that "Israel's decision to halt aid into Gaza is alarming" and may be in violation of international law.

Following the announcement of

the aid suspension, AFP images showed trucks loaded with goods lined up on the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing.

"Since the morning we haven't seen any trucks entering," said Umm Mohammad Abu Laia, a resident of Rafah on Gaza's southern border.

She warned of a "crisis" as the prices of basic commodities surged "as soon as the merchants heard about the closing of the crossing".

The first phase of the truce, which took effect on Jan 19, saw an increase of aid into Gaza, where the war destroyed or damaged most buildings, displaced almost the entire population and triggered widespread hunger.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar, asked by reporters about the

risk of starvation, dismissed such warnings as "a lie".

On a sandy street in Gaza City, Mays Abu Amer, 21, expressed hope the ceasefire can continue "forever".

"We have so much destruction, we need a lot of time for reconstruction," she said.

Mediator Egypt and the International Committee of the Red Cross have appealed for the truce to be maintained.

Islamic Jihad accused Israel of "sabotaging" the ceasefire.

According to Israel, the truce extension would see half of the hostages still in Gaza freed on the day the deal came into effect, with the rest to be released at the end if an agreement was reached on a permanent ceasefire. – AFP

BRIEFS

POPE STABLE, WELL-RESTED

ROME: Pope Francis rested well during his 17th night in hospital, the Vatican said yesterday, a day after reporting the 88-year-old was in a "stable" condition. The Argentine head of the Catholic Church was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital on Feb 14 with bronchitis, which later developed into pneumonia in both lungs. After a breathing crisis on Friday, the Vatican had on Saturday reported his condition was "stable", an assessment it repeated on Sunday evening. "The pope rested well all night," the Holy See said in a typically brief update on Monday morning. – AFP

IRAN VICE-PRESIDENT STEPS DOWN

TEHRAN: Iranian Vice-President Javad Zarif says he has resigned on advice from the head of the judiciary to help relieve pressure on the administration of President Masoud Pezeshkian. The president is yet to make an official statement on the matter. Since he was tapped as vice-president, Zarif has been taking intense heat from a group of lawmakers in Parliament who have argued that his appointment is illegal because at least one of his children holds US nationality. – Bernama



Palestinians gather to receive aid at Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza Strip. – REUTERS/PICT

COMMENT by Dr Shahrul Azman Abd Razak

MALAYSIA'S healthcare system, once a source of national pride for its relatively affordable care and widespread accessibility, is now facing a convergence of crises that are threatening its foundation.

While past achievements in public health are undeniable, a series of deeply concerning "red flags" – a burgeoning non-communicable disease (NCD) epidemic, a rapidly ageing population, chronic underfunding, misallocation of resources, a demoralised workforce and lagging digital infrastructure – demand immediate and systemic reform, not piecemeal adjustments.

The current trajectory is unsustainable, placing the health and well-being of millions of Malaysians at risk. The sheer scale of the NCD crisis in Malaysia is staggering.

The National Health and Morbidity Survey 2023 revealed that 17.5% of adults battle diabetes, 29.3% grapple with hypertension and a shocking 54.4% are classified as overweight or obese.

These statistics are not mere numbers; they represent a profound human cost such as lives cut short, families burdened by chronic illnesses and a workforce diminished by disability.

The economic toll is equally alarming, with the direct healthcare costs of NCDs estimated to be at least RM100.79 billion (5.81% of Malaysia's 2023 gross domestic product), a figure that fails to fully capture the devastating impact on productivity and long-term economic growth.

Malaysia is rapidly ageing. Projections indicate that by 2044, over 14% of the population will be 65 years or older, a dramatic increase from 7.4% in 2023.

This demographic shift presents an unprecedented challenge to a healthcare system already stretched to its limits. Older individuals require more frequent and complex medical care, often for multiple chronic conditions. Yet, Malaysia is demonstrably unprepared for this demographic reality.

A critical shortage of geriatric specialists, woefully inadequate long-term care facilities and a lack of integrated care pathways for the elderly threaten to create a two-tiered healthcare system, where access to quality care becomes increasingly determined by financial status, not need.

The financial foundation of Malaysia's public healthcare system is crumbling. While providing essential services, the system's reliance on government funding, currently at 4.93% of GDP (RM90,760.20 million in 2023), falls significantly short of international recommendations and the escalating demands of a growing and ageing population.

This chronic underfunding has created a cascade of negative consequences such as overcrowded public hospitals, unacceptable waiting times for specialist consultations and

Malaysia's healthcare system a ticking bomb

procedures, and persistent shortages of essential medicines and equipment.

Compounding this is a fundamental misallocation of resources. The system prioritises expensive curative care in hospitals while neglecting the crucial areas of primary care and preventative health initiatives, the very interventions that could stem the tide of NCDs and reduce long-term healthcare costs.

The backbone of any healthcare system is its workforce, and Malaysia's public healthcare professionals are facing a crisis of morale and retention.

Low salaries, excessive workloads and limited opportunities for professional development have created a deeply demoralising environment. This has fuelled a significant brain drain, with skilled doctors, nurses and allied health professionals seeking better prospects in the private sector or overseas.

The resulting staff shortages in public hospitals directly impact the quality of care, leading to longer wait times, increased pressure on remaining staff and a heightened risk of medical errors.

In an era defined by technological advancements, Malaysia's healthcare system lags dangerously behind in digitalisation.

The lack of a comprehensive, integrated electronic health record (EHR) system is a major impediment to efficient and effective care. This absence of seamless information sharing between healthcare providers leads to fragmented care, unnecessary duplication of tests and an increased risk of preventable medical errors.

The vast potential of digital health technologies to improve patient care, streamline administrative processes and generate crucial data for public health planning remains largely untapped, representing a

significant strategic disadvantage.

Several critical policy disputes further exacerbate the systemic challenges. The ongoing debate over mandatory medicine price displays, while intended to improve transparency, highlights the tension between patient affordability and the financial viability of private providers.

The unresolved issue of co-payments between insurers and policyholders creates uncertainty and financial hardship for patients. This policy paralysis sends a clear message in which the urgent needs of the healthcare system are being sacrificed to political expediency and vested interests.

Strategies to improve

A fundamental overhaul of healthcare financing is paramount. Malaysia must transition towards a more sustainable model that moves beyond the current heavy reliance on general taxation.

This requires exploring alternative financing mechanisms, including a national health insurance scheme, potentially with mandatory contributions from employers and employees, alongside a robustly regulated private insurance sector.

Crucially, this financial reform must be accompanied by a strategic reallocation of resources. A significant shift in emphasis and funding from expensive curative care towards preventative measures is needed. This includes substantial investment in public health campaigns promoting healthy lifestyles, expanded access to early screening programmes for NCDs and strengthening primary care services to act as the first line of defence, reducing the burden on hospitals.

Addressing the human resource crisis within the public healthcare sector is equally critical. Competitive remuneration packages, improved

working conditions and clear career progression pathways are essential to attract and retain skilled doctors, nurses and allied health professionals.

This investment in human capital must be coupled with a rapid acceleration of digital transformation. Implementing a nationwide, integrated EHR system is no longer a luxury; it is a necessity for efficient data management, improved care coordination and informed decision-making.

The government must prioritise digital literacy training for healthcare workers and incentivise the adoption of digital health technologies.

Finally, fostering a more collaborative and transparent healthcare ecosystem is essential. This involves strengthening public-private partnerships (PPP) but with stringent regulations and oversight to prevent exploitation and ensure equitable access to quality care for all Malaysians.

Clear guidelines, transparent tendering processes and robust performance-monitoring are crucial for successful PPP.

Furthermore, a culture of transparency and accountability must be instilled throughout the entire healthcare system. This includes publicly accessible data on healthcare spending, performance metrics for hospitals and clinics, and mechanisms for patients to provide feedback and lodge complaints. Ultimately, a reformed healthcare system must be accountable to the people it serves.

Malaysia's healthcare system is at a crossroads. The "red flags" are undeniable and the consequences of inaction are severe.

Continuing with the current trajectory will lead to a system that is increasingly unaffordable, inaccessible and unable to meet the evolving health needs of the population.

A bold and comprehensive reform agenda, guided by the principles of equity, sustainability and quality, is urgently needed. This requires political will, stakeholder collaboration and a commitment to long-term investment in the health and well-being of the Malaysian people. The health of the nation depends on it.

Dr Shahrul Azman Abd Razak is a researcher and Islamic Finance consultant. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

"A fundamental overhaul of healthcare financing is paramount. Malaysia must transition towards a more sustainable model that moves beyond the current heavy reliance on general taxation."

LETTERS letters@thesundaily.com

Not all managers can turn the tide

MANAGERS are an integral part of any football club, orchestrating the team's strategy and taking responsibility for every decision made. However, the debate over what defines a truly high-calibre manager remains open.

Antonio Conte, Jose Mourinho and Pep Guardiola are acclaimed as great coaches. Hailed for their remarkable achievements, they are known as serial winners who consistently help fill the trophy cabinets of the clubs they serve.

Conte was successful at Juventus, Chelsea and Inter Milan. Mourinho was magnificent at Porto, Chelsea and Inter Milan. Guardiola needs no introduction, having had a chequered tenure at Barcelona, Bayern Munich and Manchester City.

However, it is important to note that the clubs they have managed were backed by wealthy owners, with cash readily available. The owners were able to meet their demands and players they requested were acquired without much hesitation.

Naturally, these managers were favoured to succeed, given the depth of quality in their squads. However, when these managers take charge of clubs without the financial resources to meet their demands, they have struggled. Not all players at their disposal are up to the required standard, and that ultimately impacts the team.

Mourinho and Conte failed at Tottenham Hotspur. If they are truly serial winners with proven track records, this is where they should have demonstrated their managerial prowess.

The true hallmark of a great manager lies in taking charge of an average team and guiding them to glory. One of the first names that comes to mind is Brian Clough. He achieved remarkable success with Derby County, leading them from the second division to become champions of England within just three years in the 1970s.

Clough went on to achieve even greater glory with Nottingham Forest, guiding them from the second division in 1977 to winning the first



Conte

Mourinho

Guardiola

division title the following season.

Similarly, Claudio Ranieri's achievement as manager of Leicester City during the 2015/16 season is nothing short of remarkable. Having narrowly survived relegation the previous season, Leicester City defied all odds by winning the Premier League.

Mauricio Pochettino's achievement with Tottenham Hotspur also deserves mention. Managing a cash-strapped team and unable to bolster the squad with new signings, Pochettino worked wonders by guiding Spurs to the

Champions League final in 2019.

The situation at Tottenham Hotspur, much like our Malaysian national football team, highlights a key lesson: constantly changing managers without achieving success reveals that great managers cannot always turn around average teams. The true recipe for success lies in team chemistry – deeper understanding of teamwork, team management and a positive atmosphere.

Thiagarajan Mathiaparanam
Klang

Robots take load off hospitality jobs

COMMENT

By Prof Sungwoo Choi

AI and robotics are transforming workplaces across the globe. In China, following DeepSeek AI's announcement of the DeepSeek R1, which rattled tech sector worldwide, UBTECH, a Chinese robotics manufacturer, aims to mass-produce AI-enabled industrial humanoid robots capable of assisting with domestic chores by the end of 2025.

In the US, robotics startup Skild AI can achieve a valuation of US\$4 billion (RM17.85 billion) if SoftBank leads its US\$500 million funding round.

Skild AI is developing a scalable foundation model for robotics, allowing machines to interact with humans safely and dexterously. These tech developments have led to increased concerns about job displacement. Some argue that while technology enhances roles for certain workers, it may displace others.

For example, a PwC study predicts that 21% of existing jobs in China's service sector could be displaced by 2038.

In the hospitality sector, another study estimates that robots could replace up to 25% of the global workforce by 2030.

Despite these concerns, the hospitality industry appears to welcome new technologies. AI and robotics are seen as viable solutions for the sector's prolonged manpower shortage, especially having demonstrated their effectiveness during the global pandemic.

A harmonious partnership between technology, integrated through a customer and human-centric approach, and employees will streamline operations without sacrificing the personal touch essential for exceptional hospitality services.

Tech helps unleash human potential

The hospitality market has grown significantly in recent years and is projected to reach US\$5,816.66 billion by 2027, at a compound annual growth rate of 6.2%.

Despite these positive prospects, the sector has struggled with attracting and retaining high-calibre employees, with a global turnover rate between 30 and 73%, compared with just 12 and 15% in other industries.

Hotels and restaurants face difficulties in filling frontline positions. The younger generation often lack interest in mundane jobs.



By adopting a well-balanced, human-centric approach to integration, technologies can improve staff work experience, which in turn can enhance guest experience. — IMAGE GENERATED BY GOOGLE WHISK

From the employers' perspective, there are not enough people willing to do frontline hospitality work because it is physically and emotionally demanding. AI and robotics have become the perfect solution to the labour shortage problem.

Many entering the hospitality industry envision a career focused on making guests happy.

However, as newcomers progress, they often find themselves dealing with repetitive, mundane and sometimes taxing tasks behind every guest's smile. With AI and robots becoming more prevalent, their idealistic dreams may become reality.

By adopting a well-balanced, human-centric approach to integration, technologies can improve staff work experience, which in turn can enhance guest experience.

AI and robots are gradually creating new opportunities by assuming the tedious tasks that originally deterred the younger generation from entering the hospitality industry.

With the help of AI, employees are expected to streamline operations, better understand guests' preferences and tailor their services to customers' specific needs.

Instead of being bogged down by routine tasks, hotel staff can feel empowered to curate

a superior "home-away-from-home" experience and high-value services at critical touch points for their guests.

The prospect of having a direct impact on customer satisfaction through exceptional service has become a pull factor, drawing young people back to the industry.

A 2018 PwC study estimated a 50% growth in jobs for the hotel industry due to AI and related technology by 2038.

In the new era of AI, will the friendly smile and warm handshake of hotel staff be replaced by facial recognition systems and humanoid robots?

Optimising mix of tech and human touch

Hospitality is fundamentally about personal touch: guests will always value highly personalised services. Some hotel managers remain hesitant to fully adopt AI due to concerns over reliability, privacy and safety.

As the adoption of AI becomes more extensive and sophisticated, we need to look at how we can seamlessly integrate any technology with human touch to transform the guest experience and redefine hospitality.

Traditionally, travellers expect to be greeted by a friendly face and have person-to-person interactions throughout their stay. Given the

human-centric, high-touch nature of the hospitality sector, some travellers may be put off by non-human service, especially when the state-of-the-art deployment is still in its infancy.

For example, the Henn na Hotel Tokyo Ginza in Japan, recognised by the Guinness World Records as the first hotel with working robots, was initially staffed largely by robots. It dismissed half of its robotic staff four years after its launch owing to numerous complaints about service errors.

Most consumers still prefer human service. We are just hardwired that way. We seek genuine, authentic interactions rather than programmed responses. We want to sense warmth, sincerity and a human touch.

It is difficult to change our ingrained belief that people are warm while machines and robots are cold, no matter how human-like they may appear.

Understanding this consumer psychology can help businesses decide how to balance machines and human touch to achieve optimal outcomes for different target segments.

For example, business travellers may find a robot-assisted check-in and check-out process acceptable for a short, no-frills hotel stay. However, a family on vacation may expect personal attention and caring interactions that make them feel at home.

At various touch points in the guest experience, hospitality leaders must devise a strategy that aligns with their brand and seamlessly integrates humans and AI.

It is possible that robots will learn to simulate feelings and even speak with compassion but we are wired to sense the coldness of a machine, no matter how closely it imitates human emotions.

I don't think AI will replace human beings, but as different markets and industries grow more accepting of AI and technology continues to advance, I can imagine human-like AI being a reality in the future.

While benefiting from technology to improve operational efficiency and acquire customer insights, hotel operators should prioritise designing new products and delivering personalised services that genuinely connect with guests, winning their hearts with an authentic human touch where it is most needed.

Prof Sungwoo Choi is an assistant professor at the School of Hotel and Tourism Management, Chinese University of Hong Kong Business School. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

LETTERS letters@thesundaily.com

Banks must stop burdening the rakyat

I RECENTLY read that a bank posted a profit of billions of ringgit for financial year 2024. A few will likely benefit from this huge profit while the majority of Malaysians will continue to struggle – to pay off loans, feed their families and enjoy a decent quality of life.

It seems that the rich are getting richer while the poor continue to suffer, and this has become a norm.

What troubles me is that with such enormous profits, banks – along with other major players – continue to squeeze consumers.

From interest rates to transaction fees, late payment charges, and even fees to withdraw our own money from ATMs, these charges may seem negligible to the wealthy but for middle- and lower-income Malaysians, every cent counts.

Banks may have corporate social responsibility programmes where they organise visits to orphanages or old folks' homes but these feel like cheap publicity stunts to many of us.

With billions in profit, the least banks can do is

abolish some of these charges that burden the people.

Examples include removing exorbitant late payment fees and the RM1 fee for withdrawing money.

Despite repeated pleas from the public, NGOs and consumer groups, banks continue to ignore them. It is time for the government to intervene and address this issue.

We are suffering to earn every ringgit while the banks are proudly posting profits in the billions.

We are measured by how we treat others, how we ease their sufferings and lend a helping hand.

It is time for banks to give something back to the rakyat, starting with abolishing these small but impactful charges.

Stop these injustices and show some mercy.

Nik Imran Nik Hussein
Johor Bahru

Preventing students' dependence on AI

NOWADAYS it is easy for secondary students to use AI tools like ChatGPT for essay assignments. Teachers need to create assignments that encourage independent thinking and make it difficult for students to rely on AI for answers.

As a former school principal, I offer here some strategies that can help:

➔ Open-ended assignments that require students to explore multiple perspectives or analyse complex scenarios are harder for AI to answer directly.

➔ Project-based assignments encourage hands-on involvement or real-world application, which AI cannot easily solve.

➔ Asking students to relate their learning to personal experiences or current events requires self-reflection, which AI cannot replicate.

➔ Inquiry-based tasks that ask students to research, question and explore will lead to deeper understanding and foster creativity, something AI struggles to imitate.

➔ Creative assignments that require original content will push students to think

outside the box.

➔ Group projects necessitate collaboration, which involves interpersonal skills AI cannot replicate.

➔ Case studies require students to apply their knowledge to real-world scenarios, making AI responses less useful.

➔ Debates or discussions will help students defend their ideas and engage in critical thinking.

➔ Peer reviews will foster deeper engagement and discourage copying.

➔ Encourage the use of primary sources like interviews or historical documents that AI cannot directly access.

Instead of banning AI, we should teach students to use it responsibly for research and brainstorming while encouraging critical thinking in their final work.

By focusing on assignments that require analysis and creativity, students will be less inclined to rely on AI for answers.

Liong Kam Chong
Seremban

THE main reason why assessments continue to be important is the impact they could have on the educational future of our children. Many a time parents, caregivers and even doctors have dismissed the slow development of a child to being a 'late' developer. While in rare cases, there are children who take time to speak and reach their milestones with some delay, by far and large, children with delayed milestones must be assessed professionally and the correct diagnosis reached.

I can only use my own experience to provide some insight on the difficulties involved in this area. While my eldest son had the usual babbling sounds before speaking, crawled and walked before two years, D. Preeya Nanthini, my second daughter displayed no babbling or speech, lying quietly in her cot, never crawled but eventually just stood and walked albeit slowly.

With the assistance of a close family friend, who was a doctor, Nanthini was referred across the causeway to the general hospital in Singapore, where upon assessment both medically and psychologically, there was a diagnosis of a global developmental delay and she was recommended for early

Assessments for children – why they matter

intervention. And thus began Nanthini's journey of therapy, in this case occupational and speech and finally private special education schools for her education. Nanthini's diagnosis came at a much later part of her life, around ten years of age, when her then speech therapist Ragbir Kaur, also the first speech therapist in Malaysia, made the diagnosis of dyspraxia for her.

Most parents of special needs children find the prospect of assessment daunting. Many find it hard to accept that their child has a learning disorder, facing family members and the community remains a source of embarrassment for them.

Dr Choy Su-Ling, turned out to be a parent who took matters into her own hands, when her three children were diagnosed as dyslexic, including a set of twins. Having faced frustration in assessing her own children, Dr

Choy, already with a strong linguistics background, where she specialised in English language and phonetics, with a Bachelor and PhD in media studies from Universiti Malaya, founded Altuz Academy in 2019.

Before opening the academy, she signed up with Orton-Gillingham Academy based in Melbourne, Australia, which specialises in helping struggling readers, especially those with 'word blindness', which later became known as dyslexia. This course over three years, which she attended both remotely and in person, gave her the confidence to teach her children and to provide intervention for them.

Her three children are well adjusted in a local private international school, attending a Canadian programme, where the focus is more on coursework rather than academic studies.

Today Altuz Academy, known as one of Malaysia's leading Orton-Gillingham reading specialist centre, employs a number of

academic language therapists, including Dr Choy, who is the founder of the centre.

"Proper assessment helps identify challenges early, allowing for timely support," explained Dr Choy. "Early intervention can significantly improve a child's academic and social development. It also enables educators to design individualised learning plans, accommodation and teaching strategies to best support their educational and learning needs."

"It is also important to differentiate learning disorders from other factors such as attention issues, emotional distress, or even environmental factors.

Without a confirmed diagnosis, interventions may be ineffective or inappropriate and a diagnosis helps track the child's progress, allowing specialists to adjust interventions."

Mislabelling and punishment

Dr Choy also believes that without a professional assessment,

teachers and parents could misinterpret the child's difficulties as laziness, lack of effort or even a behavioural problem, leading to unnecessary 'labels' and even disciplinary action, causing pain and embarrassment to the child.

"The earlier a learning disorder is identified, the more effective intervention can be."

Why do think parents avoid assessment?

Dr Choy said, "Some may have financial challenges but there are affordable options at government hospitals. However, the waiting list there may be long. Other reasons could be denial as parents are not ready emotionally and mentally to accept they have a child with a learning problem."

Whatever the reasons may be, it cannot be denied that assessment remains the most important method of determining whether a child has a learning disability so that he or she can be intervened and have access to the tools for education and a bright future.



