



## Smart solar device game changer for salted fish producers

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i-Sun Dryer reduces processing time and boosts production by fivefold, substantially raising income of village folk.



Cambodia-bound China President Xi Jinping waves prior to boarding an Air China plane at KLIA yesterday at the end of his three-day state visit to Malaysia. — **BERNAMA** PIC

## Fresh graduates lament 'below expectations' starting salaries

MEF says mix of structural and market-driven factors explains why some companies offer wages below national average for degree holders.

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## Sin Chew duo suspended after giving statements over flag gaffe

Police receive 40 reports regarding error in illustration of *Jalur Gemilang* featured on front page of vernacular daily: IGP

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# Commitment to regional peace

Malaysia and China agree stability in Asia Pacific must be fiercely protected, and disputes over South China Sea should be resolved peacefully through dialogue.

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## Johor records first quarter investments of RM27.4b: Regent

**JOHOR BAHRU:** Johor recorded RM27.4 billion in investments in the first quarter of this year, said the Regent of Johor Tunku Mahkota Ismail.

He said the strong performance was largely driven by the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone and various state initiatives aimed at attracting greater investments into Johor.

"At the same time, as I stated upon being appointed as Regent, I am committed to improving the quality of education in the state.

"To that end, the Johor government has allocated RM55 million to enhance the education system. As for the flood mitigation project originally scheduled for completion in 2029, I have instructed that it be expedited and completed by 2027," Tunku Ismail said in a post on his official Facebook page.

The Regent added that infrastructure development continues to be a top priority, alongside efforts to improve education, raise living standards and strengthen the economy – all crucial for ensuring Johor's progress and global competitiveness.

"I would like to congratulate Menteri Besar Datuk Onn Hafiz Ghazi, the Johor state government, the private sector and all parties involved for their efforts and implementation of initiatives that reflect our shared commitment to advancing Johor across all sectors." – Bernama



Anwar being received by Paetongtarn at the Government House in Bangkok yesterday. – BERNAMAPIC

## Anwar in Bangkok for two-day visit

**BANGKOK:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim arrived here yesterday for a two-day working visit to Thailand.

The special aircraft carrying Anwar landed at the Royal Thai Air Force Military Air Terminal 2 near Don Mueang at 1.20pm.

Thai Deputy Prime Minister Suriya Juangroongruangkit and the *Charge d'Affaires ad interim* of the Malaysian Embassy in Thailand Bong Yik Jui were at the terminal to receive him and the Malaysian delegation.

Anwar is scheduled to hold bilateral meetings with his counterpart Paetongtarn Shinawatra at the Government House, according to a Foreign Ministry statement.

It said Anwar and Paetongtarn are expected to follow up on the outcomes of the 7th Malaysia-Thailand Annual Consultation, which was held on Dec 16 last year in Putrajaya.

They will also witness the signing of an MoU on the Construction Agreement for the Rantau Panjang-Sungai Kolok Bridge Project.

Anwar is also scheduled to meet with the Informal Advisory Group to the Asean Chair and hold engagements with captains of industry in Thailand.

"This visit serves as a continuation of the exchange of visits at the leaders' level last year, in addition to the recent telephone conversation between Anwar and his Thai counterpart Paetongtarn on March 6," – Bernama

# M'sia, China want Asia-Pacific stability

➤ Both nations keen on strengthening existing cooperation in national security, defence and law enforcement

■ BY AZURA ABAS  
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**PETALING JAYA:** Malaysia and China stand firm in their belief that peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region are hard-won and must be fiercely protected.

Both nations underscored the urgency of safeguarding regional peace and security and urged against any action that might threaten stability, reiterating a shared commitment to an open, inclusive regional framework in a joint statement yesterday.

"In line with the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, the two countries agreed to support efforts to preserve Southeast Asia as a region free from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, while contributing to global efforts in disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy."

