



Ismail Sabri skips MACC questioning

No reason given for absence yesterday, statement recording session to be held today instead.

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Helping home alone elderly

Recognising potential safety and mental health risks of living in isolation, Social Welfare Dept introduces initiatives to provide financial aid, social support and direct intervention for at-risk seniors.

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With new govt policies and industry collaboration driving expansion, technical and vocational education and training gains recognition as career pathway.

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Concern over digital addiction among kids

Excessive screen time affects concentration in class, academic performance as well as development of language and social skills: Expert

A consultant paediatrician says if parents want their children to spend less time on devices, they must regulate their own usage. – **AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THE SUN**

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Initiatives to protect, ensure well-being of elderly citizens

➤ Several measures introduced by Social Welfare Dept to provide financial assistance, social support and direct intervention for at-risk seniors

BY KIRTINEE RAMESH
AND QIRANA NABILLA MOHD RASHIDI
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PETALING JAYA: The growing number of elderly and infirm Malaysians living alone, and in some cases dying unnoticed, has prompted the Social Welfare Department to intensify its efforts to safeguard such individuals and ensure they remain connected within the community.

Several recent cases highlight the severity of the issue, including the death of a 46-year-old woman living alone in Putrajaya on May 26 last year, reportedly due to a chronic illness.

In another tragic incident on July 12, an 85-year-old woman perished in a house fire in Kampung Bukit, Tumpat in Kelantan. Firefighters discovered her body in the bathroom, with burns on multiple parts of her body.

In another case, a 49-year-old man who was suffering from tuberculosis and diabetes was found lifeless in his home in Terengganu last year.

Recognising the devastating effects of isolation on mental and physical health, the department has introduced several initiatives to provide financial assistance, social support and direct intervention for at-risk seniors.

"The Social Welfare Department's primary goal is to help seniors age within their communities rather than in institutional care."

One of the government's key initiatives is the Welfare Aid for Senior Citizens Programme, which provides RM500 per month to low-income elderly individuals.

This support helps seniors cover basic needs and remain independent. In 2023, RM857 million was allocated, benefiting over 146,000 senior citizens.

Another initiative is the Bedridden Disabled Persons and Chronic Patient Care Assistance, which also provides RM500 per month to families caring for bedridden or chronically ill elderly relatives.

It said in 2023 alone, the scheme supported over 28,000 recipients, with a total allocation of RM165 million.

"For those who live alone or have no

immediate carers, the department's Home Help Services Programme will deploy volunteers to provide essential care and companionship.

"These volunteers assist with daily tasks such as meal preparation, personal hygiene care, companionship, recreational activities, housekeeping, laundry and medication reminders."

The department added that beyond financial and social support, the Domestic Violence Act 1994 has been strictly enforced to protect elderly individuals from abuse, neglect and mistreatment, while the National Policy for the Elderly promotes intergenerational engagement to strengthen family and community ties.

Additionally, under the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry, the department is also working to introduce a

Senior Citizens Act, a law aimed at legally recognising and protecting the rights of abandoned or vulnerable seniors.

The Social Welfare Department has also set up activity centres for the elderly across the country, providing safe spaces where seniors can socialise, learn new skills and engage in community activities.

The department's Elderly Care Unit also provides transport services, ensuring seniors can attend medical appointments, social events and community programmes.

These initiatives aim to reduce isolation and keep seniors actively involved in society.

For seniors facing distress or emergencies, the department operates the Talian Kasih Helpline (15999 or WhatsApp 019-2615999) 24/7, all year round.

It is also working with welfare volunteer organisations through Home Help Services to ensure regular check-ins on vulnerable seniors.

With over 6,698 seniors currently receiving support through the Home Help Services, the department stresses that combating elderly isolation requires a united effort from families, communities and government agencies.

"The well-being of our elderly is not just a government duty – it's a social responsibility."



The Social Welfare Department's primary goal is to help seniors age within their communities rather than in institutional care. – AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THESUN

Seeking imprisonment to escape loneliness

PETALING JAYA: In certain parts of the world, elderly people are reportedly committing crimes not out of necessity but in search of companionship and care within prison walls.

The growing trend, observed in countries such as Japan, South Korea, the United States and the United Kingdom, highlights the devastating effects of loneliness among old people.

In Japan, a tragic case involved an elderly woman who intentionally committed crimes to be imprisoned, hoping to find shelter and care after being abandoned.

The 81-year-old woman, only known as Akiyo, as reported by CNN, has been jailed twice for theft after first stealing food while she was in her 60s and later repeating it when survival on a pension became difficult.

Could such a phenomenon occur in Malaysia? While there are no reported cases of seniors deliberately seeking imprisonment in

Malaysia, experts warn that social isolation and economic struggles among the elderly are growing concerns.

Universiti Teknologi Mara gerontologist Dr Nur Amalina Aziz said considering Malaysia is well-known as a multi-racial and multi-religious society, older persons might not resort to such drastic measures to escape loneliness.

"However, this issue can be related to the increasing number of admissions to old folk homes each year, due to lack of housing, income and children to care for them.

"Among the primary factors contributing to older people committing crimes are poverty and social isolation. For some, being sent to prison becomes the last option to escape dire conditions such as loneliness and emptiness, social stigma and poverty."

Nur Amalina said as elderly people are left alone over time, loneliness and social isolation could worsen their condition, leading to

cognitive decline, severe depression and a reduced quality of life, ultimately increasing the risk of mortality.

She said according to the World Health Organisation, socially isolated older people face a 50% increase in risk of dementia, a 30% increase in risk of stroke and cardiovascular disease, and a 25% increase in risk of early death.

Nur Amalina said considering their mental and physical well-being are crucial, it is risky for older individuals to live on their own, especially if they suffer from chronic illnesses.

"My advice to those living alone or experiencing loneliness is to stay active, embrace the simple joys of life, spend time on activities that bring you peace and surround yourself with the people you cherish. Remember, you are never alone." – QIRANA NABILLA MOHD RASHIDI and KIRTINEE RAMESH

Woman reprimanded for allegedly insulting Prophet Muhammad

KUALA LUMPUR: The Islamic Development Department has reprimanded a woman, who is an author, over a social media post allegedly insulting Prophet Muhammad SAW.

The department said it had summoned the owner of the Facebook account "Ainon Mohd" over the post.

It added that officers from the Federal Territories Mufti Office and the Selangor State Mufti Department were also present at a meeting with the woman on Monday.

"The department urged her to remove the post. It advised her to be cautious when sharing content related to Islam and recommended that she should consult authorities to avoid disseminating inaccurate information.

"She agreed to take down the social media post, apologised and promised not to do it again, and gave an assurance that she would be more careful with her writing," the department said in a post on its Facebook page.

It urged all parties to refrain from raising issues that could cause confusion or public anxiety, tarnish the dignity of Prophet Muhammad SAW as the messenger of Allah SWT, or disrupt harmony among Muslims in the country.

"(We) appreciate the efforts of those in the book publishing industry in engaging with the public through this medium, which also serves as a platform for *dakwah*. The department urges all parties to exercise caution and avoid arbitrarily attributing matters to Prophet Muhammad SAW, to uphold the sanctity of his name and his dignity as the messenger of Allah SWT."

Meanwhile, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Razarudin Husain said police have received 13 reports nationwide against the author, who is also an entrepreneur.

He said police initially received a report lodged by a 34-year-old man at the Beranang police station in Kajang on Saturday.

"The (person) has been identified as a 75-year-old woman. We have recorded a statement from the complainant to complete preliminary investigations, which were carried out under Section 298 of the Penal Code and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998.

"Police will never compromise on any issue related to race, religion and royalty, and action in accordance with all existing legal provisions will be taken against those found to be causing disharmony and disturbing public peace." – Bernama

DPM extends condolences

KUALA LUMPUR: Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi has expressed condolences over the deaths of eight humanitarian workers from the Malaysian Consultative Council for Islamic Organisations.

He said the eight, who were killed in Gaza, were humanitarian heroes who "tirelessly dedicated themselves to helping our oppressed brothers and sisters".

"I strongly condemn this inhumane attack and urge the international community not to remain silent in the face of the ongoing atrocities in Gaza," he said in a post on his Facebook page.

"May the souls of these martyrs be blessed and placed among the righteous. *Al-Fatihah*."

On Monday, Malaysian Consultative Council for Islamic Organisations CEO Datuk Dr Sani Araby Abdul Alim Araby said eight Palestinian workers were martyred in an attack at 1.30pm (local time) in Beit Lahiya, northern Gaza on Saturday.

The victims were identified as Mahmoud Yahya Al-Sarraj, Bilal Hossam Oqeila, Mahmoud Samir Oselim, Mahmoud Khaled Oselim, Mohammed Al-Ghafaer, Hazem Ghareeb, Bilal Abu Matar and Ahmad Hamad. – Bernama

Syndicate selling birth certificates for RM50,000

KUALA LUMPUR: A birth registration syndicate that forges documents to deceive the National Registration Department (NRD) into issuing legitimate birth certificates is believed to be selling the certificates for up to RM50,000 to parents with adopted or stateless children.

According to a source, the syndicate employs individuals to pose as relatives of a baby to submit forged documents on the baby's birth at NRD counters during the registration process.

"The forged documents, which are issued by legal practitioners and doctors, are instead prepared by the syndicate."

The source said the certificate sells for between RM10,000 and RM50,000.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission has frozen 11 bank accounts containing RM100,000 and seized 30 documents as part of an investigation.

On March 11, 16 individuals, aged between 20 and 80, were arrested in the Klang Valley and Johor under Ops Outlander and Ops Birth.

Among those detained were a civil servant, a medical practitioner with the title "Datuk Seri" and a legal practitioner.

They are suspected of committing offences from 2013 to 2018 and 2023 to 2025 involving bribery and the preparation and submission of false birth confirmation documents. – Bernama

Indah Water seeks approval to produce fertiliser

KUALA LUMPUR: National sewerage company Indah Water Konsortium Sdn Bhd is in the process of obtaining approval to produce fertiliser intended for food crop cultivation.

Its CEO M. Narendran said the initiative is part of the company's corporate social responsibility efforts to promote resource recovery and drive sustainability for a greener future.

"The Islamic Development Department supports this effort and we expect to secure approval by the end of the year."

"This fertiliser could benefit the B40 community by supporting urban farming initiatives. We aim to offer it at highly affordable prices, making it easier for those interested in agriculture to succeed," he said during Bernama TV's *Ruang Bicara* programme titled "IWK: Driving Sustainability for a Greener Future". – Bernama

Digital addiction among children raising concerns

■ BY DEEPLAKSHMI MANICKAM
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PETALING JAYA: As digital devices become an integral part of daily life, the growing dependency of children on them has raised significant concerns.

Consultant paediatrician and child disability activist Datuk Dr Amar-Singh H.S.S. warned that digital addiction affects children's development, mental health and overall well-being.

"Some signs of digital addiction in children include a decline in academic performance, reduced concentration in class and decreased involvement with family members."

"Children suffering from digital addiction may also display mood instability, depression and low self-esteem. Many children even hide their excessive digital use from their parents."

He said excessive screen time is linked to delays in language

➤ Signs of overuse include decline in academic performance, impaired social skills and mood instability: Consultant paediatrician

development, impaired social skills and physical health issues.

"A major concern is language delay in young children as many parents and caregivers use devices as a convenient but inappropriate babysitter," he said, adding that it also limits outdoor activities and disrupts sleep.

"While digital devices offer learning opportunities, excessive use could be harmful. There is a clear dose-response relationship between screen time and issues such as loneliness, depression and hopelessness."

"Many children are not only addicted to (videos) but also to social media and electronic games, leading to prolonged use and

social disengagement."

He recommended parents follow and enforce screen time guidelines with their children.

"For those below two years old, devices should be avoided entirely. For those aged two to five, screen time should be limited to one hour daily, ensuring content is high quality and interactive."

He emphasised the need for parental involvement, setting consistent limits for older children and fostering responsible digital habits.

"If parents want their children to spend less time on devices, they must regulate their own usage. The most important gift we can give our children is to listen to them."

Amar-Singh said with the rise of e-learning, it is a challenge to balance education and screen time.

"Parents and educators need to create structured schedules and encourage offline activities to maintain a healthy balance."

He said ultimately, the fight against digital addiction starts at home.

"Regulating electronic devices use is not enough. Parents must be actively involved in their children's play and daily activities."

A private kindergarten teacher who asked to be known only as S. Komathi said increased exposure to digital devices among young children may contribute to developmental delays, poor motor skills and even rising health concerns.

With over 20 years' experience, she has observed a sharp rise in speech and developmental issues among children.

"Previously, we would see only one child in two years with developmental delays. Now, it is around 10 out of every 100 children in my kindergarten."

She also noted an increase in cases of "lazy eye", a condition affecting vision.

"In the past, maybe one child in three years would have this problem. Now, I see around three cases in just one year."

Komathi said children's social skills have also deteriorated, with many becoming more withdrawn and struggling to show respect to teachers and parents.

She added that children today are quieter and less confident in social interactions.

"Many do not know how to hold a pencil properly or even how to chew and swallow their food correctly," she said.

She cited excessive screen time as a major factor.

"Parents are busy on their phones, so they give phones to their children. Kids start believing 'the phone is my world'. I urge parents to set limits and reintroduce outdoor play."

"Parents need to change first. If they make an effort, their children will follow."



FESTIVE OUTING ... A family shopping for Hari Raya clothes and accessories during the Anjung Syawal Festival at Dataran Putrajaya yesterday. – ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

Gobind takes helm at DAP, continuing family legacy

GEORGE TOWN: With decades of governance experience across various levels, Gobind Singh Deo has stepped into his new role as Democratic Action Party (DAP) national chairman.

His election marks a generational shift in the party's leadership and positions him as the torchbearer of his late father Karpal Singh's political legacy.

Known as the "Tiger of Jelutong", Karpal was a towering figure in Malaysian politics, advocating justice and parliamentary integrity.

Gobind, the second son of five siblings, now faces the challenge of leading the 59-year-old party within the ruling coalition as it prepares for

the 16th general election.

Universiti Sains Malaysia Political Sociology senior lecturer and political analyst Prof Datuk Dr Sivamurugan Pandian said Gobind is well equipped for the task, citing his clear ideological stance and administrative experience spanning party, state and federal levels.

"Gobind and Karpal led DAP at different times but both emerged as leaders when change was needed."

"Karpal rose to prominence while the party was struggling to build support as an opposition force. Now that DAP is part of the government, Gobind must recalibrate the party's direction and engage members in a

way that aligns with political realities."

While Karpal was known for his uncompromising stance, often clashing with political opponents in Parliament, Gobind balances assertiveness with diplomacy, which is an approach that could prove crucial as he works alongside DAP secretary-general Anthony Loke to maintain party unity and relevance.

Gobind's victory in the Central Executive Committee elections was particularly significant.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Political Science senior lecturer Jamaie Hamil said Gobind's rise to chairmanship was expected.

"Gobind is no stranger to

leadership. His aura and influence, inherited from Karpal, undoubtedly played a role in convincing party delegates to elect him."

However, Jamaie cautioned against drawing direct comparisons between the two leaders as while both are known for their strong parliamentary presence, their approaches may differ.

"Gobind has his father's firmness but he operates in a different era. Unlike Karpal's combative style, Gobind has the opportunity to shape DAP's trajectory through strategic engagement rather than confrontation."

DAP veteran Datuk Seri Phee Boon

Poh believes Gobind would uphold and expand upon the principles instilled by his late father while ensuring stability within the party amid Malaysia's evolving politics.

"The party's principles remain the same but its approach has evolved. Today's politics demands more negotiation and collaboration. Gobind must lead with strength and adaptability."

The late Karpal, who served as Jelutong MP from 1978 to 1990 and Bukit Gelugor MP from 2004 to 2014, was DAP's third national chairman from 2004 until his untimely passing in a road crash in March 2014. – Bernama



M'sia expands TVET efforts to meet workforce demand

➤ Programme equips individuals with specialised knowledge and hands-on training for advanced career growth, says academic

■ BY HARITH KAMAL
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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia is ramping up efforts to strengthen its technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector to meet the growing demand for skilled workers and boost economic growth.

Once regarded as an inferior alternative to university education, TVET is now gaining recognition as a vital pathway to employment, with new government policies and industry collaborations.

Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia TVET programme head Assoc Prof Dr Marlina Mohamad said the country's initiatives to enhance TVET are showing promising results.

"TVET equips individuals with practical skills and specialised knowledge tailored to specific trades, industries or professions. It emphasises hands-on training and real-world competencies, preparing students to enter the workforce with the expertise needed for their chosen careers."

According to the National TVET Council, as of February last year, Malaysia had 1,398 TVET institutions nationwide. This included 673 public institutions under 12 ministries, 28 state government-run institutions and 697 private institutions.

Marlina said the government had introduced several initiatives to strengthen TVET, including the National TVET Policy 2030, launched in June 2024.

"The policy aims to unify TVET standards, enhance governance and promote TVET as a prestigious career pathway."

"The Education Ministry has also announced that by 2027, basic TVET skills will be integrated into primary school curricula, ensuring pupils gain early exposure to technical education. The efforts have successfully elevated TVET's status, making it a key



The Education Ministry has announced that by 2027, basic TVET skills would be integrated into primary school curricula, ensuring pupils gain early exposure to technical education. – **THESUNPIC**

contributor to Malaysia's skilled workforce and economic growth."

Despite recent advancements, Marlina said TVET still faces challenges in gaining recognition.

"Many Malaysians traditionally view university education as the ideal pathway to career success, leading to misconceptions that TVET is a secondary or less prestigious option," she said, adding that persistent beliefs about TVET careers offering fewer opportunities or lower salaries continue to hinder its acceptance.

However, she said public perception is beginning to change.

"TVET is not a 'dead-end' option but a stepping stone to greater career advancement."

"Changing the perception requires collective effort from the government, industry, schools and society," she added.

Marlina stressed that stronger industry collaboration is key to boosting TVET's reputation.

"When top companies hire TVET graduates with competitive salaries, it demonstrates the value of technical skills."

"Schools, career counsellors and parents need to be well-informed about the benefits of TVET. Providing students with hands-on exposure to technical fields from a young age and promoting TVET as an equal and respected

option alongside academic routes can gradually shift outdated perceptions."

Marlina said Malaysia's job market is evolving, with a growing demand for skilled workers in fields such as engineering, digital technology and advanced manufacturing.

"TVET plays a crucial role in preparing students for high-demand industries by equipping them with practical skills and hands-on experience that employers seek."

She cited Germany's highly skilled workforce as an example of how a robust vocational training system can drive economic growth.

"It's time to move past outdated perceptions. TVET is a first-choice education pathway that is just as valuable as traditional academic routes," she added.

In February, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi highlighted the high employability of TVET graduates.

He revealed that the national average employment rate for TVET graduates stood at 94.5%, with some institutions reporting rates as high as 98.7%.

"Many students secure jobs even before completing their studies."

"TVET prioritises skill-based learning, which directly translates into productivity."

"Employers value competency, and this is why TVET graduates are in high demand," Zahid said.

School leavers unaware of technical education option

■ BY HARITH KAMAL
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PETALING JAYA: Many school leavers are still unclear about the prospects of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and perceive it as a second-choice pathway compared with university education.

Despite it being promoted as a viable route to skilled careers, students say they receive minimal exposure to TVET, leading to misconceptions about its value and career potential.

Nur Hayfaa Qistina, 17, from Subang Jaya, shared her perspective: "I understand that TVET provides hands-on skills in areas like mechanics and electrical work. I first heard about it from my teachers, but they didn't explain much."

"Career talks and fairs at school primarily focused on university pathways such as medicine, engineering, and business, leaving TVET largely unmentioned."

"It seemed like TVET was only suggested for students who weren't academically strong."

This lack of information led Nur Hayfaa to believe that TVET was meant for those who did not intend to pursue higher education.

"People assume university leads to better jobs and higher salaries, but some don't even know what kind of career prospects TVET offers."

Nur Iman Safia, 17, from Shah Alam, said she is familiar with TVET but does not see it as the right path for her, as she plans to pursue accounting.

However, she acknowledged TVET's benefits.

"I think it is a great option for students who enjoy working with their hands and want to enter the workforce quickly."

"I've heard of success stories from seniors who found good jobs after TVET education, so I believe it is valuable," she said.

Nur Iman also disagreed with the notion that TVET is only for students who

struggle academically.

"I know smart students who simply prefer hands-on learning over theory."

"Unfortunately, many people still assume TVET is for those who can't do well in school. But, it's not true – it's just a different way of learning," she said.

In January, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi announced that students without SPM qualifications could enroll in TVET programmes. He said over 10,000 students did not sit for the SPM in 2023 and the previous year, adding that the initiative aims to provide these students with a second chance to pursue such courses.

"We hope to establish a collaborative effort between the National TVET Council and the Education Ministry to identify these students," he said, adding that the government was streamlining technical institutions to offer more options and better opportunities for students.

Leftovers from bazaars donated to underprivileged

GEORGE TOWN: Ramadan bazaar traders in Penang have been donating unsold items to those in need to prevent food waste.

Local Government, Town and Country Planning Committee chairman Jason H'ng Mooi Lye said this was more meaningful than traders discarding the unsold food.

"Not only the traders, but the organisers of the bazaars are also very attentive to the matter and always ensure that food or drinks are not wasted at their stalls."

"If there are any leftovers, they will be donated to those in need, including at mosques, surau and other places."

He added that based on monitoring by the Penang Island City Council and Seberang Perai City Council, the cleanliness level at the bazaars was also found to be satisfactory.

H'ng said several other agencies, including the Penang Health Department, have also been monitoring the bazaars to ensure that traders comply with regulations and cleanliness standards.

He added that both local authorities place significant emphasis on the issue of foreign nationals trading at the bazaars, as the matter has been clearly outlined in the offer letters to traders.

"Throughout this fasting month, there are 100 bazaars with 4,574 traders selling various food and beverage. So far, we have taken action against two stalls operated by foreign traders."

Meanwhile, Penang Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry director S. Jegan said overall inspections at bazaars in the state over the past two weeks found that traders are displaying prices clearly and reasonably.

"We have only received three complaints from all of Penang. One is a case under the Price Control and Anti-Profiteering Act 2011, while the other two are still being investigated." – Bernama

Crocodile populations to be monitored after sightings at beach

KOTA KINABALU: The Kota Kinabalu City Hall has intensified monitoring of crocodile populations in Sungai Darau near the city hall depot workshop and other hotspot areas.

Mayor Datuk Seri Dr Sabin Samitah, who heads the Crocodile Threat Management Committee, said the city hall had also received reports of crocodile sighting in the sea near the Tanjung Lipat beach that was shared on social media.

"The monitoring is conducted in collaboration with various agencies, including the police, Sabah Fire and Rescue Department, Sabah Civil Defence Force and the Wildlife Department."

"The committee has also taken proactive steps, including conducting a study to estimate the crocodile population in areas under the city hall purview, installing warning signs in high-risk locations, and setting up closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in hotspot areas."

Those with information on crocodile sightings around Kota Kinabalu City are urged to report them immediately to the Sabah Wildlife Department hotline at 089-561 527.

Meanwhile, on its Facebook page, the Sabah Civil Defence Force said it was monitoring the Tanjung Aru Beach area with the Wildlife Department following the sighting of a 1.5m-long crocodile. – Bernama

Ismail Sabri called to MACC again to provide statement

➤ Former PM summoned to commission HQ for fifth time after failing to attend session yesterday

PUTRAJAYA: The recording of former prime minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob's statement at the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) headquarters over allegations of corruption and money laundering will be held today.

According to MACC sources, Ismail Sabri was unable to attend yesterday's statement recording session.

Media representatives had begun gathering outside the MACC headquarters as early as 9am yesterday to follow developments as Ismail Sabri was expected to provide his statement for a fifth time.

The MACC investigation into Ismail Sabri began on Dec 11, 2024, when he was ordered to declare his assets.

He officially submitted his declaration on Feb 10 and subsequently appeared at the MACC headquarters to give provide a statement on Feb 19.

Since then, he has been summoned several times to assist in the ongoing investigation.

Over the past week, he was present for five hours on March 13, almost six hours the next day and seven hours on Monday.

The investigation focuses on the expenditure and acquisition of funds for the promotion and publicity of the Keluarga Malaysia programme during Ismail Sabri's tenure as prime minister from August 2021 to November 2022.

On Monday, MACC chief commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki was reported to have said several new files had been opened in relation to the investigation.

This followed new information received, with many more matters to be presented to Ismail Sabri.

Azam also said the investigation is being conducted in relation to corruption, abuse of power and money laundering.

According to him, the investigation is not only based on the original file related to the Keluarga Malaysia issue but also on new information and MACC intelligence, Bernama reported.

The case is being investigated under the MACC Act 2009 and the Prevention of Money Laundering, Prevention of Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001.

On March 3, Azam was reported to have said Ismail Sabri is a suspect in the investigation into the corruption and money laundering case.

This followed the discovery of about RM170 million in cash in various currencies and 16kg of gold bars in a safe house during an MACC raid.

MAHB tightens wildlife smuggling checks

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd (MAHB) has reaffirmed its commitment to addressing wildlife smuggling at the KL International Airport (KLIA) through tighter security measures and closer cooperation with enforcement agencies.

As the operator of KLIA, MAHB said its aviation security team remains focused on preventing illegal activities that could threaten passenger safety and air transport.

"While our baggage handling system is designed to prioritise critical security concerns, MAHB remains committed to combatting wildlife smuggling through close collaboration with all relevant authorities," it said in a statement.

MAHB has also contributed resources to boost detection capabilities.

In June 2024, it donated two Belgian Malinois K9 detection dogs to the Wildlife and National Parks Department, trained to detect the presence of endangered species listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, including elephant ivory, rhinoceros horn, pangolin scales, snakes and turtles.

Recent seizures include five endangered Asian Koel birds worth RM65,000 at klia2 and 4,386 endangered pig-nosed turtles concealed in seven suitcases bound for Hanoi. – Bernama

RM14.5 million worth of e-waste seized

KUCHING: The Sarawak General Operations Force brigade seized over RM14.5 million worth of electronic waste in three raids across the city during Op Hazard Sarawak on Monday.

Its commander SAC Che Ghazali Che Awang said the raids, conducted between 10am and 4pm, were carried out in collaboration with the Sarawak Department of Environment and local authorities.

He added that nine individuals, including a local woman and a foreign man aged between 26 and 55, were arrested in connection with the case.

"Further inspections uncovered 525.45 tonnes of unprocessed e-waste components valued at RM14,695,500, along with three heavy vehicles worth RM2.4 million, five machines and various types of equipment worth RM3 million and other items worth RM1.5 million," he said in a statement yesterday.