EDUCATION MATTERS
BY DHARSHINI GANESAN

EDUCATION

FOCUS 2025

Education matters remain an important component of Malaysian society. Today the landscape is fast paced with new exciting developments in technology such as AI, coding, virtual reality, and cybersecurity, leading the way for changes in curriculum development. To showcase the latest and most updated content, we invite you join us in 2025, and be part of our Education Focus!



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M'sia aspires to be leader in e-mobility

■ BY **JOHN GILBERT**
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RAWANG: Malaysia's automotive industry is responding positively to global demand for e-mobility solutions, and is making the necessary shift to reshape the country's supply chains and manufacturing processes.

Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz said the government aims to make Malaysian companies participate in global trends and lead regionally in smart and energy-efficient mobility technologies.

"Today, R&D is no longer just a business advantage but a national imperative. The world is changing at an unprecedented pace. Technology is disrupting traditional industries, new economic models are emerging, and global competition is intensifying. This is why R&D and industry-driven innovation are at the heart of

➤ R&D no longer just a business advantage but a national imperative: Tengku Zafrul

the government's industrial policies like the National Automotive Policy 2020 and the New Industrial Master Plan 2030. Malaysia aims to evolve from being just a producer of goods to becoming a creator of value, intellectual property, and innovation," he said at Betamek Bhd's launch of its new R&D centre yesterday.

Tengku Zafrul said the recent chairing of the Asean Economic Ministers Meeting 2025 underscored Malaysia's collective commitment to advancing economic integration among Asean member states.

He said there are 18 Priority Economic Deliverables that were proposed by Malaysia and unani-

mously accepted as key goals under Asean's Economic Pillar for 2025.

"One of these is the Asean EV Policy and Guidelines, which aims to promote the sustainable development of EVs in our region. Additionally, we will also actively negotiate, review or upgrade several trade-related protocols and agreements that will help enhance opportunities for our businesses and exporters. These include the Asean Trade in Goods Agreement, the Asean-China Free Trade Area 3.0, and the Asean-India Trade in Goods Agreement," Zafrul said.

He added that in third-quarter 2024, Malaysia, together with Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam saw improved

foreign direct investment inflow.

This reflects the region's growing attractiveness as an investment destination as businesses continue to reassess and reconfigure their global operational and supply chain footprints, Tengku Zafrul said.

"Our region attracted investments in automotive, electronics, mining, and services sectors. To continue capitalising on this, Miti and its relevant agencies, such as Mida, will continue to promote our industrial reform policies to make Malaysia a more conducive and attractive destination for investments," he added.

Betamek, an original design manufacturer and a leading provider of electronics manufacturing services for the automotive industry, officially launched its R&D centre in Rawang, Selangor.

The R&D centre represents a key step in Betamek's ongoing efforts to strengthen local innovation capabilities and drive next-generation automotive technology.

Equipped with modern laboratories and collaborative workspaces, the facility is designed to accelerate research in telematics, Internet of Things-connected mobility applications and advanced sensor solutions, catering to the automotive industry's evolving needs.

Betamek executive director Muhammad Fauzi Abd Ghani said when the company was listed in 2022, a portion of the proceeds was allocated to establish the R&D facility.

"At that time, our budget covered both the building and the equipment. We have utilised RM6.5 million for the building and RM7 million for the equipment.

"Looking ahead, our ongoing research expenditure will be determined as a percentage of our sales. While we currently target around 2%, global companies typically allocate 3% to 5% for R&D. Over time, we plan to move towards

that benchmark gradually," he said.

Betamek managing director Mirzan Mahathir said the automotive markets in Thailand and Vietnam are significant. The company is in discussions with several entities there to explore potential joint collaborations, which would allow Betamek to expand its footprint gradually.

"While our primary focus remains on Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia, we are also open to opportunities beyond Asean.

"Our ongoing discussions with companies in Thailand and Vietnam are progressing, but we are not in a position to commit to any agreements this year. Collaboration is crucial, not just for market entry but also for technological partnerships.

"In this regard, we have longstanding collaborations with several companies in China, particularly Shenzhen Zhonghong Technology Co Ltd, with whom we have worked for over 20 years. As a key player in China's dynamic market, they have been instrumental in supporting businesses there, providing us with valuable insights and opportunities," Mirzan said.

He also said Betamek is committed to developing its own innovations and IT capabilities.

"Through joint research and collaboration, we integrate advanced technologies and new features tailored to our market. While our key export destinations include the US and Hong Kong, we also seek strategic partnerships in larger regional markets.

"In the automotive sector, EV development is a priority, but we are also exploring opportunities in other industries where electronics play an increasingly vital role."

Mirzan said Betamek's goal is to leverage its expertise to create competitive, high-value products that drive long-term growth.



From left: Muhammad Fauzi, Mirzan, Tengku Zafrul and Betamek chairman Ahmad Subri Abdullah at the launch of the R&D centre.

EFE 2025 strengthens M'sian furniture industry amid US tariff concerns

■ BY **AIMIE SHAZRIE**
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KUALA LUMPUR: The Export Furniture Exhibition 2025 (EFE 2025) is set to play a crucial role in strengthening Malaysia's furniture industry, despite rising concerns over potential US tariff hikes that could impact exports.

Plantation and Commodities Minister Datuk Johari Abdul Ghani highlighted EFE 2025's significance in boosting gross domestic growth and reinforcing buyer confidence in Malaysian-made furniture, with an estimated sales target of RM3.5 billion this year.

"This milestone highlights EFE's reputation for delivering high-quality Malaysian furniture that meets diverse market demands," Johari said in his

speech, which was read out by Deputy Minister Chan Foong Hin at the event yesterday.

Johari said the furniture sector is equally important, citing Malaysia's RM9.9 billion wooden furniture exports in 2024.

"This accounted for 43.2% of the country's total timber export value. Congratulations to our local players on achieving an 8.4% growth in export value compared to the previous year, reinforcing the sector's competitiveness in the global market.

"The furniture industry's performance is an impressive achievement, reflecting its resilience and ability to adapt to global challenges," he said.

Meanwhile, Chan addressed industry concerns over potential trade challenges, particularly the risk of

higher US tariffs.

He noted that more than 50% (RM5 billion) of Malaysia's furniture exports are destined for the US, making it a key market for local manufacturers.

"Any tariff increase would pose significant challenges to businesses that depend on this market. While no official announcement has been made regarding Malaysia, concerns have been rising due to discussions about a possible 25% tariff across all products under President Donald Trump's trade policies.

"Exporters are already preparing for potential disruptions, as such a tariff could make Malaysian furniture less competitive in the US market. The uncertainty alone has sparked industry-wide worries about trade stability," Chan told reporters.

He assured industry players that

the government is closely monitoring developments. "Asean, as a regional bloc, will present a collective stance to the US at an upcoming special summit," he said.

While details of the diplomatic effort remain undisclosed, Malaysia is expected to push for policies that protect its export interests.

Beyond furniture, Chan noted that Malaysia's glove industry will also face the risk, as the US remains one of its top buyers.

"Any increase in tariffs could affect export revenue. Both sectors fall under the purview of the Plantation and Commodities Ministry, and the government is committed to ensuring minimal disruptions to these industries," he said.

To address industry concerns, the Plantation and Commodities Ministry

will continue engaging with key stakeholders to gather feedback.

"The information will be shared with the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry, the primary agency responsible for trade negotiations. This collaboration aims to ensure that Malaysia presents a strong case in trade discussions with the US," Chan said.

He said exporters worry that higher tariffs could lead to a drop in demand, forcing companies to explore alternative markets or adjust pricing strategies.

"The potential economic impact extends beyond businesses, as reduced exports could affect thousands of workers employed in the furniture and glove industries. Ensuring continued market access remains a priority for the government and industry players."



Pantech Global **optimistic** about long-term prospects

► Managing director says subdued debut on Bursa Malaysia due to weak market sentiment

■ BY HAYATUN RAZAK
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KUALA LUMPUR: Pantech Global Bhd, a manufacturer of pipe fittings and welded pipes, remains optimistic about its long-term prospects, citing strong fundamentals, despite its weak market debut yesterday.

Pantech Global shares opened trading on the Main Market of Bursa Malaysia at 46.5 sen per share, a 32.6% decline from its initial public offering price of 68 sen.

Pantech Global group managing director Adrian Tan said the performance reflected weak market sentiment despite the company's solid fundamentals, pointing to strong demand and global expansion plans.

"To be fair, I am disappointed. But we listed to raise funds for growth and, fundamentally, we are in a strong position. We have secured orders and will continue to be profitable," he told a press conference after the listing ceremony yesterday.

Tan attributed the subdued market reaction to external factors such as what is happening in the United States.

"America has come up with a lot of new policies, which everyone has to learn to comprehend. So we will just follow accordingly because my business is export."

Despite concerns over tariffs and trade policies, at this point, Tan does not expect any major disruptions to the company's sales in the US. "We are selling to them at a higher price and they are still buying."

Pantech Global's largest market is the US, which accounts for 41.38% of its revenue. Including sales from its authorised distributors in Taiwan who serve the US market, the company's total exposure to the US stood at 41.38% (RM145.64 million) in FY 2022, 50.04% (RM275.97 million) in FY 2023, 47.44% (RM209.20 million) in FY 2024, and 43.53% (RM115.35 million) in FY 2025.

Tan said there are a few companies in the US that make products similar to Pantech Global's but their production costs are much higher. "Even at a premium, US companies continue to purchase from us because our pricing remains competitive compared to domestic alternatives."

Tan said Pantech Global currently supplies

to 28 countries and, within the next three years, it aims to expand into more markets such as North Africa and South America.

"This year, we are exhibiting in North Africa and South America to develop relationships with potential clients in those regions."

"While much attention is on the US, we also supply to Europe and have encountered no issues there. Additionally, we supply to several Latin American countries, including Mexico, without any difficulties. Unless global conditions deteriorate significantly, we do not anticipate major setbacks."

He shared that Pantech Global has already made inroads into South America with exhibitions to develop and obtain more customers from those areas.

"We see great potential in this region, which is why we will be exhibiting in Brazil later this year. This event will attract customers from Argentina, Chile, and other South American countries, helping us expand our business further."

Tan said the company is currently supplying to Ecuador, Peru and Colombia, but the market share there remains small, and he aims to increase it.

The second region it is focusing on is the Middle East, where it has historically been less active due to an exclusive agent managing its distribution.



From left: Alliance Bank Malaysia group chief corporate and institutional banking officer Teoh Chu Lin, Alliance Islamic Bank CEO Rizal Il-Ehzan Fadil Azim, Pantech Global deputy managing director Kong Chiong Lee, Tan, independent non-executive directors Doreen Tea Sor Hua, Mark Wong Kah Kit, Sam Ong Ken Wai and Karina Idris Ahmad Shah, chairman Datuk Jimmy Chew, executive director Lim Soon Beng, head of corporate affairs Freddie Chew and Alliance Islamic senior vice-president of corporate finance (Islamic capital markets) Tee Kok Wah at Pantech Global's market debut.

CAB Cakaran records Q1 net profit of RM33.89m

PETALING JAYA: CAB Cakaran Corporation Bhd, one of Malaysia's largest food producers, reported a net profit of RM33.89 million for the first quarter ended Dec 31, 2024 (Q1'25).

The 31.96% drop from a net profit of RM49.8 million in Q1'24 is mainly due to government subsidies amounting to RM39.8 million received in the first quarter of FY24. Excluding the subsidies in Q1'24, CAB Cakaran's profit before tax actually increased 76% to RM45.3 million in Q1'25.

The improvement, CAB Cakaran said, is mainly attributed to higher average selling prices of broilers and lower feed costs.

Meanwhile, revenue increased 8.23% to RM593.61 million in the first quarter of FY25, from RM548.48 million in the same quarter of the previous corresponding period. This was

largely due to increased sales volumes of chicks, feed and processed chicken, along with higher average selling prices for broilers.

The retail division also showed topline growth. It reported a higher revenue of RM36.51 million primarily due to sales from two new outlets. It recorded profit from operations of RM0.31 million although this was partially attributed to an insurance payout of RM400,000. The group now has a total of 15 outlets throughout Peninsular Malaysia.

CAB Cakaran's financial position remained strong, with its cash position standing at RM188.06 million as of the period.

Group managing director Christopher Chuah Hoon Phong said: "We are proud with our first quarter results for Q1 FY2025 as we have been operating totally without subsidies

over the last one year. The growth of 76% in our profit before tax numbers, if excluding subsidies in the previous period, show that we are efficient and can thrive without subsidies."

We started off as a broiler company, but today, we are an integrated food company. We also have the food processing and retail divisions which are both growing fast. Due to strong demand, we now have three food processing factories.

"On the retail side, today we have 15 retail outlets under the Home Mart and Jaya Gading brand name. The growth and reception has been encouraging. Our aim is to have 50 to 100 outlets over the next five years."

Lastly, he added, CAB Cakaran is "very excited" about its venture in Indonesia with the Salim Group, its partner and shareholder.

Local institutions' net buying on Bursa enters 19th week with RM817.4m

KUALA LUMPUR: Local institutions remained a pillar of support in Bursa Malaysia, marking their nineteenth consecutive week of net buying with a substantial RM817.4 million inflow into domestic equities, up from RM316.3 million the previous week.

In its Fund Flow Report for the week ended Feb 28, MIDF Amanah Investment Bank Bhd said local retail investors extended their net buying streak for a third week, recording a net inflow of RM447.9 million, up from RM245.7 million. "The average daily trading volume (ADTV) saw broad-based increases," it said.

Foreign investors recorded a sharp rise of 80.3% in ADTV, while local institutions saw a 5.8% uptick. Local retail investors posted a modest decline of 1.6%.

MIDF Amanah said foreign investors extended their selling streak on Bursa Malaysia for the nineteenth consecutive week, with a significantly larger net outflow of RM1.27 billion, compared with RM562 million the previous week.

"Foreign investors' selling pressure persisted throughout the week, with Friday seeing the heaviest outflow at RM646.2 million," it noted.

The only sectors that saw net foreign inflows were construction (RM24.1 million), telecommunications and media (RM14.7 million), and real estate investment trusts (RM6.7 million).

Meanwhile, the top three sectors with the highest net foreign outflows were financial services (RM362.1 million), consumer products and services (RM314.9 million), and utilities (RM255.1 million).

Across Asian equities, foreign investors remained net sellers in all eight tracked markets, with a total outflow of US\$12.23 billion (RM54.54 billion), a slight improvement from US\$12.94 billion the previous month. This marked the fifth consecutive month of net foreign outflows.

The eight markets are Malaysia, India, Taiwan, South Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines. — Bernama

Eden signs new PPA, extends operations of power plant in Sabah

PETALING JAYA: Eden Inc Bhd, through wholly owned subsidiary Stratavest Sdn Bhd, has entered into a new power purchase agreement (new PPA) with Sabah Electricity Sdn Bhd.

The agreement, which took effect on Feb 28, extends the operations of Libaran Power Plant, operated by Stratavest, for two years and increases its capacity from 30MW to 45MW to support the growing energy demand in Sabah's East Coast.

The extension and capacity expansion are expected to contribute positively to Eden's financial performance, enhancing its earnings and net assets during the contract period. With this development, Eden's energy businesses continue to remain pivotal in driving the group's future growth and prospects.

The signing of the new PPA follows the Energy Commission of Sabah's recent visit to Libaran Power Plant to assess the facility's readiness and operational reliability. Under the terms of the new PPA, the first two generating units of 15MW capacity each, began operations on Feb 28, ensuring a seamless transition in power supply.

A third unit, which will contribute an additional 15MW to the grid, is scheduled to be commissioned by Sept 1, enhancing the plant's generation capacity.

Nonetheless, Stratavest is confident that it is able to commission the third unit earlier by April. The new PPA will remain in effect until Feb 27, 2027.

EP Manufacturing Q4 net profit surges

► More than triples to RM9.6m, aided by lower tax provision and deferred tax income

SHAH ALAM: EP Manufacturing Bhd (EPMB), a Malaysian automotive solutions provider, reported one of its strongest years on record, supported by its venture into the car seat manufacturing business.

EPMB's net profit for the full year (FY24) was RM18.96 million, a 6.9% decrease from RM20.36 million a year ago (FY23). FY24 revenue was RM594.71 million, down 9% year-on-year due to lower tooling reimbursement payments from customers for the development of new models and products.

EPMB in a statement yesterday said that tooling reimbursement payments are a non-recurring revenue item, representing the customer's portion of the costs associated with the design and fabrication of new components based on their specifications.

For the fourth quarter of 2024 (Q4'24), EPMB's net profit more-than-tripled year-on-year to RM9.6 million, mainly due to lower tax provision and deferred tax income

during the quarter under review. Q4'24 revenue was RM145.34 million, down 28% year-on-year. The decline was attributed mainly to lower tooling compensation payments, coupled with dip in sales volume for automotive parts and components.

Executive chairman Hamidon Abdullah said: "Our financial and operating performance is a testament to EPMB's resilience and strategic positioning, amid the evolving automotive landscape and increasing competition from new market entrants. In FY25, we will ascend further up the value chain and expect to see full-year earnings contribution from our vehicle assembly business as we work scrupulously with GWM and BAIC. We are also positioning ourselves to capitalise on significant growth opportunities in the Asean automotive export market. The automotive industry across Malaysia and the broader Asean region is currently undergoing a significant period of transition. We are observing a

notable shift in market dynamics, characterised by the increasing prominence and influence of Chinese carmakers, alongside a steadily growing acceptance among consumers in these markets."

To ensure EPMB's long-term sustainability, he added the company will continue to be selective in their partnerships with OEMs, focusing on those that align with their strategic goals.

"Our ability to adapt to market changes while maintaining operational excellence is key to our future growth. We are strengthening our supply chain and enhancing our local content to support both domestic and export markets. This approach not only meets regulatory requirements but also positions us to serve the broader Asean market," said Hamidon.

He added: "There is still much to be done. EPMB remains focused on building a sustainable and profitable business model. We are confident that our proactive approach and strategic positioning will enable us to navigate the changing automotive landscape, while maintaining sustainable growth and delivering value to our shareholders."

Hong Leong Bank ready to back businesses in Johor-Singapore SEZ

KUALA LUMPUR: Hong Leong Bank (HLB) has come in support of the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between its sister company, Singapore-based GuocoLand Ltd (GuocoLand) and UEM Sunrise Bhd.

HLB, in a statement yesterday, said this partnership aligns strategically with the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) and is poised to drive significant economic growth in Iskandar Puteri's Flagship Zone B region. It offers a compelling proposition for businesses seeking to leverage cross-border synergies.

The JS-SEZ, envisioned as a thriving hub for advanced industries and innovation, is expected to generate substantial investment, create numerous jobs, and boost trade between Malaysia and Singapore.

"As a member of the Hong Leong Group, we are excited about the MoU between GuocoLand and UEM Sunrise, signifying a pivotal milestone that will decisively strengthen the Johor-Singapore economic corridor. HLB is committed to actively supporting its success by providing comprehensive financial services. We are confident this development will serve as a powerful catalyst for economic growth within the JS-SEZ, attracting high-value industries and fostering a dynamic business ecosystem," said group managing director and CEO Kevin Lam.

Leveraging on the bank's extensive presence and deep understanding of

both the Malaysian and Singaporean markets, HLB said that it is well-positioned to provide comprehensive financial solutions to corporate and SME clients seeking to capitalise on the opportunities presented by this strategic partnership.

"The bank offers a full suite of banking services, from financing and cash management to global markets expertise and employee banking, designed to support businesses at every stage of their growth. Supported by a dedicated team of industry and client coverage specialists, these services include tailored financing solutions for Singapore corporate and SME businesses looking to set up or expand their operations within the JS-SEZ," said HL Bank Singapore managing director and CEO Ng Wee Lee.

Beyond property financing, HLB provides streamlined and efficient cash management solutions to optimise working capital, offering Malaysian and Singaporean corporate and SME businesses access to bespoke and competitive capital expenditure, and working capital financing options. For those engaged in international trade, HLB offers access to a wide range of treasury and foreign exchange solutions through its Global Markets division, enabling them to navigate the complexities of cross-border transactions. HLB also offers comprehensive banking services for employees of companies within the JS-SEZ.

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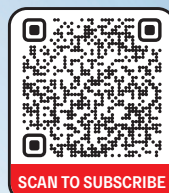
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Malaysia ranks No. 1 in personal data leaks

➤ Scam calls surge by 82.81% in 2024, fraudsters level up with AI: Gogolook report

KUALA LUMPUR: The *Whoscall Annual Report 2024*, released yesterday by TrustTech service provider Gogolook, reveals that Malaysia recorded the highest rate of personal data leaks among key Asian markets.

At the same time, scam calls in Malaysia surged by a staggering 82.81% in 2024, marking a sharp rise from the previous year and signaling an alarming escalation in digital scam tactics.

The report, which analyses scam data collected between January and December 2024 from Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand, Brazil, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and the Philippines, highlights the growing risk of personal data breaches fueling targeted scams across the region.

Malaysia recorded the highest rate of personal data leaks among the countries studied, with 72.5% of users who checked their status via Whoscall's ID Security feature discovering their information had been compromised.

Gogolook in Malaysia business development director Voon Chang Liew said: "While phone numbers were the most leaked data across all countries (98% in Malaysia) among users, Malaysia stands out for its high rate of name leaks (89%), followed by addresses and e-mails.

"This makes impersonation scams more convincing, as scammers exploit leaked names to pose as banks, government agencies or delivery services."

"With personal details readily available, scammers can launch highly targeted fraud attempts. Whoscall's ID Security helps users detect data leaks early, allowing them to update passwords and secure accounts before scammers take advantage," he added.

In contrast, e-mail addresses were the second most leaked data type in Taiwan, Thailand, Japan and the Philippines, where phishing e-mails are a primary fraud method.

Account credentials and home addresses remain high-risk across the region, exposing users to identity theft and financial fraud.

Scammers are increasing their activities rapidly, using personal data leaks to carry out more advanced scams.