To deepen strategic engagement, both sides will establish a Joint Foreign and Defence Dialogue Mechanism, expanding top-level communication and advancing political-security collaboration.

They also pledged to strengthen existing cooperation in national security, defence and law enforcement.

"This includes more joint exercises, training, official exchanges and capacity-building programmes."

The two nations stood united against terrorism and transnational crime and stressed the need to maintain calm and stability in the South China Sea.

Disputes should be resolved peacefully through dialogue and in line with international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Malaysia and China urged all parties to exercise restraint, warning against interference by parties not directly concerned.

They also called for all relevant stakeholders to uphold and effectively implement the Gaza ceasefire agreement, with the ultimate goal of a lasting truce.

Both countries reaffirmed that Gaza is Palestinian land, an inseparable part of Palestine, and that "Palestinians governing Palestine" must be the guiding principle in any post-conflict arrangement.

Both sides opposed forced displacement and backed the creation of an independent

Palestinian state under a two-state solution, with full UN membership for Palestine.

On economic and technological ties, Malaysia and China will explore joint ventures in rail systems, aerospace and nuclear energy.

Both countries will support Malaysian airlines in adopting and operating Chinese commercial aircraft, while working together to advance industrial upgrades and energy transitions in both nations.

Connectivity is another shared priority. Malaysia and China will drive forward infrastructure cooperation, fast-track flagship projects like the East Coast Rail Link and strengthen rail-sea transport to boost regional links. Their ports are encouraged to collaborate in building a thriving blue economy.

Both sides will seek out more iconic, strategic projects grounded in trust, mutual benefit and win-win outcomes.

Aviation cooperation will be scaled up, with greater technical exchange and logistics collaboration between KL International Airport and Zhengzhou Xinzheng International Airport – fuelling the shared ambition of an integrated Asean-China Air Silk Road.

Both countries will also coordinate more closely within the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec), driving the Putrajaya Vision 2040 forward and laying the foundation for an Asia-Pacific Community.

Malaysia voiced strong support for China's hosting of the Apec Economic Leaders' Meeting in 2026.

## KL, Beijing set for high-impact regional collaboration

**PETALING JAYA:** Malaysia and China have pledged to become regional trailblazers in next generation productive forces, accelerate the 2024 Belt and Road Cooperation Plan and tighten alignment of development strategies.

Focusing on the digital, green, blue and tourism economies, both sides will ramp up economic ties, drive seamless integration across industrial, supply, value, data and talent chains, and boost the scale and impact of China-Malaysia collaboration.

In a joint statement yesterday, the two countries said they would tap into new quality productive forces, forging fresh growth in cutting-edge fields like advanced manufacturing, AI and quantum technology.

Malaysia and China are seeking to deepen smart city ties and tighten industrial and supply chain integration, with Malaysia welcoming Chinese firms to help build its 5G network.

"Both sides look forward to exploring potential cooperation in the semiconductor industrial chain to the extent practicable to maintain the stability of industrial and supply chains."

They agreed to step up two-way investment and strengthen collaboration across high-value, high-growth sectors such as manufacturing, intellectual property, digital economy, research and innovation, green and sustainable investment

as well as logistics development.

"This strategic focus will attract quality investments, accelerate technology adoption and reinforce Malaysia's role in global supply chains."

Recognising the value of a high-level bilateral investment agreement in driving investment ties, both sides acknowledged the potential for future engagement to further liberalise and facilitate two-way investment, and to strengthen investment protection within the framework of the existing agreement.

The two nations will further upgrade the "Two Countries, Twin Park" initiative, support the high-quality development of economic and trade cooperation zones and foster a more dynamic, business-friendly environment for their enterprises.

They also spoke highly of the official signing of the visa exemption agreements on Wednesday.

"They believe that it will further facilitate two-way personnel exchanges, deepen exchanges and cooperation on education, cultural tourism and sports, and strengthen mutual understanding and friendship between their peoples."