All confiscated items have been handed to the department and authorities for further investigation under the Environmental Quality Act 1974, Environmental Quality (Scheduled Waste) Regulations 2005 and the Padawan Municipal Council by-laws. – Bernama

Father, son die in fiery trailer crash

IPOH: A man and his son were burned to death after the sand-laden trailer they were travelling in crashed into the rear of a trailer carrying cotton bales and burst into flames at Km331.8 of the North-South Expressway (northbound) yesterday.

Perak Fire and Rescue Department assistant director of operations Sabarodzi Nor Ahmad said the operations centre received an emergency call about the accident at 7.46am.

He said a team of officers and personnel from the Bidar Fire and Rescue station was despatched to the scene and arrived at 7.57am.

"The operations commander reported that the incident involved a sand-laden trailer, which crashed into the rear of a cotton-loaded trailer.

"The male driver of the sand-laden trailer, believed to be in his 40s, was found trapped inside the burnt-out vehicle.

"Another victim, the driver's son, in his 20s, was also found burned to death, and the bodies were removed by the rescue team," he said. – Bernama



HUGE HAUL ... North Seberang Perai narcotics crime investigation department investigating officer Insp Nurul Syahirah Muhamad Nor and Insp Safwan Hasim displaying slabs of ganja and a firearm seized in two raids during a press conference yesterday in Kepala Batas, Penang. – **BERNAMAPICT**

M'sian rescued from Myanmar scam centre arrested

KUALA LUMPUR: One of the 25 Malaysians rescued from a job scam syndicate in Myanmar on March 12 was arrested after police investigations revealed he had played a role in recruiting locals.

Bukit Aman Criminal Investigation Department (Intelligence/Operations) deputy director Datuk Fadil Marsus said the 20-year-old man was detained after police conducted screening and interrogation of all the victims who were brought back by bus from Tak Province, Thailand.

"We keep rescuing them but not all of them are victims. Out of the 25, only six individuals are genuine victims.

"These victims will be given an interim protection order and during the investigation period, we will ensure their safety. Meanwhile, the others are not genuine victims. So, it is likely they

are recruiters, facilitators or scam workers who have been to the location, before asking to be rescued," he told a press conference at Bukit Aman on Monday.

He said the man would be remanded for seven days for further investigations and police have opened five investigation papers under Section 12 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants (Atipsom) Act 2007, involving contingents from Kuala Lumpur and Johor.

The other rescued Malaysians are still under investigation, while genuine victims have been granted an interim protection order for 21 days.

On March 12, 25 Malaysians who were victims of a job scam syndicate were repatriated via Mae Sot, Tak province in northern Thailand after being handed over by Myanmar authorities to the Malaysian embassy through Thai authorities.

Meanwhile, 489 police reports have been received from Jan 1, 2021 to March 13, involving 637 individuals – 517 men and 120 women – aged between 22 and 39, who fell victim to overseas job scams, including in Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos.

Of the total, 504 individuals were rescued, while 133 remain stranded abroad.

"Investigations found that 83% of the victims had an educational background up to the Malaysian Certificate of Education level, and the primary medium through which job offers were received was social media platforms such as Facebook, Telegram and WeChat, followed by invitations from friends or family.

"A study by police also found that not all individuals rescued from human trafficking syndicates meet the definition of victims under the Atipsom Act," he said. – Bernama

M'sian brands in high demand in Thailand

PATTANI: Popular Malaysian fashion brands are experiencing overwhelming demand in Thailand's southern provinces as local Muslims prepare for the upcoming *Aidilfitri* celebrations.

A survey by Bernama found that Malaysian brands are attracting large crowds, particularly on weekends throughout Ramadan.

Customer Abdul Hakim Sabudin, 19, from Banan Seta district in Yala, travelled about 100km to Pattani to purchase his preferred *baju melayu*.

"I love Malaysian Malay attire because of its modern designs that align with current fashion trends.

"This is my third consecutive year travelling to Pattani to buy new clothes for *Aidilfitri*," he told Bernama.

Abdul Hakim said Malaysian traditional wear is affordable, of high quality, and available in various designs and sizes.

Another customer Wae Nurman Madiyah, 27, noted that Malaysian fashion brands are now the top choice among young Muslim women in Thailand due to their quality and contemporary designs.

"In the past, people had to travel to Malaysia to get these brands.

"But now, many Malaysian brands have opened branches in Pattani," she said.

Veteran actress grateful for timely Hari Raya assistance

➤ 82-year-old artiste among 50 recipients recognised for contribution to growth of national media and creative industries

KUALA LUMPUR: Veteran actress Margaret Gan expressed gratitude for being among 50 recipients of aid at the "Raya Sama-Sama" event held at the Tun Abdul Razak Broadcasting and Information Institute.

The event, held on Monday night, was organised by the Communications Ministry in collaboration with the Malaysian National News Agency (Bernama) and National Film Development

Corporation Malaysia (Finas).

Gan, 82, said the assistance was an unexpected blessing, especially as it would help her prepare for the upcoming *Syawal* celebrations.

"I am truly happy, and this support comes at just the right time," she told Bernama after receiving the aid from Communications Minister Datuk Fahmi Fadzil.

Also present were Communications Ministry secretary-general Datuk Mohamad Fauzi Md Isa, Bernama chief executive officer Datin Paduka Nur-ul Afida Kamaludin, editor-in-chief Arul Rajoo Durar Raj, deputy editor-in-chief (economy) Azlina Aziz, and head of management services and finance department Sharifah Zaini Syed Zain.

Other guests at the event included the institute director-general of Broadcasting Datuk Suhaimi Sulaiman, director Roslan Ariffin, and Finas deputy director-general (management) Datin Rozita Waty Ridzuan.

Veteran singer Ayati Ahmad Tasrip, 66, who also received assistance, said the support was

crucial, especially for ageing artistes facing financial difficulties.

"Opportunities for us to act or sing are scarce now. Special slots for veteran performers on television are rare, but *Alhamdulillah*, there are still those who remember us," said Ayati, known for her 1990s hit *Khazanah Dari Malaya*.

Malaysian Veteran Artistes Welfare Association deputy president Sandakiah Azez described the event as a meaningful recognition for veteran artistes who have contributed to the entertainment industry.

"This assistance is invaluable, as the association relies solely on contributions from the government, external parties, individuals, and private donors," she said.

The "Raya Sama-Sama" seeks to enhance the welfare of 26 media practitioners and industry veterans who have contributed to the growth of the national media and creative industries.

Veteran artistes received cash aid from Finas, while media practitioners benefited from assistance via Tabung Kasih@Hawana. They also received shopping vouchers from Mydin and Yayasan AEON Malaysia.



Gan receiving the aid from Fahmi at the event. — **BERNAMAPIC**

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Indonesia to assess scam centre returnees

➤ Suspected perpetrators face legal action

JAKARTA: Indonesia will question hundreds of its citizens arriving in the capital yesterday after they were rescued from online scam compounds in Myanmar, the largest batch of arrivals in the country following a multinational crackdown on the operation.

Myanmar's Myawaddy scam centres are part of a Southeast Asia network involving criminal gangs trafficking hundreds of thousands of people to help generate illicit revenues running into billions of dollars a year, according to the United Nations.

About 200 Indonesians arrived at Jakarta's airport yesterday from Myawaddy via Thailand and another 200 will land later, Security Minister Budi Gunawan told a news conference.

"The Indonesian government cooperated with the Thai government and the Chinese government to rescue and repatriate 554 Indonesians," he said.

Around 154 more are expected to arrive today, Budi said.

They were among 7,000 people from different nationalities freed from scam centres in Myawaddy following a multinational crackdown to dismantle the illegal compounds.

"We will conduct an assessment to find out which ones are victims or perpetrators.

"We want the Southeast Asia region free of online scams," he said.

The 554 people, consisting of 105 women and 449 men, will be taken to a dormitory usually reserved for pilgrims returning from Mecca where they will be questioned by police, he said.

Those cleared would be allowed to return home but those suspected of being willing participants in financial crimes would face legal action in Indonesia.

Footage showed the arriving Indonesians wearing red masks and bandanas and being



A returnee making his way to a dormitory at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport yesterday. – AFP/PIC

welcomed by authorities, including Foreign Minister Sugiono.

Some of them cried and hugged the officials. Budi said some of them were beaten and given electric shocks before being rescued. Others were also threatened that their body parts would be surgically removed if they failed to meet targets set by the cartel, he said.

"Be careful when you make friends on social media. I am the victim of social media," a survivor with the initials DN told reporters.

Earlier this month, another group of 84 Indonesians returned home from Myanmar while 70 others remain in the country. Some of them were being detained and a few have refused to go home, Budi said.

Aside from Indonesia, China and India have also repatriated their citizens from Myawaddy but thousands still remain in the area including those from African nations.

Authorities in Myanmar, under pressure from ally China, have cracked down on the scam compounds.

Between 2020 and September last year, Jakarta repatriated more than 4,700 Indonesians entangled in online scam operations from countries including Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam, according to Foreign Ministry data.

The United Nations estimates that as many as 120,000 people may be working in Myanmar scam centres against their will. – Reuters/AFP

Taiwan probes duo over 'unification' comments

TAIPEI: Two Chinese influencers living in Taiwan are under investigation over their comments "advocating unification" with China, a Taipei immigration official said yesterday, days after the agency ordered a third Chinese influencer to leave the island.

The National Immigration Agency (NIA) was investigating two influencers identified as En-qi and Xiao-wei over their "statements advocating unification", a NIA official said.

The two women posted videos on Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok.

Over the weekend, NIA ordered another influencer identified by her surname Liu to leave Taiwan after she allegedly called for "unification by force" in her videos.

"The NIA emphasises that, due to Liu's advocacy of unification by force, which has caused significant public concern and posed potential threats to national security and social stability, she must comply with the departure order within the given timeframe," the NIA said in a statement on Sunday.

"Failure to do so will result in enforced deportation in accordance with the law."

The NIA official said yesterday that Liu "must leave the country within 10 days, starting the day after the letter (departure order) is received".

"The letter has already been sent. I cannot confirm whether it has been received or not," the official said.

Liu, who claims to be from Hunan, shared a compilation of some of her videos with her more than 485,000 followers on Monday.

In one video, she said "Taiwan has always been China's territory, but now DPP is pushing Taiwan into the danger of war", referring to the ruling Democratic Progressive Party of President Lai Ching-te.

Liu said "according to Article 8 of the Anti-Secession Law ... the mainland no longer needs any other reason to use force against Taiwan!"

"I love the mainland and Taiwan. I support peaceful reunification because both sides of the Taiwan Strait are Chinese people. Chinese people should not fight Chinese people," she said. – AFP

South Korea tightens security for opposition leader

SEOUL: South Korean police stepped up security for the leader of the main opposition Democratic Party, after lawmakers had warned of a potential assassination plot targeting Lee Jae-myung.

In January last year, Lee was stabbed in the neck by a man who lunged at him with a knife after asking for his autograph.

The man was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Tensions have been running high in South Korea since President Yoon Suk Yeol briefly imposed martial law last December, triggering the country's worst political crisis in decades.

His martial law imposition and its fallout have widened deep social rifts between conservatives and liberals and put pressure on institutions.

Yoon faces a criminal trial on charges of insurrection, while the Constitutional Court is also expected to rule in coming days on whether to uphold his impeachment and permanently strip him of his powers.

Police have been preparing for the risk of clashes, with both Yoon's supporters and his opponents due to hold large rallies when the court makes its decision.

South Korea's acting President Choi Sang-mok repeated yesterday a call for citizens to accept and respect the court's ruling. – Reuters

Court refuses to stop arrest of fugitive police chief

COLOMBO: A Sri Lankan court refused on Monday to quash an arrest warrant for the island nation's fugitive police chief who is wanted over an officer's death in a botched raid.

Inspector-General Deshabandu Tennakoon has been in hiding since the arrest warrant was issued last month and police have made a public appeal to help find him.

He stands accused of authorising an ill-fated drug bust in 2023, allegedly against internal regulations, that sparked a gun battle between competing police units.

Despite Tennakoon being in hiding, he still managed to file a writ urging the arrest warrant be cancelled, which the Court of Appeal refused to grant in Monday's ruling.

Police said on Sunday they had deployed six special units to track down Tennakoon but were

only able to trace his wife and son, who claimed they were unaware of his whereabouts.

Failure to find the police chief has "undermined public confidence in the police force", spokesman Buddhika Manatunga told reporters.

A foreign travel ban has been imposed on Tennakoon in case he tries to flee the island.

The state prosecutor told another court hearing last week that evidence had emerged of Tennakoon operating a paramilitary hit squad to carry out illegal activities.

A magistrate ordered Tennakoon's arrest in February following allegations he authorised an illegal raid in the southern coastal resort town of Weligama.

Local police, unaware of the undercover operation, confronted the unit, sparking a gun

battle in which one officer was killed and another critically wounded. No drugs were found.

Tennakoon was appointed police chief in November 2023, but the move was challenged in the Supreme Court, which suspended him last July pending the outcome of a separate court case.

The next hearing in that case is due in May.

He was given the top job despite the country's highest court ruling in another case that he had tortured a suspect in custody by rubbing menthol balm on his genitals.

The Supreme Court had ordered Tennakoon to pay half a million rupees (RM7,111) to the victim in compensation, but the government at the time ignored judicial orders to take disciplinary action against him. – AFP

Three senior cops shot dead in gambling raid

JAKARTA: Three police officers were shot dead during a raid on an illegal gambling site in Way Kanan district, Lampung province, on the southern tip of Sumatra.

The officers were shot by a gunman on Monday while they were at the site in Karang Manik village, Negara Batin sub-district.

They were identified as Negara Batin Police Chief Inspector Lusiyanto, Chief Brigadier Petrus Apriyanto and Brigadier Two Ghalib Surya Ganta

from the Way Kanan Police Criminal Investigation Unit.

Lampung Police spokesperson Commissioner Yuni Iswandari said a 17-member team from Way Kanan Police, which included officers from Negara Batin Police, had been dispatched following reports of illegal gambling activity.

"At the scene, they came under fire. Three officers were killed in the line of duty," she said,

adding that the bodies were taken to Lampung Police Hospital for post-mortem.

Senior officers from Lampung Police arrived at the scene as authorities ramped up efforts to investigate and apprehend those responsible, Yuni said.

Indonesia has strict gambling laws, with Article 303 of the Criminal Code imposing severe penalties on those involved in organising or taking part in such activities. – Bernama



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Stranded space station astronauts head home

Return caps end to nine-month mission

WASHINGTON: Nasa astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams departed the International Space Station early yesterday in a SpaceX capsule for a long-awaited trip back to Earth, nine months after their faulty Boeing Starliner craft upended what was to be a roughly week-long test mission.

Wilmore and Williams, two veteran astronauts and retired US Navy test pilots, strapped inside their Crew Dragon spacecraft along with two other astronauts and undocked from the orbiting laboratory at 1.05am ET (1.05pm in Kuala Lumpur), embarking on a 17-hour trip to Earth.

The four-person crew, formally part of Nasa's Crew-9 astronaut rotation mission, was scheduled for a splashdown off Florida's coast later at 5.57pm ET (1.57am today in Kuala Lumpur).

The astronaut pair had launched into space as Starliner's first crew in June for what was expected to be an eight-day test mission.

But issues with Starliner's propulsion system led to cascading delays in their return home, culminating in a Nasa decision last year to have them take a SpaceX craft back this year as part of the agency's crew rotation schedule.

The mission has captured the attention of President Donald Trump, who upon taking office in January called for a quicker return of Wilmore and Williams and alleged that former president Joe Biden "abandoned" them on the ISS for political reasons.

SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, a close adviser to Trump, echoed his call for an earlier return. SpaceX's Crew Dragon is the United States' only orbital-class crew spacecraft, which Boeing had hoped its Starliner would compete with before the mission with Wilmore and Williams threw its development future into uncertainty.

The astronauts will be flown to quarters at the space agency's Johnson Space Center in

Houston for several days of health checks before Nasa flight surgeons approve they can go home to their families.

Living in space for months can affect the human body, from muscle atrophy to possible vision impairment.

Upon splashing down, Wilmore and Williams will have logged 286 days in space – longer than the average six-month ISS mission length, but far short of US record holder Frank Rubio. His continuous 371 days in space ending in 2023 was the unexpected result of a coolant leak on a Russian spacecraft.

Williams, capping her third spaceflight, will have tallied 608 cumulative days in space, the second most for any US astronaut after Peggy Whitson's 675 days. Russian cosmonaut Oleg Kononenko set the world record last year at 878 cumulative days.

Swept up in Nasa's routine astronaut rotation schedule, Wilmore and Williams could not begin their return to Earth until their replacement crew arrived, to maintain adequate US staffing levels. – Reuters

Australia slams targeting of activist

SYDNEY: Australia voiced unease yesterday over anonymous letters reportedly offering hefty rewards for information on a Hong Kong activist now living in Melbourne.

Australian citizen Kevin Yam, a lawyer and longtime Hong Kong pro-democracy activist, was targeted in letters that carried his photo and alleged national security offences.

The letters, first reported in *The Guardian* newspaper, offered a reward of HK\$1 million (RM568,827) to anyone who could provide information about him and the allegations or "take him to Hong Kong or Australia Metropolitan Police".

They were sent to homes next to two Melbourne locations cited in the notices as being linked to Yam, the paper said.

"The Australian government will not tolerate surveillance, harassment or intimidation against individuals or family members here in Australia – this undermines our national sovereignty and the security and safety of Australians," said a spokesperson for Foreign Minister Penny Wong.

"We are raising our concerns directly with Chinese and Hong Kong authorities."

In a message on social media, Yam said he would continue to live his "everyday life".

"I will not voluntarily return to Hong Kong before it is free," he said.

"I will not kill myself."

The letters were not signed but asked for information to be sent to a Hong Kong police email address used for tip-offs on wanted people.

Yam reportedly returned to Australia in 2022 after two decades in Hong Kong.

In 2023, Hong Kong chief executive John Lee called on eight overseas activists including Yam to turn themselves in for violating national security law.

At the time, he backed a police decision to offer HK\$1 million for information leading to their arrests, and warned the activists to surrender. – AFP



STINGING COMMENT ...

A cardboard figure known as a 'Ninot' titled 'Donald the Hutt' depicting President Donald Trump is displayed during the Fallas festival in Valencia, Spain. The fallas, gigantic cardboard structures that portray current events and celebrities on which individual figures or ninots are placed, are burned in the streets of Valencia yearly on March 19 as a tribute to San Jose (Saint Joseph), patron saint of the carpenters' guild.

– AFPPI

US to execute four death row inmates this week

WASHINGTON: A 46-year-old man convicted of rape and murder was scheduled to be put to death by nitrogen gas in the southern state of Louisiana yesterday, the first of four executions this week in the United States.

Jessie Hoffman, who was sentenced to death for the 1996 murder of Molly Elliott, a 28-year-old advertising executive, will be the first person executed in Louisiana in 15 years.

A district court judge last week stayed Hoffman's execution on the grounds that the use of nitrogen gas may amount to cruel and unusual punishment, which is banned under the US Constitution.

But the stay was lifted by the US Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Only one other US state, Alabama, has carried out executions by nitrogen hypoxia,

which involves pumping nitrogen gas into a facemask, causing the prisoner to suffocate.

The vast majority of US executions since the Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976 have been performed using lethal injection.

Hoffman, a parking lot attendant, was convicted in 1998 of abducting Elliott in New Orleans as she went to retrieve her car and join her husband for dinner.

Hoffman's lawyers have appealed to the Supreme Court to halt the execution on the grounds that the nitrogen gas would "interfere with Jessie's ability to practise his Buddhist meditative breathing".

"The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that prisoners must be allowed to practise their religion as their lives are being taken by

execution," said Cecelia Kappel, one of Hoffman's attorneys.

"There are plenty of execution methods Louisiana could adopt that would not interfere with Jessie's ability to practise his meditative breathing, and only one, nitrogen gas, that makes it impossible for him to do so," she said.

Three other executions are scheduled in the United States this week.

Aaron Gunches, 53, is to be executed by lethal injection in Arizona today for the murder of Ted Price, his girlfriend's ex-husband.

Wendell Grissom, 56, is to be executed by lethal injection in Oklahoma tomorrow for shooting and killing Amber Matthews, 23, in 2005 during a home robbery.

Edward James, 63, is to be executed by lethal injection in Florida tomorrow. – AFP

Kiribati eyes deep-sea mining deal

SYDNEY: Pacific nation Kiribati says it is exploring a deep-sea mining partnership with China, dangling access to a vast patch of Pacific Ocean harbouring coveted metals and minerals.

Beijing has been ramping up efforts to court Pacific nations sitting on lucrative seafloor deposits of cobalt, nickel and copper – recently signing a cooperation deal with Cook Islands.

Kiribati opened discussions with Chinese ambassador Zhou Limin after a longstanding agreement with leading deep-sea mining outfit The Metals Company fell through.

"The talk provides an exciting opportunity to explore potential collaboration for the sustainable exploration of the deep-ocean resources in Kiribati," the government said in a statement.

Pacific nations Kiribati, Cook Islands and Nauru sit at the forefront of a highly contentious push to mine the depths of the ocean.

Kiribati holds rights for deep-sea mining exploration across a 75,000 sq km swathe of the Pacific, in a region known as the Clarion Clipperton Zone.

Through state-backed subsidiary Marawa Research, Kiribati had been working with Canada-based The Metals Company to explore the mineral deposits.

But that agreement was terminated "mutually" at the end of last year, The Metals Company said.

A Kiribati fisheries official said the nation was now exploring opportunities with other foreign partners.

The Metals Company said Kiribati's mining rights were "less commercially favourable" than other projects with Pacific nations Nauru and Tonga. – AFP

KREMLIN CONCERNED ABOUT CASUALTIES

MOSCOW: The Kremlin said yesterday it was concerned by the large number of civilian casualties after Israel struck Gaza and hoped that peace would return. Its spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "Undoubtedly, it's another deterioration in the situation (in Gaza) and another spiral of escalation that is causing us concern. Especially concerning are the reports of high casualties among the civilian population. We are monitoring the situation very closely and, of course, we are waiting for it to return to a peaceful course." – Reuters

WEST BANK ANNEXATION RAMPED UP: UN

GENEVA: Israel has expanded and consolidated settlements in the occupied West Bank as part of the steady integration of these territories into the State of Israel, in breach of international law, the UN human rights office said yesterday. A report to be presented to the UN Human Rights Council later this month comes amid growing fears of annexation and policy shifts under President Donald Trump and new settler outposts in areas of the West Bank seen as part of a future Palestinian state. "The transfer by Israel of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies amounts to a war crime," UN High Commissioner Volker Turk said. – Reuters

EU: Russia, China hitting West with digital arsenals

BRUSSELS: The European Union yesterday said Russia and China were using "massive digital arsenals" to interfere in Western democracies, while their messaging on the war in Ukraine had become increasingly aligned.

"Foreign information manipulation and interference is a major security threat to the EU," foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said in a report.

"We must not underestimate the power that this has over us"

In its latest annual report on the subject, Brussels said last year it tracked disinformation attacks against over 80 countries and more than 200 organisations.

The war in Ukraine remains a major target for Russia but events such as the Olympics in Paris and farmers' protests in Germany were also in the crosshairs.

"The aim is to destabilise our societies, damage our democracies, drive wedges between us and our partners and undermine the EU's global standing," Kallas said.

The report said Brussels has become better at joining up the dots to expose the campaigns by Moscow and Beijing to shape opinion in the EU.

It said Russia uses a complex web of "of state and non-state actors" from social media influencers to state media and official spokespeople to create and amplify its messages.

China, for its part, appears to be stepping up the use of "both private PR companies and influencers to create, amplify and launder content aligned with China's political interests worldwide".

The report stopped short of accusing Russia and China of actively colluding to spread disinformation, saying the "cross-pollination between the two seems to remain largely opportunistic". – AFP

Airstrikes kill 326 in Gaza

Israeli military says campaign will expand

CAIRO: Israeli airstrikes pounded Gaza, killing 326 people, Palestinian health authorities said yesterday, collapsing a two-month ceasefire with Hamas as Israel vowed to use force to free its remaining hostages in the strip.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had instructed the military to take "strong action" against Hamas in Gaza in response to the group's refusal to release hostages and rejection of ceasefire proposals.

"Israel will, from now on, act against Hamas with increasing military strength," his office said in a statement.

Hamas accused Israel of overturning the hard-fought ceasefire deal agreed in January, leaving the fate of 59 hostages still held in Gaza uncertain.

Strikes in Gaza were reported in

many locations. Health Ministry officials said many of the dead were children.

In hospitals strained by 15 months of bombardment, piles of bodies in white plastic sheets smeared with blood could be seen stacked up as casualties were brought in.

The Israeli military said it hit dozens of targets, and that the attacks would continue for as long as necessary and extend beyond airstrikes, raising the prospect that Israeli ground troops could resume fighting.

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory urged for the ceasefire in Gaza to be immediately reinstated.

"Waves of airstrikes occurred across the Gaza strip since the early hours of the morning ... This is unconscionable," Muhannad Hadi said in a statement.

Israeli media said Israel was opening shelters in commercial hub Tel Aviv to prepare for possible retaliation from Hamas or Yemen.

In Washington, a White House spokesperson said Israel had consulted the US administration before it carried out the strikes, which the military said targeted mid-level Hamas commanders and leadership officials as well as infrastructure belonging to the group.

"Hamas could have released hostages to extend the ceasefire but instead chose refusal and war," White House spokesperson Brian Hughes said.

In Gaza, residents said Israeli tanks shelled areas in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, forcing many families who had returned to their areas after the ceasefire began to leave their homes and head north to Khan Younis.

Negotiating teams from Israel and Hamas had been in Doha as mediators from Egypt and Qatar sought to bridge the gap between the two sides after the end of an initial phase in the ceasefire, which saw 33 Israeli hostages and five Thais returned by groups in Gaza in exchange for some 2,000

Palestinian prisoners.

With the backing of the United States, Israel had been pressing for the return of the remaining 59 hostages still held in Gaza in exchange for a longer-term truce.

However Hamas had been insisting on moving to negotiations for a permanent end to the war and a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, in accordance with the terms of the original ceasefire agreement.

"We demand that the mediators hold Netanyahu and the Zionist occupation fully responsible for violating and overturning the agreement," the group said.

Each side has accused the other of failing to respect the terms of the January agreement, and there were hiccups during the first phase. But until now, a full return to the fighting had been avoided.

Israel had blocked deliveries of aid from entering Gaza and had threatened on numerous occasions to resume fighting if Hamas did not agree to return the hostages it still holds. – Reuters



Displaced Palestinians sifting through the rubble in a school-turned-camp after a strike in Gaza City yesterday. – AFP/IC

Houthis won't 'dial down' under pressure

DUBAI: Yemen's Houthis will not "dial down" their action against Israeli shipping in the Red Sea in response to US military pressure or appeals from the group's allies such as Iran, the group's foreign minister said.

Jamal Amer spoke to Reuters late on Monday after the US launched a wave of strikes in areas of Yemen controlled by the Houthis, who said last week they were resuming attacks on Red Sea shipping to support Palestinians in Gaza.