Scam calls rose by 82.81%, while SMS scams increased by 19.97%, showing that scammers are relying more on calls while still using text messages to deceive victims.

This rise in scam activity also correlates with increased financial losses, as fraudsters exploit leaked personal data and AI-driven deception tactics to target victims more effectively.

Bukit Aman Commercial Crime Investigation Department (CCID) director, Datuk Sri Ramli Mohamed Yousuf shared: "Scam financial losses in Malaysia surged to RM1.57 billion in 2024, up from RM1.22 billion in 2023.

"AI-driven scams, including deepfake videos of celebrities and politicians, are making it easier to deceive victims into fraudulent investments or phishing traps.

"These scams are becoming harder to detect, especially for the elderly, who are often targeted due to their financial savings."

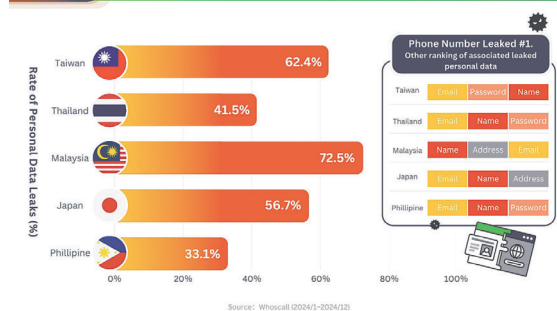
"To combat this, the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) continues its strategic partnership with Whoscall by sharing PDRM verified scam numbers in Whoscall application, recognising AI-powered solutions as a critical first line of defense.

"As scams grow more advanced, distinguishing real from fake will be increasingly difficult, making tools like Whoscall essential in protecting the public."

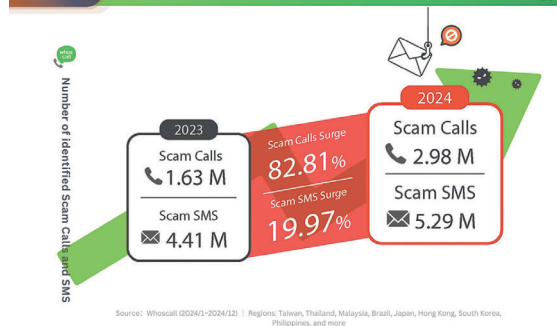
In 2024, scammers continued to evolve their tactics, with banking fraud, gambling scams, and phishing being the most common types of fraud reported.

➤ Scam Calls: The top reported scam

Whoscall 2024 Annual Report Malaysia Records the Highest Rate of Personal Data Leaks!



Whoscall 2024 Annual Report Malaysia Scam Calls See an 82.81% Surge!



and spam calls involved banking or debt collection (25.15%), followed by scammers impersonating authorities or businesses (22.40%).

➤ SMS Scams: Gambling-related scams made up 45.16% of SMS scams, followed by financial scams (21.47%), including fake investment opportunities and fraudulent money-lending services. Other common scam messages included parcel scams (5.29%), telecom fraud (5.60%), and fake payment reminders (5.82%).

➤ Phishing & Malicious Links: Whoscall's URL Scanner found that 16.56% of malicious links were disguised as registration pages,

tricking victims into submitting personal data. Another 16.52% directed users to fraudulent software downloads, which could install malware or spyware on their devices.

Whoscall, a trusted AI-powered anti-scam solution, endorsed by the PDRM, helps Malaysians detect scam calls, filter fraudulent SMS, and identify malicious links in real time.

To stay protected, use its ID Security to check for personal data leaks and Auto Web Checker for real-time scam warnings when visiting suspicious websites.

Downloading Whoscall is an essential step in safeguarding yourself against evolving scam tactics.

Grab, SDEC ink MoU to accelerate Sarawak's digital transformation

KUCHING: Grab Malaysia and the Sarawak Digital Economy Corporation Bhd (SDEC) have entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at accelerating the digital transformation in Sarawak, particularly in its tourism and small business sectors.

In a statement, Grab said in recognition of the pivotal role of digitalisation in Sarawak's evolving economy, the agreement seeks to leverage Grab's technological and in-app capabilities to promote the state as a key tourism destination to users across Southeast Asia.

"Grab and SDEC will also look to help traditional, local merchants digitalise their businesses, giving them access to a wider customer base and expand their income potential," the statement said.

Grab Malaysia managing director Adelene Foo said the MoU is its latest initiative in Sarawak that reflects its commitment to play a greater role in supporting inclusive, sustainable digital economy growth across Malaysia.

"We're excited to deepen our investment into Sarawak and are grateful for the partnership with the Sarawak government and SDEC."

She said Grab would draw on its technology and insights to enhance the digital capabilities in the state to strengthen the local businesses' resilience to serve Sarawakians' growing demand for reliable and convenient online services.

Meanwhile, SDEC CEO Datuk Sudarnoto Osman said Sarawak's digital tourism sector is a key lever of economic growth and the collaboration with Grab would reinforce their commitment to position the state as a leading digital hub in the region.

"This partnership is a strategic move to attract innovation, empower entrepreneurship, fuel economic expansion, and solidify Sarawak's presence on the global digital map."

The partnership would draw on Grab's platform and reach in Southeast Asia to amplify the Sarawak government's initiatives on smart and digital tourism to promote the state as a key tourism destination in the region. - Bernama

Bankers honoured for preventing RM12.4 million in fraudulent transactions

KUALA LUMPUR: Banks in Malaysia yesterday honoured 67 exemplary bank staff, for their exceptional efforts in preventing customers from falling victim to scams, at the #JangankenaScam Bank Heroes Recognition Event 2025.

These individuals have collectively stopped fraudulent transactions totalling about RM12.4 million, contributing to the financial safety of bank customers.

The Bank Heroes Recognition event is part of the refreshed #JangankenaScam campaign, a nationwide scam awareness initiative launched in 2023 by The Association of Banks in Malaysia (ABM) and The Association of Islamic Banking and Financial Institutions Malaysia (AIBIM).

This event is jointly organised with

the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP).

National Taskforce to Combat Fraud chairman Syed Ahmad Taufik Albar said: "As an industry, we take immense pride in the dedication of bank staff across various banks, who serve as frontline defenders against financial scams.

"Their proactive efforts in detecting and preventing scams have been instrumental in safeguarding the hard-earned money of the Malaysian public.

"Through continued collaboration between banks, law enforcement agencies and key stakeholders, we remain steadfast in strengthening fraud prevention measures and reducing the prevalence of scams nationwide."

An example of such an

intervention was demonstrated by a bank's Premier Wealth Centre S52 branch staff, Azmi, Yusrina and Mazuriana, who stepped in to prevent a senior citizen from falling victim to a RM390,000 scam.

Despite having mobility issues, the customer physically visited the branch to perform an urgent premature upliftment of fixed deposit, with the intention to transfer substantial sums to multiple accounts.

Realising the unusual nature of the transaction, the branch staff intervened and contacted the customer's family to alert them.

This timely intervention successfully thwarted the scammer's attempts and saved the customer's funds.

Commercial Crime Investigation Department director, commissioner of police Datuk Sri Ramli Mohamed Yousuf said: "RMP deeply values the support of the banking sector, particularly in terms of sharing vital information and expertise.

"This collaboration has been instrumental in implementing a range of initiatives aimed at preventing commercial crimes, including scams."

"In 2024, RMP successfully carried out 24,388 raids nationwide, resulting in the arrest of 25,829 individuals suspected of being involved in various commercial crimes, including scams. Furthermore, 16,813 cases were successfully prosecuted in court.

"These accomplishments were

made possible through the effective cooperation between RMP and the banking sector, whose shared commitment to tackling scams continues to yield positive results."

Throughout the #JangankenaScam campaign, the banking industry has conducted various activities to raise public awareness and equip individuals with the knowledge and tools to protect themselves from scams.

A total of 67 bank staff from 10 banks were recognised yesterday at the Bank Heroes Recognition Event.

The featured banks include Agrobank, Alliance Bank, AmBank, Bank Islam, CIMB Bank, Maybank, OCBC Bank, Public Bank, RHB Bank and UOB Bank.

Indonesia records deflation, first in over two decades

► February CPI fell 0.09% year-on-year due to 50% discount in electricity tariffs

JAKARTA: Indonesia's consumer price index fell for the first time in more than two decades in February, official data showed yesterday, after the government gave a substantial discount on electricity bills to support economic growth.

The consumer price index fell 0.09% year-on-year last month, the first annual measure of deflation since March 2000, and well below market expectations for 0.60% inflation.

It was the second month in a row the annual CPI rate has come in below the central bank's inflation target range of 1.5% to 3.5%.

January's inflation rate was 0.76%. Among the top contributors to the annual deflation were utilities, due to a 50% discount on electricity tariffs for some customers in January and February.

Lower prices of some food products such as rice, tomatoes and red chillies also contributed, as food

production in the last two months recovered from the impact of a drought last year.

"This (deflation) was not due to weaker purchasing power, but because of the discounted electricity tariffs," Statistics Indonesia chief statistician Amalia Adininggar Widyasanti said in a press conference.

The core inflation rate, which strips out government-controlled prices and volatile food prices, picked up slightly to an annual 2.48%, compared to 2.42% expected by analysts and a rate of 2.36% in January.

The CPI is expected to rise again starting March as the discounted

electricity tariffs end, but will remain low with new government policies to give discounts for air fares and toll roads during the Ramadan holiday, Bank Danamon economist Hosianna Situmorang said.

With that stimulus, she expected GDP to grow at 5.1% to 5.2% this year, in line with the government's target of 5.2%.

Last year, the economy grew 5.03%.

With inflation low, Bank Indonesia may have an opportunity to further reduce rates, but global market volatility may be the bigger consideration for the central bank. — Reuters

Asian markets climb on hopes of huge China stimulus package

HONG KONG: Asian markets climbed yesterday on hopes that China will announce a huge stimulus package that will help offset US President Donald Trump's looming tariffs against Chinese goods.

Investors were also watching for any last-ditch deals to ward off the levies hitting Mexico, Canada and China due to come into force today.

Trump has confirmed 25% tariffs on products from Mexico and Canada, and further imposed another 10% on Chinese goods from this week.

"Traders are on edge for last-minute negotiations to sidestep US tariffs," said Stephen Innes, an analyst from SPI Asset Management.

"In Asia, all eyes are on China's National People's Congress, where traders are betting on a fiscal boost to counter the drag from US tariffs and keep China's blistering 2024 equity rally alive," he said.

Ahead of the key Chinese parliamentary meeting opening tomorrow, Hong Kong's Hang Seng and Japan's Nikkei climbed more than 1%, while Shanghai was also up.

Chinese stocks were boosted in part by data released on Saturday that showed manufacturing activity grew in February after a dip the previous month.

Hong Kong was helped by the blockbuster IPO of bubble-tea and drinks giant Mixue Group, which saw its shares jump 40%. — AFP

Thailand drops 50m baht entry rule for locals in casino plan

BANGKOK: Thailand has dropped plans to limit casino access to citizens with assets of at least 50 million baht (RM6.7 million) because it would exclude too many people, a deputy finance minister said yesterday, as the government looks to build a major gaming industry.

The draft law now proposes that Thai nationals with a three-year tax history will be able to enter the planned casinos, instead of being required to have held at least 50 million baht in fixed deposits for six months, Deputy Finance Minister Julaporn Amornvivat told reporters.

"This criteria would not be able to solve illegal gambling," he said, noting there were only 10,000 deposit accounts in the country with more than 50 million baht.

"That means more than 70 million people won't be able to enter casinos."

A proposed casino entry fee of 5,000 baht remains in the draft law, which will be submitted to Cabinet for approval and then sent to Parliament before the current session ends on April 11, Julaporn said.

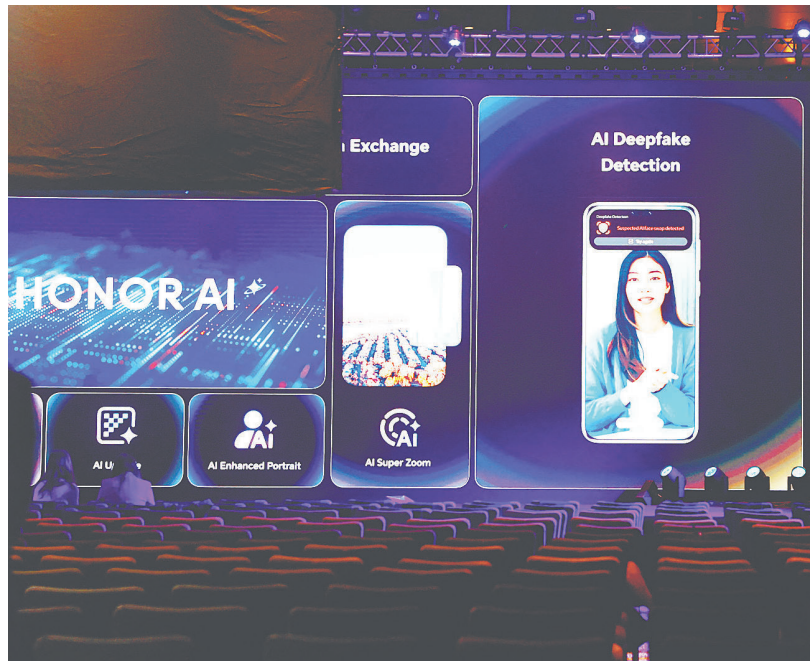
Thailand allows gambling on state-controlled horse racing, the lottery, and on some sports such as boxing.

Other forms of gambling are illegal, but illicit betting is rife.

Domestic gamblers were seen as an important draw for foreign investors, who are closely watching details of the draft casino law, analysts say.

A Citi report last year estimated that about half of Thais aged 20 and above could be casino players, providing a base for the country to potentially become the world's third-largest gambling destination.

The Thai government hopes to attract at least 100 billion baht in new investment, lift foreign visitor numbers by 5% to 10%, and generate revenue of more than 12 billion baht a year. — Reuters



A banner displaying the AI deepfake detector created by Honor at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona. — REUTERS/SPIC

Honor bets on 'intelligent phone'

BARCELONA: Chinese smartphone maker Honor said on Sunday it was working on an AI-powered "intelligent phone," adding that it would invest US\$10 billion (RM45 billion) into artificial intelligence collaborations.

In a statement ahead of the Mobile World Congress (MWC) that opens in Barcelona this week, Honor said the future device would include a "personal mobile AI agent" able to carry out tasks like making restaurant reservations.

The "envisioned" phone is part of Honor's push to become a "leading AI device ecosystem company," it said.

AI "agents" are the latest trend in the emerging technology.

Industry giants such as OpenAI are promising tools that will take tasks like scheduling and research off human hands — although for now the services mostly still require significant user supervision and input.

Honor said partnerships it announced on Sunday with both Google Cloud and smartphone chipmaker Qualcomm would boost its AI agent efforts.

Beyond agents, Honor said it would use AI to improve the quality of photos snapped with the company's handsets.

The firm also plans on-device features to detect AI-generated "deepfakes", or images and video featuring the likenesses of real people.

And it announced new laptop and tablet models integrating the company's latest AI tools.

MWC is often the venue for new model announcements, with competitor Xiaomi on Sunday trailing its latest flagship phone offering high-quality photography with a Leica camera.

Honor recently replaced its chief executive in the run-up to an

independent stock market flotation for the company.

New boss Jian Li said in Sunday's statement that he expected AI to "reshape the paradigm of the device industry".

He added that global tech firms needed to "open up our industry boundaries and co-create" the AI ecosystem, vowing US\$10 billion of investment into such collaborations over the coming five years.

Scoring internationally with high-end phones and foldable devices, Honor was spun off in 2020 from tech heavyweight Huawei as it suffered under US trade sanctions.

Honor has in recent months shored up support from other Chinese giants, including a deal for cloud services with Tencent and selling a stake to leading network operator China Mobile. — AFP

7-Eleven Japan owner to replace CEO, say reports

TOKYO: 7-Eleven's owner is set to replace its CEO as the Japanese convenience store giant battles a US\$47 billion (RM210 billion) takeover bid by Canada's Alimentation Couche-Tard (ACT), reports said yesterday.

Last week Seven & i said its founding family failed to put together a buyout to fend off ACT's offer, which would be the largest foreign acquisition of a Japan firm.

Japan's Nikkei business daily and other media reported that Seven & i's president Ryuichi Isaka would be replaced by outside director Stephen Hayes Dacus.

Dacus, who has also worked for Uniqlo owner Fast Retailing and the Japanese arm of Walmart, would also be Seven & i's first foreign CEO.

A formal decision will be made at a board meeting, the reports said, citing sources familiar with the matter.

Dacus currently heads a special committee tasked with evaluating ACT's bid, which the Canadian firm has already sweetened.

Dacus and the committee are expected over the next few weeks to unveil strategic proposals to increase the company's value ahead of an annual shareholder meeting in May, the *Financial Times* reported.

"There have been reports in some news media regarding the management of Seven & i," the company said in a statement.

"However this information was not announced by the company and no decision has been made by the company at this time," it said. — AFP



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Trump lists 5 digital assets for crypto strategic reserve

► Prices of bitcoin, ether, XRP, solana and cardano rise on the news

MIAMI: US President Donald Trump on social media announced the names of five digital assets he expects to include in a new US strategic reserve of cryptocurrencies on Sunday, spiking the market value of each.

Trump said in a post on Truth Social that his January executive order on digital assets would create a stockpile of currencies including bitcoin, ether, XRP, solana and cardano. The names had not previously been announced.

More than an hour later, Trump added: "And, obviously, BTC and ETH, as other valuable Cryptocurrencies, will be at the heart of the Reserve."

Bitcoin, the world's largest cryptocurrency by market value, was up more than 11% at US\$94,164 Sunday afternoon.

Ether, the second-largest cryptocurrency, was up about 13% at US\$2,516.

The total cryptocurrency market has risen about 10%, or more than US\$300 billion, in the hours since Trump's announcement, according to CoinGecko, a cryptocurrency data and analysis company.

XRP is cryptocurrency company Ripple Labs' token. Ripple backed a so-called super PAC to influence congressional elections in November in favour of the crypto industry, Reuters reported.

"This move signals a shift toward active participation in the crypto economy by the US government," said Federico Brokate, head of US business at 21Shares, a digital assets investment management firm.

"It has the potential to accelerate institutional adoption, provide greater regulatory clarity, and strengthen the US leadership in digital asset innovation."

James Butterfill, head of research at asset manager CoinShares, said he was surprised to see digital assets other than bitcoin included in the reserve.

"Unlike bitcoin ... these assets are more akin to tech investments," Butterfill said.

"The announcement suggests a more patriotic stance toward the broader crypto technology space, with little regard for the fundamental qualities of these assets."

Trump won support from the crypto industry in his 2024 election bid, and he has quickly moved to back their policy priorities.

He is hosting the first White House Crypto Summit on Friday, and his family has also launched its own coins.

Under his Democratic predecessor, Joe Biden, regulators cracked down on the

industry in a bid to protect Americans from fraud and money laundering.

Under Trump, the Securities and Exchange Commission has withdrawn investigations into several crypto companies and dropped a lawsuit against Coinbase, the largest crypto exchange in the US.

But in recent weeks cryptocurrency prices are down sharply, with some of the biggest digital currencies erasing nearly all of the gains made after Trump's election win triggered a wave of excitement across the industry.

Analysts say the market needs a reason to move higher, such as signs that the US Federal Reserve plans to cut interest rates or a clear pro-crypto regulatory framework from the Trump administration.

Regulatory filings in the US showed that while hedge funds remain the dominant crypto buyers, banks and sovereign wealth funds are buying too.

Quarterly filings showed that asset managers boosted allocations to US ETFs tied to the price of spot bitcoin in the fourth quarter of 2024.

Analysts and legal experts are divided on whether an act of Congress will be necessary to set up the reserve.

Some have argued the reserve could be created via the US Treasury's Exchange Stabilisation Fund, which can be used to purchase or sell foreign currencies. — Reuters

US agricultural exports on China's radar

BEIJING: China has American agricultural exports in its cross hairs as it prepares countermeasures against fresh US import tariffs, China's state-backed *Global Times* reported, raising the stakes in an escalating trade war between the world's top two economies.

US President Donald Trump last week threatened China with the extra 10% duty set to take effect today, resulting in a cumulative 20% tariff, and accused Beijing of not doing enough to halt the flow of fentanyl into America, which China said was tantamount to "blackmail".

"China is studying and formulating relevant countermeasures in response to the US threat of imposing an additional 10% tariff on Chinese products under the pretext of fentanyl," *Global Times* reported yesterday, citing an anonymous source.

"The countermeasures will likely include both tariffs and a series of non-tariff measures, and US agricultural and food products will most likely be listed," the report added.

China is the biggest market for US agricultural products, and the sector has long been vulnerable to being used as a punching bag in times of trade tensions.

"Despite a decline in imports since 2018, any tariffs on key US agricultural products like soybeans, meat and grains could have a significant impact on US-China trade as well as U.S. exporters and farmers," said Genevieve Donnellon-May, a researcher at the Oxford Global Society.

"The US agricultural sector has had time to prepare for a second Trump administration and trade war 2.0, with lessons learned from the first Trump administration."

"So, in theory, it should be in a better place to find alternative markets. However, the reality may prove far more complex."

China's most active soybean and rapeseed meal futures, already underpinned by a supply shortage, each surged 2.5% after the *Global Times* report.

The soybean contract on the Dalian Commodities Exchange hit its highest since Sept 30, 2024.

The world's top agricultural importer and second-largest economy brought in US\$29.25 billion worth of US agriculture products in 2024, a 14% drop from a year earlier, extending a 20% decline seen in 2023.

Analysts say Beijing still hopes to negotiate a truce with the Trump administration, but with no signs of any trade talks yet the prospect of a rapprochement between the two economic giants is fading. — Reuters



Milei gesturing during the inauguration of the 143rd ordinary session of Congress at the National Congress in Buenos Aires. — AFP/PPIC

Argentina's Milei says 'chainsaw' cuts to last years

BUENOS AIRES: Argentine President Javier Milei told lawmakers he planned to make more "chainsaw" cuts to public spending, adding that his government's austerity programme would "last for years".