Malaysia and China also reaffirmed their commitment to diversity, coexistence, harmony and inclusiveness.

Both sides will promote meaningful dialogue

between Islam and Confucianism, encourage interfaith understanding and cultural exchange, and support the shared growth of Chinese and Islamic civilisations through mutual learning, anchored in Asian values of peace, cooperation, openness and inclusivity.

They expressed satisfaction that pandas, which were warmly welcomed by Malaysians, have become an important symbol of China-Malaysia friendship.

"The two sides agreed to continue to conduct joint research on panda protection and expect to achieve more progress in this field."

On space collaboration, both governments recognised the strong potential to enhance partnerships under their bilateral agreement on peaceful space cooperation. The goal is to grow the new space economy, drive technological innovation and contribute to national security.

Both sides acknowledged the positive outcomes of the Agreement on Cooperation in Vaccine Development and Accessibility, which has facilitated expert training, strengthened vaccine innovation, and enabled technology transfer, knowledge exchange and resource sharing.

Both nations agreed to strengthen cooperation in the fields of health and traditional medicine.

– By Azura Abas



# Degree holders lament incommensurate wages

► Most graduates earning starting pay of below RM3,000 per month: MEF

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**PETALING JAYA:** Many Malaysians with higher education qualifications say their wages fall short of expectations, with salaries lagging behind industry norms and the cost of living.

The average salary for degree holders varies depending on factors such as industry, job role and experience.

According to global job platform Indeed, new graduates in Selangor earn an average of RM2,783 per month.

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman told *theSun* that while graduates often expect their academic credentials to translate into higher pay, most degree holders still start out earning below RM3,000 a month.

In its 2024 salary survey, MEF found that degree holders earn an average basic salary of RM2,703, with gross income averaging RM2,971.

However, these figures do not always reflect the true state of the job market.

"We acknowledge growing concern that graduates, particularly in oversupplied fields such as arts, social sciences and general business, are increasingly underpaid and undervalued, especially in industries such as retail, hospitality and traditional manufacturing," said Syed Hussain.

According to MEF, a mix of structural and market-driven factors explains why some companies offer salaries below the national average for degree holders.

Syed Hussain said while graduates may hope for higher



Syed Hussain said relevant work experience, education and industry exposure remain the most effective route to long-term career success and income growth. — ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THESUN

wages due to their qualifications, many employers, especially MSMEs, face financial constraints that limit what they can offer.

"Some companies, especially in low-margin sectors, simply cannot afford to pay more without jeopardising their operations.

"In an oversaturated job market, employers often have the upper hand in setting lower salary offers due to the abundance of job seekers."

He added that relevant work experience, education and industry exposure remain the most effective route to long-term career success and income growth.

While formal qualifications could open doors, hands-on experience often plays a bigger role in driving salary progression.

"In contrast, sectors such as healthcare, finance and engineering still require formal certifications, so higher qualifications typically lead to better pay.

"However, in tech and startup environments, MEF has observed that skills often outweigh academic background, with some self-taught professionals earning more than degree holders."

Syed Hussain acknowledged public frustration over wages falling behind the cost of living but urged caution over blanket salary hikes.

He said wage increases must be tied to productivity growth rather than inflation alone, warning that indiscriminate adjustments could harm businesses, especially MSMEs, which make up 98% of Malaysia's registered firms.

"MEF advocates a combination of performance-based pay, upskilling and stronger government support through targeted subsidies and tax incentives to reduce financial pressure on employers and workers.

"Setting a mandatory wage floor for graduates could distort the

labour market and deter job creation in the private sector, potentially leading to automation, outsourcing or hiring freezes, which would worsen youth unemployment, currently at 10.1%."

He urged a shift in mindset, focusing on performance, skill relevance and business value instead of relying solely on academic credentials.

He said salaries are typically determined by industry benchmarks, company budgets and regional norms, although these factors may not align with an individual's self-perception.