Two senior Iranian officials said Iran had delivered a verbal message to the Houthi envoy in Tehran on Friday to cool tensions and that Iran's foreign minister asked Oman, which has mediated with the Houthis, to convey a similar message to the group when he visited Muscat on Sunday.

Both officials asked not to be named.

Iran has not made any public comment about recent outreach to the Houthis over their renewed action. Tehran says the group takes decisions independently.

President Donald Trump said on Monday he would hold Iran responsible for any attacks carried out by the Houthis.

"There will be no talk of any dialling down of operations before ending the aid blockade in Gaza. Iran is not interfering in our decision but what is happening is that it mediates sometimes but it cannot dictate things," Amer said, in his first comments on the issue to a foreign news agency.

Speaking from Yemen's capital Sanaa, which has been hit by strikes, he said he had not been informed of

any message Iran delivered to the Houthi envoy in Tehran.

There were messages from other powers to dial down, he said, but added: "Now we see that Yemen is at war with the US and that means that we have a right to defend ourselves with all possible means, so escalation is likely."

Iran has shown increasing concern it could be drawn deeper into conflict with the United States. Iran and Israel exchanged direct strikes for the first time last year as the Gaza war escalated.

Trump, who withdrew the US from a 2015 deal between Iran and six major powers that curbed its sensitive nuclear work in exchange for sanctions relief, has stepped up a "maximum pressure" campaign of sanctions on Iran since returning to office for a second term in January.

"(The US) is threatening Iran and hitting Yemen. Now all scenarios are possible. We will do what they will do to us. If they are hitting us from (aircraft carrier *USS Harry S. Truman*), we will retaliate by hitting *Truman*," the Houthi foreign minister said.

While Iran champions the Houthis, the group says it is aligned with Tehran without being a puppet.

Experts on Yemen, where the Houthis expanded control during years of civil war, say the group seems mainly motivated by domestic concerns and support base.

The Houthis said on March 12 they had resumed attacks on Israeli ships using routes that pass through the Red Sea after the group said Israel had not met a Houthi deadline for ending an aid blockade on Gaza. – Reuters

COMMENT by Robert Gass



IT is midnight in Rantau Panjang, Kelantan. Ten-year-old Ameera finds herself surrounded by water. The floods have crept into the house that is built three feet above ground.

Her father, Abe Ha, keeps watch as the levels rise. Outside, it reaches his chest. He urges Ameera, her sister and mother into a *sampan*. It is time to seek shelter. They push off – leaving the monsoon rains to once again claim the family's belongings and home.

Ameera's story is a stark reminder of the escalating climate disasters facing Malaysia. While many anticipate new beginnings each year, families like Ameera's hope simply for a return to normalcy.

However, the devastation worsens. In December 2024, six months' worth of rain fell in five days, flooding nine northeast states, displacing over 90,000 people.

With continued rising temperatures and increasingly frequent severe floods and landslides, climate scientists predict that a quarter of Malaysia's population may be displaced by 2030. This is no longer just an environmental issue but a child rights crisis.

Children at risk

Disasters expose children to heightened risks of violence, abuse and exploitation.

Forced from their homes, they lose safety, education and healthcare.

Parents' job losses can push them into labour, early marriage or trafficking. During the 2024 floods, at a school that was used as a temporary relief centre in Kota Baru, Kelantan, a 23-year-old male construction worker raped a 15-year-old girl – they got acquainted at the centre.

Cases like this have severe social, physical and emotional impacts, requiring a comprehensive response. Protecting children in these situations is crucial.

“Malaysia has the opportunity to demonstrate leadership in ensuring that no child is left behind in the face of climate challenges.”

Role of social workers in child safety

Social workers are the backbone of disaster response

This year's Asean Social Work Day underlines the importance of social workers for climate resilience and response.

When crisis strikes, they are the ones ensuring that children are protected, families find shelter and those in distress receive the help they need to rebuild.

In disaster-prone areas, the shortage of social workers is a glaring issue. Currently, the ratio of child protectors to children stands at a staggering one to 108.

However, there is hope on the horizon. The minister of Women, Family and Community Development has pledged to reduce this ratio to one to 30 by 2026.

This commitment is a crucial step towards ensuring that our children receive protection and support during times of crisis.

Social workers provide vital support, including psycho-social aid, community engagement and harm prevention, particularly for children and women. They build resilient communities, ensuring the vulnerable are supported.

The government must prioritise their recruitment and training as it is an essential component of climate resilience.

Strengthening workforce

Unicef Malaysia, in close partnership with the Malaysian



Disasters expose children to heightened risks of violence, abuse and exploitation. Forced from their homes, they lose safety, education and healthcare.

– **BERNAMAPIC**

Association of Social Workers, has been advocating for the professionalisation of social work.

The Social Work Profession Bill, expected to be tabled in Parliament this July should include statutory provisions for a clear definition of the social service workforce, common standards for all social workers and robust regulation and accreditation systems.

We hope that the passing of the bill will further recognise the importance of social workers, the need to strengthen their capacity and bring awareness to their important role in building resilience.

The upcoming regional guidance for Asean member states on the role of social workers and the wider social service workforce in disaster risk reduction and climate resilience will further highlight their importance in

disaster preparedness.

As 2025 Asean chair, Malaysia should leverage this guidance to align its social work framework with regional leaders like Thailand and Singapore.

Time to act is now

The time for decisive action is now. Malaysia has the opportunity to demonstrate leadership in ensuring that no child is left behind in the face of climate challenges. Unicef is prepared to support in this important endeavour.

By prioritising the training of social workers, integrating their expertise into disaster response strategies and placing child protection at the forefront of national policies, Malaysia can build a resilient future for every child.

Robert Gass is a representative of Unicef in Malaysia. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

LETTERS
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Without action, Thomas Cup dream will fade

THE performances of the France and Taiwan badminton players in the recent All-England tournament, send a shudder as to what they could achieve in the upcoming Thomas Cup competition.

France has emerged as a new force on the badminton circuit, producing men's singles and doubles players who have been performing impressively, either winning or reaching the later stages of several tournaments.

Taiwan, however, appears to be an even more formidable threat. Recently, they have been producing incredible talent in the men's singles and doubles, making them a serious contender and a dark horse in the upcoming Thomas Cup tournament.

Since South Korea and Japan made their mark on the world badminton scene in the past decade, France and Taiwan have also been rising. They are certainly strong contenders capable of springing a surprise or two in any tournament.

While Malaysia has depth in men's doubles, consistency remains a challenge. In singles, they are not a dominant force, as they have not been able to consistently produce exceptional talent.

Relying on one or two players to deliver the results is not the way to win team competitions, especially when those players themselves are not consistently performing.

In addition to France and Taiwan, more nations, such as Hong Kong, are emerging as tough contenders and could pose a serious challenge in the near future. The long wait to regain the Thomas Cup since 1992 will remain a distant dream if nothing is done to address the issue.

Thiagarajan Mathiapparanam
Klang

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Traffic pollution: A deadly killer of health

GLOBAL carbon emissions from fossil fuels surged to a record high last year, with no sign that the world has reached a peak.

Burning fossil fuels resulted in CO₂ (carbon dioxide) releases hitting 40 billion tonnes last year, pushing atmospheric CO₂ levels 52% higher than they were in pre-industrial times.

Emissions growth overall has slowed, fortunately, thanks to the global adoption of solar panels and electric vehicles.

We saw in Part Two that Malaysia scored its first plus point with a radically new solar panel installation scheme that will make every roof dance in the sun, provided the details when released are truly groundbreaking. We concluded Part Two with -4 points.

Resurrection of EVs

In Part Three, we take a drive with the electric vehicle (EV). Has

Malaysia stepped on the pedal or is the EV going at a snail's pace? Let us place the EV in the context of its long history.

The EV, in the form of milk delivery vans, was introduced in the 1970s in Britain.

This columnist, as a visiting Commonwealth fellowship journalist, enjoyed the good fortune of being invited by a milkman to ride in his EV van as it made short trips in the city neighbourhoods.

However, the low capabilities of the EV, restricting its use to neighbourhood trips and growing resistance from the oil industry towards any technological improvements to the EV, ensured that they almost suffered extinction until their miraculous resurrection in 2004 – thanks to Elon Musk's Tesla.

His Tesla was the first production of an all-electric car to travel more than 320km per charge.

Japan's Mitsubishi entered the scene in 2009 and Nissan followed soon after. The global stock of EVs grew steadily in the 2010s, with European and Chinese carmakers joining in.

The first EVs sold in Malaysia were the Mitsubishi i-MiEV and the Nissan Leaf in 2013. This marked the beginning of the EV market in our country. However, EV adoption in Malaysia has been slow as protectionist measures are in place.

Hence, prices for many years were all above RM130,000, and the saying, "EVs are only meant for the rich," became household words. Tax exemptions introduced in Budget 2022 made no dent: if you own a petrol car less than five years old, would you dump it for an EV priced

above RM100,000?

In 2023, the BYD Dolphin and Neta V entered the Malaysian market but their prices on the road with insurance still exceeded RM100,000. The Proton e.Mas 7, launched in December 2024, is priced at RM109,800.

In China, the BYD Seagull is priced at just US\$9,700 (RM43,141), making it possible for one out of every two cars sold in China to be an EV.

EVs in Malaysia cost upwards of RM100,000, not because EVs are expensive by nature but the high price is due to restrictions set by the Investment, Trade and Industry Ministry that requires an imported EV to tag its price in our market above RM100,000. This restriction of course runs against climate action.

In Malaysia, EVs account for only 5.6% of the total car industry volume. For our snail-paced response to climate change, the EV earns Malaysia no points.

The government should incentivise the committees of all houses of worship to purchase one EV as a show of frontline leadership in climate action.

If all religions participate, it gets to be a commitment that brings religions together.

Two concerns deter most top-income earners from buying. They are the battery range and charging infrastructure, and battery life and replacement cost.

The government could bypass these concerns by getting the oil industry to reward hybrid owners with incentives.

Hybrids priced below RM200,000 include Proton X90 Mild Hybrid, Honda e:HEV and Toyota Corolla Cross Hybrid.

Our climate score remains at -4 points.

Ecological crisis

We shall now look at two related issues: traffic congestion

and air pollution. Remember that our holistic analysis sweeps in all three facets of the great ecological crisis. These facets are climate change, biodiversity loss and mass pollution.

Klang Valley residents have noticed that year after year, traffic is getting heavier. However, it is not the pro-car policies since the 1980s that resulted in Klang Valley's spreading congestion; it is the failure of transport authorities to prioritise bus services.

Car owners in many countries take the bus rather than drive to work daily. Research by three French transport associations last year found that 81% of Europeans living in five European capitals – Berlin, Madrid, Paris, Stockholm and Warsaw – use



With three million petrol cars on Klang Valley roads every working day, some 12 million kg of CO₂ is spewed out per year by all the Klang Valley petrol cars on working days. – **BERNAMAPIC**

public transport for day-to-day travel. For half of them, a bus stop or rapid transit station is just five minutes away.

In Malaysia, there is near-complete absence of first- and last-mile connectivity, meaning that the buses ply only profitable routes.

For saturation coverage, obviously more than half the routes will be unprofitable if only large buses are used. In Malaysia, there is no concept of bus transport as a must-have public service.

Ride-hailing service is costly if you were to use it daily for connectivity. Demand-responsive transit is also not practical as it requires you to book a ride.

Buses operate solely for profit because the government counts only the cost of bus operations; it does not factor in the cost of manpower hours lost in traffic jams, the cost of wasteful petrol burning and the environmental damage.

Petrol car exhaust contributes to carbon emissions primarily through the combustion of fuel in the engine.

Petrol is a hydrocarbon that consists mainly of carbon and hydrogen. When it burns in the engine, hydrocarbon reacts with oxygen (O₂) from the air to produce CO₂, the most significant greenhouse gas emitted by petrol cars that traps heat in the atmosphere contributing to global warming.

If combustion is not complete due to insufficient oxygen or inefficient engine performance, it also produces carbon monoxide (CO), a toxic gas that forms when there is not enough oxygen for complete combustion.

On average, burning one litre of petrol produces about 2.3kg of CO₂. How much petrol is burnt on choke-filled Klang Valley roads every working day when even the suburban lanes are now seeing bumper-to-bumper traffic? Each petrol car emits 4kg on average.

With three million petrol cars on

Klang Valley roads every working day, some 12 million kg of CO₂ is spewed out per year by all the Klang Valley petrol cars on working days.

Klang Valley also has approximately six million petrol motorcycles, mostly used for deliveries. Factoring in the heavy frequency of daily trips, their emissions equal that of the car population.

Even the British newsweekly *The Economist* has commented on Klang Valley's monstrous traffic jams. For preferring to keep a monster instead of developing excellent bus transportation, Malaysia loses one point. The score is now back to -5.

Impact of air pollution on health

There is another cost that the government ignores: the cost of air pollution on health. Roughly 24 million kg of CO₂ is breathed in by Klang Valley residents per year. This works out to 90,000kg per day, except Sundays, but inclusive of Saturday traffic at half the working-day volume. If you live in a high-density traffic area, you are breathing in 10kg of CO₂ a year.

The byproduct CO₂ reduces the oxygen-carrying capacity of blood. Petrol also emits nitrogen oxide and nitrogen dioxide, which cause respiratory issues and increase cancer risk, as well as benzene and volatile organic compounds linked to leukaemia and other cancers. Additionally, it releases polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons associated with lung and skin cancer, sulfur dioxide that causes respiratory problems, and formaldehyde, which irritates the eyes, nose and throat while penetrating deep into the lungs.

Worst is the cancer-causing PM_{2.5} particle. PM means "particulate matter" and the number 2.5 refers to fine inhalable particles with diameters that are generally 2.5 micrometres and smaller.

Harvard University researchers have discovered that not only does PM_{2.5} directly affect the foetus, leaving it vulnerable to asthma, but it also increases the risk of cerebral palsy which causes infant disability.

Prolonged exposure to heavy traffic pollution increases the likelihood of heart ailments and lung cancer.

The Health Ministry revealed last month that nearly 250,000 Malaysians have been diagnosed with cancer over the past seven years, with the number of deaths from the disease rising each year.

Lung cancer is among the five most common types of cancer affecting Malaysians, according to the ministry. Cancer is the third leading cause of premature deaths after pneumonia and heart failure.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer, part of the World Health Organisation, has classified outdoor air pollution as a Group One carcinogen, meaning there is strong evidence that it causes cancer in humans.

The simplest, most affordable way to provide first- and last-mile connectivity to the nearest rail transit station or to a nearby destination is for existing bus services to use van-sized buses for local routes so that every household is within five or 10 minutes walking distance from a bus stop.

Additionally, buses should run at intervals of no more than 15 minutes during the daytime.

Due to the government's failure to address the threat to lives, Malaysia loses another point, bringing the score to -6.

In Part Four, we shall examine whether Malaysia's stand in the geopolitical field earns us a plus point.

Joachim Ng champions interfaith harmony.

Comments: letters@thesundaily.com



"The International Agency for Research on Cancer, part of the World Health Organisation, has classified outdoor air pollution as a Group One carcinogen, meaning there is strong evidence that it causes cancer in humans."

Sustainable real estate development in Sarawak

➤ Solarvest to provide green infrastructure for Exal's Solcare programme

KUALA LUMPUR: Solarvest Holdings Bhd, a clean energy solutions provider, has partnered with Exal Group, groundbreakers in sustainable real estate, to bring clean energy infrastructures to Exal's architectural developments in Sarawak.

This collaboration marks a significant milestone in Exal's Solcare sustainability efforts, an ambitious promise designed to improve the quality of life in the communities they have built, alongside their aim of continuing ESG excellence for the generations to come.

As Malaysia drives forward with its National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR) 2030, environmental awareness is reaching new heights, the country is committed to reducing its economy-wide carbon intensity by 45% in 2030 compared to 2005 levels, aiming to have 31% of its national installed capacity mix be renewable energy by the second quarter of 2025.

In response to this growing demand for sustainable solutions, Exal has joined forces with Solarvest to integrate cutting-edge rooftop solar PV systems and green EV charging infrastructures into their developments.

This collaboration not only strengthens Exal's commitment to a more sustainable living lifestyle, but also advances its Solcare's sustainability efforts, which aims to reduce carbon footprints and foster a cleaner, greener Malaysia for generations to come.

To this end, Exal's partnership with Solarvest marks a major step in adopting renewable energy solutions into modern architecture.

Beyond the high-efficient and durable rooftop solar PV systems, its green EV charging infrastructure is 100% powered by clean energy, further supporting the transition to a clean township through e-mobility.

By leveraging Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs), the partnership also enables property owners to validate their commitment to 100% renewable energy consumption. These initiatives not only minimise energy consumption and reduce carbon footprints but also deliver significant cost savings for homeowners. Additionally, Solarvest's advanced inverters and monitoring systems provide real-time performance data,



From left: Sarawak regional director Abang Jamili Abang Julai, Liew, Padawan Municipal Council chairman Tan Kai, Ko, and GreenRE senior general manager Nurfateha Jamaluddin.

empowering end-users to track energy output, charging efficiency, and environmental benefits.

Solarvest executive director and Group chief strategy officer Leon Liew shared: "As a leader in clean energy infrastructure, we prioritise ESG considerations in every aspect of project construction and development. This partnership with Exal represents our shared commitment to reducing carbon footprints and promoting sustainable living. Being born and raised in Sarawak, I am proud to be part of the sustainability property development, driving Malaysia's clean energy transition for a greener environment for the next generations."

Furthering its commitment to sustainability, Exal has also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with GreenRE, Malaysia's premier green certification body. GreenRE focuses on enhancing energy and water efficiency, reducing carbon footprints, and prioritising occupant well-being - ensuring Exal's projects adhere to internationally recognised green building standards.

GreenRE-certified homes in Malaysia are up to 40% more energy-efficient than conventional homes, reducing environmental pollution by lowering reliance on fossil fuel-generated electricity while also enhancing water efficiency and using eco-friendly materials to minimise their carbon footprint. With GreenRE certification, properties can achieve up to 50% reductions in energy consumption and significantly lower operational costs, boosting their environmental value and market appeal for developers and homeowners alike.

"Sustainability is at the heart of everything we do. This partnership with Solarvest and our commitment to GreenRE certification reflects our vision for a future where sustainable living is accessible, practical, and impactful. Together, we are redefining what modern, sustainable real estate looks like in Malaysia," said Exal Malaysia managing director Albert Ko.

Reaffirming his commitment to driving Malaysia's transition toward a more sustainable and environmentally responsible future, Ko was also recently honoured with the prestigious Asean-Sarawak Business Excellence Award, recognising his leadership in driving innovation, sustainability, and economic growth in the region.

Under his stewardship, Exal Group has not only set new benchmarks in sustainable real estate development but has also played a key role in positioning Sarawak as a dynamic regional hub. This award underscores his commitment to aligning business excellence with Asean's broader goals, particularly in advancing ESG initiatives and fostering long-term sustainable development.

Maybank echoes Exal Malaysia's commitment in advancing sustainable real estate in Sarawak, and is ready to meet the growing demand for sustainable housing and other eco-conscious practices. Through solutions such as Green Home Financing, Home+Reno Financing, MyDeco Financing, and Solar Financing, Maybank empowers new and existing home owners to make environmentally conscious choices.

Capital A reaches new heights in ESG scores

SEPANG: Capital A Bhd and its associate Asia Aviation Public Company Limited (AAV) reported new highs in their sustainability scores according to the latest ratings released by regional exchanges and international assessment bodies in December 2024.

At group level, Capital A's FTSE ESG ratings rose to 3.5 out of a maximum 5, up from 3.2 the previous year. The group also saw its S&P Global Corporate Sustainability Assessment (CSA) score surge to 47% from 40% for the previous two years, scoring above average in the airline category for the second year consecutively.

Meanwhile, AAV - which operates Thai AirAsia - received its first internationally benchmarked score of 3.7 as the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) commences its transition from ranking the ESG performance of its listed entities using its own ESG ratings scorecard to FTSE Russell by 2025. AAV's first FTSE ESG score reflected its stellar performance under SET's ESG Ratings of 83%, corresponding to the exchange's AA-level rating.

All abovementioned ESG scores were assessed based on the entities' 2023 performance.

Capital A chief sustainability officer Yap Mun Ching said: "Capital A continues to put emphasis on strengthening its sustainability strategy and delivering outcomes in response to regulatory developments, particularly in relation to the environmental performance of its aviation business. "The positive ESG results show that we are on the right track as we focus on increasing operational efficiency to lower our emissions and improving governance through the establishment of sustainability committees at all our listed entities."

"Key achievements in 2023 that helped to deliver this strong performance were the publication of Capital A's emissions reduction targets up to 2050, achieving AirAsia's lowest yet carbon intensity measures and recovering the group's On-Time Performance and Net Promoter Score."

"The appointment of sustainability advisers to our boards also helped to increase our understanding of ESG risks and opportunities as we integrate ESG considerations into decision-making processes."

Externally, Capital A spearheaded a regional drive engaging policy-makers and regulators from the aviation and environment sectors to deliver the solutions needed by airlines to meet emissions caps under CORSIA, the aviation industry's global carbon offsetting scheme. In 2023, AirAsia began chairing the Malaysia National Task Force on CORSIA and was appointed to the ICAO Committee for Aviation Environmental Protection working group on CORSIA.

Yap said the group has now commenced its 2024 reporting cycle. Further improvements will include new airline efficiency measures and compostable onboard food packaging.

The group has also embarked on new initiatives in response to a shift towards more robust human rights assessments.

Firms struggle to meet standards, says expert

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian firms face hurdles in meeting environmental, sustainable and governance (ESG) standards due to capability, capacity, and investment challenges, an expert said.

PwC Malaysia's sustainability and climate change leader Andrew Chan said capability is a significant factor because sustainability is still a relatively new field.

Evolving frameworks and standards under the ESG agenda require firms to adapt and develop the necessary expertise and resources.

"For instance, after addressing climate risks through existing frameworks such as the task force on climate-related financial disclosures and the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) S2 climate-related disclosures, companies will also need to respond to nature-related risks and upcoming frameworks like the IFRS S3 and S4.

"Additionally, many sustainability

professionals may not yet possess the skills required for detailed financial reporting, necessitating collaboration with financial reporting colleagues to meet requirement standards such as the National Sustainability Reporting Framework," he told Bernama.

Another challenge, according to Chan, is capacity, as evidenced by the intensified sustainability agenda over the past five years.

He highlighted LinkedIn's Global Green Skills Report 2024 which showed that the global demand for workers with green skills, or green talent, is outpacing supply.

Between 2023 and 2024, demand for green talent rose by 11.6% while supply grew only by 5.6%.

"If the current trajectory continues, we will face a shortfall of nearly one-fifth (18.7%) of the green talent required by 2030, leaving us without half the green talent that employers will need.

"While universities are responding to this demand, more efforts are needed to sustain the pipeline of talent for mid to senior roles."

Chan said investment is another barrier. Many organisations view sustainability primarily as a compliance-driven obligation rather than as strategic opportunities for value creation.

PwC Malaysia's Corporate Directors Survey 2024 showed only 21% of board directors perceive sustainability as an opportunity for value creation.

"This perception often results in relatively low budget allocations for sustainability initiatives."

"However, companies that are more mature in sustainability reporting invest in enterprise systems that integrate efforts across sustainability, finance and technology, allowing access to larger budgets and resources, enabling more comprehensive and effective sustainability data management and reporting," he said.

While sustainability is on board agendas, companies may not be capturing its impact adequately as part of their bottom line, he said.

"Our corporate directors survey finds that only 14% understand how their climate commitments influence capital allocation decisions."

"Just 27% believe that climate change consideration is embedded into their value creation strategy."

A challenge they face aligning sustainability with business strategy is the lack of control and visibility over their companies' sustainability plans and data, he said.

"Many current ESG data systems lack the robustness and consistency needed for high-quality and timely analysis, often relying on manual or spreadsheet-based systems instead of integrated enterprise resource planning solutions," Chan said. - Bernama



Regulatory shifts reshaping fintech expansion: Kairous Capital

■ BY **JOHN GILBERT**
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KUALA LUMPUR: Regulatory changes in key markets such as the United States and the European Union impact fintech expansion, particularly in cross-border payments, crypto, and digital banking. Hence, domestic companies must stay compliant to retain market access, making regulatory adaptability a vital investment factor.

Kairous Capital managing partner Joseph Lee (*pic*) said the geopolitical landscape, including US-China fintech restrictions, affects the capital flow and tech partnerships in emerging markets such as Malaysia.

"Investors must gauge how fintech startups tackle regulations while seizing regional opportunities.

"At Kairous Capital, we assess their regulatory resilience and scalability across markets, leveraging our Southeast Asia-China network to help them navigate complexities, form key partnerships, and refine expansion strategies," he told *SunBiz*.

Lee said fintech is transforming payments with real-time settlements, Application Programming Interface integrations and digital wallets, making transactions faster and more secure.

Artificial intelligence-driven fraud detection, encryption, and tokenisation enhance security, making

➤ Geopolitical landscape affects the capital flow and tech partnerships in emerging markets such as Malaysia, says managing partner

digital payments safer than cash, he said, adding, however, that integrating these innovations with legacy systems is costly and complex.

"Fintech firms must also keep up with evolving regulations and cyber threats. From January to October 2024, Malaysia saw RM1.22 billion in cybercrime losses, prompting the government to review banking laws for stricter accountability. Banks and fintechs alike must invest in infrastructure and talent to balance innovation with security," Lee said.

Fintech plays a crucial role in expanding access to financial services by significantly lowering the barriers to entry, he noted.

One key aspect is the transformation of traditional banking through digital platforms.

Mobile banking apps, digital wallets, and online payments reduce costs and make it affordable for underserved populations to open and maintain accounts. This digital shift has allowed millions, especially in developing regions, to manage

money and transact without needing physical branches.

Lee said another important role is fintech's innovative approach to credit scoring.

By utilising alternative data – such as utility payments, rental histories, behavioural metrics, or even social circles – fintech firms can assess the creditworthiness of individuals lacking formal credit histories.

This, he said, opens the door for micro-loans and other financial products to those previously excluded by traditional lenders.

"For example, most digital wallets in Malaysia offer micro-financing products for their users. Given the small loan size and cost of delivering this service to a large user base, banks have historically been unable to do so. Together, these advancements democratise financial services and drive economic empowerment and growth

by integrating more people into the formal financial ecosystem."

On fintech's role in healthcare payments, Lee said digital platforms enhance efficiency by automating billing, claim verification, and fraud detection.

"A notable case we can examine is fintech companies working on digital-enabled medical coverage and digital third-party administrators.

"By integrating mobile wallet solutions and potentially blockchain-based claim processing in future, they can reduce billing turnaround times and slash administrative costs by more than 30%.

However, there are challenges like integrating these

solutions with legacy systems, ensuring robust cybersecurity to protect sensitive patient data and complying with evolving healthcare regulations."