The libertarian leader has held a chainsaw at public events as a symbol of his push to restore fiscal discipline in the South American nation where he has been president since December 2023.

Milei's measures, which have plunged Argentina into recession, are blamed for tipping millions more people into poverty in the first half of 2024, and bringing tens of thousands of people onto the streets in protest.

Milei has swatted away criticism, insisting that what he presents as short-term pain will lead to long-term gains for the economy.

"The chainsaw today is the symbol of a change of era, the beginning of a new golden age for humanity, but this time, instead of going against the world, Argentina is at the forefront."

"The eyes of the world are now on Argentina," Milei told Congress, adding in some cases other countries were taking note of his administration's approach and applying it at home.

He mentioned tech billionaire Elon Musk, who has been tasked by US President Donald Trump to slash federal government spending

and downsize or dismantle federal agencies.

The Argentine president said on Saturday that "the chainsaw is not only a government program, it is a state policy that will last for years", telling lawmakers he planned to pursue more budget cuts during his second year in office.

He has suspended public works, laid off tens of thousands of civil servants, gutted state agencies and reduced aid to provincial governments as part of his bid to shrink the government and revive Argentina's long-ailing economy.

On Saturday, he touted his government's successes, recalling the significantly reduced inflation rate. — AFP

Turkish annual inflation falls below 40%

ISTANBUL: Türkiye's annual inflation rate slowed for a ninth consecutive month in February, falling below 40% for the first time since June 2023, official data showed yesterday.

The drop comes as the central bank will make its latest decision on interest rates on Thursday after lowering borrowing costs at its last two meetings.

Consumer prices rose by 39.05% last month, down from 42.1% in January, according to the country's statistics institute.

Türkiye has experienced double-digit inflation since 2019, making life increasingly more expensive for millions of people.

The central bank began to raise interest rates in 2023 after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan dropped his opposition to orthodox monetary policy.

Annual inflation soared to 75% in May last year but began to ease the following month.

The central bank lowered its key interest rate in December for the first time in nearly two years.

It lowered the rate again in January to 45%.

The ENAG group of independent economists disputes the official inflation rate, estimating it at 79.5% — more than double the figure released by the statistics agency. — AFP

MARKET ROUND-UP: MARCH 3

Bursa Trade Statistic

Source: Bursa Malaysia, Inter-Pacific Research

3 MAR 2025

Participation					
Retail (20.70%)		Institution (40.91%)		Foreign (38.39%)	
Net (in RM mil.)		Net (in RM mil.)		Net (in RM mil.)	
+55.09		+13.04		-68.13	
Bought (in RM mil.)	Sold (in RM mil.)	Bought (in RM mil.)	Sold (in RM mil.)	Bought (in RM mil.)	Sold (in RM mil.)
532.25	477.16	1004.11	991.07	902.21	970.33

Preliminary status (Excluding Trade Amendments) | Final data, refer to Bursa website

Need Some Ideas?
Our Monthly Trader's Talk will be held Every 1st Monday of the Month Live webinar with Q&A

iPacOnline
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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

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Bursa Indices

INDEX	CHANGE
FBMEMAS	11,711.80 -24.40
FBMKLCI	1,571.39 -3.31
CONSUMER PRODUCTS	494.35 -2.06
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS	156.53 -1.82
CONSTRUCTION	264.95 -5.74
FINANCIAL SERVICES	19,384.00 +57.08
ENERGY	755.55 +1.41
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	507.77 -2.44
HEALTH CARE	1,960.72 +24.44
TRANSPORTATION	1,027.75 -20.50
PROPERTY	1,018.79 -7.21
PLANTATION	7,519.69 -90.00
FBMSHA	11,348.00 -63.70
FBMACE	4,692.07 -64.90
TECHNOLOGY	50.43 -0.11

TURNOVER: 3.180 bil **VALUE: RM6.456 bil**

Bursa falls for third day on global trade uncertainties

BURSA Malaysia ended lower for the third consecutive day yesterday as investors remained cautious ahead of a key trade policy announcement from US President Donald Trump.

At 5pm, the FBM KLCI eased 3.31 points or 0.21% to 1,571.39 from last Friday's close of 1,574.70.

The market bellwether opened 2.43 points lower at 1,572.27, and moved between 1,568.59 and 1,580.80 throughout the day.

On the broader market, decliners beat gainers 707 to 354, while 425 counters were unchanged, 831 untraded, and six suspended.

Turnover narrowed to 3.18 billion units worth RM2.44 billion from 4.39 billion units worth RM6.45 billion last Friday.

UOB Kay Hian Wealth Advisors Sdn Bhd head of investment research Mohd Sedek Jantan said the looming decision on the US tariffs targeting Canada, Mexico, and China has amplified market uncertainty, prompting investors to reduce exposure to equities amid heightened geopolitical risks.

"While the trade dispute primarily involves the US and China, its spillover effects continue to influence local market sentiment and Malaysia's trade exposure," he told Bernama.

Heavyweights Public Bank gained 3 sen to RM4.56, CIMB perked up 19 sen to RM8, Tenaga Nasional added 10 sen to RM13.70, Maybank decreased 4 sen to RM10.68, and IHH Healthcare shrank 3 sen to RM7.42.

As for the actives, MY EG picked up 6 sen to 93.5 sen, Pantech Global fell 10.5 sen to 57.5 sen, Cape EMS lost 2.5 sen to 24.5 sen, and Nattongate Holdings slipped 55 sen to RM1.30.

In a Bursa Malaysia filing yesterday, it said that the intraday short selling for Nattongate Holdings stock has been suspended for the rest of the day as the last done price of the approved securities dropped more than 15% or 15 sen from the reference price.

Top 20 Actives

STOCKS	CLOSING [RM]	+/- [RM]	+/- [%]	VOLUME ('00)
HSI-PWDN	0.095	-0.005	-5.00	3,032,310
HSI-CWCD	0.110	-0.015	-12.00	1,572,852
PGLOBAL	0.575	-0.105	-15.44	860,640
HSI-PWD2	0.140	-0.005	-3.45	841,361
MYEG	0.935	+0.060	+6.86	631,194
CEB	0.245	-0.025	-9.26	579,608
GENM	1.900	-	-	535,689
NATGATE	1.300	-0.550	-29.73	488,522
HSI-CWCA	0.140	-0.015	-9.68	438,026
INGENIEU	0.035	-0.005	-12.50	426,889
GENM-C3B	0.010	-0.005	-33.33	397,327
CIMB	8.000	+0.190	+2.43	379,677
HSI-CWCM	0.200	-0.010	-4.76	315,503
EAH	0.005	-	-	314,150
HSI-PWD5	0.200	-0.015	-6.98	312,164
CAPITALA	0.835	-0.030	-3.47	302,719
KNM	0.055	-0.005	-8.33	286,799
KPJ	2.640	+0.270	+11.39	268,553
MYEG-CBE	0.085	+0.020	+30.77	255,090
INARI	2.090	+0.020	+0.97	253,110



Top 20 Gainers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING [RM]	+/- [RM]	VOLUME ('00)
F&N	25.620	+0.620	586
AYER	7.500	+0.500	51
PPB	11.100	+0.360	4,691
KPJ	2.640	+0.270	268,553
MPI	18.660	+0.260	1,169
CARLSBG	18.900	+0.200	880
CIMB	8.000	+0.190	379,677
HEIM	26.860	+0.180	860
XOX-PA	0.290	+0.170	20
PADINI	1.850	+0.160	50,895
COASTAL	1.400	+0.140	3,354
KOTRA	4.230	+0.130	151
KLUANG	5.750	+0.120	10
METROD	1.350	+0.120	50
MBMR	5.520	+0.110	9,711
KPJ-C15	0.310	+0.100	3,070
TENAGA	13.700	+0.100	28,041
NSOP	4.000	+0.080	302
PICHEM	3.800	+0.080	40,383
UTDPLT	23.000	+0.080	7,529

Top 20 Gainers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING [RM]	+/- [%]	VOLUME ('00)
XOX-PA	0.290	+141.67	20
ARMADA-C99	0.020	+100.00	14,941
BORNOIL-WD	0.010	+100.00	2,633
GENTINGC3H	0.010	+100.00	40
GIIB-WA	0.010	+100.00	200
KGROUP	0.010	+100.00	56,762
MYEG-C7M	0.030	+100.00	500
NOVAMSC-PA	0.040	+100.00	6,283
SAMAIDEN-CA	0.010	+100.00	3
SCBUILD	0.010	+100.00	5,354
GENM-HJ	0.095	+58.33	792
KPJ-C19	0.190	+58.33	250
AEON-C32	0.015	+50.00	6,966
DGO-C14	0.015	+50.00	7,731
FBMKLCI-HA2	0.015	+50.00	400
MTRONIC	0.015	+50.00	5,570
TRIVE-WD	0.015	+50.00	1,310
YB-LA	0.015	+50.00	10
KPJ-C15	0.310	+47.62	3,070
RHBANKC56	0.180	+44.00	500

World Stocks/Commodities

INDEX	CLOSING	DAILY CHANGE	DAILY CHANGE [%]
DJIA [US]	43,840.91	601.41	1.39
S&P 500 [US]	5,954.50	92.93	1.59
NASDAQ [US]	18,847.28	302.86	1.63
NYSE [US]	20,028.19	220.04	1.11
EURO STOXX 50 [EUR]	5,465.80	2.26	0.04
FTSE 100 [UK]	8,839.14	29.4	0.33
DAX [GER]	22,674.09	122.66	0.54
NIKKEI 225 [JPN]	37,785.47	629.97	1.7
TOPIX INDEX [JPN]	2,729.56	47.47	1.77
HANG SENG INDEX [HK]	23,006.27	64.95	0.28
CSI 300 [CHN]	3,888.47	-1.58	-0.04
MSCI ASIA PACIFIC	183.38	-4.69	-2.49
SHANGHAI SE COM [CHN]	3,316.93	-3.97	-0.12
KOSPI INDEX [SK]	2,532.78	-88.97	-3.39
SENSEX INDEX [IND]	73,156.50	-41.6	-0.06
ASX 200 [AUS]	8,245.65	73.3	0.9
ALL ORDINARIES INDX [AUS]	8,478.77	74.9	0.89
FBM KLCI	1,571.39	-3.31	-0.21
STRAITS TIMES INDEX [S'PORE]	3,908.52	12.82	0.33
WTI [US\$/BBL]	69.47	-0.29	-0.42
BRENT [US\$/BBL]	72.55	-0.26	-0.36
GOLD [COMEX] [US\$/T OZ]	2,880.10	31.6	1.11
SILVER [COMEX] [US\$/T OZ]	31.92	0.42	1.33
PLATINUM [US\$/T OZ]	953	3.57	0.38
COPPER [COMEX] [US CENTS/LB.]	455.3	0.5	0.11
COPPER 3MO [LME] [US\$/MT]	9,358.00	-31.5	-0.34
CORN [US CENTS/BU.]	468.75	-0.75	-0.16
WHEAT [US CENTS/BU.]	560.5	4.75	0.85
SOYBEAN OIL [CBOT] [US CENTS/LB.]	44.22	0.1	0.23
COCOA [ICE] [US\$/MT]	9,124.00	-131	-1.42
RUBBER [S'PORE] [US CENTS/KG]	204.3	0.3	0.15

As at 5pm, Mar 3

Top 20 Losers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING [RM]	+/- [RM]	VOLUME ('00)
NESTLE	80.120	-4.320	1,050
NATGATE	1.300	-0.550	488,522
PANAMY	16.500	-0.500	867
PETDAG	18.700	-0.500	4,676
DLADY	28.500	-0.360	93
HLIND	13.080	-0.320	435
HSI-CWCH	0.800	-0.300	25
MASTER	2.980	-0.290	3,030
HSI-CWAS	0.395	-0.285	2,366
ALIBABA-C41	0.140	-0.265	4
ALLIANZ	18.440	-0.260	987
HSI-CWCV	1.070	-0.220	150
AMLEX	0.200	-0.200	150
HLBANK	21.200	-0.200	6,058
HSI-PWFA	0.965	-0.185	1,006
FRONTKN	3.580	-0.160	27,228
GESHEN	4.500	-0.160	384
KLK	20.460	-0.160	3,553
BAT	6.570	-0.150	3,004
GAMUDA	4.210	-0.150	107,508

Top 20 Losers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING [RM]	+/- [%]	VOLUME ('00)
NATGATE-CG	0.010	-75.00	35,588
NATGATE-CL	0.020	-75.00	30,140
WCT-C29	0.005	-75.00	8,653
SIME-C90	0.040	-73.33	8,000
NATGATE-CI	0.010	-71.43	16,379
NATGATE-CK	0.020	-71.43	77,539
GENM-C2Y	0.005	-66.67	155,779
NATGATE-CC	0.005	-66.67	40,448
NATGATE-CE	0.010	-66.67	185,628
PMETAL-CIC	0.005	-66.67	5,200
SNS-CD	0.005	-66.67	6,470
ALIBABA-C41	0.140	-65.43	4
KEYFIELD-CA	0.010	-60.00	879
AMLEX	0.200	-50.00	150
BAT-C36	0.010	-50.00	18,220
DIGISTA-WC	0.005	-50.00	186
GOINNO	0.030	-50.00	500
MFLOUR-CJ	0.010	-50.00	2,000
NATGATE-CD	0.005	-50.00	44,330
PADINI-C16	0.005	-50.00	2,000

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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Sime Darby Property has confidence in data centres

KUALA LUMPUR: Sime Darby Property Bhd (SDP) remains confident in its data centre business despite concerns over US semiconductor tariffs and artificial intelligence (AI) chip export restrictions, citing exemptions for US companies operating in Malaysia.

Group managing director and CEO Datuk Seri Azmir Merican said the company's data centre projects are backed by US hyperscale operators, including Google, which qualify for exemptions under US regulations.

"We are dealing with a US hyperscale company. Based on our communication with Google, we do not foresee any issues. The projects remain on track, and we are committed to pursuing more data centre-related developments if the economics are right," he said in an online media briefing on the group's financial year 2024 (FY24) yesterday.

Azmir said SDP has earmarked a long-term lease value of RM7.6 billion from its data centre projects over the next two decades, reinforcing its ambition to establish a steady recurring income stream.

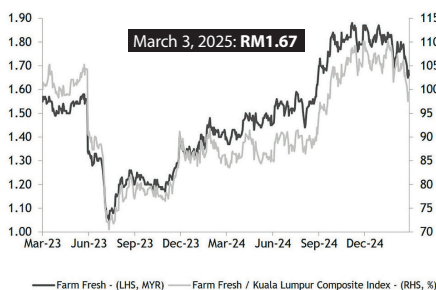
He said the company expects the first data centre to begin contributing to earnings in 2026, with a second facility set to follow in 2027.

While no capital expenditure details were disclosed, he reiterated that SDP remains focused on securing long-term, sustainable returns from the growing digital infrastructure sector.

For FY24 ended Dec 31, 2024, the company's net profit rose 23.1% to RM502.2 million, up from RM407.91 million in FY23, while revenue increased to RM4.25 billion from RM3.44 billion in the preceding year, with all segments reporting growth. — Bernama

Farm Fresh Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM2.05



Source: Maybank Investment Bank

FFB'S Q3'25 core net profit of RM28 million (+37% YoY, +8% QoQ) brought 9M'25 core net profit to RM79 million (+112% YoY), at 76%/70% of our consensus full-year earnings estimates.

Q3'25 revenue eased -1% QoQ as stronger Malaysia sales (+1% QoQ) led by its HORECA, commercial UHT and new product sales categories were offset by weaker Australia contribution (-24% QoQ) from lower external sales to the Middle East. Consequently, EBIT contracted -2% QoQ in Q3'25 given lower group gross profit margin (-0.8ppts QoQ) where lower-margin product mix resulted in lower margins in both Malaysia and Australia operations (Malaysia GP margin: -0.6ppts QoQ; Australia GP margin: -6.6ppts QoQ). As at end-Dec 2024, the chilled milk and ambient/UHT milk categories accounted for 37% and 31% of group sales respectively, while the HORECA channel remains its top sales channel at 24% of group sales.

Management assured that its whole milk powder requirement (WMP) is well stocked up for the remainder of CY25 – within a cost range of US\$3,500/MT to US\$3,700/MT, we suspect. This should arrest investors' worries on significant cost increases in FY26 amid rising WMP ASP trend. Although FFB's Bandar Enstek facility's commissioning date has been pushed back to Jan 2026, it is adding an additional ice cream line to its Taiping plant (expected production by early-April 2025) to partially fill in the supply gap for its CPG ice cream products.

The group's outlook remains steady with resilient liquid milk demand supplemented by added sales contribution from new products (i.e. CPG ice creams, Choco Malt, Farm Fresh Grow).

BUY with RM2.05 TP. – **Maybank Investment Bank, March 3**

Ringgit falls against dollar, market in high alert mode

THE ringgit closed lower against the US dollar yesterday as the forex market tiptoes into the week on high alert, stuck in a "wait and see" mode, as traders hedge their bets ahead of Donald Trump's tariff D-Day today, said an analyst.

Last week, the US president said his proposed 25% tariff on Mexican and Canadian goods will take effect on March 4, along with an extra 10% duty on Chinese imports.

At 6pm, the ringgit fell to 4.4640/4680 against 4.4600/4650 at Friday's close.

SPI Asset Management managing partner Stephen Innes noted a sense of optimism in the air following comments made by US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick over the weekend.

Lutnick referred to Trump's approach to Mexico and Canada as "fluid", sparking positive sentiment.

Meanwhile, the ringgit was traded lower against major currencies.

It fell against the British pound to 5.6394/6444 against 5.6174/6237 last Friday, declined against the euro to 4.6586/6628 from 4.6362/6414 and was slightly weaker against the Japanese yen at 2.9683/9711 from 2.9682/9717.

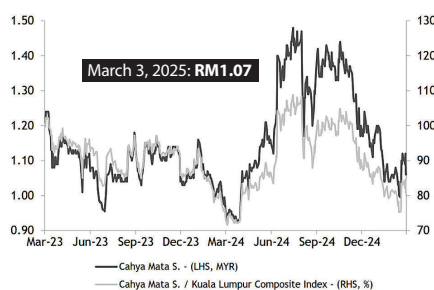
The local currency was traded easier against Asean currencies.

It depreciated against the Singapore dollar to 3.3130/3163 from 3.3069/3108 and slipped against the Thai baht to 13.0576/0762 from 13.0455/0670.

The ringgit went down against the Indonesian rupiah to 270.8/271.2 from 268.7/269.1 and weakened against the Philippine peso to 7.71/7.72 from 7.69/7.70. — Bernama

Cahaya Mata Sarawak Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM1.66



Source: Maybank Investment Bank

CMS cement volume sales, we estimate, was down 5% YoY in FY24, impacted by a prolonged rainy season esp. in 1H. Nonetheless, lower clinker cost and operational efficiencies had lifted margins, leading to a small PBT expansion (+2% YoY) in FY24. The weather condition has since improved, supporting our 5% demand growth assumption for FY25E amid a catch-up in construction activities in Sarawak.

Plant commissioning is now targeted for Q4'25, on expectation that the upcoming arbitration proceeding with SESCO (in May 2025) would see a resolution and thus a reinstatement of electricity supply. The phosphate op posted a loss before tax of RM77 million in FY24 (excluding RM9 million unrealised FX loss and RM11 million write-down of inventories to NRV) due to costs incurred to prepare the plant for commercialisation despite the ongoing dispute with SESCO.

On Jan 1, two new independent, non-executive directors joined CMS' Board, bringing the total number of independent directors to 7, or 70% of its Board. Earlier in April 2024, a Board Sustainability Committee was formed. We thus look forward to more positive measures to raise CMS' ESG profile, including tangible mid/long-term sustainability targets, and carbon neutrality/net zero commitments.

As at end-Dec 2024, CMS' consolidated cash balance has grown to RM648 million (end-FY23: RM618 million), while its borrowings have shrunk to RM213 million (end-FY23: RM320 million). At RM435 million in net cash (end-FY23: RM298 million), this is one-third (or 38%) of CMS' current market capitalisation of RM1.07 billion.

BUY with RM1.66 TP. – **Maybank Investment Bank, March 3**

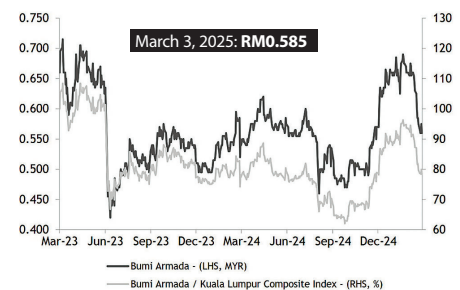
Exchange Rates

FOREIGN CURRENCY	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.5250	4.3920	4.3820
1 Australian Dollar	2.8310	2.7180	2.7020
1 Brunei Dollar	3.3530	3.2570	3.2490
1 Canadian Dollar	3.1310	3.0470	3.0350
1 Euro	4.7180	4.5670	4.5470
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.5470	2.4540	2.4380
1 Singapore Dollar	3.3530	3.2570	3.2490
1 Sterling Pound	5.7110	5.5320	5.5120
1 Swiss Franc	5.0500	4.8390	4.8240
100 UAE Dirham	124.6500	118.2300	118.0300
100 Bangladesh Taka	3.8020	3.5410	3.3410
100 Chinese Renminbi	62.5500	59.9200	N/A
100 Danish Krone	64.8500	59.6900	59.4900
100 Hongkong Dollar	58.8000	55.9000	55.7000
100 Indian Rupee	5.2600	4.9400	4.7400
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0282	0.0256	0.0206
100 Japanese Yen	3.0100	2.9150	2.9050
100 New Taiwan Dollar	14.8000	N/A	N/A
100 Norwegian Krone	41.3700	38.0400	37.8400
100 Pakistan Rupee	1.6500	1.5400	1.3400
100 Philippine Peso	7.9200	7.4600	7.2600
100 Qatar Riyal	125.5600	119.1900	118.9900
100 Saudi Riyal	122.0200	115.8300	115.6300
100 South Africa Rand	25.1900	22.7500	22.5500
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	1.5700	1.4500	1.2500
100 Swedish Krona	43.5100	39.6300	39.4300
100 Thai Baht	13.8200	12.2600	11.8600

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

Bumi Armada Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM0.78



Source: Maybank Investment Bank

BArmada reported headline losses of -RM84m in Q4'24. This was mainly due to a non-cash impairment of RM325 million on its *Kraken* FPSO. With *Kraken*'s firm charter period ending in March 2025, the contract renewal will see charter rates decline by 70% during its extension period (vs. its firm period). The difference between *Kraken*'s discounted NPV and its net book carrying value given the steep decline in projected charter rates post contract renewal resulted in an impairment. For prudent reasons, BArmada's auditors applied the lower value of these amounts.