"Even highly qualified employees may be paid within a fixed salary range if that is what the role commands."

MEF advised graduates to develop industry-relevant skills and shift towards high-demand sectors offering better pay and long-term career stability.

## Roadshow on prevention of labour exploitation

**KUANTAN:** The Roadshow and Seminar on Prevention of Labour Exploitation: Towards Zero Forced Labour 2030 in the East Coast Zone attracted nearly 300 employers in support of efforts to eliminate forced labour and exploitation.

Peninsular Malaysia Labour Department director-general Kamal Pardi said the two-day programme, which began on Wednesday, aimed to raise awareness and improve compliance with worker rights and international labour standards.

"The roadshow convoy, comprising 20 vehicles, started at the Setia Perkasa Complex in Putrajaya, with the involvement of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants unit, Social Security Organisation, Immigration Department and the Employees Provident Fund," he told a press conference after launching the programme here yesterday.

He said the programme featured seminars and covered topics such as forced labour, its indicators and the issues faced by SD Guthrie Berhad and Felda Plantation Management Sdn Bhd concerning the Withhold Release Order and foreign worker recruitment.

The Labour Department set up a booth on the prevention of labour exploitation at the Temerloh Rest and Recreation area and Tunas Manja Mall in Kuantan, operating from 10am to 5pm throughout the programme.

Kamal said the roadshow would be expanded to the northern zone of Peninsular Malaysia, starting with Perak, Kedah and Perlis next month.

"The programme will take place at the end of May, with Perlis as our final destination, where we will focus on raising awareness on job scams. Last year, we carried out this programme in Negeri Sembilan and Johor." — Bernama

## SPM results out on April 24

**PUTRAJAYA:** The results of the 2024 Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination will be announced on April 24, according to the Education Ministry.

It announced that 402,956 candidates registered for the test, which was held at 3,337 examination centres nationwide.

"School candidates can obtain their results at their schools starting at 10am.

"For private candidates, the results will be sent by post or they can contact the state Education Department where they registered to sit for the examination to get their results."

All candidates can also check their results online at [myresultsmpm.moe.gov.my](http://myresultsmpm.moe.gov.my) from 10am on April 24 until 6pm on April 30.

Checks can be made via SMS to 15888 within the same period by keying in "SPM" followed by the MyKad number and candidate number. — Bernama

## Govt departments urged to review outdated laws

**PUTRAJAYA:** Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) Chief Commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki urged all government departments to review outdated or obsolete laws and propose suitable amendments that reflect current needs.

He said law reform is a key agenda that must be taken seriously to prevent negative public perceptions towards government agencies.

"Any outdated or unclear SOP should be improved or amended to align with current demands of society and expectations of relevant stakeholders," he said in a speech at the Federal Territories Department's Seminar on Governance, Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strengthening Module yesterday.

His speech was delivered by MACC Deputy Chief Commissioner (Prevention) Datuk Azmi Kamaruzaman.

Officiated by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territories) Datuk Seri Dr Zaliha Mustafa, the seminar was attended by about 200 personnel from the department.

Azam Baki said every government department must have clear systems in place, particularly in matters involving the public.

"In enforcement matters, continuous monitoring of personnel, such as tracking signs of excessive or lavish lifestyles, should be carried out by department heads.

"When incidents occur, the government is often blamed. It is important to recognise that such

perceptions could arise when certain agencies lack effective oversight and proper management systems.

"At MACC, we have clear SOP for matters such as arrests, detention and lockup processes. There are specific guidelines that outline who should be detained, the procedures for doing so and even the protocol for when detainees are required to wear the orange uniform."

He said response to the media must be prompt and accurate to ensure the public receives reliable information.

He cited the case of witness Teoh Beng Hock's death and noted that at the time, MACC media management lacked experience and efficiency, which led to the failure of accurate information reaching the

public and internal stakeholders.

"We learnt from that mistake how to respond more effectively to the media and to discern which ones are not worth engaging.