Lee said fintech is also revolutionising sectors like manufacturing, agriculture, and supply chain logistics by unlocking new avenues for working capital and streamlining payments through data-driven digital platforms.

"Overall, we see these innovations lowering the transaction costs and accelerating fund disbursement, enabling a more agile, inclusive financing ecosystem that drives growth and competitiveness in traditionally capital-intensive sectors.

"We strongly believe investors should scrutinise how these firms deploy technology: cost-effective AI and automation should enable rapid scaling without excessive capital outlay.

"A successful fintech should balance tech investment with tangible outcomes, ensuring innovation leads to improved customer retention and sustainable income rather than higher tech spending.

"When these elements are in place, investments in inclusive fintech diversify portfolios and offer potential for long-term stable returns as they tap into expanding underserved markets," Lee said.



FIM 2025 set to boost franchise expansion in Asean, says MFA

■ BY **AIMIE SHAZRIE**
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PETALING JAYA: Franchise International Malaysia 2025 (FIM 2025) is poised to become a key gateway for franchise expansion in the Asean region, providing a platform for local and international brands to explore new market opportunities.

Organised by the Malaysian Franchise Association (MFA) in collaboration with the Ministry of Entrepreneur and Cooperatives Development, this year's edition is expected to attract more than 150 franchise players and 30,000 visitors, reinforcing Malaysia's position as a regional franchise hub.

MFA chairman Datuk Radzali Hassan (*pic*) said, FIM 2025 will feature a range of high-impact programmes designed to facilitate business networking, knowledge sharing, and cross-border investment.

"Among the highlights are the Asean Franchise Convention (May 7-8), which will bring together industry experts to discuss franchise sustainability, digital transformation, and

profitability. The event will also see the adoption of key franchise-related declarations among Asean member countries, further strengthening regional collaboration," he told *SunBiz*.

Additionally, Radzali said the franchise business matching session (May 8) aims to connect franchise brands with potential investors and partners from over 20 countries, helping businesses expand beyond their domestic markets.

"Other major events include the franchise exhibition (May 8-10), featuring global franchise brands, and the certified franchise executive training programme (May 5-6), which will equip professionals with advanced franchise management skills," he added.

Beyond FIM 2025, Radzali said, MFA is actively facilitating the global ex-

pansion of Malaysian franchise brands through a series of franchise trade missions to high-potential markets."

In 2025, MFA will lead trade missions to key destinations including the Philippines, Taiwan, China, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Kazakhstan, connecting local franchisors with international investors and business partners."

He said these trade missions provide Malaysian franchise brands with direct access to foreign markets, helping them

understand local consumer behaviour, regulatory requirements, and investment landscapes.

"They also offer structured business networking opportunities, including business matching sessions, market briefings, and franchise showcase events," he added.

Radzali emphasised the importance of these initiatives in positioning Malaysia as a global franchise leader.

"Malaysia has a well-established franchise ecosystem, supported by strong legal frameworks such as the Franchise Act 1998 and globally recognised certifications like our *halal* certification. Through FIM 2025 and our international trade missions, we aim to accelerate the global expansion of Malaysian franchise brands and strengthen cross-border collaborations," he said.

To ensure sustainable franchise growth, Radzali said, MFA is working closely with financial institutions and government agencies to provide financing support for franchise entrepreneurs.

"Several institutions, including Perbadanan Nasional Bhd, SME Bank and Tekun Nasional, are

offering financing schemes tailored to franchise businesses. The Market Development Grant by Matrade further supports international franchise expansion efforts by providing financial assistance for overseas market entry."

With the National Franchise Policy 2030 positioning franchising as a key driver of Malaysia's economic growth, Radzali said.

MFA's strategic focus remains on expanding market access, strengthening financial accessibility, and fostering global partnerships.

"As MFA continues to strengthen collaborations with government agencies, trade associations, and private investors, FIM 2025 and the upcoming franchise trade missions are set to play a pivotal role in accelerating Malaysia's franchise industry growth both regionally and globally," he said.

FIM 2025 will be held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre from May 8 to 10, providing a prime opportunity for franchise brands, investors, and industry stakeholders to engage, collaborate, and expand their businesses across borders.





KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's oil and gas services and equipment (OGSE) companies have been urged to consider strategic partnerships to be more competitive and get more energy transition opportunities beyond the industry.

Malaysia Petroleum Resources Corporation (MPRC) senior vice-president/operations head Mustafa Akbar Reza noted that the OGSE industry consolidation has been repositioned to focus on strategic partnerships.

"The idea is that there are many OGSE companies and each company is concentrated on one business. The term 'industry consolidation' did not fully capture the opportunities available for OGSE companies to build capacity and capability and was too restrictive in terms of what we want to achieve in the industry," he told Bernama in an interview ahead of the launch of the Mid-Term Review of the National OGSE Industry Blueprint 2021-2030 (OGSE Blueprint) report tomorrow.

Launched by the Ministry of Economy in April 2021, the OGSE Blueprint aims to develop a robust, resilient and globally competitive Malaysian OGSE sector.

In 2023, there were 3,392 OGSE companies under the Standardised Work and Equipment Categories licensed and registered by Petroliaam Nasional Bhd.

Mustafa noted that strategic partnerships would help OGSE companies diversify and compete better, especially outside Malaysia, which can also help them diversify their customer base.

He said the MPRC is committed to

M'sian OGSE players told to consider strategic partnerships

➤ MPRC looking at programmes to enhance competitiveness and resilience of local companies to drive tie-ups within industry

driving the OGSE companies' strategic partnerships forward and that the agency is looking for a series of programmes to enhance the competitiveness and resilience of OGSE companies to drive strategic partnerships within the industry.

"More details will be shared during the OGSE mid-term review launch," he added.

Mustafa said the MPRC also is planning to introduce another key component of strategic partnerships on March 20 that may include the signing of memorandums of understanding or formal agreements between one or two partners and pointed out that technology adoption was historically an area where OGSE companies lagged.

"We have just seen our effort to boost technology adoption pick up pace since last year," he said, adding that there would be an announcement of new developments under the OGSE Development Grant to support

technology adoption.

Since the launch in 2021, RM20 million has been allocated through the OGSE development grant, benefiting 64 companies, with 22 companies successfully commercialised and generating a combined revenue of RM38.3 million.

Mustafa noted that the OGSE development grant has not gotten enough representatives from Sabah and Sarawak and that the MPRC would work together with stakeholders in both states to address the issue.

Explaining the mid-term review report, Mustafa said the report was conducted by MPRC to evaluate progress and ensure the industry remains aligned with national priorities and successfully adapts to the evolving energy landscape.

In general, Mustafa said the majority of OGSE companies are small and medium enterprises, so the



impact of the OGSE Blueprint, especially concerning their most pressing "pain points", such as upskilling talent, technology adoption and access to finance, benefits the SMEs.

"The OGSE Blueprint is a long-term document, involving all the OGSE ecosystem stakeholders, as with any undertaking of this size, one challenge is ensuring everyone remains committed to working together until the finish line," he added.

Among key milestones achieved since the OGSE Blueprint launch were bridging the talent gap and addressing the industry's need for a one-stop source of information on support and services available for OGSE companies.

On talent development, Mustafa said around 600 individuals were

trained under the coaching and mentorship programmes, enhancing OGSE industry knowledge and expertise, and more than 300 upskilled and certified in highly sought after technical disciplines.

He added that the launch of the i-OGSE portal in 2023, which provided information on areas including financing and export programmes has channelled grants, alternative financing and export assistance to more than 60 companies.

Mustafa said eight new or expansion projects have been approved by Mida, attracting multinational investments and 160 companies and recording a total of RM2 billion in potential export sales via Matrade-led business matching and global trade fairs.

Since 2021, Mustafa said some OGSE companies are gradually shifting to new adjacent sectors in the energy transition, with companies venturing into solar and other renewable energy.

"This marks a major milestone in the evolution of the OGSE sector, where we see companies pivoting to new businesses, in line with the oil and gas industry's shift towards providing lower emissions solutions," he added.

EVE Energy expansion to create over 1,000 jobs

KUALA LUMPUR: EVE Energy Co Ltd's phase 2 expansion will create over 1,000 jobs, underscoring its commitment to Malaysia's economic growth, the Malaysian Investment Development Authority (Mida) said.

Mida CEO Datuk Sikh Shamsul Ibrahim Sikh Abdul Majid said the expansion aims to meet rising global demand for energy storage system solutions, driving innovation and sustainability in the sector.

"EVE Energy is dedicated to forging strong alliances with Malaysian suppliers, fostering a robust and technologically advanced local supply chain. By prioritising collaboration with local vendors, EVE Energy aims to establish a comprehensive battery manufacturing ecosystem in Malaysia.

"The influx of international suppliers through this expansion will provide valuable mentorship and technical expertise, empowering Malaysian enterprises and propelling growth within the local industry," he said in a statement.

EVE Energy recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Invest Kedah to develop its Phase 2 manufacturing facility, a project expected to transform Malaysia's energy storage sector and create significant employment opportunities.

The MoU was signed on March 16 between Invest Kedah chief operating officer Noor Ikhsan



EVE Energy signed a memorandum of understanding with Invest Kedah to develop its Phase 2 manufacturing facility, a project expected to transform Malaysia's energy storage sector. — MIDA PIC

Abdul Aziz and EVE Energy president Liu Jian Hua.

Sikh Shamsul Ibrahim said the agreement reflects Malaysia's commitment to sustainable economic growth, technological innovation, and the expansion of its electric vehicle (EV) ecosystem.

"As we accelerate towards a cleaner and more energy-secure future, strategic investments like this play a vital role in positioning Malaysia as a regional leader in EV and battery technology.

"With EVE Energy's expertise and commitment, alongside Malaysia's strong industrial ecosystem, we are not just building factories — we are building opportunities, empowering local talent, and strengthening our position in the regional clean energy supply chain," he noted.

Meanwhile, EVE Energy chairman and founder Liu Jincheng said the Malaysia facility, the company's first step in its global expansion, aims to set a new international benchmark. — Bernama

Catcha Digital to acquire 51% of Digital Symphony

KUALA LUMPUR: Catcha Digital Bhd has entered into a conditional share sale agreement to acquire a 51% stake in DS Services Sdn Bhd (Digital Symphony) for RM22.95 million cash.

In a filing with Bursa Malaysia, Catcha Digital said the cash consideration will be paid in three tranches over 24 months.

It said the payment is linked to achieving a net profit of RM4.5 million for the first 12 months and another RM4.5 million in the second year.

Launched in 2017 by Kuhan Kumar, Digital Symphony specialises in performance marketing, leveraging automation, data analytics, and custom software solutions to help brands achieve their digital advertising goals.

"Catcha Digital and its subsidiaries will be able to offer Digital Symphony's data-driven performance marketing solutions to its clients, while Digital Symphony can leverage Catcha Digital's extensive digital media ecosystem and broad reach to enhance its offerings.

"This data-driven synergy is expected to accelerate growth for both entities, giving advertisers a more intelligent, and results-focused approach to digital marketing," it added.

Catcha Digital chairman Patrick Grove said the company is doubling down on the power of data, automation, and machine learning to create even better solutions for advertisers through the acquisition.

"The combination of Digital Symphony's result-driven performance marketing and Catcha Digital's extensive audience reach is a game-changer for brands looking to scale their digital presence," he said. — Bernama

IRB's e-Ansuran now accessible on MyTax portal

PUTRAJAYA: The online instalment application service for payment of tax balances or tax arrears via e-Ansuran has been accessible through the MyTax Portal since March 5.

The Inland Revenue Board (IRB), in a statement yesterday, said the initiative was introduced to make it easier for taxpayers to apply to pay in instalments their tax balances or tax arrears, allowing them to obtain automatic

approval without the need for supporting documents.

According to IRB, eligible taxpayers must meet the following criteria, the total application amount must exceed RM 300 and above and the Instalments can only range between two to six payments.

It said the application applies to income tax instalments only and does not include ongoing

instalment plans.

Taxpayers can access the e-Ansuran service by logging into the MyTax portal via the link <https://mytax.hasil.gov.my/> and selecting the relevant role (Individual / Director / Representative Director).

However, cancellation of e-Ansuran applications can only be done at the IRB office. — Bernama

New dawn for third-party funding in Malaysia

LEGALLY SPEAKING

THIRD-PARTY funding (TPF) is the funding by an external party of a litigant's costs for arbitration proceedings. Funding is typically provided by specialised funders or insurers, in return for a share of the settlement or damages, if the litigant is successful. The enactment of the Arbitration (Amendment) Act 2024 sees the introduction of a formal framework governing TPF in domestic and international arbitrations, where any services related to the arbitration are provided in Malaysia, even if the seat of arbitration is outside Malaysia.

The Arbitration (Amendment) Act introduces a structured framework for TPF agreements emphasising legitimacy, transparency, and regulation. The Act states, amongst others, that:

➔ TPF agreements may cover the "costs or expenses of the arbitration", which includes any costs or expenses incurred prior to the commencement of the arbitration or during the arbitral proceedings or the court proceedings relating to the arbitration.

➔ The common law rule against maintenance and champerty shall cease to apply to the TPF and such agreements shall not be treated as contrary to public policy; and

➔ The Act sets out the disclosure requirements for such agreements which include requirements to disclose the existence of a TPF agreement and the identity of the funder to assess any potential conflicts of interests to facilitate transparency.

This shift signals the end of Malaysia's long-standing position on the torts of maintenance and champerty – both traceable to English common law and deemed contrary to public policy. Maintenance occurs when a third party, with no prior interests in the proceedings, maintains or aids a litigant to prosecute or defend an action. Champerty is a form of maintenance wherein an action is funded in exchange for a reward or portion of the proceeds of litigation.

These specialised funders, often financial firms or insurers, provide financial assistance on a contingency or success-based model and are invaluable to levelling the playing field in David versus Goliath scenarios where a litigant with little means comes up against a defendant with extensive resources and deep pockets. TPF may balance the scales, ensuring the financial backing of everyday



TPF agreements help litigants cut financial risks by transferring costs to an external funder, reducing upfront costs, and limiting disruptions to their work. – PEXELS PIX

Goliaths do not outlast, overpower or pressure the Davids into submission. It holds larger corporations and well-funded entities accountable and discourages them from using financial dominance over entities or individuals with lesser means, for example, tech startups defending their patents from a dominant tech conglomerate; a subcontractors enforcing payment claims against a main contractor; and a minority shareholder challenging the unfair practices of the majority.

TPF agreements also allow litigants to mitigate financial risks by transferring the costs and risks to an external funder and reducing their own upfront expenditure and exposure to losses with minimal disruption to everyday workflow. Contextually, such agreements would allow a small business(es) involved in protracted legal proceedings to avoid dipping into its working capital or exhausting other financial reserves. Incidentally, this financial safety net may also result in parties being less inclined to settle and may encourage a more robust and drawn-out pursuit of claims.

TPF agreements are often bespoke, highly customisable and complex, with terms tailored to meet the litigant's specific needs. For example, rather than relying on a single funder, agreements may cater to multiple

funders at varying stages of the proceedings, with the funders' returns and contributions aligned to their expertise and the case's requirements. This model however brings its own set of challenges as it requires careful coordination between the parties to prevent misalignment of expectations on the outcome, timelines, or strategies of the case. The involvement of multiple funders raises concerns about funders potentially influencing case strategy and prioritising profit over the best interests of the litigant. Without adequate safeguards, there is a risk that disputes may shift from being justice-driven to being investment-driven.

Whilst the introduction of TPF into arbitration proceedings marks a significant shift in the alternative dispute resolution scene in Malaysia, its newness brings both promise and uncertainty, expanding access to justice and providing a lifeline to smaller entities but at the potential cost of unfamiliar complexities. As parties navigate this evolving landscape, it is imperative to seek legal consultation to ensure fair and equitable resolution of disputes that remains justice-driven, not investment driven.

This article is contributed by Praveen Abraham & Sivaram Prasad of Christopher & Lee Ong (www.christopherleong.com).

KLIA ranked among world's top 10 airports in 2024 ASQ survey

KUALA LUMPUR: Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) has been ranked among the top 10 airports globally in the 2024 Airport Service Quality (ASQ) survey for airports handling over 40 million passengers annually.

According to Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd (MAHB), the airport received a near-perfect score of 4.99 out of 5 from the Airports Council International (ACI), which represents the collective interests of airports around the world to promote excellence in the aviation industry.

ASQ serves as the leading, data-driven benchmark for airport excellence, measuring passenger satisfaction across key areas such as safety, services, facilities, and cleanliness.

This reinforces KLIA's position as a leading global aviation hub, said MAHB in a statement on Monday.

MAHB managing director Datuk Mohd Izani Ghani said KLIA's consistent placement in the ASQ top 10 airports since 2022 is a testament to the airport's commitment to continuous improvement.

"KLIA's strong performance reflects our focus on enhancing the airport experience through innovative solutions and improved facilities. We also thank KLIA's dedicated airport community and stakeholders who are the driving force behind our progress.

"With our new shareholders placing strong emphasis on service excellence, we are confident these efforts will further elevate our standing in future global rankings," he said.

Several key elements contributed to KLIA's success, all designed to enhance passenger comfort and convenience including a welcoming ambience, expanded seating area, upgraded charging stations, as well as fast and reliable WiFi.

Passengers also rated highly the airport's exceptional cleanliness, particularly in its washrooms, which further enhances the travelling experience.

Beyond its amenities, KLIA's dedicated staff have also been praised for their warmth and attentiveness, further showcasing Malaysia's hospitality at its best.

In preparation for Visit Malaysia Year 2026, MAHB said KLIA is undergoing key upgrades to further improve the passenger experience including expanded terminal seating, refurbished prayer rooms, and next-generation baggage trolleys.

It said passengers can also look forward to improved buggy services, self-service check-in and bag drop kiosks, and new family-friendly features such as the Orangutan Playground Kids Zone, wheelchairs, baby strollers, heritage walls, and family parking lots. – Bernama

Malaysia Airlines offers MHUpgrade directly on Trip.com

SEPANG: Malaysia Airlines has partnered with Trip.com, an international travel service provider, to elevate the travel experience for passengers.

In a statement, Malaysia Airlines said the collaboration marks a significant milestone as Trip.com becomes the first third-party platform to integrate the MHUpgrade programme – previously exclusive to the Malaysia Airlines website.

With this integration, travellers can now seamlessly access and bid for upgrade opportunities, enjoying greater flexibility and convenience when enhancing their journey.

MHUpgrade offers eligible economy class or business class ticket holders the opportunity to place an offer to upgrade to the next cabin class. By integrating this feature, users who book Malaysia Airlines flights on Trip.com can now conveniently access and enjoy premium travel experiences with greater ease and flexibility.

Malaysia Aviation Group chief commercial officer of Airlines Dersanish Aresandiran said: "We are delighted to collaborate with Trip.com to

extend the reach of our MHUpgrade service. This strategic partnership will enable us to offer our valued passengers with an elevated travel experience with our signature Malaysian hospitality while expanding our presence in the global market through a trusted partner in Trip.com."

Trip.com Group associate vice-president CT Ooi said: "We are thrilled to partner with Malaysia Airlines to bring the MHUpgrade service to our customers. This collaboration aligns with our commitment to enhancing the travel experience by providing more options and greater convenience to our users and is also a testament to the trust that our partners such as Malaysia Airlines have in us to build innovative new products together."

Demand for premium cabin flight bookings has been rising. In 2024, Business Class bookings on Trip.com saw three-digit growth compared to the year before, underscoring the increased willingness of travellers to spend more for added comfort and luxury on their trips.



MHUpgrade gives eligible economy or business class ticket holders the opportunity to bid for an upgrade to a higher cabin class. – UNSPLASH PIX



BEIJING: Dozens of foreign CEOs will visit Beijing this month for a flagship development conference where some are expected to meet President Xi Jinping, according to a draft agenda and three sources familiar with the matter.

The annual China Development Forum will take place on March 23-24 at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in the capital, two sources told Reuters.

Beijing is keen to attract foreign investment at a time of heightened geopolitical tensions, as policymakers try to boost domestic consumption to offset fresh US tariff pressure.

Those attending include the CEOs of FedEx, Siemens, automakers BMW and Mercedes-Benz, chip designer Qualcomm, AstraZeneca, Nestle, Saudi Aramco, Citadel, Rio Tinto, Estee Lauder, Standard Chartered and KPMG, according to a draft agenda seen by Reuters. The chairman of Deutsche Bank is also on the list.

A Mercedes-Benz spokesperson confirmed to Reuters that CEO and chairman Ola Kallenius would attend the forum. A spokesperson for pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca declined to comment on whether the CEO was attending and meeting Xi.

BMW's China chief Sean Green will also attend, according to people familiar with the matter, adding CEO Oliver Zipse would make clear to the Chinese government that the German carmaker planned to continue to support the market. BMW declined to comment.

Foreign CEOs set to flock to Beijing for key conference

➤ Draft agenda shows major attendees at China Development Forum include chief execs of Qualcomm, FedEx, Siemens, BMW, Saudi Aramco, Rio Tinto, Citadel

None of the other firms immediately responded to requests for comment.

Top executives of several major mining, engineering and healthcare firms will also take part, according to the draft agenda, which could be subject to last-minute changes, one of the sources said. Compared to previous years, a higher proportion of European CEOs are represented.

Xi is likely to meet a select group of foreign chief executives on March 28, which could include European and British CEOs, said one source, adding that the list of attendees and timings could be subject to last-minute

changes. Reuters was not able to determine the list of overseas CEOs expected to meet Xi.

US President Donald Trump imposed 20% tariffs on Chinese exports this month, prompting China to retaliate with additional duties on American agriculture products.

Foreign direct investment into China fell 13.4% year-on-year in January, according to official data released last month.

"Any trip to China by American CEOs would be very low-key given the current heightened scrutiny on American investment in China from Washington," said the source, adding that fewer US CEOs would attend this year.

However, some leading American chip firms such as Broadcom and Synopsys are sending their CEOs, according to a list of foreign delegates seen by Reuters. Micron said yesterday its CFO Mark Murphy has been invited to attend the forum this year.

American firms subject to current investigations or scrutiny by Chinese authorities including Google, Illumina, PVH and Walmart were also not on the draft agenda.

"I think it's still important for the Chinese to showcase their interest in foreign business people but it's hard to see how there is a real dialogue going on," Joerg Wuttke, partner at DGA Group and former president of the European Chamber of Commerce in China, told reporters in Shanghai on Monday.

"It would be nice if (Xi) has a new message of real openness and the question is would he do this. In the European business community we've coined this phrase 'promise fatigue' - Reuters

CK Hutchison faces increasing pressure over ports deal

HONG KONG: Hong Kong is opposed to "bullying tactics" by foreign governments, the city's leader said yesterday when asked about conglomerate CK Hutchison's port deal with US firm BlackRock amid reports that China is also scrutinising the sale.

CK Hutchison said this month it had agreed to sell most of its global US\$22.8 billion (RM101.3 billion) ports business, including assets near the strategically important Panama Canal, to a group led by BlackRock.

The deal has become highly politicised, with US President Donald Trump hailing the deal after previously calling for the Panama Canal to be removed from what he says is Chinese control.

Other American politicians have said CK Hutchison's operation of the ports represented a security risk to the US due to its reliance on the trade of goods through the canal.

"(The Hong Kong) government urges foreign governments to provide a fair and just environment for enterprises," Hong Kong leader John Lee told reporters at his weekly press conference.

"We oppose the abusive use of coercion or bullying tactics in international economic and trade relations."

Yesterday, Bloomberg News reported Chinese authorities have begun looking into CK Hutchison's ports transaction, directing multiple agencies to review the deal for potential security risks and antitrust violations.

Beijing's examination of the deal doesn't necessarily mean any action will be taken subsequently, the report added, as large deals often attract regulatory attention.



A view of the Balboa Port is pictured after Hong Kong's CK Hutchison agreed to sell its interests in a key Panama Canal port operator to a BlackRock Inc-backed consortium. - REUTERS/PIIC

CK Hutchison did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the report. It has previously said the deal is "purely commercial in nature and wholly unrelated to recent political news reports concerning the Panama Ports".

It was not immediately clear what levers, if any, China could pull to block the deal, given the business that CK Hutchison is selling is outside China and Hong Kong, while the company itself is registered in the Cayman Islands.

Hong Kong leader Lee told reporters "any transaction must comply with legal and regulatory requirements", adding the city would handle it "in accordance with the law".

Shares of Hutchison fell as much as 4.9% yesterday, hitting their lowest since March 4.

Founded and listed in Hong Kong, CK

Hutchison, owned by billionaire Li Ka-shing, has said its business operations are independent from China.

A week after news of the ports deal, China's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office reposted two commentaries criticising CK Hutchison and saying the sale was a betrayal of China that neglected national interests.

While CK Hutchison agreed to negotiations with the BlackRock consortium on an exclusive basis for 145 days according to a statement, the deal has not yet been finalised.

As the controversy escalates, two sources told Reuters on Monday that CK Hutchison will not hold earnings conferences after it reports results tomorrow, a highly unusual move for the conglomerate. - Reuters

'Hedge fund Polymer Capital to debut pure Japan funds'

HONG KONG: Polymer Capital Management, a Hong Kong-headquartered hedge fund, is launching two Japan-focused funds this year to tap into the robust demand for the world's third-largest stock market, according to three people familiar with the matter.

The move will see the US\$4 billion (RM17.7 billion) multi-manager Asian hedge fund heavyweight joining a wave of fund launches in Japan.

One of Polymer's new funds will adopt an equity long/short strategy and allocate capital across a team of 30 portfolio managers, with an initial target size of US\$500 million.

This fund will largely replicate the current

Japanese book under its flagship Polymer Asia Fund, two of the sources, who are directly involved in the matter, said on condition of anonymity as the information is not public.

The second fund is an equity fund that takes only long positions, or so-called long-only fund, one of the sources said.

Tokyo-based investment veteran Daisuke Nakayama, who previously ran JPMorgan Asset Management's Japan fund, will lead the long-only product, the source said.

Nakayama's portfolio, since he joined Polymer in September 2023, has posted returns exceeding 20% over the Topix benchmark, the source added.

A Polymer spokesperson declined to comment.

Polymer, founded by ex-Point72's Asia head Angus Wai in 2019 and backed by alternative investment giant PAG, has quickly grown into one of Asia's largest hedge fund platforms that uses various trading teams to invest across different asset classes. Its main market-neutral Polymer Asia Fund returned 11.6% in 2024.

Polymer started a China A-shares Equity Fund in April 2024, diversifying into a single country fund for the first time.