BArmada's Q4'24 core net profit of RM213 million (-6% YoY, -17% QoQ) brought FY24 core earnings to a record high of RM979 million (+48% YoY). FY24 core earnings are within our expectations but slightly above consensus at 100%/105% of FY24 forecasts respectively. BArmada declared a 1sen DPS for FY24 (first time since FY15); a positive surprise.

We are positive on BArmada's financial improvement over the past few quarters as the group continues its deleveraging efforts. Its net debt decreased over 19 consecutive quarters to RM2.3 billion as at end-Q4'24 (from RM8.7 billion as at end-Q1'20). We expect BArmada's balance sheet strength to sustain with its strong OCFs and this should help in: i) reducing its finance costs over the mid-term; and ii) making some financial room for potential job wins/other ventures in the future.

There are several risk factors that may impact our earnings estimates, target price and rating for Bumi Armada. Key risks include: (i) any unplanned shutdown for its floating assets; and (ii) a termination of any of its FPSO/FSU's leasing contracts.

BUY with RM0.78 TP. – **Maybank Investment Bank, March 3**



Travel therapy

Escaping stress by
satisfying wanderlust
— P22



WEEKLY FOCUS

MONDAY

Technology and
social media

TUESDAY

Travel
and leisure

WEDNESDAY

Fashion
and beauty

THURSDAY

Home
and living

FRIDAY

Food
and beverage

INSIDE

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Heritage hotel
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Chengdu: From
pandas to
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Behold Taiwan's
spectacular
lantern festival

P26

Nosferatu's
terrifying return to
screens

MILLENNIALS and Gen Z crave travel as a vital form of self-care and rejuvenation, yet their wanderlust remains out of reach.

Nearly all young travellers see travel as a powerful stress reliever, according to Klook's latest Travel Pulse research across 14 markets in partnership with consumer insights platform GWI.

However, a staggering nine in 10 feel frustrated from not being able to take these much-needed journeys, held back due to barriers such as time constraints, work commitments and financial concerns.

"Millennials and Gen Z increasingly turn to travel as their ultimate form of therapy. While life's stressful demands often leave many frustrated, the transformative power of travel is undeniable.

"With 92% hit hard by post-travel blues, and nearly 40% immediately planning their next getaway, it is clear travel offers more than just a break — it is a force for self-discovery, creativity and renewal," said Klook president and co-founder Eric Gnock Fah.

For 64% of these travellers, travel is not just a getaway — it is their reset button to escape from monotony and boost their self-confidence. All respondents (100%) from Malaysia agree travel is effective in managing stress and improving well-being, highlighting a strong perception of travel as a therapeutic tool.

Travel has significantly reduced their stress levels for two in three (69%). Time is revealed as travel's biggest enemy, with travellers from Mainland China feeling the most time-strapped (74%), while Australian travellers (38%) enjoy the most flexibility for their schedules.

Stretching budgets for social-worthy experiences
Millennials and Gen Z know where to invest in when it comes to achieving self-care.

While budgets may weigh high on travellers' minds, they are not willing to compromise on experiences with 91% willing to allocate up to half of their travel budget on experiences, instead of splurging on other areas



Travelling is now therapy, self-discovery and a ticket to a more balanced life.

When choosing their next destination, 28% of respondents seek out new places they have never visited.



Travel as ultimate therapy

➤ Many young travellers view vacations as powerful stress reliever, ticket to balanced life

such as flight costs to maximise their trips.

Gen Z travellers, in particular, are more budget-conscious, favouring bundled travel packages to stretch their spending further. While affordability is key, unique and authentic experiences remain a top priority, with local cuisine and off-the-beaten-path destinations topping the list.

Social media dominates travel planning

Inspiration is fuelled by the power of social media, which emerges as the top source of information for holiday planning. 79% of travellers have booked activities, accommodations and dining experiences based on social media recommendations, proving its influence on travel decisions.

Travellers from Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines tend to act on social recommendations, while those from Australia, Japan and the US are less swayed.

For aesthetic-driven travellers, 27% are willing to pay up to 20%

more to visit trendy spots.

Travellers cannot wait to embark on new adventures in 2025

Despite the hurdles, travellers are undeterred as 84% are already preparing to take at least one international trip in 2025, referring to flights more than four hours, compared with 71% in 2024.

When choosing their next destination, 28% seek out entirely new places they have never visited. Japan continues its reign as the top must-go destination for 2025, with Mainland China as a second, with demand increasing over seven times. About 25 up-and-coming destinations are making their mark on travellers' radar, featuring a mix of city and natural wonders.

Travel has evolved beyond just a trip, it is therapy, self-discovery and a ticket to a more balanced life.

As this generation seeks renewal and purpose, the future of travel will continue deliver experiences that rejuvenate, inspire and empower travellers to reconnect with their best selves.



For many travellers, a holiday is a chance to hit the reset button.
— PICS FROM PEXELS

Lorong Gopeng Klang set to become new tourism icon

THE Selangor State Government, in collaboration with Tourism Selangor Promosi, the Royal Klang City Council and K Production, has announced the development of the Lorong Gopeng Klang to strengthen the state's tourism sector.

The Lorong Gopeng development project will be carried out in three main phases. The first phase will focus on the construction of the gateway, mural art, street furniture and historical elements.

The second phase will revitalise Pasar Jawa and Sungai Klang to enhance the appeal of the area. Meanwhile, the third phase will focus on the improvement of accessibility by connecting Jambatan Kota to Pengkalan Batu, upgrading food stalls and beautifying Pengkalan Batu Public Park.

Spanning 240m, Lorong Gopeng will feature 30 to 40 vendors offering a variety of local and heritage foods. It is expected to operate from Friday



Ng (second from left) at the soft launch of Loreng Gopeng Klang.

to Sunday, from 3pm to midnight, with no entrance fee. The project is estimated to receive an investment of RM10 million and is expected to

attract 30,000 to 40,000 tourists per month after its launch in December 2025.

"Lorong Gopeng will be

developed as an arts alley and cultural market, which will not only revive Klang's heritage areas but also provide opportunities for small and micro-entrepreneurs to grow and contribute to the local economy.

"We aim to position Lorong Gopeng as a tourism icon on par with Petaling Street in KL, Jonker Walk in Malacca and Concubine Lane in Perak. Our aspiration is to achieve international tourism standards akin to Icon Siam in Bangkok and Namdaemun Market in Seoul," said State Local Government and Tourism Committee chairman Datuk Ng Suee Lim.

The Selangor State Government expresses hope that this initiative will serve as a catalyst for more tourism development projects in the state, further strengthening Selangor's tourism industry as a premier destination for domestic and international visitors.

AirAsia provides over 16,000 seats at fixed fares for Hari Raya

AIRASIA is providing more than 16,000 seats on over 90 late-night flights at fixed fares between Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia for Hari Raya Aidilfitri this year.

From March 28 to April 5, guests can enjoy fixed fares at RM328 one-way between KL and Kuching, Sibul, Bintulu or Miri, as well as between Johor Bahru and Kuching and Sibul. Meanwhile, flights between Kuala Lumpur and Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan or Tawau, as well as between Johor Bahru and Kota Kinabalu, are available at RM388 one-way. These promotional fares are available for booking until April 5.

In addition to more than 90 late-night flights at fixed fares on 10 routes between Peninsular and East Malaysia, AirAsia is also operating 287 weekly flights at regular fares to Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan in support of the government's festive season initiative.

BY T.C. KHOR

THE internet changed our lives since it arrived in our homes in the late 80s — 1987, to be exact. However, stepping into Ascott's Lyf hotel is not just witnessing change, it is living it. As millennials would say, it is "lit", and that is no exaggeration. While the hotel sits within a heritage building, its decor and interior fit-outs resemble an insta-worthy playland, with every corner designed as a picture-perfect backdrop.

As Ascott's latest addition to its co-living hospitality brand, Lyf Penang opened its doors this January to cater to travellers who prefer memorable experiences, or as the hotel puts it: experience-led travel. Located in the heart of Penang, as part of the Garage building at Farquar Street, the hotel is a five-story property that shares commercial space with other brands such as Lexus, the luxury car brand and Chagee, a tea franchise outlet.

"While other Ascott brands cater to serviced residences or traditional hotel stays, Lyf reimagines the guest experience by creating social connections, creativity and collaboration," said Ascott country manager Mondri Mecja.

Elaborating further, he said the new generation of travellers look for a sense of belonging and community in their travels.

Its reception area, playfully called "Say Hi", sets the tone for that ultra-urban vibe that is casual and non-intimidating. It is quite hard to pinpoint exactly what else is in the lobby as it is designed to be fluid and multi-functional. Its space operates as a function room, meeting or training room or a waiting area to meet and connect with others.

However, what is consistent throughout its layout is that many areas are specially designed creative spaces to encourage interaction and connection among hotel guests. Areas such as the shared kitchen called Bond Kitchen, laundromat and pockets of spaces provide a sense of community, making it easy to blend work, leisure and social engagement.

Without losing sight of being in the heart of Unesco's World Heritage Site, its rooms are covered with abstract wallpaper prints of George Town's skyline of old shophouses in hues of orange, dark brown and dark greyish blue.

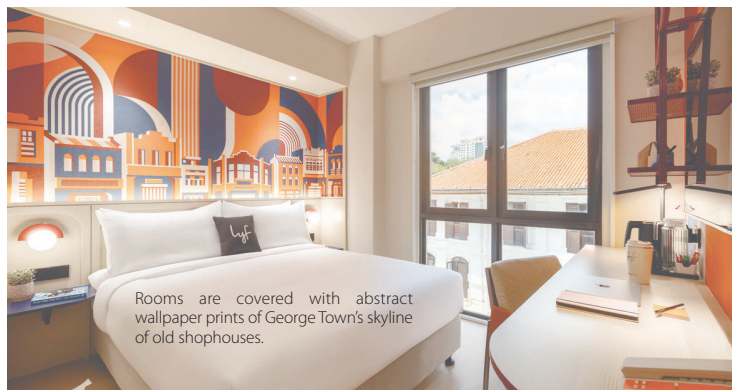
According to Mecja, Penang is a growing tourism hotspot, with increasing demand for flexible and community-focused accommodations, which is why



Its reception area 'Say Hi' sets the tone for that ultra-urban vibe that is casual and non-intimidating.

Live 'lyf' your way

Heritage hotel provides picture-perfect backdrop for social media posts



Rooms are covered with abstract wallpaper prints of George Town's skyline of old shophouses.

Lyf has found a home here.

"Penang's growing status as a tourism and business hotspot also makes it an attractive destination for visitors from around the world. The city attracts digital nomads, creatives and modern travellers who seek meaningful experiences," he said.

While the prices may not come cheap, Lyf Penang definitely lives up to its name. At first glance, one might think it resembles a budget hotel, compact and minimalist, but on closer inspection, it is easy to distinguish what sets it apart from others. No doubt, its high-quality fittings and amenities, ranging from its room features to shared facilities such as its gym, kitchen and laundry room, leave guests wanting more.

The hotel is attached to a cafe that operates separately, where guests may opt to have their breakfast. Guests will also find plenty of Instagrammable spots throughout the hotel, with witty and thought-provoking quotes scattered across its walls, adding an extra touch of personality.

Mecja also highlighted Lyf's sustainability strategies as the chain's core value and philosophy. He said the hotel implements energy-efficient systems, enforces plastic-free policies and uses locally-sourced materials in its design. He also pointed out this is the organisation's effort to reduce its environmental impact and support sustainable tourism.

With increasing direct flights from Singapore, Thailand, China, India and Indonesia, Penang has become a key hub for international travel and Mecja anticipates high occupancy rates for Lyf Penang.

He added that their target demographic includes millennials, Gen Z travellers and digital nomads and believes Lyf Penang is poised to meet the growing demand for "flexible, community-focused accommodations".

"In Malaysia, we see potential in secondary cities with vibrant local cultures. Southeast Asia continues to show a growing demand for such accommodations. We offer a glimpse into the future of hospitality — one that is not just about a place to stay, but a place to connect, collaborate and live," he said.

Due to the building owner's preference, Lyf Georgetown Penang is the only property under the Lyf brand that is not pet-friendly. However, Lyf Chinatown Kuala Lumpur and other Ascott properties remain open to pets.

StarCruises, Dream Cruises return

RESORTS World Cruises has announced the return of cruise brands StarCruises (a refreshed take on the previous Star Cruises brand) and Dream Cruises. The Resorts World Cruises brand was used temporarily to restart cruising in Asia post-Covid, and will be reverting to its original roots, which span over 30 years. The brand transition period will take three months with the renewed ambition to reinforce StarCruises and Dream Cruises as pioneers of the Asian and global cruising industry.

Launched in June 2022, Resorts World Cruises has welcomed close to two million passengers to date. Now, as part of this revival, the fleet will transition under both brands:

- The Resorts World One cruise ship will be renamed Star Navigator, joining Star Voyager under the StarCruises banner.
- Genting Dream will continue under the Dream Cruises brand.

StarCruises

With a legacy of over 30 years, the original Star Cruises name will be revitalised as StarCruises, bringing a modern, vibrant and innovative approach that will deliver a lifestyle-driven cruising experience to new generations across the region. The refreshed StarCruises brand represents:



Resorts World Cruises's fleet will undergo brand transitions to StarCruises and Dream Cruises.

- Affordable yet premium lifestyle cruising.
- Vibrant onboard entertainment, world-class dining and themed experiences.
- Mid-sized ships (about 2,000-passengers) for a more intimate and accessible voyage.
- Short port intensive itineraries for domestic and

Fly-Cruise passengers.

Star Navigator will begin four-night sailings from Singapore this Friday to Krabi and Penang, before being deployed to Taiwan for an eight-month operational period starting March 28. During this eight month, the ship will offer

diverse itineraries that connect Taiwan's scenic coastlines with various destinations in Japan and South Korea, allowing guests to experience cherry blossoms in spring, vibrant summer seascapes and stunning autumn foliage.

Star Voyager will set sail on March 26, from multiple seasonal homeports in Singapore, Jakarta, Malacca, Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh, with more cities to be added.

Dream Cruises

Dream Cruises will introduce a new era of luxury cruising, tailored for travellers seeking world-class service, premium amenities and elegance. Dream Cruises represents:

- A sophisticated and indulgent onboard experience.
- Spacious ships with over 3,000-passenger capacity.
- Vibrant onboard entertainment, world-class dining and themed experiences.
- Luxury Fly-Cruise itineraries for the modern explorer

Genting Dream, the flagship of Dream Cruises, will be homeported in Singapore all year round, offering itineraries to Malaysia and Thailand, ideal for travellers who seek a seamless combination of a Singapore city stay and an opulent cruise escape to the region.



Beyond Chengdu's pandas, animation

Heart of China's creative economy mixes ancient, modern worlds, offers relaxing lifestyle

IN recent weeks, *Nezha 2* has made headlines by becoming the highest-grossing animated film worldwide, establishing itself among the 10 highest-grossing films in global box office history. While the film has captured global attention, what many may not know is this cinematic triumph has its roots in Chengdu, a city in southwestern China.

Chengdu's charm

If you have seen a panda in a wildlife documentary or zoo, you have likely encountered one of Chengdu's most famous residents. But there is much more to the city. Just like Tokyo or Paris's blend of history and modern art, Chengdu mixes both worlds, from ancient markets and temples to contemporary shopping districts. And like the iconic New York pizza or Mexico's tacos, Chengdu's spicy hotpot has earned a place in kitchens across the globe. Home to over 16 million people, Chengdu features a relaxed and welcoming lifestyle that nourishes the city's creativity and entrepreneurial spirit. Beneath the city's success in animation, including *Nezha 2*, lies a vibrant hub for tech and digital industries. But the question is, why Chengdu?

Competitive, cooperative

Much like Hollywood's production model in California, where everyone works together seamlessly and efficiently, animation in Chengdu can be made by a network of companies that are located just a stone's throw from one another, from concept development to special

effects and production. *Nezha 2* was born this way. Cococartoon, the main production company, is situated near Qnanimation Studio, which contributed to character design, and Morevfx, a company specialising in visual effects. With an environment of collaboration such as this, over 1,000 enterprises in Chengdu's cultural creative industries generate an annual output exceeding US\$39 billion (RM174 billion), making it a major player in China's creative economy.

Policy support

Animation production cannot be achieved over night. *Nezha 1* took five years to complete, and *Nezha 2* took another five-and-a-half years. Such long timeframes require patience, market tolerance and a helping hand. Through the city's policies such as rent reductions, project support and guidance for new ventures, small and medium-sized companies such as those behind *Nezha* gain the breathing room to sustain their projects and take creative risks. By offering a range of financial incentives and resources, Chengdu is positioning itself as a key player in the global digital creative sector.

Innovation beyond animation

While animation may be Chengdu's most visible success, the city's innovation extends far beyond film. Chengdu has become a centre for artificial intelligence, robotics, biotechnology and more. Breakthroughs here such as China's first quantum computing control system, the first "seed bank" for drug



The city in southwestern China has become a centre for AI, robotics and biotechnology.

screening, surgical robots and so on highlight the city's position at the forefront of global innovation. Chengdu's support for these industries is also apparent in its financial initiatives. The city's "sci-tech loan" system helps startups secure the capital they need to grow, addressing one of the biggest challenges faced by emerging companies. Over 4,000 companies have already benefited from this programme, contributing to Chengdu's growing reputation as a hub for innovation.

Ranking 23rd globally in innovation, Chengdu is home to over 1.45 million high-tech enterprises, 19 companies listed on the Sci-Tech Innovation Board and nine unicorns.

As the city continues to attract international talent and foster groundbreaking innovation, Chengdu aims to make an even



The sprawling metropolis is home to 16 million people.

bigger impact on the world stage. Whether it is creating the next animated blockbuster or launching the next big tech startup, Chengdu is a city to watch in the years to come.

This article is contributed by CGTN
Radio reporter and Round Table
podcast editor Wang Yangyang.

Industry experts to provide hands-on learning experiences for youth

BY YASMIN ZULRAEZ

SUNWAY Theme Parks, via its Explorer Rangers Season Three, has signed a memorandum of partnership (MoP) with a line-up of industry leaders, reinforcing experiential learning and youth empowerment.

This collaboration brings together partners, including RHB Bank Bhd, Sunway University, Sunway X-Farms, Sunway Medical Centre, Farm Fresh Malaysia, POS Malaysia, Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM), Fire and Rescue Department of Malaysia and Universiti Malaya's Faculty of Creative Arts. By uniting industry expertise with immersive learning opportunities, this initiative aims to equip young minds with essential skills and real-world exposure.

These partners will be engaged with the Explorer Rangers programme during Season Three and Season Four, focusing on the individual organisation expertise and know-how. Throughout these two seasons, members of the Explorer Rangers event will be able to participate in the outreach programmes.

Explorer Rangers programme

Sunway Theme Parks executive director Calvin Ho highlighted the programme's core mission: fostering a love for nature, sustainability and community among Malaysia's youth.

"This season, we want our children to love the country and nature, to grow up and become great Malaysians who care about sustainability," Ho said, adding the programme's success lies in making learning enjoyable.

What makes Season Three unique is the expansion of the programme to include participants aged 13 to 17. These advanced classes cater to older participants seeking deeper industry knowledge, offering diverse workshops in collaboration with partners such as Sunway Medical Centre, RHB Bank and Universiti Malaya's Faculty of Creative Arts.

Notably, Ho recalled a touching success story, one of the first Junior Rangers, who joined the programme at just seven years old and is now a veterinarian at Sunway Wildlife Park.

"It is inspiring to see how a spark lit here can grow into a lifelong passion," Ho said.

The programme is not just about



Sunway Theme Parks's Explorer Rangers Season Three strengthens industry collaborations to enhance youth development.

individual growth. It also aims to build confidence and unity among participants, ensuring inclusivity by offering free memberships for B40 communities.

"No one should be left behind. We make sure all children, regardless of background, have the opportunity to learn and be inspired," Ho added.

Education with industry expertise

Explorer Rangers Season Three brings together a network of industry leaders through an MoP. Partners such as Pos Malaysia, Farm Fresh Malaysia, Royal Malaysia Police and the Fire and Rescue

Department of Malaysia will share their knowledge through immersive workshops.

"These partnerships align with our ESG and SDG commitments. Everything we do is driven by a sustainable business model that gives back to the community. We believe that by inspiring children now, they will grow up to lead and protect the planet in the future," Ho said.

Hands-on activities, including emergency response simulations with PDRM and the Fire and Rescue Department, sustainability education at Sunway X-Farms and medical

insights at Sunway Medical Centre, are designed to equip participants with practical skills and real-world exposure.

Cultural collectibles

Its collaboration with Tiny Hong Kong, a toy brand under Toyeast Holdings Ltd, adds a creative twist to Sunway Lagoon's retail. This partnership, marked by a memorandum of understanding, introduces exclusive Malaysia-inspired collectables, blending nostalgia with Malaysian cultural elements.

"This is Tiny Hong Kong's first entry into Malaysia and we are thrilled to be their partner. Their high-quality collectables resonate with guests of all ages, offering a unique cultural experience," Ho said.