"What matters most is that the public receives clear information and a proper understanding of the issues at hand."

In her speech, Zaliha called on the Federal Territories Department to consider establishing a dedicated governance and integrity task force for all federal territories.

She also emphasised the importance of each division and agency conducting self-audits of their existing SOP and work processes to identify areas for continuous improvement. — Bernama



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# Smart solar dryers boon for salted fish producers

➤ New technology enables Kampung Kuala Bibang folk to raise income by ramping up supply and improving quality

**SEMPORNA:** With RM100,000 in funding from the Sejahtera Komuniti Madani (SejaTi Madani) programme, the residents of Kampung Kuala Bibang here have boosted their salted fish production to half a tonne per day, five times the output of conventional methods, through the innovative i-Sun Dryer smart drying technology.

Kampung Kuala Bibang Residents Association member Mohamad Nawir said the increase in salted fish production had substantially raised the income of residents, which spans an area of around 15a.

"My family and I, along with other community members, have been in the salted fish business for the past 10 years. We used to dry the fish the old way, just leaving it out in the sun for up to three days.

"Using the traditional method, we can produce 100kg of salted fish a week, but it really depends on the weather. We need to monitor the drying process closely because flies or animals could spoil the fish," he told Bernama.

Mohamad said the idea to use the i-Sun Dryer came a few years ago when he came across a Facebook post by a senior lecturer from Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) about the benefits of the technology.

"I was interested and I contacted the UiTM team. After discussions, they agreed to set up an i-Sun Dryer in the village. However, the cost of building it was RM50,000," he said.

Mohamad said two smart solar dryers were built in the village, with each one capable of



Mohamad showing the salted fish dried using the i-Sun Dryer technology. —BERNAMAPIC

drying 250kg of fish in just three hours. With the drying process taking place three times a day, they've managed to ramp up production to half a tonne per day.

"This i-Sun Dryer technology reduces drying time, with temperatures reaching up to 60°C. It also produces better-quality salted fish with a more even and cleaner drying process."

Mohamad said since using the i-Sun Dryer, the community's income had increased by 65%, from RM1,800 per month to as much as RM17,000.

"Previously, we supplied dried fish around Semporna and Tawau due to limited stock, but with this fast-drying process, we now have enough salted fish to enter the markets in Kundasang, Ranau, and Kota Kinabalu.

"It has definitely helped increase our income," he said.

He added that the smart dryer was also

capable of drying various products such as noodles and mushrooms, and that the community hoped to expand the business to include fish crackers and mushroom products.

"This can generate income for the community and open up job opportunities in rural areas. We would also be able to support the government's efforts to eliminate poverty," he said.

Hasdiana Mohd Dachsan, 43, and Asmierah Mohd, 32, said the project was a turning point in improving their family's quality of life and economy.

For Form Six student Muhammad Nadir Abdul Muin, 19, the project had given him the chance to make money by cleaning and packing salted fish during school holidays.

He added that the extra income had enabled him to save up to further his studies at the tertiary level.

## Penang ready to implement 23 water projects

**GEORGE TOWN:** Preparations for the simultaneous implementation of 23 water projects in Seberang Perai and Penang island on April 25 are ready, said Penang Water Supply Corporation chief executive officer Datuk K. Pathmanathan.

He said this was based on a visit by its engineering staff to the project sites at the Sungai Dua Water Treatment Plant (WTP) and Jalan Pengkalan Tambang, Sungai Perai.

He said preparations had also been made to commence ancillary water works at Bukit Minyak, Kolam Air Complex, Bukit Gedung Pump Station, Jalan Datuk Ismail Hashim, Tun Dr Awang and Teluk Kumbar Pump Station.

"The works to be carried out simultaneously for the 23 projects starting April 25 would include repair of a leaking

700mm pipeline and six upgrading works at the Sungai Dua WTP pump house and replacement of a damaged 1.2m valve in the pipeline on Jalan Pengkalan Tambang, near the Sungai Dua WTP.