The firm now has six offices in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore, Sydney, Taipei and Tokyo. - Reuters

BRIEFS

EQUINIX ISSUES GREEN BONDS IN MAIDEN OFFERING IN SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE: US digital infrastructure company Equinix said yesterday that it has issued S\$500 million (RM1.66 billion) in green bonds in its inaugural offering in the Singaporean market. The Nasdaq-listed company said in a statement it intended to allocate an amount equal to the net proceeds from the green bonds to recently completed or future eligible green projects. Equinix issued S\$500 million in 3.50% senior notes due 2030 in the offering that closed on March 13, said the statement. The issuance is the first time a US company has accessed the Singapore dollar bond market in over five years. DBS Bank and Standard Chartered were joint global coordinators. They were also the joint lead managers and bookrunners with HSBC and OCBC, the statement showed. - Reuters

CHINA EV GIANT BYD SOARS AFTER SUPER FAST CHARGER LAUNCH

BEIJING: Shares in Chinese EV giant BYD surged to a record high yesterday after it unveiled new battery technology it says can charge a vehicle in the same time it takes to fill up a petrol car. The company said the battery and charging system, called "Super e-Platform", boasted peak speeds of 1,000kW, allowing cars to travel up to 470km after being plugged in for just five minutes. Hong Kong-listed shares in BYD jumped more than 6% to hit a fresh peak at one point yesterday morning before paring some of the gains. Shenzhen-based BYD introduced the Super e-Platform alongside two new EV models that will be the first to feature the system: the Han L sedan and the Tang L SUV. The Shenzhen-based company also unveiled plans to build more than 4,000 ultra-fast charging stations nationwide to support the new technology. - AFP

'Other countries will hit back at US with high tariffs'

► China's *Global Times* warns that Washington's measures will inflict significant harm on American economy

BEIJING: US tariffs will inflict significant harm on the US economy as other countries hit back with "high tariffs" on American goods, Chinese state media warned, leaving the door open for more measures by Beijing as another wave of levies looms.

Barely two months after returning to the White House, President Donald Trump has triggered trade conflicts with China, Canada, Mexico and the European Union. Trump is also threatening reciprocal tariffs on every country that taxes US imports, with those levies potentially kicking in on April 2.

China swiftly responded with countermeasures in February and March when two rounds of Trump tariffs took effect. And Beijing is widely expected to quickly react to the April tariffs should they come to pass.

"In response to US tariffs, its trading partners will not sit idly by," the nationalist Chinese tabloid *Global Times* wrote in an editorial yesterday.

"Retaliating with high tariffs on US exports could become an option for many countries"

Beijing has slapped retaliatory levies on US agriculture and food exports, placed export and investment curbs on 25 US firms, suspended soybean import licences of three US firms and halted imports of US logs.

China also launched probes into some US fibre optic products.

To help foreign companies based in China resist "external shocks", its commerce ministry will take a series of measures to help them expand sales in the country, according to Yuyuan Tiantian, a social media account affiliated with state broadcaster CCTV, on Monday, citing people familiar with the matter.

"Many countries are actively seeking to diversify their economic partnerships and reduce their reliance on the US by forging new trade alliances," *Global Times* said.

In a separate development, the CEOs of two top Australian banks said in Sydney a



Comyn speaking during the Australian Financial Review Banking Summit, in Sydney yesterday. – REUTERS/SPIC

trade war sparked by Trump's tariffs may drive up global inflation, stoke market volatility and slow economic growth, but added Australia was insulated from the disruption.

The heads of No. 1 retail lender Commonwealth Bank of Australia and No. 1 business lender National Australia Bank told a conference the new US administration's protectionist policies would likely strain the global economy in the medium term with higher costs and lack of certainty.

But Australia's roughly US\$15 billion (RM66.7 billion) a year in exports to the US was small compared to its overall export trade, so the country was better placed than Canada, which sells 85% of its exports to the US, the financial leaders added.

"There's certainly risk to the downside, around slowing global growth," CBA CEO

Matt Comyn told the Australian Financial Review Business Summit, adding US tariffs would mean "inefficiencies in trade (and) therefore more inflation".

CBA had reported a "pronounced uptick" in mortgage applications since the Reserve Bank of Australia cut interest rates last month for the first time since November 2020 to 4.1%, Comyn's head of retail banking Angus Sullivan told the conference earlier.

NAB CEO Andrew Irvine said the rate cut had been an "exhale of breath" in the economy, but "tariff madness" under Trump may lower the chance of further cuts this year. Currently NAB expects two 25-basis point cuts in 2025.

"We're not an island," Irvine told the conference. "If this tariff madness does happen, we could be at the end of (rate) reductions." – Reuters, AFP

Air India CEO: Global aircraft shortage at least 4 years

NEW DELHI: Air India CEO Campbell Wilson said yesterday the global aircraft shortage hampering airline growth will persist for four to five years as supply snags hobble production at jetmakers Boeing and Airbus.

Speaking at an event organised by travel news website Skift, Wilson said he sees pinch points in the supply of narrowbody jet engines, business and first class seats, and some elements of aircraft fuselages.

Air India is in the midst of an ambitious turnaround strategy two years after Tata Group took control of the airline, but its restructuring efforts have been complicated by jet delivery delays. These setbacks have forced the airline to operate older jets longer than planned, increasing maintenance costs and slowing its modernisation and expansion drive.

When asked about how Air India plans to navigate delays, Wilson told reporters: "There is not a lot we can do. We are victims of circumstance, as is every other airline."

"If you are capacity constrained, you need to be a little bit more ruthless with respect to where you deploy aircraft to maximise the return," he added. "It means you can't expand to places you would otherwise like to expand."

The competition among airlines to lease aircraft and the different configurations available make leasing aircraft challenging, Wilson added.

In 2023, as a part of the multi-billion-dollar revamp, Air India ordered 470 jets from Airbus and Boeing, including 10 of the US planemaker's much-delayed 777X aircraft and 190 Boeing 737 MAX jets. Late last year, the

airline ordered 100 more Airbus aircraft.

When asked about delivery timelines for 777X, Wilson said, "Who knows?"

His comment underlined uncertainty among airlines who have ordered the jet that is considered a successor to Boeing's 777, one of the most commercially successful long-haul airliners.

Last month, Wilson told Reuters Air India was holding off on exercising its outstanding options to buy additional Boeing jets until the planemaker has cleared its backlog.

Boeing is recovering from a near two-month crippling worker strike last year. The planemaker cannot produce more than 38 737 MAX aircraft per month because of a cap set by the US Federal Aviation Administration.

Boeing did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment. – Reuters

Alaskan officials to seek investors in Asia for LNG project

TOKYO: Alaska's governor and state representatives will visit Japan and three other Asian countries starting this week to court investors for a natural gas project that President Donald Trump says could pump trillions of dollars into the US, although Japanese energy firms remain sceptical.

Officials from the state-run Alaska Gasline Development Corporation (AGDC) and development partner Glenfarne Group will visit allied Asian countries "to update industry leaders on Alaska LNG's economic and strategic competitive advantages, and discuss opportunities for participation", said AGDC spokesperson Tim Fitzpatrick.

The officials want to transport gas south from Alaska's remote north via a US\$44 billion 1,300km pipeline, to be shipped as liquefied natural gas to Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

The trip, which Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy will also be taking, runs from today to March 30 with visits to Taiwan, Thailand, South Korea and Japan.

"He's going to be going over there to hold high-level discussions with the leaders in all those countries and corporate executives to talk about the pipeline," said Jeff Turner, Dunleavy's spokesperson. "If we can get a pipeline project going, we can certainly be a steady supplier of LNG to the Pacific Rim."

Dunleavy said last week that exports could begin by 2030 and deliver about 3.5 billion cubic feet of gas per day.

Trump is pushing energy sales to Asian allies while threatening trade tariffs, reviving Alaska's stalled LNG ambitions. On Feb 7, he asked Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba for support and on March 4 South Korea agreed to discuss the project.

South Korea's industry ministry said AGDC had asked for a meeting, but that nothing has been decided. Despite Trump's claim that Japan wants in, Japanese energy firms have yet to commit. – Reuters

BRIEFS

INDONESIA TO RAISE PALM OIL EXPORT LEVY TO 4.5%-10% TO FUND BIODIESEL MANDATE

JAKARTA: Indonesia will raise its palm oil export levy to between 4.5% and 10% of the crude palm oil reference price, up from 3% to 7.5%, to finance a mandated increase in the amount of the oil used in biodiesel, a plantation fund official said yesterday. Indonesia raised the mandatory amount of palm oil in its biodiesel mix to 40% this year from 35%. It is studying increasing it to 50% in 2026, as well as a 3% blend for jet fuel next year, as it seeks to curb fuel imports. Kabul Wijayanto, director at the Plantation Fund Agency, which is in charge of collecting and distributing the export levy, said authorities would impose the new rates three days after the regulation is issued. Wijayanto said the regulation was being processed by the law ministry. – Reuters

SNB SAYS WEAKNESSES IN BANKS' CAPITAL REGIME STILL NEED TO BE ADDRESSED

ZURICH: Weaknesses in the capital regime for the Swiss banking sector still need to be addressed after the 2023 collapse of Credit Suisse, the Swiss National Bank (SNB) said yesterday, backing government efforts to make the industry more robust. In its annual report, the Swiss central bank noted that it had in an assessment last June highlighted weaknesses in UBS's capital backing for its subsidiaries. "The SNB emphasised that the current capital position of the UBS parent bank is stronger than that of Credit Suisse before the crisis," it said. "Nevertheless, weaknesses in the current capital regime need to be addressed." UBS argues that it is already well capitalised in comparison to global rivals and that making it hold billions of additional dollars risks putting it at a disadvantage. – Reuters



Gold hits record high amid economic concerns

► Bullion surpasses US\$3,000 twice in one week as trade tensions, economic instability drive investor demand

BENGALURU: Gold prices scaled a record peak above the crucial US\$3,000-mark (RM13,326.90) yesterday for the second time in a week, as investors sought cover from economic concerns fuelled by US President Donald Trump's tariff policies.

Spot gold rose 0.2% to US\$3,006.88 an ounce as of 0525 GMT after hitting a record high of US\$3,016.92 per ounce earlier in the session.

Gold climbed above the US\$3,000/oz milestone for the first time on Friday.

US gold futures gained 0.4% to US\$3,017.20.

"Gold is moving higher on account of a weaker dollar and continued tariff uncertainties... With gold at record highs there

is a lot of technical and chart based buying that kicks in since there is no resistance apparent on the charts," said Marex analyst Edward Meir.

The US dollar index wallowed near a four-month trough, making gold cheaper for overseas buyers.

Historically considered a hedge against geopolitical instability, gold has risen more than 14% year-to-date. Since Trump took office in January, gold has hit a record high 14 times as trade tensions boosted safe-haven demand.

Trump has floated plans for a series of US tariffs, from a flat 25% on steel and aluminium which came into effect in February to reciprocal and sectoral tariffs that he said will

be imposed on April 2.

ANZ raised their up to 3-month gold price forecast to US\$3,100/oz and 6-month forecast to US\$3,200/oz, citing escalating geopolitical and trade tensions, easing monetary policy and strong central bank buying.

New economic projections from Federal Reserve officials this week will provide the most tangible evidence yet of the likely impact of Trump administration policies.

Forecasters have marked down their expectations for US growth this year, raised concerns about a potential recession, and expect increased inflation.

"Israeli air strikes may also see tensions flare in the Middle East again and that could add to the litany of drivers pushing gold higher," Capital.com's financial market analyst Kyle Rodda said.

Spot silver firmed 0.1% to US\$33.85 an ounce, platinum added 0.2% to US\$1,002.50 and palladium rose 0.4% to US\$968.96. – Reuters

Big pharma fears top drugs targeted in US-EU tariff feud

LONDON: Drugmakers are urging the Trump administration and European Union (EU) officials to exclude medical goods from expanding tariff wars, hoping to avert price spikes on top-selling medicines made in Europe from Novo Nordisk's Wegovy for weight loss to Merck's cancer immunotherapy Keytruda.

In conversations with US officials, the pharmaceutical industry argued that tariffs on the EU would increase drug costs and create access barriers for patients, endangering priorities outlined in President Donald Trump's health-related executive orders on drug pricing and increasing life expectancy of Americans, according to more than a half dozen pharma industry sources with direct knowledge of the discussions.

Some are signalling a willingness to expand manufacturing in the US, while pressing for tax breaks and regulatory changes that would make it easier to make that happen, according to three of the sources.

"We are firmly delivering the message to the Trump administration and to the European Union that patients will pay the price" for tariffs, said a senior executive at a European drugmaker.

Industry executives are also pressing their case with officials in Brussels, urging the EU hold off on retaliatory tariffs even if Trump includes medicines in a trade dispute, several of the sources said. Some raised the fact that lifesaving medicines were excluded from sanctions on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine.

"We as Western countries have interconnected supply chains in this sector. Interrupting these flows will hurt patient access to lifesaving medicines," said a senior executive at another large European drugmaker. "It's a lose-lose" situation.

Pharmaceutical products have long been spared from trade wars due to the potential harms. But Trump's move to increase tariffs on goods from China, including finished drugs and raw ingredients, as well as an initial round of tariffs between the US and EU on goods like steel and bourbon, has raised expectations that medicines will join the list.

The majority of medicinal supplies imported from China are of low monetary value. But the US depends on medicines partly produced in Europe that bring in hundreds of billions of dollars in revenue.

For example, Novo Nordisk partially makes some of the active pharmaceutical ingredient for obesity injection Wegovy in Denmark, while



Pharmaceuticals are usually protected in trade wars, but Trump's tariffs on Chinese goods and US-EU tariffs on items like steel suggest medicines could be targeted next. – UNSPLASH PIX

Merck's mega-blockbuster Keytruda and AbbVie's wrinkle treatment Botox are made in Ireland.

Novo CEO Lars Fruergaard Jorgensen said this month that his company would experience short-term impacts from tariffs, but is moving to produce domestically more of its medicines sold in the US. The company last year announced a US\$4.1 billion (RM18 billion) investment to expand production in North Carolina.

Merck declined to comment for this story. AbbVie declined to comment on where individual medicines are manufactured but said it has a robust manufacturing network globally.

The US government, a major buyer of drugs for its massive Medicare and Medicaid health programs, may face higher prices to account for the cost of tariffs, said Simon Baker, head of global biopharma research at Redburn Atlantic.

Emily Field, head of European pharma equity research at Barclays, told Reuters that until very recently she thought tariffs on prescription drugs were not a serious threat. Now she is "getting asked about this nonstop by clients," she said.

Industry sources declined to say how the Trump administration has responded to its messages. The US president has previously announced tariffs on trade partners only to subsequently suspend or delay them or allow exceptions. One source said it was impossible to know which of several trade policy philosophies would prevail in the White House.

Trump last week called out Ireland for luring pharmaceutical companies with tax breaks, contributing to a "massive deficit." White House officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The European Commission declined to comment.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the dependency of the US and EU on China and India for raw ingredients to make critical drugs and hospital supplies, as governments competed for materials used in vaccines and protective gear.

Many large drugmakers have since sought to delink supply chains for the Western and Chinese markets. But the notion of separating production ties between Europe and the US was not seriously considered, several of the sources said.

Indianapolis-based Eli Lilly recently announced plans to spend at least US\$27 billion on four new manufacturing plants in the US, but many drugmakers would find it difficult to follow suit, several of the sources said.

Building a new production facility in the US can cost up to US\$2 billion and take 5-10 years before it is operational, including time and costs related to fulfilling regulatory requirements, according to industry trade group PhRMA.

A senior executive from one of the European drugmakers said creating a wholly US-based manufacturing process would mean diverting funds from researching future medicines, and amounts to "fixing something that is not broken." – Reuters

FAA reinstating fired employees after court order: Union

WASHINGTON: The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is reinstating 132 employees who were fired on Feb 14 after a federal judge in Maryland ordered their return, a union said on Monday.

The Professional Aviation Safety Specialists union said the probationary employees who were fired as part of the Elon Musk-led Department of Government Efficiency federal government cuts will receive back pay and should return to duty status on March 20.

"This is a win for public safety and for a critical workforce dedicated to the FAA's mission," union President David Spero said.

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said last month that the FAA cut 352 probationary employees out of about 45,000 total, but said none were in "safety critical" positions.

The FAA did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The US Transportation Department cut hundreds of other probationary workers across other agencies.

The firings raised alarm after a series of plane crashes have sparked concern about US aviation safety.

US District Judge James Bredar in Baltimore directed the administration to reinstate tens of thousands of federal workers, saying 18 agencies that fired probationary employees en masse violated regulations governing the process for laying off federal workers. The government had claimed it fired individual workers for performance reasons.

"There were no individualised assessments of employees. They were all just fired," Bredar said.

The union said those who were fired in February included technical operations, mission support services, air traffic services and flight standards service.

"Haphazardly eliminating positions and encouraging resignations creates a demoralising effect on the workforce," Spero said. "We are pleased that the expungement of these letters referencing the false performance claims allows these employees to continue their service to the American flying public without this unsubstantiated blemish on their work record." – Reuters

Audi to cut 7,500 administration, design jobs by 2029

BERLIN: Volkswagen's Audi will cut up to 7,500 jobs in Germany by 2029 in areas like administration and development, the premium carmaker said on Monday, the latest German auto industry player to reduce costs.

The planned measures, agreed on Monday by management and labour representatives, should save the carmaker €1 billion (RM4.9 billion) per year in the medium term, it said, adding it was investing a total of €8 billion in its German sites in the coming four years.

The cuts at Audi bring layoffs currently planned across the Volkswagen Group to just under 48,000: VW has unleashed a cost-cutting programme involving 35,000 job cuts, Porsche plans to cut 3,900 jobs, and software unit Cariad aims to slash around 1,600.

Audi has already cut around 9,500 production jobs since 2019, a move it said at the time should free up billions of euros to fund its shift to EVs and boost margins to 9-11%.

But the brand has fared poorly in recent years, with its operating margin crashing to 4.5% in the first nine months of 2024 from 7% in the same period of the previous year due to weak sales in its key markets and the cost of ceasing production at its struggling Brussels plant.

A job security guarantee agreement at its German sites was extended to the end of 2033, Audi said. – Reuters

SUCCESS:
THE INSIGHT STORY**How has your life experience made you the leader you are today?**

My journey at Sirim (formerly known as the Standard and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia, now known as Sirim Bhd), starting as a testing officer nearly two years ago has been fundamental to my leadership style. Through hands-on experience in various departments, including food product testing, I gained insights into our organisation's core operations and challenges which has shaped my understanding of quality assurance, customer satisfaction, and the importance of continuous improvement.

My experience taught me the importance of empathy, communication and strategic thinking in leadership. I understand the diverse perspectives within our organisation and the broader industry, which allows me to make informed decisions that benefit our stakeholders. Furthermore, encountering and overcoming challenges throughout my career has strengthened my problem-solving skills.

Overall, my life experiences have instilled in me a deep sense of responsibility, integrity, and passion for driving positive change. These qualities have guided me in my leadership approach at Sirim QAS, ensuring that we can continue to uphold our commitment to excellence, innovation, and customer satisfaction in the testing and certification industry.

What traits do you look for in your talent or how do you decide who is right for a job?

We value individuals who bring creativity and innovation to the table, providing fresh solutions and insights that keep our team moving forward. Moreover, those with a strong adaptability and growth mindset are important, as employees need to embrace change, learn swiftly, and tackle new challenges with eagerness. By prioritising these traits in our hiring process, we can assemble a high-performing team capable of realising our company's vision and mission.

How do you think the industry you are in will evolve in the future?

I foresee a significant evolution and transformation in the testing, inspection, and certification industry in the coming years.

Advancement in technology: We anticipate rapid advancements in technology, particularly in areas such as automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and data analytics. These technological innovations will revolutionise our testing and certification processes, making them more efficient, accurate, and adaptable to changing market needs.

Focus on Sustainability and Environmental Standards: The global focus on sustainability and environmental protection will drive the demand for testing and certification services that ensure products can meet stringent environmental standards.

Emphasis on Quality and Consumer Protection: As consumer expectations continue to rise, there will be an increased emphasis on quality assurance and consumer protection. Our continuously updated certification schemes and commitment to upholding the highest standards of quality and impartiality will be crucial in meeting these evolving demands.

Digital Transformation: The industry is undergoing a digital transformation, with a shift towards digital platforms for testing, certification, and compliance management. We will continue to invest in digital solutions and technologies to enhance the customer experience, improve efficiency, and streamline processes.

What advice can you offer those looking to start their career/own business?

To embark on your entrepreneurial journey or career path, I believe the initial step is conducting thorough research into the current landscape and dynamics of your chosen industry. This lays the essential groundwork for success by offering insights into the business landscape, including its challenges.

Lastly, have the courage to embrace change

Give priority to strong relationships and teamwork

► This week, Sirim QAS International CEO Nur Fadhilah Muhammad tells *SunBiz* that employees with a growth mindset are crucial, as they are open to change and eager to take on challenges

and think critically about how you can improve from there. When starting something new, do not hesitate to take new chances.

We all know about the industrial revolution, are we in for a technological revolution? Your thoughts.

I believe we are indeed on the cusp of a technological revolution that has the potential to transform industries globally. The advancements in digital technologies, automation, artificial intelligence, and data analytics are reshaping the way businesses operate, innovate, and interact with customers.

Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital solutions, remote work arrangements, and e-commerce platforms, highlighting the importance of technology in driving resilience, efficiency, and agility in business operations. Similar to how we moved to digitalisation and implemented an online system to deal with our customers. It gave us maximum flexibility as we did not have to meet our customers face-to-face to solve their problems.

As a leading testing, inspection, and certification body, Sirim QAS International is at the forefront of this technological revolution. We play a crucial role in ensuring the safety, quality, and compliance of emerging technologies and digital solutions.

How has mentorship made a difference in your professional life?

Fortunately, I had the opportunity to meet mentors who provided invaluable guidance throughout my career journey. Their strategic thinking and forward-looking mindset inspired me to become a more independent and responsible leader, shaping me into who I am today.

From them, I learned how a good leader would guide and inspire their team. Their mentorship has left a lasting mark on my professional career, moulding me into the capable and confident leader that I am today.

What do you want to see Sirim accomplish in the next five years?

As the CEO of Sirim QAS, I envision Sirim QAS accomplishing several key objectives for the next five years. I believe that they will be able to broaden their service offerings to cater to the evolving needs of industries, both locally and internationally. This includes enhancing our certification, testing, inspection, and training services to support various sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, healthcare, and beyond.

In addition to this, I feel that Sirim can focus on leveraging cutting-edge technologies and innovative solutions to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of our services. This may involve the implementation of advanced testing methodologies, digitalisation of processes, and embracing emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and blockchain.

In five years, I aspire to boost Sirim's reputation as a leading conformity assessment body globally which entails fostering partnerships with international organisations, expanding our presence in key markets, and obtaining recognition for our services on an international scale.

Overall, my vision for Sirim QAS is to solidify

our position as a trusted partner for quality and conformity assessment services, driving innovation, and excellence across industries.

Best piece of advice you ever got on your career.

One of the most valuable pieces of advice I've received in my career is to prioritise building strong relationships and fostering teamwork. Collaborating effectively with colleagues, partners, and stakeholders is essential for achieving our goals and driving organisational success. By working together, leveraging each other's strengths and communicating openly, we can overcome challenges, seize opportunities, and achieve remarkable outcomes.

How do you stay abreast of issues affecting your industry?

Staying abreast of issues affecting our industry is a top priority to ensure we remain at the forefront of testing, inspection, and certification advancements.

It's important we maintain our relationships with regulatory authorities and government agencies. I think that through all of the partnerships, I was able to gain valuable insights into emerging policies, standards and targets that impact our industry.

We should also actively engage with clients and partners to understand their changing needs and issues. I remember how we made a very big decision during the pandemic to change our service model to a one-stop based on customer feedback. I think that the changes are worth it because by adjusting our process to accommodate our clients who are leaders in their respective industries, we can anticipate disruptions and opportunities well in advance.

What has been the biggest challenge you have faced and what did you learn from it?

I think the efficiency and delivery of services at Sirim QAS been a huge challenge for me. The industry holds a strong expectation for quick turnaround times on test results, creating a pressing need to meet these demands efficiently.

Over the past decade, we've made significant strides in this area by upgrading our testing machinery and elevating staff competencies, which has been crucial in improving our response times.

What I've learned from this experience is the invaluable role of teamwork and collaboration in overcoming challenges. Without the collective effort of our team, achieving our goals would have been far more difficult.

We've also learned the importance of innovation and technology in driving efficiency, but it's the synergy within our team and our collaborations with partners like NDT Ventures and WebGeaz that have enabled us to truly excel in delivering excellent service to our customers. This journey has reinforced my belief that while technology and innovation are vital, teamwork is the cornerstone of success.

What man-made innovation confounds you? Why?

The innovation that truly confounds me has been the rapid digitalisation of our operations at Sirim QAS. When I first stepped into my role as CEO, we were blindsided by the Covid-19 pandemic, which could have severely disrupted our work. However, the foresight to begin our



digital transformation just before the pandemic struck was a saving grace.

All our systems had to operate online, from solving customer issues to conducting meetings with clients.

The ability to adapt and transform our operations virtually overnight showcases the incredible power and potential of digital technology to not only solve immediate problems but also to fundamentally improve how we serve our customers and operate as an organisation.

How do you expect policies on climate change to impact businesses in the future?

With new regulatory compliance requirements, businesses will face increasingly stringent regulatory requirements related to environmental sustainability, carbon emissions, and resource conservation. Compliance with these regulations will become a priority, necessitating investments in sustainable practices, renewable energy solutions, and eco-friendly technologies.

In addition to more market demands for green products and services, I believe that consumer preferences are shifting towards environmentally responsible products and services. Businesses that prioritise sustainability and offer green alternatives will have a competitive advantage in the market. This includes adopting eco-certifications and labels to demonstrate environmental stewardship and attract environmentally-conscious consumers.

In summary, climate change policies will drive businesses towards greater environmental responsibility, innovation, resilience, and collaboration. At Sirim QAS International, we are committed to supporting businesses in navigating these evolving challenges and opportunities through our expertise in sustainability certification, environmental testing, and compliance services.

What are the top three factors you would attribute to your success?

Persistence. Persistence is crucial because it fuels resilience and determination when challenges arise. People who persevere in the face of difficulty acquire the resilience and persistence necessary to triumph over hardship and accomplish their objectives. It is the driving force that keeps me moving forward, even when the journey is difficult.

Positive mindset. Keeping an optimistic outlook is essential because it affects how I see possibilities and obstacles. With a positive outlook, I approach obstacles as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable barriers. This mindset empowers me to stay resilient, embrace change, and find creative solutions amidst adversity.

Continuous learning. By embracing a mindset of ongoing growth and development, I open myself to new ideas, skills, and perspectives. This commitment to learning promotes creativity and innovation in addition to improving our knowledge and skills.

IT'S no secret that savings and investments should form part of a healthy financial plan. As economic shifts, technological advancements, and new government initiatives come on board, Malaysia is witnessing a growing interest in retail investment.