"Through this collaboration, we aim to share wonderful Hong Kong and Malaysia stories, ensuring every guest leaves with a meaningful memento," Toyeast Holdings Ltd and Tiny founder and director Steve Ng said.

Guests can look forward to exclusive collectables such as KTM train models and culturally inspired toys, available at Sunway Theme Parks Kedai Runcit.

Taiwan Lantern Festival

► Fusion of light, innovation showcasing country's infinite possibilities

THE recent 2025 Taiwan Lantern Festival in Taoyuan, Taiwan's gateway city, marked the festival's 36th edition, coinciding with the 36th anniversary of the Chinese Professional Baseball League.

Integrating baseball elements into the festival's design, it relived the exhilarating moments of Team Taiwan's championship victory at the Premier12 Tournament, embodying the passion and glory of the sport.

This year's festival merged technology with sustainability principles, combining artificial intelligence (AI) innovations with traditional lantern artistry to attract international visitors eager to explore Taiwan's artistic and cultural charm.

President Lai Ching-Te said this festival marked his first participation in the Taiwan Lantern Festival since taking office. Hosting the event in Taoyuan holds special significance, as the city is a symbol of baseball culture and a major international transport hub.

Themed "Taoyuan: Light Gathering on a Thousand Ponds", the festival's exhibits spanned the Main Lantern Exhibition Hall at Taoyuan Airport MRT A18 Station (THSR Taoyuan Station) and the Light



A baseball lantern to reflect Taoyuan's national sport.

Playground near A19 Station (Taoyuan Sports Park Station), featuring over 300 lantern artworks in a dazzling visual spectacle.

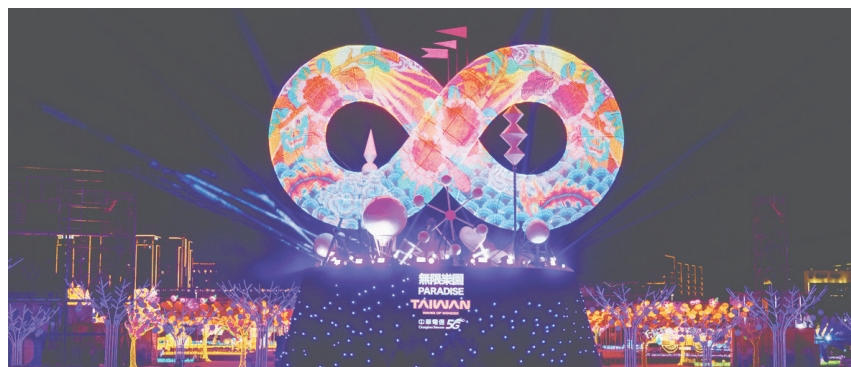
The Main Lantern Exhibition Hall featured six major lantern areas, including "Island Beacons" that showcased the seasonal beauty of Taiwan's offshore islands and "Global Lantern Festival", where the Light Wish Tree symbolised global connections and conveys blessings of peace. The festival also presented



Elements of mochi-making inspired this lantern set, which pays homage to the traditions of the Atayal people.



A plane lantern to symbolise Taiwan's growing tourism industry.



Main lantern 'Infinite Paradise', designed by Lee, breaks new ground by using abstract and modern symbolic shapes.



Lantern with the Chinese character *Fu*, which means blessing.



A metaphorical display of 'removing evil and disease'.



Swinhoe's Pheasant lantern, a nod to the popular endemic species in Taiwan.

"Creating Technology Trends", integrating AI, augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies, showcasing Taiwan's seamless blend of culture and innovation. The event underscored sustainable development, aligning with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals while promoting Taiwan's collaboration with international partners.

Infinite paradise and walking snake lanterns

The main lantern "Infinite Paradise", designed by artist Akibo Lee, was inspired by amusement park roller coasters and water slides, incorporating modern infinity symbols, spheres and geometric shapes to create a futuristic paradise.

Enhanced by AI, the mesmerising light show featured a musical composition by Chang Ching-Shan, performed by the Budapest Symphony Orchestra, delivering a stunning audio-visual experience.

This year's mini lanterns, themed after the Year of the Snake, were designed as interactive toy snakes with a flexible, movable structure. They can be assembled into different shapes or numbers (0-9) and illuminated via an external Type-C power source, reducing battery waste in line with the festival's sustainability ethos.

Beyond the festival's mesmerising exhibits, the Taiwan Tourism Administration and the Taoyuan City Government encourage visitors to explore nearby attractions and indulge in authentic local cuisine. Through international engagement



Embodying Taiwan's nickname 'Kingdom of Butterflies', the flower fairy lantern adds a whimsical touch to the festival.

at the Taiwan Lantern Festival, the country continues to showcase its technological innovation and cultural richness, inviting domestic and international travellers to experience its charm.

Ideal destination for Muslim travellers

According to the 2024 Global Muslim Travel Index, Taiwan ranked third among non-Organisation of Islamic Cooperation destinations, just behind Singapore and the UK. Taipei also won the Most Promising Muslim-friendly Travel City Award.

Taipei City now offers over 60 Muslim-friendly accommodations and dining spots, as well as more

than 30 attractions and public places equipped with prayer rooms or ablution facilities.

"The Taiwan Lantern Festival is not only a spectacular visual and cultural celebration, but also an enriching journey of discovery and inspiration.

"We warmly welcome Muslim travellers, as Taiwan is dedicated to becoming a truly Muslim-friendly destination, offering comprehensive facilities and thoughtful services. Whether for religious needs or cultural experiences, we strive to provide a seamless and enjoyable visit," said Kuala Lumpur Taiwan Tourism Administration Office director Abe Chou.

BY MARK MATHEN VICTOR

DESPITE its sanitisation in the recent decade or so, vampirism in folklore, literature, films and television has always been about death, rot and decay.

The gorging of blood, the stalking and murder of the living, along with everything else synonymous with these creatures of the night are part of their essence.

Under those lenses, Robert Eggers's *Nosferatu* effortlessly joins the pantheon of good vampire films.

Unfortunately, that is really all the film does, which is to mimic the movies that came before it.

Set in the 1800s, *Nosferatu* tells the story of how Ellen (Lily-Rose Depp) unknowingly summons the attention of Count Orlok (Bill Skarsgard).

Her cries for proof of a god or something beyond the mortal realm breaks the primordial vampire out from his slumber.

To put his scheme of escaping the grounds that he was cursed to never leave and reach Ellen into action, Orlok lures her husband Thomas (Nicholas Hoult) to Transylvania.

Visual horror mastery

Those who have watched the iconic *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* from 1922, Werner Herzog's



Director:
Robert Eggers
Cast:
Nicholas Hoult, Lily-Rose Depp, Willem Dafoe, Bill Skarsgard

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Nosferatu's gothic horror tale is nothing new.

Iconic vampire returns

► Robert Eggers's *Nosferatu* honours tradition with little innovation, but terrifying visuals

Film about Israeli eviction of Palestinians wins Oscar for best documentary

SHINING light on the Israeli displacement of a Palestinian community, *No Other Land* won the documentary feature film Oscar on Sunday, and its directors appealed to the world to help end the conflict and accused the US of blocking a solution.

The film's co-directors, Palestinian activist Basel Adra and Israeli journalist Yuval Abraham, spent five years making the film, which shows Israeli soldiers tearing down homes and evicting residents to create a military training ground and the encroachment of Jewish settlers on the Palestinian community.

The documentary highlights the parallel realities in which the two friends live – Abraham with his yellow Israeli number plate that lets him travel anywhere, Adra confined to a territory that only ever gets smaller for Palestinians.

"*No Other Land* reflects the harsh reality we have been enduring for decades and still resist as we call on the world to take serious actions to stop the injustice and to stop the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people," Adra said on taking the stage.

Standing beside his co-director, Abraham added: "We made this film, Palestinians and Israelis, because together our voices are stronger. We see each other, the atrocious destruction of Gaza and its people which must end, the Israeli hostages brutally taken in the crime of Oct 7, which must be freed."

"When I look at Basel, I see my brother but we are unequal. We live in a regime where I am free under civilian law and Basel is under military law that destroys his life and he



Adra (left) and Abraham pose with the Oscar for Best Documentary Feature Film for *No Other Land* following the 97th Academy Awards in Hollywood. – **REUTERSPIC**

cannot control.

"There is a different path. A political solution without ethnic supremacy, with national rights for both of our peoples. And I have to say as I am here, the foreign policy in this country is helping to block this path."

"And why? Can you not see we are intertwined? That my people can be truly safe if Basel's people are truly free and safe. There is another way. It is not too late for life, for the living," Abraham said.

Israel's Culture Minister Miki Zohar lamented the film's win as a "sad moment for cinema" because it presented what he described as a distorted view of Israel, still reeling from the Oct 7, 2023 Hamas attack. – **Reuters**

Nosferatu the Vampyre from 1979, Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* from 1992 or literally any movie inspired by the 1922 film will get a whiplash just reading the previous two paragraphs.

Eggers's film is thematically and narratively a copy of its predecessors. It is void, almost bereft of novel additions to the myths of *Nosferatu*.

However, what the writer-director brings to the table in filmmaking and talent allows his version of *Nosferatu* to stand well above those that came before it.

The film shows Eggers's impeccable taste in cinematography and lighting from his previous films like *The Witch* and *The Lighthouse* being blended

with the symmetry of centre framing, heavy use of panning along the four cardinal directions to bring the gothic, larger-than-life, human yet inhuman atmosphere of a story such as *Nosferatu* to life.

Caked in magnificent rot

Though Hoult, Depp and Willem Dafoe – who plays an occult professor – are great in their roles, the film is really about the character it is titled after.

While his traditional human roles have always left something to be desired, Skarsgard once again shows he was born to play alarming and terrifying otherworldly characters with his take as Orlok or *Nosferatu*, which rivals his version of Pennywise the Clown from the *It* films.

Kept largely out of focus or shrouded in the shadows, Skarsgard's version of *Nosferatu* is a hulking monstrosity rocking an equally intimidating fur coat. Speaking in a near-perpetual snarl with a Romani-accent, "*Skarsferatu*" is a shadow born out of unholy nightmares.

The choice to change *Nosferatu's* appearance in the film has to also be commended.

Eggers knew the audience would have liked his vampire to look similar to Max Shreck's *Nosferatu* from 1922, but opted for an update that is more striking and sinister.

The make-up and costumes have delivered and fully deserve their Oscar nominations in these categories.

The audience will only get a clear view of the vampire in the final minutes of the film, but glimpses allowed to them are more than enough to shock and nauseate.

From shots that put the vampire's blisters into focus to the repulsive "interior" hidden by the fur coat, Eggers's *Nosferatu* is worth the watch just for Skarsgard's portrayal of the legendary vampire.

Nosferatu is playing in cinemas.



To his shock, Thomas (Hoult) finds out his client is not interested in just selling an old, spooky castle.



TUESDAY
MAR 4, 2025
T: 03-7784 6688
F: 03-7785 2625

E: sunconnects@thesundaily.com

Classified

322 Notices

NOTICE OF CESSATION

This is to inform that Meridin Properties Sdn Bhd (Firm's Registration No. E(1)1525/2) have ceased operation with effect from 25/02/2025 in the state of Pulau Pinang.

NOTICE OF CESSATION

This is to inform that Meridin Properties Sdn Bhd (Firm's Registration No. E(1)1525/1) have ceased operation with effect from 25/02/2025 in the state of Johor.

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR

COMPANY WINDING UP PETITION NO.: WA-280C-173-02/2025

In the matter of Widad Builders Sdn Bhd (Company No.: 200101000816 (536572-0))

And

In the matter of Sections 465(1)(e) and 466(1)(a) of the Companies Act 2016

And

In the matter of the Companies (Winding-Up Rules) Rules 1972

BETWEEN

ADVANCED CLARITY HETARES SBN BHD (COMPANY NO.: 201601042832 (1213774)-0)

...PETITIONER

AND

WIDAD BUILDERS SDN BHD (COMPANY NO.: 200101000816 (536572-0))

...RESPONDENT

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a petition for the winding-up of the above-named Petitioner by the High Court was, on 13th February 2025, presented by ADVANCED CLARITY HETARES SBN BHD.

And that the said Petitioner is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Kuala Lumpur High Court at 9.00 a.m. on 3rd June 2025.

And any creditor or contributory 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 by counsel for that purpose, and a copy of the petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributory of the said company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's registered address is at 03-11, Jalan Dataran 3, Taman Dataran, 43000 Seremban, Selangor and business address is at No. 13, Jalan Kenanga S0 9/1C, Bandar Sri Damansara, 52200 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan.

The Petitioner's solicitors are Messrs. Kheng Hoe & Lee Yuen with the address for service at A3-3-6, Block A3, Solaris Dataran, 1 Jalan Dataran 1, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Kheng Hoe & Lee Yuen
Messrs. Kheng Hoe & Lee Yuen
Solicitors for the Petitioner

NOTE - Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said Petition must serve on or send by post to the above-named Messrs. Kheng Hoe & Lee Yuen notice in writing of his intention so to do. The notice must state the name and address of the person, or, if a firm, the name and address of the firm, and must be signed by the person or firm, or his or her solicitor (if any) and must be served, or, if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the above-named not later than twelve o'clock noon of 2nd June 2025 (the day before the day appointed for the hearing of the petition).

This ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION is issued by Messrs. Kheng Hoe & Lee Yuen, solicitors for the Petitioner, with the address for service at A3-3-6, Block A3, Solaris Dataran, 1 Jalan Dataran 1, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

(Ref: 26221101)
Tel: 03-6262 3929
Email: ask@holylaw

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 BIZCITI VENTURE PLT (201704003318 (LLP0013444-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.

Office based in Petaling Jaya (5 days a week)

2 MEDIA SALES Representative / Agent (Freelance)

Requirement:

- Minimum 1 year sales experience in classified ad, print and digital advertising
- Those without sales experience but with media advertising knowledge can apply.
- Attractive commission package and incentive.
- Able to start immediately.
- Central, Northern, Southern, East Coast and Sabah/Sarawak.

Send in your CV with your photo via email to : thesun.hr2@gmail.com

322 Notices

PERISYTHARAN JUALAN DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYSIA DI PULAU PINANG

PERMOHONAN UNTUK PERLAKSANAAN NO. PA-36-1644-12/2024

Dalam perkara mengenai Seksyen 256 dan 257 Kanun Tanah Negara, 1965 Dan

Dalam perkara mengenai Galian Penerahan No. 0799S/2022/046735 (bertarikh: 09/06/2022) ke atas semua bahagian tanah yang dipapung di bawah Hakmilik Strata No. Hakmilik Geras 67787/M18/12/239, Lot 10220, Mukim 13, Daerah Timor Laut, Pulau Pinang

Dalam perkara mengenai Aluran 83 Kaedah-Kaedah Mahkamah, 2012

ANTARA

Public Bank Berhad (No. Syarikat: 64634-8) ...PLAINTIF

Lingsewari a/p Silvum (No. Kad Pengenalan: 940217075098) ...DEFENDANT

Menurut Perintah Mahkamah Tinggi Malaysia di PULAU PINANG mengenai Perintah Jualan dan Perintah bertarikh 14 Jun 2023 dan 4 Februari 2025, adalah dengan ini dipaparkan bahawa Timbalan Pendatar/Pendong Kanan Pendatar Pusat Operasi e-Lelong di Kuantan

AKAN MENJUAL SECARA LELONG AWAM

Pada Hari Rabu, 19 Mac 2025, Pada Jam 11:00 pagi,

SECARA ELEKTRONIK DI LAMAN WEB e-LELONG, PUSAT OPERASI e-LELONG, KOMPLEKS MAHKAMAH KUANTAN, PAHANG DARUL MAKMUR

NOTA: Bakal pembeli adalah dinasihatkan agar membuat carian Hakmilik secara rasmi di Pejabat Tanah dan memeriksa semua tanggungan, bebanan serta mengenai paksi dengan tepat hartanah tersebut sebelum jualan lelongan dijalankan.

Sila layari https://elelong.hakmilik.gov.my/bidderweb

BUTIR-BUTIR HAKMILIK:

No. Hakmilik : Hakmilik Strata No. Hakmilik Geras 67787/ M18/12/239

No. Lot : Lot 10220

No. Mukim / Daerah / Negeri : 13 / Timor Laut / Pulau Pinang

Pemilikan : Hakmilik Kikak

No. Petak/No. Tingkat/ No. Bangunan : 229 / 12 / M18

Kawasan Tanah : 700.0000000000 kaki persegi

Pemilik Berdaftar : 65.0000000000 meter persegi

Syarat Nyata : Lingsewari a/p Silvum

Sekatan Kepentingan : Petak ini hendaklah digunakan untuk tujuan rumah

Bebanan / Lain-Lain : Charge to Public Bank Berhad vide presentation No. 0799S/2022/046735 registered on 23 June 2022.

Kawasan Rizab : Nombor Pers: 0799S/2022/04630 Kawat Persendirian

Kawatan : Atas Petak oleh PUBLIC BANK BERHAD CAWANGAN

Kawatan : BUKIT MERTAJAM ditandatangani pada 13 Mei 2022

LOKASI DAN PERIHAL BARTANAH:

Hartanah tersebut adalah A-3-andromeda apartment yang beralamat pos di No. J-11-05, Lebuh Relau 2, 11900, Bayan Lepas, Pulau Pinang.

HARGA RIZAB:

Hartanah tersebut akan dijual atas "seperitmana sedia ada" tertakluk kepada satu harga riaz sebanyak RM 195,000.00 (RINGGIT MALAYSIA: SATU RATUS SEMBILAN

PULUH LIMA RIBU SAHAJA) dan kepada syarat-syarat jualan yang ditamparkan. Pembida yang bermat hendaklah mengemukakan 10% daripada harga riaz dalam bentuk Bank

Draf di atas nama PUBLIC BANK BERHAD 1 HARI BEKERJA sebelum tarikh lelong awam.

Baki harga belian hendaklah dibayar oleh pembida yang berjaya kepada PUBLIC BANK

BERHAD dalam tempoh seratus dua puluh (20) hari dari tarikh jualan. Untuk buter-butir

selanjutnya, sila berhubung dengan:-

Firma Guaman : WONG-CHOI & MOHD NOR

Alamat : NO. 27, 1ST & 2ND FLOOR

JALAN MALU JAYA

PUSAT PERNIAGAAN MALU JAYA, 14000, PG, MY

No. Telefon : 04-3398855

No. Faks : 04-3398855

No. Rujukan : WCMN(BM)/PBB-ML/2022-451/RS/(R/S)

302 Jobs

theSun

Malaysian Paper

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1 MEDIA SALES Executive / Specialist

Job Description:

- Building and sustaining strong working relationship with advertising agencies and clients.

- New business development and business retention.

- Conceptualize, plan, and execute creative and innovative marketing campaigns to enhance brand visibility and engagement.

- Create, develop and continuously improve marketing material, presentations and proposals that showcase our products/services effectively.

Requirement:

- SPM Level with at least 2 years of experience.

- Diploma or Bachelor's degree in business, marketing or other related fields.

- Fresh graduates are encourage to apply, training will be provided.

- Good communication, presentation, problem-solving and organisational skills.

- Passionate in client servicing

- Possess own transport and willing to travel.

- Able to start work immediately.

2 MEDIA SALES Representative / Agent (Freelance)

Requirement:

- Minimum 1 year sales experience in classified ad, print and digital advertising

- Those without sales experience but with media advertising knowledge can apply.

- Attractive commission package and incentive.

- Able to start immediately.

- Central, Northern, Southern, East Coast and Sabah/Sarawak.

Office based in Petaling Jaya (5 days a week)

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HARGA RIZAB:

Hartanah tersebut akan dijual atas "seperitmana sedia ada" tertakluk kepada satu harga riaz sebanyak RM 195,000.00 (RINGGIT MALAYSIA: SATU RATUS SEMBILAN

PULUH LIMA RIBU SAHAJA) dan kepada syarat-syarat jualan yang ditamparkan. Pembida yang bermat hendaklah mengemukakan 10% daripada harga riaz dalam bentuk Bank

Draf di atas nama PUBLIC BANK BERHAD 1 HARI BEKERJA sebelum tarikh lelong awam.

Baki harga belian hendaklah dibayar oleh pembida yang berjaya kepada PUBLIC BANK

BERHAD dalam tempoh seratus dua puluh (20) hari dari tarikh jualan. Untuk buter-butir

selanjutnya, sila berhubung dengan:-

Firma Guaman : WONG-CHOI & MOHD NOR

Alamat : NO. 27, 1ST & 2ND FLOOR

JALAN MALU JAYA

PUSAT PERNIAGAAN MALU JAYA, 14000, PG, MY

No. Telefon : 04-3398855

No. Faks : 04-3398855

No. Rujukan : WCMN(BM)/PBB-ML/2022-451/RS/(R/S)

LOKASI DAN PERIHAL BARTANAH:

Hartanah tersebut adalah Sebuah rumah teres bertingkat dua yang beralamat pos di No. 1, Jalan Jentaya 1, Taman Jentaya, 14100 Simpang Ampat, Pulau Pinang.

HARGA RIZAB:

Hartanah tersebut akan dijual atas "seperitmana sedia ada" tertakluk kepada satu harga riaz sebanyak RM 388,800.00 (RINGGIT MALAYSIA: TIGA RATUS LAPAN

PULUH LAPAN RIBU LAPAN RATUS SAHAJA) dan kepada syarat-syarat jualan yang ditamparkan. Pembida yang bermat hendaklah mengemukakan 10% daripada harga

riaz dalam bentuk Bank Draf di atas nama PUBLIC BANK BERHAD 1 HARI BEKERJA

sebelum tarikh lelong awam. Baki harga belian hendaklah dibayar oleh pembida yang berjaya kepada PUBLIC BANK BERHAD dalam tempoh seratus dua puluh (20) hari

dari tarikh jualan. Untuk buter-butir selanjutnya, sila berhubung dengan:-

Firma Guaman : WONG & LOH

Alamat : NO. 44, CANTONMENT ROAD, 10350, PG, MY

No. Telefon : 04-2286888

No. Faks : 04-2287989

No. Rujukan : GT/LY/PH/VN/PBB/L/2024/007

TUESDAY | MAR 4, 2025

SPORTS 27

TRAMLINES



USA's Emma Navarro (right) celebrates with the trophy after winning the Merida Open final beating Emiliana Arango from Colombia at the Yucatan Country Club, Merida, Mexico yesterday. – REUTERS/PIC

Navarro outclasses Arango to claim Merida title

TOP SEED Emma Navarro made light work of Colombian qualifier Emiliana Arango with a crushing 6-0, 6-0 victory in the final of the Merida Open yesterday as the American claimed her second career title.