Invest-to-save, where money is put towards an investment instrument with the objective of building a nest egg, can be an effective financial planning strategy. Among the investment instruments available in Malaysia, securities are often part of an invest-to-save strategy as it offers good potential to grow an initial or principal investment amount.

However, unlike savings, investments such as securities entail risks and must be carefully conducted with sound knowledge, discipline and good habits. Here are three ways new investors can develop the right traits to meet their objectives, obtain long-term value and find success when investing in securities.

Understand time horizons

Generally, businesses use securities as a means to raise capital for various purposes such as to fund business activities, launch new products or for business expansion. The most common type of securities are shares which are tradable financial assets



that represent a share or ownership of a company.

Investing in well-managed companies that have strong financials and a competitive advantage in the market such as companies that are well-established with a strong market share or possess proprietary technology, can offer good potential for capital appreciation over the mid- and long-term. This begins with a strong foundation – a well-structured portfolio powered by an informed investment strategy.

To build an investment portfolio, start by realistically determining when the money would be required, and determine your risk appetite. As stock prices fluctuate with market, industry, and economic changes, ensure there are periods for growth when conditions are favorable and time for recovery when prices drop. As a rule of thumb, if there is less time available until the point you expect to use the money, take less risk.

Take informed, well-calculated risks

No investment opportunity is

completely risk-free, and it is imperative for investors to understand what these risks are, how they can evolve and how to balance these against personal goals and potential returns. Investors who deep dive into understanding the risks they are comfortable with at the start of their investment journey, and strategically consider calculated risks against the rewards they are looking to gain will find more meaningful success in the longer term.

From the onset, be clear, honest and firm about your risk tolerance level. Determine and write down how much money you can realistically bear to lose in the event things don't go as planned. Before attempting to buy stocks or shares, learn about the company, its past and current performance, as well as its risks and potential rewards.

Study aspects such as revenue growth, profit margins, debt levels and cash flow to learn if the company can weather economic downturns and continue to grow over time. Look at consistent earnings growth, the frequency of dividends, and payouts in the context of industry trends and the company's market potential.

Investors with a lower risk tolerance should also consider more defensive portfolios, while growth or speculative portfolios may be better suited for more ambitious investors

with higher risk tolerances.

Build diversity

As the saying goes, don't put all your eggs in one basket. This certainly rings true when it comes to investing, and securities is one way to build more diversity into investors' overall financial plans.

On Bursa Malaysia Securities, the main categories of securities include shares, warrants, exchange-traded funds (ETFs) and real estate investment trusts (REITs). This plethora of investment instruments offers investors the ability to spread risk through the acquisition of different types of shares or tradeable financial assets in various industries.

A good way to build diversity into your portfolio is to constantly consider and spread the risk across different asset types to ensure there is no overdependence on one sector, industry or asset class. Depending on risk tolerance levels, consider a split portfolio with a percentage allocated appropriately to growth, speculative and defensive stocks. Visualise your portfolio diversity by creating a list of current and planned stocks and analyse the investment spread and risk across types of companies, sectors and regions.

When analysing and executing your portfolio, steer clear of emotional investing and behaviours

that can cloud judgement. This includes "anchoring" on previous stock performance, panic selling shares driven by fear, or confirmation bias – overlooking negative information in the hopes that a stock would recover.

Self-directed trading platforms are an accessible and affordable way to get started on your investing journey. Apart from offering competitive fees and commissions, and the ability to start investing with a small amount, these platforms also have handy tools such as paper trading that allow investors to test portfolios, practice strategies, and hone emotional control in a simulated real-life situation using virtual cash.

When exploring self-directed trading platforms, look for trusted, secure, and reliable platforms that are licensed by the Securities Commission Malaysia, that are intuitive and easy to use and have good user ratings. Consider aspects such as accessibility to products and markets that meet investment goals, platform language, as well as a rich resource of educational material, trade information and analytics that can help even new investors make informed decisions.

THIS article is contributed by Webull Malaysia CEO Kenneth Chan (pix).

Pixlr: Bringing Malaysia to the forefront of AI development

PETALING JAYA: When it comes to tech companies making a mark in the global scene, Pixlr is one name to watch out for, earning its place alongside global leaders like Adobe and Canva. Offering a powerful yet lightweight alternative for content creators who seek efficiency and accessibility, its AI-powered tools can effortlessly produce stunning content for its wide range of users.

Boasting up to millions of monthly active users worldwide, the company's unique selling points include AI-driven editing, an intuitive user experience and cloud-based flexibility.

"With our tools, we allow users to create professional-quality visuals without the steep learning curve or expensive subscription," Pixlr Group founder Stephanie Sitt said.

The innovative SaaS powerhouse is behind a variety of features and AI-powered generative tools such as Pixlr.com, Designs.ai and Vectr.com.

Being one of the few global technology companies being built out of Malaysia, the company's success highlights the country's potential as a hub for world-class technology solutions.

"We hope we can inspire other start-ups and enterprises in the industry to pursue global expansion," Sitt said optimistically.

With employees and staff from all around the world, the group serves as a bridge for talent and best practices in terms of application development.

Leveraging Malaysia's strong innovation ecosystem and cost

advantages, Pixlr is able to build cutting-edge AI-powered products at a competitive price point. This combination of homegrown innovation and global scalability will help to serve as a blueprint for other Malaysia tech companies looking to establish their name on the world stage.

"Our constantly evolving product portfolio demonstrates how Malaysia can lead in AI-driven innovation, further strengthening the local tech ecosystem."

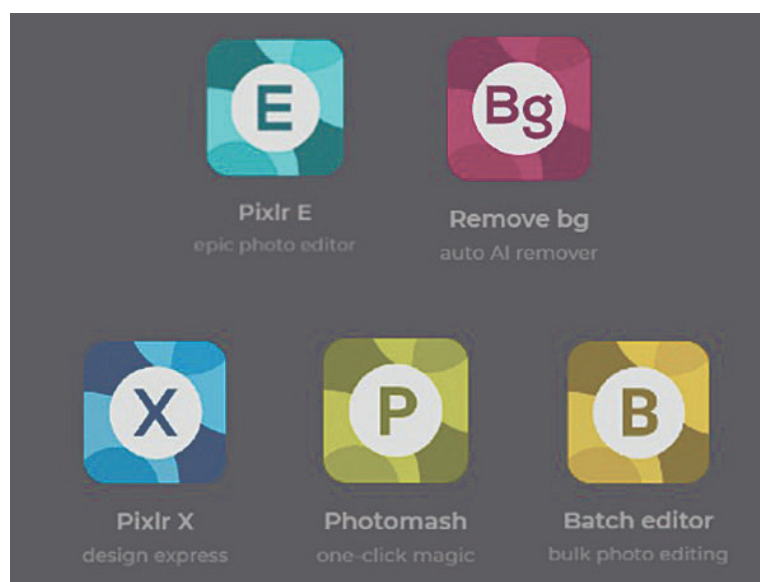
Pixlr is on a mission to empower content creators of every skill level to bring their creative visions to life by advancing design capabilities through artificial intelligence, continuous technological innovation, and exceptional design applications.

With a wide range of users, what makes Pixlr Group's tools appealing is their user-friendly interface that makes them ideal for beginners while still offering advanced features for more experienced users.

The company's success not only elevates its own brand, but it's doing wonderfully in terms of putting Malaysian technology companies on the map as well.

Pixlr Group CEO Warren Leow said that the company also serves as a key member of Konsortium AI Negara (KAIN), which is a collective of top AI start-ups in Malaysia with the goal of pushing AI agenda with appropriate policies, programmes and investments by the government and other stakeholders.

Through KAIN, the group contributes to shaping AI policies,



Pixlr aims to help creators of all levels bring their ideas to life by improving design tools with AI, innovation, and user-friendly apps. – **PIXLR WEBSITE**

fostering industry-academia collaboration, and ensuring that Malaysia remains at the forefront of AI development.

"As a Malaysian technology company servicing the global market, our participation in these national initiatives offers a differentiated point of view on Malaysia's position as a serious contender in the global AI landscape," Leow said.

Believing that AI adoption in the country had grown significantly, Pixlr is doing its part to drive this shift amongst Malaysians. Through training over 1,500 individuals in

generative AI, the group is equipping professionals and businesses alike with the skills to leverage AI for both creative and commercial purposes.

"Through our various AI-powered tools, we are determined to make content creation accessible to everyone, and that includes all Malaysians regardless of their backgrounds.

"There have been reports indicating that Malaysians fear AI may take over their jobs. Here at Pixlr, our mission is to empower our users – whether casual beginners or seasoned industry professionals – to

create stunning visuals, videos, brochures, and icons quickly, bringing their imagination to life," Sitt said.

Not only do these AI-powered tools revolutionise content creation and design by seamlessly blending creativity with efficiency, it also helps to transform the future of visual content creation into a groundbreaking experience for its users.

Through the evolution of AI, creative boundaries are consistently challenged and pushed. All these contribute to Pixlr becoming a frontrunner in shaping the future of digital visual artistry. The integration of ChatGPT, Gemini, Mistral, LLaMA, and Claude has helped individuals streamline the process of drafting and writing articles, captions, and taglines that align with various marketing and communication pieces.

Other than that, the group's Pixlr for Education programme also ensures all DELiMa users (up to 5 million students and teachers) in Malaysia can access Pixlr for free, fostering creativity and digital literacy amongst students and educators.

(DELiMa is the Education Ministry's digital learning platform designed to facilitate online teaching and learning sessions.)

Pixlr has also signed a memorandum of agreement with Universiti Teknologi Mara to open up access to Pixlr for Education to its faculty and staff, and is considering other ways to work together with the university on the AI agenda.



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Going traditional for Raya

► Alfaro unveils new collection that dresses whole family

■ BY **S.TAMARAI CHELVI**

MALAY traditional textile brand Alfaro Sdn Bhd has recently launched its Raya collection last month.

Actress Fasha Sandha and Alfaro CEO Muhammad Irfan, in matching pastel blue *baju kurung* and *baju Melayu* with *sampin*,

opened the show, accompanied with fireworks.

The show kicked off with the women collection, where the models strutted in *kebarung moden*, made from the Nyda fabric, or *nida*, which is comfortable on the skin. The traditional attires incorporated *sulam batu* embroidery, accentuated with lace and stone embellishments.

The men's collection, on the other hand, featured *baju melayu* made from *Dachi* fabric and the looks were styled with matching stylish *songket sampin* in dark to soft pastel tones for the festive touch.



Matching teal-coloured *baju melayu* for father and son.



Black *abaya* with statement print.



The decorated bottom balances the almost plain top.



A demure black *abaya*.

Abaya for days

WITH Hari Raya Aidilfitri fast approaching, shops have begun rolling out new collections for traditional attire such as *baju kurung*, *kebaya* and *kebarung* but the *abaya* is becoming a favourite option.

The *abaya* is a religious and traditional garment worn by Muslim women for its modesty and practicality for centuries, particularly in Middle Eastern countries. The robe-like dress has gone through some transformation over the years as designers have redefined the *abaya* with contemporary designs such as pleated sleeves.

For instance, in 2024, capes were all the rage and it looks like the trend continues to be popular in 2025. Open *abaya* with embellishment and embroidery has also become a popular trend.

Fashion forward

The diverse designs of *abaya* that incorporates the style of traditional Malay attire, took centre stage this year. Open *abaya* with wrap belts, buttoned and layered pieces as well as capes were crafted using chiffon and cotton fabric, ideal for the Malaysian weather.

Hue of pastel colours with subtle shimmer for that soft glam look dominated the runway as old money aesthetics becomes the trend of the year.

Showy but elegant, the minimal shimmer, stone embellishment, embroidery and floral lace keep the mood light but still makes a fashion statement.

The *abaya* is just the one for women who exudes subtle sophistication and it is timeless — in spite of its many reimagined looks, the *abaya* never goes out of style.



Cape *abaya* in pastel yellow at Alfaro's fashion show.

— ALL PICS COURTESY OF ALFARO



Pastels, baby blue, are all the buzz this Raya.

The show was made more wholesome with Alfaro's children collection, so parents can have themed-Raya looks with pastel colours and subtle embroidery, with just the right amount of shimmer and glitz.

For the edgy fashionistas, the black *abaya* choices, featuring Arabic floral embroidery inspired

by Arabic artistry, add just the right shimmer and grunge to your Raya.

As Alfaro founder Farooq Ahmad walked down the runway flanked by models, the event came to a close, leaving the sartorial fraternity impressed by the wide variety clothing and colours options for the upcoming Hari Raya celebrations.



Open *abaya* in pastel lavender.



Open *abaya* with shimmering embroidery.

Celeb collabs

► Four brand ambassadors to watch

BY JOHN TAN

IT is a great year for brand ambassadors. Be it in the realms of fashion or lifestyle, a good number of celebrities have been tapped to represent big brands.

We are also seeing new collaborations involving prominent names from the musical and acting worlds.

theSun has made a list of these hot brand partnerships that you should pay attention to.

Sandra Lim Shue Hui – Visit IOI Resort City

Sandra Lim Shue Hui placed in the top 30 in last year's Miss Universe contest. The 24-year-old Puchong native made history as it was the first time Malaysia achieved that feat in 54 years.

She is following up on that success with her appointment as Visit IOI Resort City's brand ambassador.

Lim represents the company's hotels, including Putrajaya Marriott Hotel, Le Meridien Putrajaya, Palm Garden Hotel, A Tribute Portfolio Hotel, Moxy Putrajaya and Four Points by Sheraton Puchong.

She will play an active role in showcasing the distinctive experiences offered by the cluster of premier hotels, engaging with guests through exclusive events, promotional campaigns and social media collaborations.

Since her crowning as Miss Universe Malaysia, Lim has advocated for empowerment, dedicating herself to charity. She has also been pursuing a career in acting,



Beyonce has partnered with Levi's in a campaign that is inspired, in part, by her recent turn to country music.



Lim is the most recent Miss Universe Malaysia.

appearing in the local movie *Money Games*.

Ningning – Maybelline

K-pop's Ningning has joined the Maybelline family as its new

ambassador. The 22-year-old, who is a member of the South Korean group Aespa, is the brand's representative for North and Southeast Asia.

The singer was chosen for her strong display of individuality, confidence and creativity in her work as an artiste – values that resonate deeply with Maybelline.

She will represent the company in key regional markets and be featured in upcoming product and brand campaigns.

Her first appearance will involve the campaign for the Lash Sensational Sky High mascara, in which she will showcase the product while promoting self-expression.

Ningning is best known as Aespa's vocalist and dancer since the band debuted in 2020. She is also the ambassador for luxury fashion brand Versace.

Beyonce – Levi's

Partnering with singer Beyonce, Levi's has launched the second chapter of its Reimagine campaign, *Pool Hall*.

The collaboration involves a short film, which sees the singer sporting the signature denim in a high-stakes game of pool, celebrating the brand's legacy and her artistic transformation.

Chapter Two highlights striking pieces such as the ribcage wide-leg jeans, the braided vest and the spade trench, styled with custom embellishments.

The campaign was conceived in a creative partnership with international media company TBWA and produced by creative agency Prettybird.

Its aesthetic was inspired by Beyonce's recent turn to country music. The 43-year-old released her first country and western album *Cowboy Carter*, inspired by her Texan roots.

The album won her Album of the Year and Best Country Album at the 67th Grammy Awards.

Jackson Wang – Anessa

K-pop star Jackson Wang is sunscreen

brand Anessa's new ambassador for the Asia-Pacific region.

The artiste's first collaboration with the brand involves its Gold series, which is said to elevate skincare benefits, containing ingredients that enhance ultraviolet radiation defence while nourishing the skin.

Wang was picked as the brand's ambassador as his outgoing and radiant personality reflects Anessa's philosophy of "embrace the sun, live life to the fullest".

The 31-year-old rose to fame as a member of the South Korean group Got7.

Since his debut, he has also pursued a solo music career and founded his record label Team Wang.



Ningning is a member of South Korean group Aespa.



Wang is a member of South Korean group Got7.

LYFE'S LOOKBOOK



Taiwanese actor Edward Peng Yu-Yan suits up in a classic tuxedo.



Hong Kong actor Philip Ng rocks up in a clean black suit to the awards show.



Taiwanese actress Yang Kuei-Mei wins Best Supporting Actress for her movie *Yen and Ai-Lee*.



South Korean actor Jang Dong-gun (left) and Chinese actress Tang Wei posing backstage after receiving Excellence in Asian Cinema Award. – **ALL PICS FROM REUTERS**

Best of Asia

➤ Asian Film Awards in Hong Kong celebrates cinematic achievements in glitzy ceremony

THE 18th Asian Film Awards in Hong Kong early this week celebrated the region's cinematic achievements. This year's Asian Film Awards showcased 30 exceptional films from 25 countries or regions, competing for 16 awards.

The red carpet event saw a star-studded lineup, including Malaysian actress Lin Min

Chen, South Korean actor Jang Dong Gun, Taiwanese stars Eddie Peng and Wu Kang-ren.

Hong Kong filmmaker and martial arts star Sammo Hung served as president of the jury that selected the winners.

The prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to *Perfect Days*' Yakusho Koji, recognising his four decades of profound contributions to cinema.

Payal Kapadia's Indian co-production *All We Imagine as Light* won best film, while the best actress honour was awarded to Shahana Goswami for her lead performance in *Santosh* directed by first-time filmmaker Sandhya Suri, who also won the best new director prize.

The best director prize went to Japan's Yoshida Daihachi for his atmospheric character study *Teki Cometh*.



Taiwanese actors Austin Lin (left) and Cheryl Yang looking radiant on the red carpet in opposing colours.



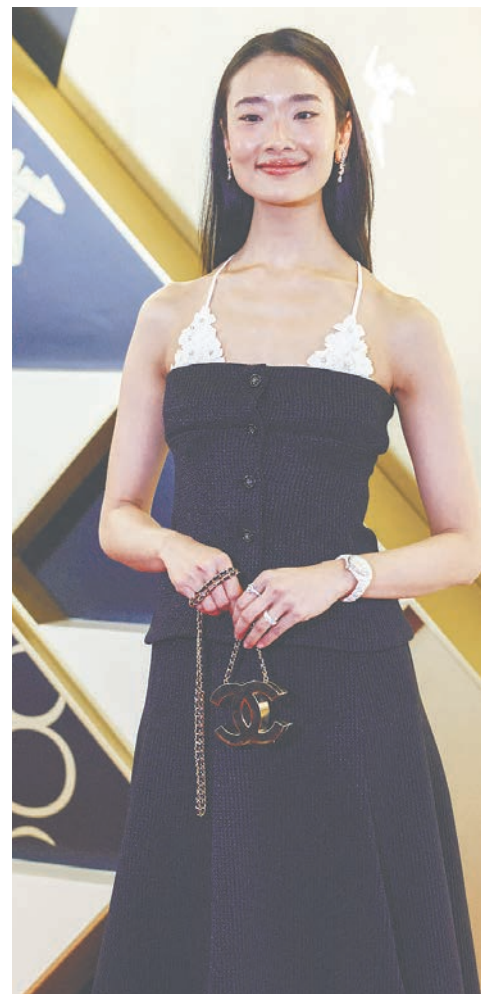
Japanese actress Yuumi Kawai chooses to pair statement earrings with a plain fit.



Hong Kong actor Sean Lau Ching-wan wins Best Actor for his movie *Papa*.



Thai actor Metawin Opas-iamkajorn graces the event.



Thai actress Chutimon Chuengcharoensukying stuns, adorned in Chanel jewellery and watch.



Japanese actor Hayato Kurihara wins Best Newcomer award for his movie *Happyend*.



BY MARK MATHEN VICTOR

AMAZON Studios knows *Invincible* is one of its strongest media properties, yet certain decisions it made for the adult animated show's new season raise some eyebrows, particularly in the animation department.

In *theSun's* review of the second season, we pointed out despite a strong narrative, the season had a weak, downright comical moustache-twirling primary villain. However, as a whole, it was elevated by solid writing and great animation, be it during the fights or standard conversations.

On the animation front, *Invincible's* second season is almost the exact opposite – at least for the first six out of eight episodes.

Superhero morality tested

Once again weaving several plot threads at once, the new season gets down and dirty on the morality and ethics of superheroes, particularly for those who with powers that could easily decimate entire cities.

Mark Grayson/*Invincible* (Steven Yeun) continues to face the repercussions of his father Nolan/Omni-Man's (J.K. Simmons) actions in the first season. This time around, he is also burdened with setting a good example for his half-brother Oliver/Kid Omni-Man (Christian Convery).

A babbling baby in the second season, the young superhero has aged to around 10 years old in a matter of months due to his half-Tharaxan genetics. Further complicating matters is the emerging bloodlust within Oliver due to being half-Viltrumite.

In the background, several other developments take place, particularly Cecil Stedman's continued research into developing anti-Viltrumite weapons to protect Earth through morally dubious means, Allen the Alien (Seth Rogen) attempting to break Nolan out from a Viltrumite prison in space and Angstrom Levy's return.

As said before, there is a lot more going on in the story with the supporting characters. These plot threads – seemingly inane and sometimes pointless – all culminate and intersect with the final two big events in the season's last episodes.

Animation woes drag season down

The definitive and strongest connective tissue in this season is Mark's growth, along with the relationship between him, Oliver and their mother.

For the half-brothers, a large aspect of their relationship and growing familial bond, which grows throughout and bookends the season, is where do they, as heroes, draw the line when it comes to killing "bad guys" who deserve it and whether the act of taking another's life is warranted.

His development as a character and the Grayson brothers' growing relationship bloom in the final two episodes, which is also the high point of a strong season bogged down by poor animation.

Conquest (pictured) and Mark's encounter is the show at its most extreme.



Not so *Invincible*

➤ Shaky animation weighs down season until epic finale

Possibly due to budget or time constraints, every shot, scene or action sequence from the first episode up to the sixth looks like it was done by an amateur animator – or animation team – on YouTube.

Scenes are often poorly shaded. Faces regularly lack dynamic expressions. There is a weird lack of depth in relation to the shadows cast. The worst by far is how any form of movement, particularly the flying or action-heavy ones, looks like still images that are poorly animated to give an illusion of motion.

To illustrate this, look at a picture with someone's face on your phone and use your fingers to crudely enlarge the image and move it around. This is what scenes in *Invincible's* third season look like when they try to portray movement.

Explosive finale redemption

Amazon Studios may have brought its budgeting approach from *The Boys* over to *Invincible*, where a large chunk of a season is done on a shoe-string budget so money can splurged on the season finale. Because once the seventh episode kicks off, the animation quality roars back with a vengeance.

And what a finale it was. In the seventh episode, a war breaks out with alternate versions of Mark/*Invincible* appearing on Earth and battling its heroes, while the final episode once again highlights the pure carnage, devastation and catastrophe that follows any Viltrumite.

Lasting nearly 40 minutes, *I Thought You'd Never Shut Up* is an orchestra of mayhem, as one of the most infamous Viltrumites from

Robert Kirkman's comics appears on Earth.

Voiced by Jeffrey Dean Morgan with the actor's natural menacing swagger, Conquest arrives to see that Mark has failed to conquer Earth after the last Viltrumite, Anissa, came to deliver the order in the last season.

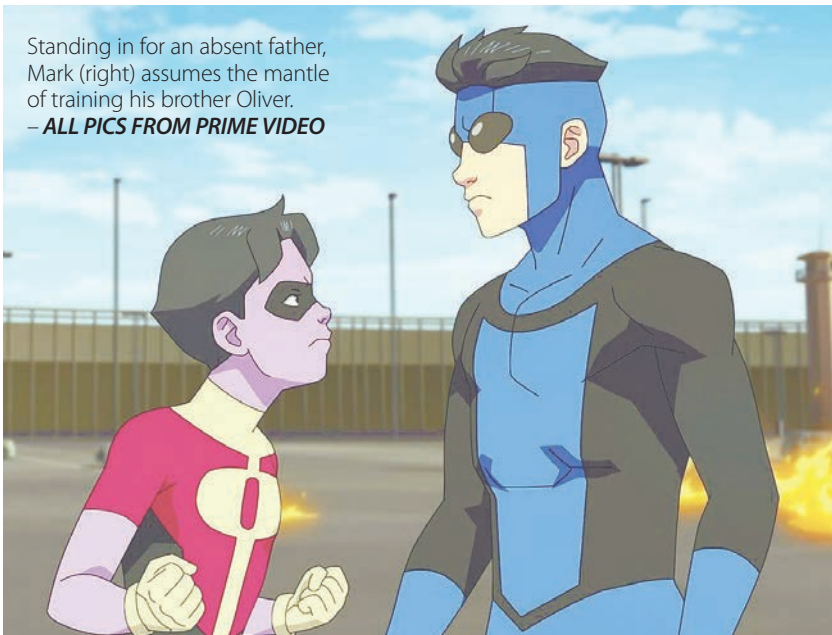
Nothing short of being a *The Walking Dead* reunion for Yeun and Morgan, their characters enter into a battle that is best summed up as a destructive spectacle, levelling entire cities and leaving at least several thousand civilians either dead or maimed for life.

For the entirety of the season, Conquest is never mentioned or shown coming to Earth. He is not a villain that the season builds up to. The Viltrumite simply appears out of nowhere and through the stellar animation, Morgan's voicework and writing, Conquest proves to be just that good of a villain that he requires no build-up or progression before the climactic fight.

Conquest also answers the question that Mark and Oliver asked each other – yes, some bad guys should certainly be killed if it means protecting even one person.

Invincible's third season is streaming on Prime Video.

Standing in for an absent father, Mark (right) assumes the mantle of training his brother Oliver.
– ALL PICS FROM PRIME VIDEO



The *Invincible* variants wreaking havoc is the appetiser to Conquest's arrival.



SCAN ME



Vickery's *Hotel Lobby* is inspired by the likes of Sabrina Carpenter and Daniel Caesar

English singer drops new single

RISING R&B star James Vickery has marked the new chapter of his musical career, releasing his new single *Hotel Lobby*.

The single, which is the first release from an upcoming project, showcases a new side to Vickery as it embodies the newfound confidence he discovered within himself.

"I really wanted to go outside of my comfort zone and write over something that I would never normally sing to. Malik 95 and Mosaic (the producers) cooked up this weird and wonderful guitar loop.

"Chloe Angelides and I wrote the rest of the song so quickly — it flowed out of us so effortlessly, which in my eyes is usually a sign of a great song," said the 30-year-old singer.

The release comes with a music video that brings its heartfelt lyrics to life. Set in an intimate bedroom scene, the visuals capture the raw emotion and passion woven into the song.

Vickery, who is completely deaf in one ear, is ready to bare his soul to the world and share the new side of his musical artistry.

At eight years old, he was diagnosed with a non-cancerous growth of skin cells called cholesteatoma, which was in his ear and growing towards his brain.

With surgery, Vickery survived the illness and discovered his vocal abilities upon working with a vocal coach. This led him to pursue a career in music.

He has since released over four EPs and one full-length album, earning him over 200 million streams online.

Celebrating local performing arts excellence

➤ Awards announces nominees for 38 categories

MALAYSIA'S arts community gathered for the 20th Boh Cameronian Arts Awards (20BCAA) nominees announcement last week, which highlighted nominees across theatre, dance, music and musical theatre.

This year, 77 submissions were received across 38 award categories, including Best Actor/Performer in a Leading Role, Best Costume, Styling and Make-up and Production Values.

A total of 41 productions have been nominated: 12 in dance, seven in musical theatre, 10 in music and 12 in theatre.

A panel, including Sabrina Hassan, Fazleena Hishamuddin, Christopher Ling and Dr Syahrul Musa, evaluated the submissions, recognising achievements in performance, technical execution and creative innovation.

To mark its 20th anniversary, 20BCAA has introduced initiatives to promote arts appreciation. The BCAA University Tour will take key creatives to universities across Malaysia, engaging students with insights into the industry. Meanwhile, sharing sessions with 20BCAA nominees will bring interactive discussions and showcases to key locations in the Klang Valley.

Sponsored by Boh Plantations and presented by Kakiseni, the awards continue to champion creative excellence in Malaysia's performing arts scene.

This year's theme "20 Years of Legacy: Igniting Inspiration for Tomorrow" honours past award recipients while challenging creative boundaries for future artistic innovation.

Here are some of the categories and the nominees:

Best Director

- Khairunazwan Rodzy, *Teater Muzikal Sudirman*
- Nicole-Ann Thomas, *The Working Dead*
- Shafeeq Shajahan, *Sang Kancil & The Dragon King*



2025 Collector's Edition Canister reveal with (from left) Kakiseni president Low Ngai Yuen, Boh Plantations CEO Jason Foo and Taylor's University School of Liberal Arts & Science head Dr Anindita Dasgupta.

- Shahrul Mizad, *Teater Muzikal Sakti Merong Mahawangsa*
- Vale V Wong & Tomos Nicholls, *Life Is...*

Best Choreographer in a Feature Length Work

- Boyz Chew & Damien Leow, *Orang Orang Drum Theatre (Kaka-Lala)*
- Gowri Chandran & Sumathi Chandra, *Temple Of Fine Arts (Pragati 2)*
- Hwa Wei-An, Hwa Wei-An (*A Reason For Falling*)
- James Kan & Yeo, Kwang Tung Dance Company (*Lyle Laluan Amaryllis - Still*)
- Loh Kok Man, Ming Low & Wong Jyh Shyong, Pentas Project Theatre Production (*Double Punctum*)

Best Featured / Lead Performer

- Geetha Shankaran-Lam, Geethashankarandance (*Samskara - Past Reflections, Present Expressions*)
- Naim Syahrazad, Juxt Studio, Lasalle College Of The Arts & College Of Creative Arts UTM (*Trans/Position*)
- Wong Jyh Shyong, Pentas Project Theatre Production (*Double Punctum*)

Best Group Performance

- ASK Dance Company, The Actors Studio
- Seni Teater Rakyat (*Kontra: Yueguang*)
- Temple of Fine Arts Dancers, Temple Of

Fine Arts (Pragati 2)

- Faculty of Dance, Aswara (*Jamu 2024*)

Best Music & Sound Design

- Hariraam Tingyuan Lam, Geethashankarandance (*Samskara - Past Reflections, Present Expressions*)
- Kent Lee, JinnD Productions (*Beyond Moving with Artisans: Rattan Weaving x Contemporary Dance*)
- Ng Chor Guan, Pentas Project Theatre Production (*Double Punctum*)
- Orang Orang Drum Theatre & Gideon Alubakhan Chen, Kwang Tung Dance Company (*Laluan Amaryllis - Still*)
- Zye Leow, Orang Orang Drum Theatre (*Kaka-Lala*)

Best of Nomination List

- Malaysia Century Chinese - *Orchestra East X West: A Musical Journey* (Music)
- Five Arts Centre - *Mortal Man: Two Monologues* (Theatre)
- Pusat Seni Pentas Tradisional (PuTRA), Aswara - *Randai "MacBeth"* (Theatre)
- Music TAS Seni Teater Rakyat and klpac - *Spice, Magic and Mystique by The Young KL Singers* (Music)
- Studio Sedar Ruang - *Teater Persiapan Seorang Aktor* (Theatre)
- Pentas Project Theatre Production & W Productions - *The Bee* (Theatre)



The 20th Boh Cameronian Arts Awards Collector's Edition Canister.

Rory's St. Patrick's Day delight

RORY MCILROY of Northern Ireland (*pic*) celebrated St. Patrick's Day by winning a three-hole aggregate playoff against JJ Spaun to capture his second title at The Players

Championship yesterday at TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida.

McIlroy took a one-shot lead when he birdied the par-5 16th hole, and the task of protecting that advantage became much easier when Spaun hit his tee shot at the par-3 17th over the famed island green and into the water.

Spaun struggled his way to a triple-bogey 6 and dropped to 3-over, trailing by three after McIlroy made a three-putt bogey.

Both players missed to the right of the fairway at the par-4 18th, and the tournament was all McIlroy's once Spaun's third shot narrowly missed the green.

McIlroy finished up with a bogey and won the playoff at 1-over.

"I feel like I'm a way more complete player than I was a few years ago," McIlroy said on the *Golf Channel* broadcast. "Even in conditions like this.

"That little 9-iron into 17, the little 8-iron into the last there, I said to (caddie Harry Diamond) there, that little

McIlroy defeats Spaun in playoff for second Players title

shot will take us a long way.

"I feel like I can play in all conditions and anything that comes my way. Really happy that I was able to get it done today."

McIlroy, 35, picked up the 28th victory of his PGA Tour career and his second of the year, following the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am.

His first Players Championship title came in 2019, and he is the eighth player to win the prestigious event multiple times.

His 2019 victory also happened to occur on St. Patrick's Day.

"It's been a good luck charm for me," McIlroy said.

Spaun, 34, is stuck on just one victory in 228 tournaments in his PGA Tour career. But he continued a stellar start to the season this week by notching his third top-three finish, following a T3 at the Sony Open and a T2 at the Cognizant Classic.

"This is probably the best golf I've played maybe in my career consistently," Spaun said.

"I had a chance to win at Sony, had a pretty good

chance to win at Cognizant, had a chance to win this week.

"But to go from where I was a year ago today or to start the week, yeah, I'm pretty proud of where I've been able to dig deep and kind of get some self-belief and get some confidence to play some good golf."

Spaun and McIlroy both noted the windy conditions at TPC Sawgrass, which had wreaked havoc on the golfers as early as Sunday.

"It was just a tough morning to play golf in general," Spaun said. "It would probably be one of the harder days that we'd have if it was this wind direction."

"Yeah, committed to every shot I hit. The one on 17 was exactly what I was trying to do, just didn't work out."

"A lot of positives from the week to take from and proud to give myself a chance today, and maybe next time it'll go in my favour."

Playing with a one-shot edge, McIlroy landed his tee shot at the par-3 29 feet from the hole with a 9-iron before Spaun played his shot.

"I feel bad for JJ; he hit a really good shot on 17 and it just went straight through the wind," McIlroy said.

Tom Hoge mixed seven birdies with a lone bogey en route to a 66 to share third place at 10-under with Akshay Bhatia (70) and Lucas Glover (71). – Field Level Media



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DI SEREMBAN
DALAM NEGERI SEMBILAN DARUL
KHUSUS, MALAYSIA
NO. PENGULUNGAN SYARIKAT:
NA-28NCC-15-03-2025**

Dalam perkara Seksyen 465 (1) (e) Akta Syarikat 2016, peruntukan-peruntukan dalam Akta Syarikat 2016 dan Kaedah-Kaedah (Penggulungan) Syarikat 1972

DAN

Dalam perkara Terra Zone Sdn. Bhd. [No. Syarikat: 199701020719 (436216-P)]

ANTARA

PERBADANAN USAHAWAN NASIONAL BERHAD [NO. SYARIKAT: 199101010745 (221057-V)]

PEMPETISYEN

DAN

TERRA ZONE SDN. BHD. [NO. SYARIKAT: 199701020719 (436216-P)]

RESPONDEN

IKLAN PETISYEN

NOTIS adalah dengan ini diberi bahawa Petisyen Penggulangan Syarikat yang dinamakan di atas oleh Mahkamah Tinggi di Seremban adalah pada 10hb Mac 2025 dikemukakan kepada Mahkamah tersebut oleh Perbadanan Usahawan Nasional Berhad. Dan bahawa Petisyen tersebut diarah untuk didengar di hadapan Mahkamah Tinggi Insolvency yang bersidang di Seremban pada hari Isnin, 28hb April 2025 pada pukul 9:00 pagi dan mana-mana penituh atau penumbang syarikat tersebut yang ingin menyokong atau menentang pembuatan perintah ke atas Petisyen tersebut boleh hadir pada masa pendengaran oleh beliau sendiri atau Peguamcaranya untuk tujuan itu dan salinan Petisyen akan diberikan kepada mana-mana Penituh atau penumbang Syarikat tersebut yang memerlukan oleh penandatangan di bawah ('undersigned') atas pembayaran caj terkawal untuk yang sama.

Alamat Pempetisyen adalah di Tingkat 7, Blok 1B, Plaza Sentral, Jalan Stesen Sentral 5, Kuala Lumpur Sentral, 50470 Kuala Lumpur

Peguamcara Pempetisyen ialah Tetuan Kama & Wan, yang beralamat di 5-1-1, Jalan Medan PB 4A, Seksyen 9, 43650 Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan.

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Ikian Petisyen ini difailkan oleh Tetuan Kama & Wan, Peguamcara & Peguambela bagi pihak Pempetisyen yang mempunyai alamat untuk penyampaian di No. 5-1-1, Jalan Medan PB 4A, Seksyen 9, 43650 Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan. (Tel: 03 89221465) (E-mel: wan.kamawan@gmail.com) (Ruj. No.: WS/PUNB/MFTSB/2199/L)

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Notices

**DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA
DI KUALA LUMPUR
DALAM WILAYAH PERSEKUTUAN KUALA
LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
PENGULUNGAN SYARIKAT
NO.: WA-28NCC-277-03-2025**

Dalam perkara Seksyen 465 (1) (e) Akta Syarikat 2016, peruntukan-peruntukan dalam Akta Syarikat 2016 dan Kaedah-Kaedah (Penggulungan) Syarikat 1972

DAN

Dalam perkara MGF Food Trading Sdn. Bhd. [No. Syarikat: 201501025346 (1150669-T)]

ANTARA

PERBADANAN USAHAWAN NASIONAL BERHAD [NO. SYARIKAT: 199101010745 (221057-V)]

PEMPETISYEN

DAN

MGF FOOD TRADING SDN. BHD. [NO. SYARIKAT: 201501025346 (1150669-T)]

RESPONDEN

IKLAN PETISYEN

NOTIS adalah dengan ini diberi bahawa Petisyen Penggulangan Syarikat yang dinamakan di atas oleh Mahkamah Tinggi di Kuala Lumpur adalah pada 10hb Mac 2025 dikemukakan kepada Mahkamah tersebut oleh Perbadanan Usahawan Nasional Berhad. Dan bahawa Petisyen tersebut diarah untuk didengar di hadapan Mahkamah Tinggi Insolvency yang bersidang di Kuala Lumpur pada hari Isnin, 28hb Jun 2025 pada pukul 9:00 pagi dan mana-mana penituh atau penumbang syarikat tersebut yang ingin menyokong atau menentang pembuatan perintah ke atas Petisyen tersebut boleh hadir pada masa pendengaran oleh beliau sendiri atau Peguamcaranya untuk tujuan itu dan salinan Petisyen akan diberikan kepada mana-mana Penituh atau penumbang Syarikat tersebut yang memerlukan oleh penandatangan di bawah ('undersigned') atas pembayaran caj terkawal untuk yang sama.

Alamat Pempetisyen adalah di Tingkat 7, Blok 1B, Plaza Sentral, Jalan Stesen Sentral 5, Kuala Lumpur Sentral, 50470 Kuala Lumpur

Peguamcara Pempetisyen ialah Tetuan Kama & Wan, yang beralamat di 5-1-1, Jalan Medan PB 4A, Seksyen 9, 43650 Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan.

Tetuan Kama & Wan
Peguamcara bagi Pempetisyen

NOTA: Mana-mana orang yang berhasrat untuk hadir pada pendengaran Petisyen tersebut hendaklah menyampaikan atau menghantar melalui pos kepada Tetuan Kama & Wan yang dinamakan di atas, notis bertulis tentang hasratnya berbuat demikian. Notis itu mesti menyatakan nama dan alamat orang itu, atau, jika firma, nama dan alamat firma itu dan mesti ditandatangani oleh orang atau firma itu atau Peguamcaranya (jika ada) dan mesti disampaikan, atau jika dipos, mesti dihantar melalui pos dalam masa yang mencukupi untuk sampai kepada yang dinamakan di atas tidak lewat pada pukul 12:00 tengah hari 20 Jun 2025.

Ikian Petisyen ini difailkan oleh Tetuan Kama & Wan, Peguamcara & Peguambela bagi pihak Pempetisyen yang mempunyai alamat untuk penyampaian di No. 5-1-1, Jalan Medan PB 4A, Seksyen 9, 43650 Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan. (Tel: 03 89221465) (E-mel: wan.kamawan@gmail.com) (Ruj. No.: WS/PUNB/MFTSB/2199/L)

Prancing Horse reality bites Hamilton

■ BY KIERAN JACKSON

THERE'S nothing like racing agony, the reality of a new dawn compared to the high-octane hullabaloo, to wipe out a two-month period of euphoric bliss.

Lewis Hamilton arrived in Melbourne visibly joyous ahead of the opening chapter of his Ferrari story. Three days on, F1's joint-most successful driver will now be under no illusions regarding the scale of the voyage ahead.

And it wasn't just Ferrari's late fumble – for both drivers, we should add, with Charles Leclerc also impacted – which will eat away at Hamilton on his flight to Shanghai for this weekend's Chinese GP.

Nor will it be the last-lap concession to Oscar Piastri, resorting Hamilton to a 10th-place finish and just one point in the Albert Park rain on Sunday.

In fact, the signs were actually ominous from the wet weather forecast long set for Sunday's grand prix.

Conditions that Hamilton usually revels in actually – to the surprise of the whole paddock – gave him cause for concern.

"I don't know which buttons I'm going to switch to tomorrow," he admitted about driving the SF-25 car in the rain, after qualifying a

Briton has to improve driver-engineer partnership to thrive at Ferrari

disappointing eighth on the grid.

"I don't know what settings we're going to have to use with the car."

It seemed an astonishing revelation, and it set the tone for Sunday's chaotic season-opening race in which Hamilton's patience wore thin, right from lights out to the chequered flag.

Gradual indications of Hamilton's angst increasing were played out to the world, as ever, on team radio.

After he was paired with new race engineer Riccardo "Ricky" Adami – a 51-year-old Italian stalwart of Ferrari who has previously worked with Sebastian Vettel and Carlos Sainz – an intense 58-lap grand prix placed their new partnership firmly in the spotlight.

And, perhaps inevitably after 12 years with the same engineer, Peter "Bono" Bonnington, at Mercedes, there are issues to iron out.

It is no secret that Hamilton prefers brief, concise instructions in his ear while driving at 300kph around a narrow street circuit. Who can blame him for that?

As such, Adami's regular interventions on Sunday were not welcomed by the 40-year-old.

At the start of his 19th season in F1, Hamilton is well attuned to what makes him tick. And this was not it.

While driving behind the safety car on lap four, when told to "stay in mode charge... charge button on," Hamilton's response was polite but firm. "Yeah, no problem. Just don't repeat everything, please."

Nine laps later, Hamilton responded, "Leave me to it, please" twice when instructed to use an overtake button on the steering wheel, as he frustratingly failed to pass the Williams of Alex Albon.

By lap 25, the Briton's replies were sharper: "Yes, please leave it, please leave it."

Much of this should be expected. Even in Hamilton's title-winning pomp at Mercedes, former engineer Bono experienced his fair share of vexed Hamilton rebukes.

Yet with dark clouds circling in Melbourne in the final 10 laps on Sunday, what Hamilton cannot expect is to make a strategy call himself, unaware of the weather radar. And the inaccuracy of Ferrari's forecasts cost them dear.

To his credit, Hamilton did not twist the knife in when speaking to the media afterwards. "I

think Riccardo did a really good job," he said.

"Generally I'm not one who likes a load of comments during a race. If I need it I'll ask for it. But he did his best today and we'll go through it."

In defence of Ferrari's strategy department, these are split-second decisions being made with a whole range of moving parts. Yet Red Bull, Mercedes and McLaren timed their pit stops accurately; Ferrari did not.

Ferrari's floundering in the tactical department has long been used as a stick to beat the prancing horse.

A series of errors in 2022 ultimately cost Mattia Binotto his job as team principal and current boss Fred Vasseur has worked hard to improve the clarity and accuracy of decisions from the pit wall to the cockpit.

But Melbourne showed they are far from perfect. Perhaps of more concern to Hamilton will be Ferrari's lack of pace.

For all the fanfare of his £50 million-a-year (RM275m) move, Hamilton will now know the extent of the challenge ahead if he wants to compete for a world championship. – The Independent

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT PULAU PINANG COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO.: PA-28NCC-18-02/2025

In the matter of Section 464 of the Companies Act, 2016; And
In the matter of the Companies (Winding-Up) Rules 1972; And
In the matter of ATM HOLIDAYS SDN. BHD. (Company No. 887313-T)

BETWEEN
PUBLIC BANK BERHAD (Company No. :6463-H) ...PETITIONER
AND
ATM HOLIDAYS SDN. BHD. (Company No. 887313-T)

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a petition for the winding-up of the above-named company by the High Court was, on the 13th day of February, 2025 presented by Messrs. Public Bank Berhad (Co. No. 6463-H). And that said petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Penang High Court at 9:00 a.m. on Monday of 14th day of April, 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 his counsel for that purpose; and a copy of the said 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 of the same.

The Petitioner's address for service is at Regional Credit Control Centre, No. 48, Tingkat Dua, Lebuhraya, 10200 Pulau Pinang.

The Petitioner's solicitor is Messrs Toh Theam Hock & Co., Advocates & Solicitors of No. 155, Tingkat 1, Medan Kikik Satu, Taman Inderawasih, 13600 Perai, Pulau Pinang.

.....T.T.....
Messrs. Toh Theam Hock & Co 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 Toh Theam & Hock, 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, of his or their solicitors (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 the 11th day of April, 2025.

This Notice of Advertisement is filed by Messrs Toh Theam Hock & Co, Advocates & Solicitors of No. 155, Tingkat 1, Medan Kikik Satu, Taman Inderawasih, 13600 Perai, Pulau Pinang solicitors for the above-named petitioner. [Ref: TTH/PBB/FL-198/2022/OSY/DURA]

322 Notices

DALAM MAHKAMAH MAJISTRET DI KUALA SELANGOR
DALAM NEGERI SELANGOR DARUL EHSAN
GUAMAN NO.:
BJ-A72NCCVC-77-12/2024

MAJLIS PERBANDARAN KUALA SELANGOR (MPKS) ... PLAINTIF

DAN
CHEANG KOK CHENG (NO K/P : 600827-08-6201) ... DEFENDAN

NOTIS IKLAN

Kepada:
CHEANG KOK CHENG No. 21, Jalan 8, Pasir Pinji, 31650 Ipoh, Perak Darul Ridzuan.

CHEANG KOK CHENG No. 51, Jalan Suria 4, Taman Suria, 45600 Bestari Jaya, Kuala Selangor, Selangor Darul Ehsan.

AMBIL PERHATIAN bahawa satu Writ Saman dan Pernyataan Tuntutan telah dikeluarkan terhadap kamu dalam Mahkamah ini oleh MAJLIS PERBANDARAN KUALA SELANGOR (MPKS) yang beralamat di Jalan Semarak, 45000 Kuala Selangor, Selangor Darul Ehsan dan Mahkamah telah memerintahkan supaya Writ Saman dan Pernyataan Tuntutan tersebut disampaikan kepada kamu dengan menampalkan salinan salinannya beserta satu salinan yang dimeterai bagi Perintah untuk penyampaian ganti pada Papan Notis Mahkamah Majistret di Kuala Selangor, Selangor, menampal satu salinan Writ Saman bersama dengan Perintah tersebut ke alamat terakhir Defendan yang diketahui dan pengiklanan Perintah tersebut dalam satu keluaran akhbar tempatan "The Sun" selama satu hari dan bahawa penampalan, pengeposan dan pengiklanan sedemikian dianggap sebagai penyampaian yang wajar dan mencukupi akan Writ Saman dan Pernyataan Tuntutan ini keatas kamu atas penamatan EMPAT BELAS (14) hari selepas tarikh terakhir penampalan dan pengiklanan tersebut. DAN SELANJUTNYA AMBIL NOTIS bahawa tarikh pengurusan kes Writ Saman dan Pernyataan Tuntutan tersebut telah ditetapkan di hadapan Majistret 30.04.2025 pada 9.00 pagi di dalam Pengurusan Kes secara eReview (dalam talian).

Jika kamu berhasrat untuk menentang dan/atau membela diri, kamu mestilah dalam masa empat belas (14) hari dari tarikh penampalan dan pengiklanan tersebut menjadi sempurna, memohon kepada Mahkamah untuk memasukkan kehadiran di Mahkamah ini. Jika tidak, suatu Penghakiman boleh dikeluarkan terhadap kamu. Writ Saman dan Pernyataan Tuntutan ini boleh diperiksa oleh kamu dengan melalui permohonan kepada Mahkamah ini.

Bertarikh 11 Mac 2025
Pendaftar
Mahkamah Majistret
Kuala Selangor

NOTIS IKLAN ini difailkan oleh TETUAN IBRAHIM & FUADDAH. Peguambela & Peguamcara bagi Plaintiff yang beralamat di No.12F, Jalan Bidara 8, SU Mall, Saujana Utama 3, 47000, Sungai Buloh, Selangor, No. tel: 03- 6038 8164 /3031 emel: info@ibrahimfuadah.my
Ruj fail : IF/1/1462/18724/MPKS(If)

Swiatek takes responsibility for 'unacceptable' action

IGA SWIATEK has responded to the criticism aimed in her direction after she was involved in a furious incident with a ball kid at Indian Wells.

It took place during her defeat to Mirra Andreeva, who went on to beat Aryna Sabalenka in the final.

Swiatek was visibly frustrated during the match and struggled to control her temper as it progressed.

At one point, she was thrown a ball by a ball kid and furiously smashed it into the ground, prompting jeers from the fans in attendance.

It landed in the stands but only narrowly missed the ball kid on its way over. The incident led to Swiatek being widely criticised on social media, with some fans branding her behaviour "unacceptable".

Swiatek issued a firm response yesterday, taking to *Instagram* with a lengthy statement as she reflected on what happened and the

criticism that followed.

"I expressed frustration in a way I'm not proud of," she wrote. "My intention was never to aim the ball at anyone but merely to release my frustration by bouncing it on the ground.

"I immediately apologised to the ball boy, we made eye contact and nodded to each other when I expressed regret that it happened near him.

"I've seen many players bounce balls in frustration, and frankly, I didn't expect such harsh judgements.

"Usually, I control such impulses, so half-jokingly I can say I lack experience in this and misjudged my aim in the

heat of the moment."

Swiatek went on to point the finger at those criticising her by accusing them of "creating theories" and insisting the standards she is judged against are unhealthy.

"When I'm highly focused and don't show many emotions on court, I'm called a robot, my attitude labelled as inhuman," she said.

"Now than I'm more expressive, showing feelings or struggling internally, I'm suddenly labelled immature or hysterical. That's not a healthy.

"Will sharing this change anything? Probably not, because I clearly see how much we love judging, creating theories and imposing opinions on others.

"Nevertheless, to those fans who truly support me, I deeply thank you and want you to know how grateful I am for your kindness." – Express Newspapers



Jack Draper.
– REUTERS/PICT

■ BY JAMIE BRAIDWOOD

JACK DRAPER believes his hard work is paying off after thrashing Holger Rune to win the biggest title of his career at Indian Wells, a result that moved the 23-year-old up to a ranking of seventh in the world.

Draper won his maiden ATP Masters 1000 title in style by demolishing Rune 6-2, 6-2 in just 68 minutes on Sunday, backing up his victory over defending champion Carlos Alcaraz in the semifinals.

The Briton was rewarded with a place in the world's top 10 and Draper said he "deserves" to stand next to the game's best after a difficult couple of years dealing with injuries and physical issues.

He told *Sky Sports*: "I feel like I deserve it in all honesty. The amount of adversity I've been through, the amount of sacrifices, the amount of time that all the people around me have put into and the hard work.

"It's an emotional feeling to know how much you've gone through and put in and to be here now and to say that I'm gonna be No 7 in the world tomorrow. Honestly it means... I can't tell you how much that means."

Draper's third career title was his biggest to date and follows a run to the US Open semifinals last season.

He also reached the fourth round of the Australian Open this year, but on both occasions suffered injury set-backs after playing best-of-five.

He recovered in time to play Indian Wells, one of the biggest tournaments in tennis outside the grand slams, and enjoyed an impressive run that included wins over Alcaraz, Taylor Fritz and Ben Shelton.

The 23-year-old saved his most complete performance until last, however, and served brilliantly during his first ATP Masters final.

Draper broke Rune early in both sets and did not face a break point on serve throughout the match.

"I hadn't kind of felt that way on the court... in truth, I felt kind of a bit nervous before I played but then when I got out on the court, I felt amazing. I felt like I was in control. I knew what I needed to do." – The Independent

South Korea coach slams Bayern over Kim injury

SOUTH KOREA coach Hong Myung-bo has accused Bayern Munich of not looking after Kim Min-jae properly after he withdrew the central defender from his squad for two World Cup qualifiers to receive treatment on an Achilles injury.

Kim was named in Hong's 28-man squad last Monday for the qualifiers against Oman and Jordan but withdrawn on Saturday for "treatment on his left Achilles tendonitis and rehab".

Hong told reporters at training in Goyang that the national team coaching staff had been aware for a while of "warning signs" that the injury might flare up.

"Unfortunately, Bayern Munich did not properly protect the player to prevent injury so we've ended up in a situation where we have to play these important matches without a key player," Hong said.

"Just because a match is important doesn't mean it's right to have Kim on the pitch. There have been warning signs since last year and we were fully aware of them.

"We couldn't keep Kim Min-jae around for these important games because it would run counter to our principles of protecting players. So we've made the decision to rest him."

Kim missed Bayern's 1-1 draw with Union Berlin in the Bundesliga at the weekend but has played 13 of the club's 16 matches since the German winter break ended.

FC Seoul centre half Kim Ju-sung, who has played only two previous internationals, will replace the Bayern player in the heart of the South Korea defence, Hong said.