World No. 10 Navarro, who won the WTA 250 Hobart International last year, needed just 55 minutes to lift her first WTA 500 trophy, wrapping up a dominant run in the tournament in which she didn't a set.

With a strong serve and powerful groundstrokes, Navarro never allowed Arango to reach a break point, while the US Open semifinalist won 71% of points on return.

The 23-year-old became only the fifth player this century to win a WTA final with a 6-0, 6-0 scoreline, and the first since Iga Swiatek's victory over Karolina Pliskova in the 2021 Italian Open.

Arango, who will reach a career-high singles world ranking of 80 today, could not find her stride following a nearly three-hour semifinal battle against fellow qualifier Daria Saville on Sunday.

The Colombian world No. 133 reached the final on the back of an 11-match winning streak, including last week's winning run at the WTA 125 Cancun Open, but had to play three sets in each of her last three matches.

Pegula captures first WTA crown of 2025

WORLD NO. 4 Jessica Pegula powered to her first WTA title of 2025 yesterday, beating McCartney Kessler 7-5, 6-2 in an all-American final in Austin, Texas.

Pegula, the top seed, claimed a seventh WTA title and her first since she won the 1000 event in Toronto last year.

That was one of Pegula's two titles in a 2024 campaign in which she also reached the US Open final.

In Kessler she stopped a fast-rising talent, whose first two WTA finals had yielded a pair of titles – in Cleveland last August and at Hobart in January.

The 25-year-old arrived in Austin riding high after claiming her first career top-10 player with an upset of Coco Gauff in the second round at Dubai.

But she couldn't find a way past Pegula, who snapped a three-match losing streak in finals for a confidence-building crown heading into the prestigious hard court tournaments at Indian Wells and Miami.

Pegula, the only top-10 player in the draw, dropped just one set all week.

Kessler looked set to change that when she rallied from 0-2 down to take a 4-2 lead in the first set.

But too many unforced errors from Kessler allowed Pegula to get back in front and after Kessler missed a chance to break in the 11th game she was broken in the next as Pegula pocketed the first set.

Kessler broke Pegula to open the second, but Pegula won the next four games to seize control.

Machac shows class with heartwarming message

TOMAS MACHAC showed his class by sending an uplifting message to Alejandro Davidovich Fokina after beating him in the Mexican Open final. Machac clinched his maiden ATP title with a convincing 7-6, 6-2 victory, earning him a place in the world's top 20 for the very first time.

Davidovich Fokina was visibly gutted after losing his second final within the space of a month.

He was beaten at the Delray Beach Open by Miomir Kecmanovic and would have been hoping to put things right in Mexico, but ended up falling short once again.

In a classy post-match interview, Machac attempted to console his beaten rival as he insisted the Spaniard will go on to win many titles over the course of his career.

"I'd like to congratulate Alejandro on a great week," he said. "It's a great achievement that he played a final the week before and then straight away into (another) final. Keep going. It won't be just one title, it will be many. Just continue. I believe in you."

Ready to race

Key talking points from F1 testing 2025

THE countdown to one of the most anticipated seasons in Formula 1 history can officially begin following the conclusion of testing last week.

All 10 teams and 20 drivers have been on track in Bahrain, honing their new cars ahead of the season opener in Melbourne.

While it's advisable to not to read too much into testing, the three days provided insights into how the season could pan out, at least in the early going.

Bahrain confirmed the confidence of some teams but for some, the test was a stark reminder that they hadn't made the progress they wanted since 2024.

Meanwhile, others, worryingly, appear to have gone backwards. Here's a wrap-up of some of the key talking points from F1 testing 2025.

Norris 'winning car'

Ahead of testing, championship favourite Lando Norris predicted that midfield teams could upset the established "big four" of McLaren, Ferrari, Red Bull and Mercedes. However, Bahrain suggested there would again be a gap between that quartet and the rest.

Fernando Alonso, whose Aston Martin team had a troubled test, doesn't agree with Norris. Speaking after the test, the Spanish legend described the Briton's words as a "normal, confident speech".

"I don't know. Now that he has the winning car he says that! When he was the fifth or sixth team, he was saying that only one team will win all the races," said the two-time world champion.

The numbers would suggest Norris's prediction is indeed misguided. McLaren's long-run

pace was impressive, hinting that their small but clear advantage over the field in the second half of last season remains.

Hamilton's Ferrari 'ban'

Much of the focus in testing week was naturally on Lewis Hamilton's first meaningful running in a Ferrari. The seven-time champion enjoyed a solid test, even if his new team appear to be just behind McLaren in the pecking order.

Off-track, it didn't go unnoticed that Hamilton was wearing Ferrari team gear as he arrived at the track, instead of an extravagant outfit from a luxury fashion brand, which has become the norm in recent times.

That was highlighted by veteran F1 photographer and YouTuber Kym Illman, who speculated that Hamilton might have

been ordered to stick to Ferrari attire to give the team's numerous sponsors maximum exposure.

"To be honest, I thought he'd come into wearing fashionable gear, but I'm sure Ferrari have other ideas," he said on his YouTube channel. "And certainly, Ferrari is a peculiar team when it comes to rules and regulations."

"Now Lewis is being paid a lot of money and Ferrari have said for this sort of money, you need to wear our sponsors' logos."

Russell set for fine

George Russell could become the first F1 driver of 2025 to be punished amid FIA's swearing clampdown. The governing body's sporting code has been updated to outline the harsher penalties, meaning that should a driver commit three offences, they will now risk a one-month suspension and deduction of championship points.

And it was the Mercedes driver who inadvertently dropped a four-letter expletive during an interview with Viaplay, which broadcasts F1 in the Netherlands among

other European countries.

Pointing to a building above the pitlane, he said: "Oh s**t, there's no lights on." That could land him a fine of £33,800 (RM186,000).

Red Bull, Aston Martin on backfoot

Red Bull ended last season with the third-fastest car at best. Bahrain has done little to suggest that Max Verstappen's team have fixed the handling issues that blighted the car over the second half of 2024.

It's early days, of course, but the world champion may need to outperform his car again to cling to his crown. Looking further down the grid, big-spending Aston Martin endured a worryingly poor test.

Lance Stroll's running on the final day was restricted by illness, meaning a few extra laps for Alonso. However, the Silverstone-based squad looks to have the second slowest car, with only Sauber behind them.

Williams on the up

Like a number of midfield teams, Williams have made it clear they are prioritising getting a head start on 2026, which will see a mass regulation change.

However, with one of the strongest line-ups on the grid following the arrival of Carlos Sainz to partner Alex Albon, the Grove team appears to have a handy 2025 car.

The decent long run pace and table-topping time from Sainz on day two suggest they are contenders, along with Alpine, to be the 'best of the rest' behind the top four.

Express Newspapers



FROM LEFT: McLaren's Lando Norris, Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton and Mercedes' George Russell. — REUTERS/SPIC

Newey going back to the drawing board at Aston Martin

ADRIAN NEWEY will be literally going back to the drawing board when Formula One's foremost designer starts work at Aston Martin today.

The 66-year-old Briton, whose departure from Red Bull was announced last May, famously likes to work with pencil and paper in a sport awash with supercomputers and data-crunching on a mind-blowing scale.

"His office is ready, the drawing board's there," team principal Andy Cowell told reporters during testing in Bahrain last week.

Newey had an office, complete with drawing board, next to team boss Christian Horner at Red Bull and his new one will be in the midst of an army of designers on a floor of Aston Martin's Silverstone "campus".

"I guess it means I am the last dinosaur in the industry probably," he once told Reuters when asked about the drawing board early in his time at Red Bull.

"It's what I grew up on. I like the ability to sketch at a decent scale. What I like about a drawing board is that I can lay things out."

Cars designed by Newey have won 12 constructors' championships for Williams, McLaren and Red Bull and 223 grands prix since 1991.

His 2023 Red Bull was the most dominant in the sport's history with 21 wins from 22 races.

Aston Martin, with 43-year-old Spanish double world champion Fernando Alonso and team owner's son Lance Stroll, have yet to win anything in Formula One and finished fifth last season.

Canadian Lawrence Stroll, the big boss, described Newey as a bargain after announcing his signing in September.

Cowell, a former Mercedes engine head who joined Aston Martin last year as chief executive officer and was appointed team boss in January, has said he expects Newey to have an immediate impact.

"Everybody's super excited to work with Adrian. His record speaks for itself." — Reuters

Varun gives India 'good headache'

SPINNER Varun Chakravarthy yesterday became a "good headache" for India ahead of their Champions Trophy semifinal against Australia after his match-winning five-wicket haul against New Zealand, said captain Rohit Sharma.

Mystery spinner Varun returned figures of 5-42 in Dubai to help India beat New Zealand in their last group match of the 50-over tournament.

His recent 14 wickets in a 4-1 T20 series win over England at home got Varun back into the India reckoning in the white-ball formats and he was a last-minute addition to the Champions Trophy squad.

After being left out for the first two games, Varun made the team in India's last group match and was named player of the match in just his second ODI after his debut against England last month.

India face Australia in the first semifinal in Dubai tomorrow.

"Varun has got something different, wanted to try and see what he had to offer," said Rohit. "We got to think a little about what to do for the next game, good headache."

Varun went wicketless in three matches in Dubai during the 2021 T20 World Cup, but put that disappointment behind him in style.

"The first spell of mine I was little nervous because the previous things, the emotions and all were playing whatever happened in the last three years before in this ground," the 33-year-old Varun told reporters.

"Where little bit it was playing with me and I was trying to keep it down, control it. But Virat (Kohli), Rohit (Sharma) and even Hardik (Pandya), they were telling (me to) calm down. That really helped."

New Zealand pace bowler Matt Henry also took 5-42, albeit in a losing cause.

"He bowled beautifully, didn't he?", Henry said of Varun. "I think he showed his skill tonight, the way he turned the ball both ways, and even the way that he could bowl pace. I thought he was brilliant, and yeah, that they were able to put us under pressure right throughout."

New Zealand will take on Group B winners South Africa in Lahore on Wednesday and Henry said they are "excited" to face the best teams. — AFP

Zampa looking for best form ahead of semis

AUSTRALIA spinner Adam Zampa says he is below his best at the Champions Trophy but will still be ready to take big wickets in the semifinal against India today.

Zampa took 2-48 in the washed-out group match against Afghanistan and 2-64 in the five-wicket win over England in Lahore to help Australia reach the last four of the ODI tournament.

The veteran legspinner may be key to Australia's hopes of victory in Dubai, where India won their three group matches on spin-friendly wickets.

"Personally, I don't think I'm bowling quite at my best but I like to think the beauty about me, when I'm not quite at my best and not feeling that great out there, is my ability to still contribute and take those big wickets," Zampa said.

"So, yeah, (I am) obviously working on some stuff at the moment to hopefully get back to my best."

"But as I said, the ability to still do a job for the team and get those big wickets is still

there, which to me is really important."

The Australia squad flew from Lahore to Dubai on Saturday despite knowing they might need to fly back to Pakistan for the second semifinal depending on the result of the India-New Zealand group match.

India duly beat New Zealand by 44 runs yesterday to ensure Australia's early trip to Dubai was worth it.

South Africa, however, were forced to travel back to Pakistan for the second semifinal against New Zealand in Lahore on Wednesday.

The International Cricket Council has come under fire over the scheduling but Zampa was not complaining.

"Obviously we had a bit of a hectic schedule playing a couple of games in Pakistan, back and forth in between cities," he said.

"It's kind of nice to get here. We've got a great facility here at the ICC Academy, changes it up a little bit as well, so yeah, the boys are feeling OK about it." — Reuters

PIN HIGH

Highsmith claims maiden PGA Tour win

AMERICAN Joe Highsmith earned his first win on the PGA Tour after a final round 7-under 64 clinched the Cognizant Classic at Palm Beach Gardens by two strokes. The 24-year-old flirted with the cut-line on Friday when he made a second-round 72, but back-to-back rounds of 64 saw him in the clubhouse on 19-under for the tournament. That proved too much for the chasing field that included Jake Knapp, who shot an opening round 59 and had led after each of the first three rounds. A triple bogey from Knapp on the 11th hole wrecked his dream of a wire-to-wire triumph as Highsmith snaffled the US\$1.7 million (RM7.7m) prize and earned a place in the Masters and the elite signature events. "Obviously winning was the last thing on my mind. I was just trying to go out there and execute just shot after shot, and I was able to do that really well," said Highsmith. "I mean, it was so tough out there and I played the best round of my life for sure," he said.

Ko wins first HSBC Championship

LYDIA KO shot a final-round 69 to win her first HSBC Women's World Championship in 11 appearances on Sunday in Singapore. For Ko, who had five birdies and three bogeys on the Tanjong course at Sentosa Golf Club, it's her 23rd career LPGA Tour victory. She finished the tournament with a 13-under 275. Ayake Furue of Japan (68) and Jeeno Thitikul of Thailand (70) tied for second place, four shots back of Ko. "I dreamt last night that I won but then I woke up, and I was like, dang, it's not real yet," she said after the match. "But I just wanted to focus on my game, and it was a pretty tight leaderboard. To win here in Singapore and get all the love, not only this year but for the years that I've come, it means a lot."

Troubled Milan sunk by Lazio

AC MILAN plunged deeper into crisis yesterday after Pedro's penalty in the eighth minute of stoppage time condemned the seven-time European champions to a 2-1 home defeat to Lazio in front of livid fans.

Pedro was cool from the penalty spot to fire Lazio into fourth and the Champions League places, a point ahead of Juventus who host Verona overnight.

The former Spain forward was given the chance to snatch the win by Milan goalkeeper Mike Maignan cleaning out Gustav Isaksen just as Samuel Chukwueze's 85th-minute leveller looked like giving Milan a barely-deserved point.

Instead Sergio Conceicao's team languish in ninth place following a largely dismal home display in which Milan had to play with 10 men for over 20 minutes after Strahinja Pavlovic was sent off for chopping down Gustav Isaksen.

"It's not an easy period for the club, the players can feel everything that's going on around them," said Conceicao to DAZN.

The boos and whistles which had crashed down from the stands all match got louder once Pedro slotted home his spot-kick and condemned Milan to their third defeat in little more than a week.

"It's the first time in my career that I've ever seen anything like it," added Conceicao.

"When you play in an atmosphere like that your boots become boiling hot. It's not easy... and I have to say tonight the team showed the desire to change things. We managed to level with 10 men and could have even won the game." – AFP

Faith in Alvarez

Atletico hoping Argentina striker can end Madrid heartbreak in Europe

FOR Atletico Madrid it has been a repetitious and painful tale whenever they have faced city rivals Real Madrid in Europe, but they signed Julian Alvarez to try and rip up the script.

The Argentina international has become Atletico's key attacking threat after arriving from Manchester City last summer and will lead the line for them tomorrow (4am Malaysian time) at the Santiago Bernabeu in the Champions League last 16.

Atletico have reached three Champions League finals and lost every time, including against Real Madrid in 2014 and 2016.

Those agonising defeats, the first in extra-time and the second on penalties, were compounded by *Los Blancos* wins in the 2015 quarterfinals and 2017 semifinals.

The only other occasion they have met in the competition was in 1959, when after an aggregate semifinal draw the tie went to a play-off.

Real Madrid emerged triumphant and went on to lift a fourth consecutive European Cup.

Their dominance in the competition has held until this day, with Carlo Ancelotti's side record 15-time winners and the current holders.

Diego Simeone's team were ousted by Borussia Dortmund in last year's

quarterfinals, one of the low points of a miserable campaign.

They responded in the summer by signing Alvarez for €85 million (RM383m), hoping the 25-year-old forward would become the cornerstone of their side.

"He has everything a player needs to play for Atletico Madrid, and for many years to come," said Simeone after Alvarez struck twice to help them beat German champions Bayer Leverkusen in the group phase.

Alvarez has nine goals in his last 13 matches across all competitions, and 21 strikes in 40 games in total.

The striker kept his nerve to net an ice-cold Panenka penalty against Real Madrid in a 1-1 La Liga derby draw in February at the Bernabeu.

Alvarez has quickly formed a bond on the pitch with Atletico talisman Antoine Griezmann, meaning Alexander Sorloth and Angel Correa generally have to be content with a place on the bench.

Although Alvarez and Griezmann regularly start, Simeone has made no secret of considering Atletico's squad depth their greatest asset this season.

Alvarez came off the bench to send Atletico top of La Liga on Saturday with the only goal in a 1-0 victory against Athletic Bilbao, although Barcelona moved back

clear of the *Rojiblancos* yesterday by a point. "When we learned that it was confirmed, his arrival, it made us very happy, very happy indeed," said Simeone at the weekend.

"(That's) because a different calibre player was coming, like in his day, Luis Suarez.

"They are special players, they have a talent, they have something others don't, like when (David) Villa came, players who can make the difference."

Alvarez is well-rounded, a sharp finisher with great mobility, ability to link the play and high work-rate.

"Every move he gets involved in, he improves," said impressed Athletic striker Inaki Williams.

Simeone requires great intensity from his players, with those who don't sweat for the club badge not lasting long at Atletico.

Despite arriving as a World Cup winner with Argentina and a Champions League and double Premier League winner with Man City, Alvarez has shown no airs and graces.

"(Alvarez) is a guy who won everything and he's the one who runs the most, you look at him and admire him," said Atletico defender Jose Gimenez.

"He is an example for all of us, from the youngest to the oldest." – AFP



Barcelona's Ronald Araujo (left) and Real Sociedad's Jon Martin vie for a header during the La Liga match yesterday. – AFP/PICT

Barca thrash Sociedad to reclaim top spot

BARCELONA secured a comfortable 4-0 win over Real Sociedad yesterday to move back top of La Liga.

Aritz Elustondo's early red card gave Hansi Flick's side a comfortable afternoon with Gerard Martin, Marc Casado, Ronald Araujo and Robert Lewandowski on the scoresheet.

Atletico Madrid beat Athletic Bilbao on Saturday to temporarily knock the Catalans from their perch, while Real Madrid, third, lost at Real Betis.

Flick was able to rotate his side a little ahead of the Champions League last 16 visit to face Benfica on Thursday and still move one point above Atletico.

"There were a lot of things that helped us a lot today, the red card but also how we played, we were dominant after the red card," Flick told reporters.

The German coach said before the game Barca would fight hard to win all of the three major competitions they are in, and reiterated it afterwards.

"Today we are happy with the three points and there's a long way to go in La Liga, the Copa del Rey and the Champions League," he continued.

"We will fight for every title and when we started the season no-one (expected) this.

"We're in this situation, that we can

fight (for the trophies), and that's what we want until the end of the season."

The game swung Barcelona's way when Elustondo was sent off in the 17th minute for pulling down Dani Olmo, who was running through on goal.

The hosts took the lead after 25 minutes when Olmo chipped the ball across for Martin to fire home the first goal of his career.

Four minutes later, Barca had their second, with Olmo involved again, this time his wayward shot deflected home by teammate Casado.

Pedri came close again after the break with an effort from range which bounced back off the crossbar, shortly before Araujo nabbed the third.

Lewandowski cleverly converted Barcelona's fourth, prodding home Araujo's low drive from distance.

"I'm very happy for our performance and it was important to win and go back to being leaders," Araujo told *Movistar*. "I'm happy for the good work we did and going first again."

"I came back from a long-term injury, I'm calm and going step by step, I believe in myself and my characteristics, and I am happy to help," said Araujo. – AFP

Guirassy carrying Dortmund's hopes against Lille

BORUSSIA DORTMUND striker Serhou Guirassy takes on his former side Lille in the Champions League last 16 tomorrow (4am) as seemingly the finished product, a decade in the making.

Guirassy has almost single-handedly guided a struggling Dortmund through the Champions League so far this term after signing last year from Stuttgart.

In his first season in Europe's top competition, Guirassy has more goals than anyone else in the Champions League, with 10 in 10 matches.

That dominant showing is a far cry from Guirassy's time at Lille, who he joined from boyhood club Laval in 2015.

Guirassy played just nine games for Lille, scoring once, and was sent out on loan to then-Ligue 2 side

Auxerre, before joining Cologne in 2016.

His disappointing stint at Lille was one of several stops as he bounced around the first and second divisions in France and Germany, before exploding into form for Stuttgart last season.

Guirassy's exploits this year in yellow and black, with 24 goals in 32 games in all competitions, are all the more impressive considering how badly Dortmund have struggled.

Dortmund may have needed Guirassy to bail them out regularly this season, but there are indications the 1997 Champions League winners have turned the corner under new coach Niko Kovac.

Saturday's 2-0 win at St. Pauli was just Dortmund's second away win in the league this season – and the first time they have won two Bundesliga games in a

row this term.

Kovac, a former Bayern, Eintracht Frankfurt and Monaco coach, has only had six games in charge, but his simplified message seems to resonate.

Germany forward Karim Adeyemi has been perhaps the most obvious beneficiary.

Against St Pauli, the 23-year-old scored a stunning solo goal and created a goal for Guirassy.

"I don't think we were in the position we deserve in the table," Adeyemi told the Bundesliga website.

"(Kovac told me to) 'Play to my strengths, speed and one-on-one duels – and score goals'."

"That's what he wants. I try to show that and to bring it every game."

"I'm gaining self-confidence, but there's definitely more to come. I'm building on that." – AFP

ARSENAL manager Mikel Arteta is hoping the glamour of the Champions League can galvanise his injury-ravaged squad from their Premier League funk.