"We had Kim Ju-sung with the national team last year and he has some experience with our system. That's why we chose him. He has been excellent so far in the K League," Hong added. — Reuters

Blue Samurai eye World Cup spot

... as Taegeuk Warriors' Son aims to forget Tottenham woes

JAPAN can become the first team to qualify for the 2026 World Cup this week while Son Heung-min will try to forget his Tottenham woes by firing South Korea to the finals.

Asian nations play two rounds of games, tomorrow and Tuesday, as qualifying for the enlarged 48-team tournament in North America approaches the business end in the region.

Japan will seal their spot with three qualifying matches to go if, as expected, they beat Bahrain at home in Saitama tomorrow (4.35pm Malaysian time).

Even if they stumble, it looks only a matter of time until the Blue Samurai secure a place in the United States, Canada and Mexico, as they have another home match against Saudi Arabia next week.

Hajime Moriyasu's side are nine points clear of Australia at the top of Group C, having won five and drawn one of their six games in this phase of qualifying, scoring 22 goals and conceding twice.

Moriyasu named a full-strength squad led by Liverpool's Wataru Endo and Brighton's Kaoru Mitoma, but said there were plenty of other players who deserved call-ups.

"There are a lot of players who are showing what they can do in the J. League and in Europe and wouldn't look out of place in this squad," he said.

There are three groups in the third Asian qualifying round for 2026, with the top two in each going straight to the World Cup.

Japan are sitting pretty on 16 points with four matches to play but the five-way battle to qualify second from the group could go to the wire.

Australia have seven points, while Indonesia,

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and China all have six.

The Socceroos, who are without several players through injury, tomorrow (5.10pm) host an Indonesia side in Sydney led for the first time by Barcelona and Dutch great Patrick Kluivert.

Indonesia have leaned heavily on the Netherlands as they look to reach the World Cup for the first time since the Asian nation gained independence from the Dutch in 1945.

Indonesia have recruited a dozen players born in the Netherlands and in January added Kluivert as coach, with Jordi Cruyff also coming in as technical adviser.

South Korea are well on their way and will seal their spot at the 2026 World Cup with home wins over Oman and Jordan.

The 32-year-old

forward Son has struggled for fitness and form in the Premier League this season, scoring seven times for Spurs, with the London club

languishing in the bottom half of the table.

But the skipper continues to be the *Taegeuk Warriors'* talisman, with 51 goals in 131 appearances.

"There are many discussions regarding his recent form, including his goal tally," said coach Hong Myung-bo.

"However, we must not forget everything he has accomplished so far."

South Korea top Group B with 14 points with Iraq, who are likely to clinch second place, on 11. Jordan are third on nine points.

Iraq next face Kuwait and Palestine, the bottom two in the group.

Iran lead the way in Group A with 16 points from six games, ahead of Uzbekistan on 13 and the United Arab Emirates on 10.

Qatar, who won the Asian Cup on home soil 13 months ago, are fourth on seven points.

Even if they finish outside the top two, their World Cup hopes will not be over.

The teams that finish third and fourth in the three groups go through to a further round of qualifying. — AFP



Son Heung-Min

SIDENETTING

Barcelona vs Osasuna set for March 27

BARCELONA'S LaLiga game with Osasuna, postponed earlier this month due to the death of the Catalan club's doctor Carles Minarro Garcia, has been rescheduled for March 27, the Spanish soccer federation (RFEF) said yesterday. Both teams had announced the line-up on March 8, and the players went to warm up, before hosts Barcelona declared that the game was postponed through the stadium speakers. Osasuna are scheduled to visit Athletic Bilbao on March 28, just a day after the rescheduled match. League leaders Barcelona are set to host Girona on March 30. Spanish media reports said Barcelona were considering appealing the RFEF decision due to Raphinha and Ronald Araujo, who are expected to play for Brazil and Uruguay in the World Cup qualifiers on March 21 and 25, being unavailable to play on March 27.

Injured Thuram out of France squad

MARCUS THURAM has been ruled out of France's Nations League quarterfinal games against Croatia with an ankle injury, the team's medical staff confirmed yesterday. Thuram, capped 29 times with two goals scored, was the only one of Didier Deschamps' 24 players called up for this week's games to miss yesterday's open training session at Clairefontaine, outside Paris. The 27-year-old Inter Milan forward scored

twice against Feyenoord in the Champions League before being substituted around the hour in both games. He also played for the Italian club on Sunday in a 2-0 win against Atalanta in Serie A. The French staff did not specify whether he would be replaced. France play Croatia in Split on Friday (3.45am Malaysian time) with the second leg at home on Monday.

Messi out as Argentina seek to seal WC place

LIONEL MESSI will miss two World Cup qualifiers after he was yesterday left out of the Argentina squad for games against Uruguay and Brazil because he reportedly suffered an injury in a club game the day before. After missing three games for his club, Inter Miami, at the start of March with a pulled muscle, the 37-year-old Messi returned with a goal off the bench in a Concacaf Champions Cup win. He played a full 90 minutes and scored again in an MLS win in Atlanta on Sunday but, Argentinian media reported, then felt muscle discomfort. Argentina, the defending World Cup champions, can ensure qualification for next year's tournament in their two games on the current international group. They lead the 10-team South American qualifying

group by five points from Uruguay and visit Montevideo on Saturday (7.30am) before hosting Brazil in Buenos Aires on March 25. The top six teams qualify directly for the World Cup in the United States, Mexico and Canada. The seventh-placed team is currently Bolivia with 13 points.



Lionel Messi

Red-hot Forest striker Wood targets NZ history

CHRIS WOOD has fired Nottingham Forest into surprise Champions League contention and now the striker wants to score the goals to help New Zealand make history at the World Cup.

New Zealand are strong favourites to qualify out of the Oceania region over the next week and reach the World Cup for only the third time.

At the country's two previous appearances at the finals, in 1982 and 2010, they have failed to win a match in six attempts.

With Wood captaining the side and leading from the front, he told local media yesterday that the current squad can finally deliver a World Cup victory.

"That will be our goal if we're there, to win a game and progress out into the group stages," the 33-year-old told *Radio New Zealand*.

"It's the mentality of proving it, and I believe we can. The squad is only getting bigger and better, and moving on to bigger and better clubs.

"They're proving around the world that they're good

enough and capable enough of playing in the best leagues in the world."

Wood is enjoying the best season of his career, hitting 18 goals in the Premier League and rubbing shoulders in the scoring charts with Alexander Isak and Erling Haaland.

His exploits have helped propel Forest into third place in the table and if they stay there it would guarantee Champions League football.

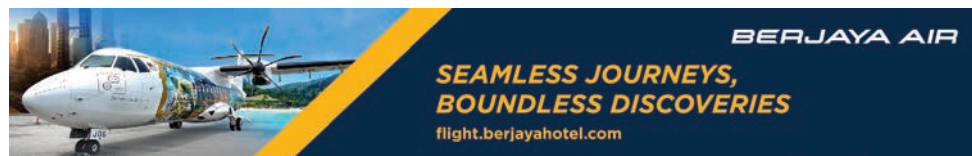
Other New Zealanders playing in Europe include Marko Stamenic at Olympiacos in Greece, Tyler Bindon at Reading and Matt Garbett with Breda in the Netherlands.

The 2026 World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico has been expanded to 48 teams, ensuring a team from Oceania will gain automatic qualification.

To seal their place, New Zealand must first beat Fiji on Friday (2.10pm Malaysian time) in Wellington before a decisive qualifier against either New Caledonia or Tahiti on Monday.

"This team is probably one of the best ones that (we've had) in history," said Wood, who has scored 41 goals in 80 games for New Zealand.

"But they have to prove that on the pitch to class themselves as one of those. Making a World Cup is the way to do that." — AFP



BY SIMON PEACH

RASMUS HOJLUND is hungry for more after ending his three-month wait for a goal in Manchester United's convincing win at Leicester.

The 22-year-old has been through some frustrating fallow periods since joining from Atalanta in August 2023, leading to questions about the £64 million (RM352m) deal that could reach £72m (RM396m) with add-ons.

Hojlund was always seen as a rough diamond by United and has often lacked the requisite service, but the doubters only grew during a long scoreless run that started in December.



Postecoglou's future hanging by a thread

TOTTENHAM have reportedly identified two potential successors to Ange Postecoglou (pic).

Pressure is ramping up on the Australian manager after his side's 2-0 defeat at Fulham on Sunday, leaving Spurs 14th in the table.

The club's worst-ever Premier League campaign came in 1993/94, when they were 15th under Ossie Ardill.

Postecoglou and his players' season now seemingly hinges on the Europa League, with a quarterfinal tie against Eintracht Frankfurt taking place next month.

A defeat against the Bundesliga side will likely leave the 59-year-old fighting for his job.

According to the *Daily Telegraph*, Andoni Iraola and Marco Silva are the main candidates to replace him if he leaves his role.

After their win at Craven Cottage, Silva's Fulham team are eighth in the table and still in the hunt for European football.

They are also through to the quarterfinals of the FA Cup, where they will play Crystal Palace.

The Portuguese boss is contracted until the end of the 2025/26 season but is thought to have £6 million (RM33m) release clause.

Iraola's Bournemouth team are just one point and two places behind Fulham and have their own FA Cup ambitions. They'll host Manchester City in their last-eight tie at the end of the month.

Like Silva, the Spaniard's deal runs for another 15 months. However, doubts have been cast over his future with the Cherries seemingly at risk of losing key players like Milos Kerkez this year.

Postecoglou has frequently hit back at criticisms of his team and style of management.

After Sunday's loss, where Spurs didn't muster a shot on target for 65 minutes, the ex-Celtic man argued that suggestions he had lost his way at the club were unfair.

"When you hear he's out of his depth, he doesn't know what he's doing, he's got no idea, his methods don't work, his philosophy doesn't work... in any other industry, you wouldn't do that. You might be critical of his performance, but you wouldn't do that," Postecoglou said. – Express Newspapers

Hojlund hungry for more goals

The Denmark international ended his 21-match wait for a goal stretching three months by emphatically setting Ruben Amorim's side on their way to a 3-0 win at King Power Stadium and immediately targeted more.

Put to Hojlund that there looked a lot of relief in his celebration, he said: "Yeah, of course. I'm happy, but it's not all about goals.

"I'm obviously very happy to get my goal and it gives me a lot of confidence.

"I think it comes down to my performances

as well. I think obviously I've not been on top of my game as I wanted to, and we're still adapting to a new system and some new positions.

"But I think I've been growing into it lately and starting to look a bit better.

"But again, yeah, just happy to get on a scoresheet and I'm sure they will come more now."

Hojlund feels a growing connection with teammates as head coach Amorim looks to get

the best out of his players.

"I see it as a good step on the way, but I just want to keep improving and keep being better," he said.

"I know I'm not the finished article, but I just want to keep going and keep becoming even better and I'm sure I'll get even better and score even more goals if I just focus on that.

"(Amorim) wants me to stretch the pitch, I think that's quite obvious and get me into the channels and keep keeping the centrebacks occupied.

"That's what I'm trying to do. I think I've got a good amount of speed and yeah, that's what I'm here for." – The Independent

'We have to turn this around'

Reds need to work hard to rebound from testing week, says Van Dijk

BY RICHARD JOLLY

VIRGIL VAN DIJK believes Liverpool have to respond to their Carabao Cup final defeat to Newcastle by working "their a** off" to end their mini-slump and ensure they don't miss out on the Premier League title as well.

Liverpool have seen a potential treble disappear in a few days as Paris Saint-Germain knocked them out of the Champions League and then Newcastle defeated them at Wembley, with Van Dijk saying it was "disappointing" both deserved their triumphs.

But while the captain said he does not need any extra motivation to win the title, he said their twin setbacks should give Arne Slot's side the added determination to put the effort in and ensure they do not give up their 12-point lead at the Premier League summit.

And Van Dijk vowed to ensure their losing run does not continue.

"We have to turn this around," he said. "It's how football works: in five days you lose twice and the world is sinking, sort of how you can say it, and two weeks before everything was, you know, sunshine and rainbows everywhere.

"We have nine games to go and I don't think there's any motivation needed to try to get the job done. What is needed is that we have to realise there is hard work and still a job to do."

Van Dijk admitted Newcastle merited their victory at Wembley as he struggled to find an explanation as to why Liverpool were below par.

He added: "The last two games you are either in or out. You win or you lose. It was very disappointing to be

knocked out of the Champions League, like we all saw after the game.

"We gave it everything, it wasn't enough,



Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk. – AFP/IC

unfortunately, and today it was just disappointing in so many ways.

"We still could have maybe got a draw but I think they deserved it and that is the disappointing part.

"I don't know exactly what the explanation for that is but it's a disappointing thing.

"But we all have to realise is the job is not done for what we have coming up. We have to work our a** (off) for it and everyone needs to realise."

Van Dijk believes Liverpool have to use their two defeats to remind them how hard every victory is as they look for the 16 points that will make it mathematically certain they regain the Premier League crown.

"If you realise that if you win five games – obviously that's a very difficult job – you're going to be champions of England," he said.

"If you keep these things in your mind it also can benefit you for working hard, to keep going in difficult moments, because I can guarantee you right now all those games that we have to coming up there will be so many difficult moments and if you're prepared to suffer, whether it is 1-0 down, 2-0, whatever, you have to keep going because you can see the end and you work so hard for it each and every day.

"For me personally, I do it automatically maybe it's experience, but when some players haven't been through that as much as I've been through it then obviously it's good to speak about it and keep pushing and keep going, keep believing and it will all be worth it at the end of the road." – The Independent

West Ham's Antonio '100%' sure he will play again after car crash

WEST HAM forward Michail Antonio says he came close to dying in a horrific car crash that shattered his leg but is "100%" confident he will play football again.

The Jamaica international required surgery after crashing his Ferrari into a tree on Dec 7.

"All I know is that I hit a tree," he told the *BBC*. "I don't know how I hit a tree, that the police came and when they found me in the car, I was in between the two seats."

The 34-year-old, who also had a serious car accident in 2019, said he broke his femur bone in four places but revealed his comeback is three months ahead of schedule.

"I'm a good three months ahead of where I should be," he said. "I've lifted 130kg on the leg and I'm trying to do other things and just focus on myself, so it's definitely a good place right now and mentally I'm in a good place too."

He added: "I'm 100% (certain) that I'll be back on the pitch. This is what I'm focused on."

Antonio paid tribute to West Ham for their support but explained how he had sought therapy and struggled when manager Julen Lopetegui was dismissed and replaced by Graham Potter in early January.

"If I try and rush myself back, go out there and try and show him what I can do when I'm not

physically right, it puts me in a bad stead because I won't be right and I won't be able to do the things that I want to do," he said.

Antonio, West Ham's all-time top scorer in the Premier League, admitted he was embarrassed after the crash, near London.

"Obviously I've almost died in the car crash. It just made me slightly embarrassed that it was that bad," he said.

"Physically I'm getting better but mentally trauma lasts a long time," he added.

"So, there is always going to be periods and going to be times where something's going to affect me." – AFP

BRIEFS

Khai Xing-Aaron seek improvements

THE 2024 World Junior Badminton Championship (WJC) men's doubles champions, Kang Khai Xing-Aaron Tai, will focus on improving their first three shots following their poor performances at two recent European tournaments. Khai Xing-Aaron were eliminated in the first round of the 2025 German Open by United States pair Zhi Yi Chen-Presley Smith 21-19, 21-18 and suffered a similar fate when they lost to Chinese pair Liang Wei Keng-Wang Chang 21-13, 22-20 at the 2025 Orleans Masters. Apart from improving their first three shots, Khai Xing said national men's doubles head coach Herry Iman Pierngadi also demanded that they reduce their floating shots in the court. Despite trying to implement Herry's planned game tactics in Europe, Khai Xing admitted that they were still struggling to adapt to the new style of play, which has made it difficult for them to achieve their desired performance. "Our performance was not satisfactory and the game plan did not reach 100 per cent. We tried to use the strategy we practised before but it did not work because we were also new to Herry's training programme," he told reporters after a training session yesterday.

Hans Isaac quits PSM

DATUK Hans Isaac has announced that he will no longer hold the position of chairman of the Malaysia Stadium Corporation (PSM), two years after starting his service in 2023. Hans, who made the announcement via a post on *Instagram*, said that PSM has achieved many successes under his auspices and thanked Youth and Sports Minister Hannah Yeoh, her deputy Adam Adli Abd Halim for the opportunity given to him so far. He is also proud to be able to work with the entire PSM workforce, especially with chief executive officer Ilyas Jamil. "Having said this, it's time for me to take on another challenge which will hopefully be announced in due course. Finally, I would like to wish only the best to the amazing PSM management and its next line up of board members. Will never forget this amazing opportunity given," he said.

Five more sports for Sukma 2026 to be finalised after Raya

SELANGOR is expected to finalise five additional sports that will be contested at the 2026 Malaysia Games (Sukma) after the Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebrations, said state Youth, Sports and Entrepreneurship Exco Mohd Najwan Halimi.

He said this was due to the results of a meeting held on Feb 26 which decided to give space to other states to propose suitable events for the biennial games.

"Through the Sukma Supreme Committee meeting on Feb 26, the decision still gives any state the opportunity to propose five additional events. Currently, no decision has been made but I expect that we will get a decision on the five events after Raya at the latest," he said on Monday.

Previously, Najwan was reported as saying that the list of sports events to be contested at Sukma 2026 would be fully finalised in August which also involve additional sports events, including pickleball that was proposed by Selangor, as the host.

Meanwhile, Najwan said the Sepang International Circuit (SIC) will be used as the main venue for the opening event and his party were still reviewing the suitable location for the closing event.

"The closing ceremony usually does not involve the presence of a large contingent such as the opening, so we (the state government) are looking for a venue that suits the current needs.

"For the opening ceremony, it can be said that 80 per cent of the results are in favour of the Sepang International Circuit (SIC) but it does not involve any circuit activities," he said. – Bernama

THE number of teams participating in next Super League season will only be known after April 30.

Malaysian Football League (MFL) acting chief executive officer Mohd Shazli Shaik Mohd said the First Instance Body (FIB) would meet to decide the number of teams that would be eligible to receive a national license to play in the 2025-2026 Super League.

Mohd Shazli said his party is in touch with the teams involved, including clubs that are plagued by financial problems, to ensure that they could complete the necessary documents before uploading them into the club licensing system.

"I think we are still optimistic that any existing team can remain and can commit to club licensing.

"So far, through the meeting sessions, it appears very positive. "I think, in over a month, the clubs have to work hard to ensure that matters involving licensing can be fulfilled

MFL to announce 2025/26 Super League teams after April

before the end of April 30," he said when met at the MFL breaking fast with the media on Monday night.

Asked whether Brunei DPMM would return to the Super League scene, Mohd Shazli said any further developments would be announced in the near future.

Brunei DPMM, which is currently playing in the Singapore Premier League, had competed in the Super League in the 2005/06 season finishing in third place.

Mohd Shazli also said that MFL is open to receiving participation from invited teams from foreign countries to spice up the local football competition but must take into account

approval from the International Football Federation (Fifa) first.

"Of course, we are open but we also need to take into account when the league will start and when the league in that country will end. We have no problem as long as we get support from FAM (Football Association of Malaysia) followed by approval from the AFC and then taken to Fifa," he said.

Meanwhile, he said the status of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) license application by defending Super League champions JDT, Selangor FC, Sabah FC, Penang FC, KDA and Terengganu FC will only be known after this month. – Bernama

'The ball is round'

Ex-Tok Gajah coach says it's not impossible for Pahang to subdue JDT

SRI PAHANG FC are capable of pulling off a surprise upset over defending champions Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) in the 2024-2025 Malaysia Cup final scheduled to be held at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil on April 12.

Former *Tok Gajah* squad coach, Datuk Zainal Abidin Hassan said the performance of the team from the east coast was outstanding in this Malaysia Cup campaign, and he expects Fandi Ahmad's team to play without pressure against the domestic football giant.

"We certainly don't deny the strength that JDT have, but I think Pahang will give good and fierce competition in the final.

"The ball is round, we have seen many surprises happening, JDT certainly doesn't want what happened in the 2014 final to happen again and they will be more careful. For Sri

Pahang, they will still be able to surprise and this is the chance for the players to shine in the final," he said.

He said this when met at a breaking of fast with the media organised by the Malaysia Football League (MFL) on Monday night.

The last time Sri Pahang lifted the Malaysia Cup was in 2014 when they were under Zainal Abidin's management by defeating JDT 5-3 in a penalty shootout after both teams were tied 2-2.

The four-time champions ended a wait of more than a decade to advance to the final stage of the prestigious local football competition by defeating Sabah FC 3-2 on aggregate while JDT easily dismissed the challenge of Terengganu FC 6-1 on aggregate.

Meanwhile, the national football legend hopes that speculations about Sri Pahang's absence from the Super League next season will

not affect the players' focus ahead of the Malaysia Cup final this time.

He also said that the local football scene will experience a big loss if his old team does not play in the 2025-2026 Super League.

"For me, the players need to focus on the final, and let the management do their job in other agenda so let us pray because Pahang is an elite team and needs to be in the Malaysian football scene," he said.

Last week, the Regent of Johor Tunku Mahkota Ismail in a question and answer session with JDT supporters said that the Sri Pahang and Kedah Darul Aman FC teams will most likely not play in the Super League next season.

He explained that this problem is due to inefficient financial management when expenses exceed income. – Bernama



Natxo, Sumareh selected for Harimau Malaya squad: Cklamovski

THE selection of Natxo Insa and Mohamadou Sumareh meets the criteria to be included in the Harimau Malaya squad to strengthen the team ahead of the opening Group F match in the 2027 Asia Cup Qualifiers against Nepal at the Sultan Ibrahim Stadium on March 25.

National Head Coach Peter Cklamovski stated that their profiles align with the style of play he intends to implement during the training camp.

"I look at the profiles of the players I want, attacking-minded, positive players who want to play good, aggressive football. I believe we have a squad, not just one or two players, but a team that can compete against each other every day.

"This will allow us to put out a strong team on the 25th against our opponent and showcase our

strength. Competing against each other in training helps us build two competitive sides," he said at a press conference on Monday.

He said this when asked to comment on the selection of Natxo and Sumareh in the squad for the Asia Cup Qualifiers, which has been questioned by some football fans.

Meanwhile, he stated that all 27 selected players will begin the training camp yesterday in Johor Bahru, where they will be divided into several groups after undergoing medical and physical assessments.

He said the preparation is about ensuring a productive training session, whether it's recovery based or on the field.

"We have a training session tonight, which will

be split into groups. Some players, who played last night and may be a little sore, will focus on recovery, while others, who are ready and excited to train, will take part in a full session," he said.

Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) has confirmed that the Harimau Malaya squad's first match in the 2027 Asia Cup Qualifiers against Nepal will take place at the Sultan Ibrahim Stadium.

FAM said the venue change for the March 25 match follows a request from the All Nepal Football Association to move the fixture to Malaysia due to ongoing maintenance work at Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu. The return match on Nov 18 will now be held in Nepal. – Bernama



Running on empty

Liverpool's season sliding off the rails as Slot's players look fatigued

BY RICHARD JOLLY

THE Carabao Cup had been lifted by Bruno Guimaraes and Kieran Trippier, Eddie Howe drenched in alcohol by Joelinton and the black-and-white hordes were starting to disperse when a manager reflected on a historic first. Not the victorious one, though.

"It took us seven, eight, nine months to lose twice in a row," said Arne Slot.

It is perhaps not a statistic to echo through the ages like Newcastle's 70-year wait for domestic silverware or the 56-year gap between claiming any major honour.

It was nevertheless a way of illustrating Liverpool's consistency this season.

Slot's pragmatic explanation underlined why trebles are rarities; within a week, Liverpool's disappeared, replaced by a solitary pursuit of the Premier League.

"You know if you go further into tournaments that the opposition get stronger and stronger and even Liverpool can lose games," he added.

It was notable he referred to Paris Saint-Germain, their first conquerors last week, as the best team in Europe.

That tag was applied to Liverpool late last year. They haven't looked it in March. They were distinctly second best in the first leg against

PSG, albeit while winning it, and again against Newcastle in the Carabao Cup final.

Perhaps the French champions softened Liverpool up for Newcastle, exhausting them by making them run for 120 minutes, further depressing them with Gianluigi Donnarumma's excellence in the penalty shootout.

Liverpool looked drained at Wembley, even if Slot disagreed.

"Were we on Tuesday mentally or physically tired?" he asked. "No. This game had nothing to do with running, only to do with duels."

Newcastle's bruising physicality equipped them to win them. Liverpool looked overpowered in midfield.

That can be a consequence of facing Sandro Tonali, Bruno Guimaraes and Joelinton. But it also highlights Liverpool's workload.

Alexis Mac Allister had one of his most ineffective games. Ryan Gravenberch was a revelation before Christmas but has only found that form sporadically since then.

Gravenberch began 21 club games last season, just six the



previous year. His 41st start for Liverpool this season came at Wembley.

Gravenberch, who could have been confined to a bit-part role this season if summer target Martin Zubimendi had joined, has instead been their third most-used player.

He was taken off at Wembley with 3,516 minutes to his name this season, behind only - inevitably - Virgil van Dijk and Mohamed Salah. Mac Allister, who may not be built for such a schedule, is next with 3,081.

Slot had called Dominik Szoboszlai a "machine" but the Hungarian looked like one whose battery was running down against Southampton the previous week.

Like Trent Alexander-Arnold and Andy Robertson, Szoboszlai has played over 2,800 minutes this season. Luis Diaz and Ibrahima Konate have passed 2,700.

Continuity has brought consistency and a commanding lead in the title race. Yet Slot's preference for working with a small core of around 14 or 15 risks them becoming fatigued at the same time.

Salah's season has been sensational but his only goals in his last five games were penalties against lowly Southampton; his impact over 300 minutes against PSG and Newcastle in the last two weeks has been insufficient.

Yet in turn, that underlined how Liverpool have become overreliant on him. Diaz's recent return stands at one goal in 18 games, Diogo Jota's at none in 10.

The Portuguese, who was poor against PSG, is performing in such a way to suggest that centre-forward is a position where Liverpool are in most need of an upgrade.

Liverpool have found much to cherish in their campaign but it seems, in very different circumstances, that they are hitting the wall at the same time as they did last year.

It may render it just as well that the context has changed. It could be just as well they have a 12-point lead: a side who were even lethargic in the first half against Southampton have fewer guarantees of victory but only need a maximum of 16 points.

It will give them just a second League title in 35 years; Newcastle do not have a monopoly on long waits.

But if Slot wants to win it twice in a row, some lessons from Wembley may be required if Liverpool are to look stronger at the business end of next season. - The Independent



Rory's St. Patrick's Day delight

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Reality bites Hamilton

Story on page 28



'Natxo' Sumareh selected for Harimau Malaya squad'

Harimau Malaya players in a training session ahead of the 2027 Asian Cup qualifiers Group F match on March 25 against Nepal at the Johor Darul Takzim (JDT) Training Centre. - BERNAMAPIC

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