The Gunners' dream of a first League title in 21 years appears over after falling 13 points behind runaway leaders Liverpool.

Conquering Europe for the first time now appears their only chance of ending a five-year trophy drought and a kind last-16 draw with PSV Eindhoven could buy Arteta time to get some of his key attackers back.

Kai Havertz and Gabriel Jesus have been ruled out for the rest of the season with serious hamstring and knee injuries respectively.

But Bukayo Saka and Gabriel Martinelli could return for the quarterfinals next month should Arsenal progress.

The absence of all four forwards has been keenly felt as Arsenal failed to score in their last two Premier League games against West Ham and Nottingham Forest to realistically end their title aspirations.

Midfielder Mikel Merino has deputised as a makeshift striker, while Arteta has been forced to

Last chance saloon

'Beautiful' Champions League offers Arsenal chance to salvage season

rely on teenager Ethan Nwaneri in Saka's normal wide right role.

"I know that what's lacking is that piece up there," said Arteta. "There's a lot to play for and we need to find the solution to unlock it."

"We have the Champions League, we have a beautiful competition in front of us and we have to be ready for Tuesday (tomorrow 4am)."

A lack of creativity as well as cutting edge in the final third has been a common occurrence all season for Arsenal.

The visitors managed just one shot on target in a 0-0 draw at Forest last week, the ninth time this season they have failed to score in a match.

Captain Martin Odegaard has struggled to hit the heights of the previous two seasons since

recovering from an ankle injury that kept him out for two months earlier in the campaign.

Arteta has been one of many managers hit by mounting injury problems to point to the strain a congested calendar is putting on the top players.

"He came back in such a strong way and performed at a very, very high level," said the Spaniard on Odegaard's inconsistent form.

"Then just sustaining that over a period of time, like we are demanding the players to do constantly, especially the creative players, is very difficult."

But Arsenal's early exit from the FA Cup ensured Arteta's men have had six days to prepare for the trip to the Netherlands.

And without the luxury of a free-flowing

attack, they can at least lean on the Premier League's meanest defence and one of the best in the Champions League so far this season.

PSV boss Peter Bosz was left impressed by Arsenal's defensive strength when the visitors were humbled 4-0 at the Emirates in last season's Champions League group stage.

"As soon as we got to their box, (the attack) was over. How is that possible?" Bosz said at the time.

The Dutch champions' own domestic struggles offers more encouragement for the Londoners.

PSV have been beaten twice by Go Ahead Eagles in the past week and are winless in four league games either side of a memorable 3-1 victory over Juventus to make the last 16. – AFP

Welbeck's late strike sinks Newcastle

DANNY WELBECK sent Brighton into the FA Cup quarterfinals as his extra-time strike clinched a dramatic 2-1 win against Newcastle in a stormy clash scarred by red cards for both teams.

Alexander Isak's penalty put Newcastle ahead in the fifth round tie at St James' Park.

Former Newcastle winger Yankuba Minteh equalised before the break, setting the stage for an explosive second half.

Newcastle forward Anthony Gordon was sent off for violent conduct in the 83rd minute after shoving Brighton's Jan Paul van Hecke in the head.

Brighton were also reduced to 10 men late in the second half when Tariq Lamptey was dismissed for a second booking.

Fabian Hurzeler's side emerged victorious thanks to Welbeck's strike in the closing stages of extra-time.

Brighton have never lifted the FA Cup and last reached the final in 1983 when they lost in a replay against Manchester United.

The Seagulls have won five successive matches since their 7-0 thrashing at Nottingham Forest.

They are through to the quarterfinals for the second time in three seasons after winning at St James' Park for the second time this season.

It was a bitter blow for Newcastle, who haven't won a domestic trophy since landing the 1955 FA Cup, while their last major trophy was the 1969 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup.

Newcastle boss Eddie Howe will consider an appeal against the red card that is set to cost Gordon a Carabao Cup final appearance.

The England international now faces a three-match ban

which will rule him out of the final against Liverpool on March 16.

Asked if he reserved the right to appeal referee Anthony Taylor's decision, Howe, who saw keeper Nick Pope miss the final of the same competition in 2023 because of a red card, said: "Of course. If we analyse the incident and feel there's grounds for that, we will do without hesitation."

Seagulls boss Fabian Hurzeler was delighted with his team's display on Tyneside.

Hurzeler said: "Not only the character, also the performance was quite impressive. Of course we had some setbacks during the

game, but we reacted always in a very special way."

"We stayed very calm, we found a good balance between defensive stability and controlling the game in possession."

"Then we had, of course, some phases of the game where we had to suffer, but in the end, we did it in quite an impressive way."

"We always stayed together, we always found the right solution on the behaviour of Newcastle and therefore I'm really pleased with the character, but also the performance." – AFP/The Independent



Brighton's Danny Welbeck (centre) celebrates with his teammates after the English FA Cup fifth round match against Newcastle United yesterday. – REUTERS/SPIC

SIDENETTING

Bournemouth to face City in FA Cup

BOURNMOUTH have been drawn at home to Manchester City in the FA Cup quarterfinals. Preston, the only Championship side left in the FA Cup, are at home to Unai Emery's Aston Villa. Fulham host Crystal Palace in a London derby. And Brighton will be at home to either Nottingham Forest or Ipswich, who play their fifth-round tie overnight. Aside from 2023 victors Manchester City, Ipswich are the most recent FA Cup winners (1978) left in it. Fulham, Palace, Bournemouth and Brighton have never won the cup. "It's very open now. What a chance for a team to go and win it," said ex-Manchester City and Villa defender Micah Richards on BBC One. "All the (other) big teams are out. Manchester City are obviously the strongest

team left in there. This is what we wanted, teams to get a chance." The quarterfinal ties will take place on the weekend of March 29.

FA CUP QUARTERFINALS DRAW
Fulham vs Crystal Palace
Preston vs Aston Villa
Bournemouth vs Manchester City
Brighton vs Nottingham Forest/Ipswich

Leno's heroics lets Cottagers dream on

BERND LENO was the decisive figure as Fulham eliminated Manchester United from the FA Cup, saving two penalties in a dramatic shootout at Old Trafford. The Cottagers secured a quarterfinal spot,

avenging their controversial exit to United two seasons ago. After both teams converted their first three spotkicks, Leno denied Victor Lindelof before Antonee Robinson extended Fulham's advantage. The German then saved Joshua Zirkzee's effort, sealing Fulham's place in the last eight. Reflecting on the victory, Fulham manager Marco Silva praised his team's progress since their last FA Cup meeting with United. "We wanted to play in the quarterfinal and I really believe – and it's my feeling – that we deserve to be there," the Fulham boss said. "From the first day of the competition (we thought we had an opportunity) – it's not just now because we won against Man Utd. We don't know what's going to happen, what we are going to achieve, or where is going to be the last stage for us, but we want to think (we will exit) in the last day of the competition."

Chelsea struggling because of inexperience, says Terry

CHELSEA icon John Terry has explained why he believes the Blues have been struggling after initially making a strong start to the campaign.

They were tipped as Premier League title challengers only a few months ago but are now facing an uphill battle to secure a Champions League spot.

The west Londoners have only won three League games since the turn of the year, with their lack of form leaving them outside the division's top four.

They have spent more than any other English club over the last few seasons but have little to show for it, having failed to win a single trophy under their current ownership.

Terry believes that Chelsea are stuttering because they have a young and inexperienced squad without enough leadership to mount a sustained challenge.

Speaking to *DR Sports*, the former Blues captain said: "We've shown signs this year of being a really young squad, I think, and I say that in terms of performances where you see a really good spell, then we've come off of it lately."

"It was always going to be one of those seasons for me, even when we started well I thought we'd have a little bit of a drop off and we have done that."

"Listen, Champions League has to be the minimum every year for me. When you're playing at a top club like Chelsea, the mentality has to be Champions League football."

Chelsea players reportedly exchanged frank words in a behind-the-scenes meeting after last month's Premier League defeat to Brighton.

According to *The Athletic*, there was an understanding that standards would need to improve across the board to bring about a change in fortunes.

In their next game, Chelsea were narrowly beaten by Aston Villa before returning to winning ways against a poor Southampton side in midweek.

Following the defeat to Brighton, manager Enzo Maresca said it was the 'worst performance' of his time in charge, adding: "We (were) fourth in the League and winning."

"The performance is not one you want to offer so we are very upset and sorry for the fans that were here."

It remains to be seen if Chelsea will be able to save their season over the remaining 11 games, with a place in next season's Champions League still up for grabs if they can start firing on all cylinders. – Express Newspapers

RESULTS & STANDINGS

ENGLISH FA CUP (5th round): **Manchester United 1** (Fernandes 71) **Fulham 1** (Bassey 45+1) **aet** – Fulham win 4-3 on pen, **Newcastle 1** (Isak 22-pen) **Brighton 2** (Minteh 44, Welbeck 114) **aet**.

LA LIGA: Leganes 1 (Garcia 90+2) **Getafe 0**, **Barcelona 4** (Martin 25, Casado 29, Araujo 56, Lewandowski 60) **Real Sociedad 0**, **Mallorca 1** (Asano 9) **Alaves 1** (Garcia 68), **Osasuna 3** (Oroz 26, 39, 45-pen) **Valencia 3** (Lopez 14, Sadiq 32, 87).

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	26	18	3	5	71	25	57
A. Madrid	26	16	8	2	43	16	56
Real Madrid	26	16	6	4	55	25	54
A. Bilbao	26	13	9	4	44	23	48
Villarreal	25	12	8	5	48	35	44
Real Betis	26	9	8	9	34	38	38

SERIE A: Bologna 2 (Orsolini 48-pen, 56) **Cagliari 1** (Piccoli 22), **Genoa 1** (Vasquez 81) **Empoli 1** (Grassi 36), **AC Milan 1** (Chukwueze 85) **Lazio 2** (Zaccagni 28, Pedro 90+8-pen), **Monza 0 Torino 2** (Elmas 41, Casadei 66), **Roma 2** (Saelemaekers 61, Dovybyk 76) **Como 1** (Da Cunha 44).

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter Milan	27	17	7	3	60	25	58
Napoli	27	17	6	4	43	22	57
Atalanta	27	16	7	4	59	26	55
Lazio	27	15	5	7	49	35	50
Juventus	26	12	13	1	43	21	49
Bologna	27	12	11	4	42	33	47

BUNDESLIGA: Augsburg 0 Freiburg 0, Union Berlin 0 Holstein Kiel 1.

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
B. Munich	24	19	4	1	72	20	61
B. Leverkusen	24	15	8	1	55	28	53
E. Frankfurt	24	12	6	6	50	37	42
Mainz	24	12	5	7	39	25	41
Freiburg	24	12	4	8	34	36	40
RB Leipzig	24	10	8	6	39	33	38

FRENCH LIGUE 1: Lyon 2 Brest 1, Auxerre 0 Strasbourg 1, Angers 0 Toulouse 4, Montpellier 0 Rennes 4.

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Paris SG	24	19	5	0	66	23	62
Marseille	24	15	4	5	52	29	49
Nice	24	13	7	4	49	28	46
Monaco	24	13	4	7	48	31	43
Lille	24	11	8	5	39	27	41
Lyon	24	11	6	7	44	31	39

Nakhon Pathom to host SEA Games takraw events: Astaf

SEPAK TAKRAW and chinlone competitions for this year's Thailand SEA Games will be held at the Nakhon Pathom Municipality Stadium, near Bangkok.

Asian Sepaktakraw Federation (Astaf) president Datuk Abdul Halim Kader said, the 4,000 capacity venue, which is about an hour-away from the capital city, has been selected to host the biennial event competitions from Dec 9-20.

He said Nakhon Pathom is a convenient location in terms of facilities, including the availability of a five-star hotel within a short distance to the venue.

"Further, Nakhon Pathom is hosting the SEA Games Tournament Management Committee, the International Sepaktakraw Federation (Istaf) and the Tournament Technical Service Committee among others.

"Technically, Astaf is fully confident that the sepak takraw and chinlone events will be run professionally, where Astaf will continue to impose the use of the Challenge Camera with improvement of allocation of challenge system," he said in a statement yesterday.

Meanwhile, Abdul Halim said the SEA Games Federation (SEAGF) Council and Thailand SEA Organising Committee have approved the men's and women's team regu, regu, quadrant, hoop, and mix quadrant events in sepak takraw, as well as the men's and women's chinlone (linking) to be contested at the Games. – Bernama



Herry Iman Pierngadi.

Early elimination

Doubles back-up players lack mental power, says Herry

THE national men's doubles badminton back-up players need to improve their mental strength to "shine" on the international stage after witnessing them failing to advance to the final of the Sri Lanka International Challenge 2025 which ended on Sunday.

National men's doubles head coach, Herry Iman Pierngadi, said he did not rule out the possibility that the deficiency factor was the reason why the players sent were unable to emulate the positive steps of their senior players.

"I need time to change the way they play a little. According to me, if you look at training, they have shown improvement but it is different when competing.

"I need to re-analyse the matter because it is possible that their mental strength is lacking in competition," he said when met recently.

The badminton camp sent a total of six men's doubles pairs but all of them failed to advance to the final of the tournament offering a total cash prize of US\$17,500 (RM78,000).

Malaysia, however, did not return empty-handed after professional men's singles player Aidel Sholeh Ali Sadikin became the country's sole representative to emerge champion of the International Challenge.

The world's 68th ranked player needed only 47 minutes to defeat the world No. 210 player from India, Pranay Katta, 21-19, 21-15 in the final at the St Joseph's Sports Complex, Colombo.

This is the 25-year-old's second international title as he also won the Indonesia International Challenge 2023.

Aidel Sholeh, who turned professional last year, beat world No. 71 Viren Nettasinghe of Sri Lanka 21-16, 21-18 in the semifinals. – Bernama



Connor, Wang emerge as country's Elite Jr champions

Connor Axel Liewkai.
– BERNAMAPIC

CONNOR Axel Liewkai and Wang Xin Yip, both from Kuala Lumpur, walked away with the overall champion titles in the SportExcel-NSC-MILO Malaysian Junior Premier Elite Golf Grand Finals over the weekend.

Connor, playing off the Blue Tee at the Danau Golf Club, emerged victorious in the boys' category after carding rounds of 72, 76, 81 in the three-day competition to finish with a total of 229.

Xin Yip swept the girls' overall title in the White Tee category after finishing with rounds of 75, 75, 82 for a total of 232.

The competition featured 43 of the country's best elite players who qualified for the grand finals based on their achievements throughout the SportExcel Junior Tour held at various golf clubs in the country.

"For these young athletes, it's proven that this golf meet is about more than winning medals. It provides an opportunity to display their talent,

build friendship and gain experience from playing among the top junior players in the country," said Milo's assistant sports marketing manager Sheena Dina Rizal.

"Milo has been a supportive partner of SportExcel for over 30 years, and we believe that this prestigious platform is truly important in nurturing and shaping world-class talent within our young aspiring Malaysian juniors," she added. – Bernama

RESULTS:

Boys A: Aiden Tai 73,82,78; Afif Jasmin 73,77,81; Tengku Husein 75,79,77

Boys B: Azka Azfar 77,83,79, Anthony Lim 78,82,79, Zhang Aoran 78,76,80

Girls A: Nur Batrisyia Balqis 80,81,82; T. Kaesini Devi 83,78,82; Bae Eun Kyung 80,77,76

Girls B: B. Vikasni Laakshithaa 88,80,86; Park Kyoung Won 80,85,83; Wang En Xi 80,83,80

TOUCHLINES

MANCHESTER CITY and **Manchester United** are keeping a close eye on Portugal winger **Francisco Trincao**, although Sporting hope to agree a new contract with the 25-year-old.

THE Red Devils are eyeing a summer move for Real Sociedad's Spain midfielder **Martin Zubimendi**, 26.

LIVERPOOL are monitoring Danish right-back **Anton Gaaei**, 22, and Belgian forward **Mika Godts**, 19, as well as their Ajax teammate, 18-year-old Netherlands defender **Jorrel Hato**.

EVERTON want to sign Brazilian winger **Luis Henrique**, 23, from Marseille this summer but will face competition from Newcastle and Nottingham Forest.

MAN UNITED want to sign Nigeria striker

Victor Osimhen, 26, from Napoli, who are evaluating whether to try to get Denmark striker **Rasmus Hojlund**, 22, as part of the deal.

WEST HAM are interested in signing Genoa's Belgium centreback **Koni de Winter**, 22.

TOTTENHAM have joined Brighton among the many clubs interested in signing Romania rightback **Andrei Ratiu**, 26, from Rayo Vallecano.

SPURS are set to pass on their £8.5m (RM48m) option to buy Germany forward **Timo Werner** this summer after the 28-year-old's loan move from RB Leipzig.

CHELSEA are still attempting to secure the signature of Gremio's 16-year-old Brazilian midfielder **Gabriel Mec**.

BRIEFS

FAM president meets nation's Prime Minister

FOOTBALL Association of Malaysia (FAM) president Datuk Mohd Johari Mohd Ayub paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at Bangunan Perdana Putra in Putrajaya yesterday. In a statement, FAM said that during the meeting, Mohd Johari shared the latest agenda on the direction of Malaysian football, as well as Harimau Malaysia's preparations ahead of their opening 2027 AFC Asian Cup Qualifier against Nepal on March 25. He also emphasised the importance of strengthening youth and grassroots football development to Anwar. Youth and Sports Minister Hannah Yeoh and Fifa Council member Tan Sri Hamidin Mohd Amin, a former FAM president, joined the visit. Mohd Johari was accompanied by FAM deputy president Datuk S. Sivasundaram; vice-presidents Datuk Seri Rosmadi Ismail, Datuk Mohd Azhar Jamaluddin and Datuk Dollah Salleh; executive council member Datuk Zainal Abidin Hassan and secretary-general Datuk Noor Azman Rahman. Meanwhile, Anwar, in a post on his official Facebook page, wished the new FAM leadership, led by Mohd Johari, success. "May it bring significant change to the nation's football scene," the Prime Minister said.

Mohd Shazli appointed acting MFL CEO

MOHD SHAZLI Shaik Mohd has been appointed as the acting chief executive officer of the Malaysian Football League (MFL) with immediate effect. Mohd Shazli has been the MFL chief operating officer since 2018. "Mohd Shazli has vast experience in football management, having served as MFL COO since 2018, particularly in ensuring the smooth operation of competitions and the MFL secretariat," MFL said in a brief statement yesterday. Last month, MFL confirmed that its former CEO, Giorgio Pompili Rossi, was no longer with the Malaysia League (M-League) governing body, just five months after taking up the role. As a result, Mohd Shazli was entrusted with leading the MFL secretariat's operations before being officially appointed as acting CEO.



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SCAN ME

Man United's Diogo Dalot (centre) and Bruno Fernandes (right) look dejected after the shootout against Fulham yesterday. - REUTERS/SPIC



Delusional Devils

Amorim responds to Rooney 'naive' remark after Man Utd's FA Cup exit

BY SIMON PEACH

RUBEN AMORIM reiterated Manchester United's goal is to win the Premier League as he hit back at Wayne Rooney's comments that he was "naive" to talk about that ambition following the FA Cup fifth-round exit to Fulham.

Yesterday brought another low in a season to forget at Old Trafford, where the side 14th in the Premier League cancelled out Calvin Bassey's opener through Bruno Fernandes' fine strike only to lose on penalties.

Bernd Leno saved Victor Lindelof and Joshua Zirkzee's spot-kicks as the Cottagers won the shoot-out 4-3 having ended 1-1 after extra-time, leaving the Europa League as United's only route to silverware and continental qualification.

Amorim said "the goal is to win the Premier League again" in his post-match interview with the BBC, whose pundit Rooney said "it's a little bit naive to say 'We're looking to win the Premier League' because, from where they are now, they're a long way off that".

Those comments were put to Amorim at his post-match press conference as he was asked whether it was realistic to talk about winning the title, and the United head coach said: "That is the goal."

"Being naive is to think that we are going to do it this season or going to be the best contender for the next season."

"So, I know that in this moment everybody knows everything. I know that and it's really easy - I was a pundit when I finished my career, so I know it's really easy."

"Our goal is to win the Premier League. Maybe it is not with me. But our goal, as a club, the board, is winning the Premier League like we did in the past, with all the great glories and the legends of this club."

"We want to do better and we know that we are in a difficult moment. And I'm not naive. That's why I'm here coaching at 40 years old Manchester United."

United co-owner Ineos has set up "Mission 21" to win a first Premier League crown since 2013 - a 21st English League title overall - with "Project 150" outlining the ambition to do it by the club's 150th anniversary in 2028.

But missing out on European football would dent those hopes, with United's all-time top scorer Rooney questioning how attractive a move to Old Trafford is nowadays.

"You need to be in a stable position to bring the best players in," Rooney said.

"And if I'm a player playing in a different country or in a different club and Manchester United come to try and sign me now, I'm looking thinking, 'I'm not sure'."

"The top players want Champions League football and unfortunately that's not where the club are at the minute."

The former United star added: "They were in transition when I signed but a big reason I signed was Sir Alex Ferguson because you knew he'd get it right and he'd build up that team again. It's hard to see that now."

Speaking about the game, Amorim said: "We managed to score in the second half after that goal near halftime."

"It's harder for us to go and press a little bit high but we managed to do it and score. I think we have the best chances in the game."

"In the end, the penalties can go both ways and today wasn't our way. It is important to say that with the substitutions we had our chance to win the game."

"I think we are better in the first ball than the second ball. I think it is also sometimes the quality of the players. Bruno, Casemiro and Josh are improving a lot."

Discussing the shootout, Amorim insisted: "I try to relax the players and they know that it is something that is technical - but you have to be relaxed and confident."

United's attention turns to Thursday's (Fri 1.45am Malaysian time) Europa League last-16 first leg at Real Sociedad as Fulham return to the capital buoyed by a memorable Old Trafford triumph. - The Independent/Express Newspapers

Fulham's goalkeeper Bernd Leno (right) celebrates with his teammates after the shootout against Man United yesterday. - REUTERS/SPIC



Faith in Alvarez

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Last chance saloon

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