"It also involves the final connection works for the 1.35m pipeline across Sungai Perai, the diversion of a 0.9m section of the pipeline at the State Sports Council Complex in Batu Uban and three projects to upgrade the re-pumping operation of treated water at the Bukit Dumar Water Pool and Pump Station Complex," he said in a statement.

Prior to this, Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow had announced that 341,708 consumer accounts in five districts in Penang would be affected by the April 2025 scheduled water supply interruption (SWSI) from April 25 to

April 28, the largest this year.

The disruption was due to the implementation of 23 pipe installation projects and other essential works involving a total cost of RM25 million.

Meanwhile, Pathmanathan said the corporation would implement all the April 2025 SWSI water works projects as planned for the benefit of consumers in Penang.

"Water supply is expected to be fully restored on the morning of April 28, and consumers in North Seberang Perai, Central Seberang Perai and Northeast District are expected to receive supply within 24 hours,

Consumers in South Seberang Perai and Southwest District are expected to receive supply within 48 to 60 hours," he said. —Bernama

## Perak seeks RM20m to explore for new mineral resources

**IPOH:** The Perak government has applied for RM20 million from the federal government to explore for new mineral resources, including non-radioactive rare earth element (NR-REE) in the state.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Saarani Mohamad said the allocation would enable the Minerals and Geosciences Department to conduct

research towards finding a new source of revenue for the state.

Saarani said six plots of privately owned land had been approved for NR-REE mining based on the Environmental Impact Assessment Report.

The plots of land are in Mukim Kenering, Hulu Perak District, with only one plot currently operating as a pilot project for NR-REE mining.

"Based on the initial study carried out by Perak Minerals and Geosciences Department, there are four districts with potential for NR-REE mining, namely Hulu Perak, Kuala Kangsar, Larut Matang and Kinta. However, 70% to 80% of the areas with potential NR-REE reserves are within forest reserve areas," he said at the state assembly sitting, here yesterday. —Bernama

## Kelantan probes pollution affecting treatment plant

**KOTA BHARU:** The Kelantan Environment Department (DOE) has confirmed that an investigation into the water pollution affecting the operations of the Wakaf Bunut Water Treatment Plant (WTP) in Pasir Puteh is under way in collaboration with the National Water Services Commission.

Kelantan DOE director Wan Aminordin Wan Kamaruddin said they conducted an investigation at the incident site on April 12 and took some water samples from strategic points to be sent to the Chemistry Department for analysis.

"A sample was taken at Sungai Rasau, near the intake point of the Wakaf Bunut WTP, while two more samples were taken from the water channel near the fish pond before it flows into Sungai Jeram Batu Hitam

"In situ (on-site) tests were also carried out and, so far, the readings recorded are normal," he told Bernama.

He added that on-site tests were also conducted at the Sungai Jeram Batu Hitam Bridge area, with preliminary results also showing readings at normal levels.

However, he said they have yet to receive the results of the full analysis from the Chemistry Department, adding that until then, the commission will continue to monitor the situation, with any decision regarding the reactivation of plant operations coming under the agency's jurisdiction.

"All actions regarding the operations of the water treatment plant come under the supervision of the commission. The DOE will continue to cooperate in monitoring activities in the surrounding area to ensure there is no threat of a recurrence," he said.

He also advised the public to be calm and wait for the official notification from relevant authorities regarding the current status of the plant, and the water quality in the affected area.

On Sunday, Syarikat Air Kelantan Sdn Bhd said the Wakaf Bunut WTP in Pasir Puteh had been temporarily shut down due to raw water quality issues at its intake point on April 11.

It added that the commission decided to shut down the WTP temporarily as a safety measure pending further investigation.

Sungai Rasau is the intake source for the plant, and the pollution was detected in the upstream area of the river.

## Public jetty plan for Pulau Tenggol

**KUALA TERENGGANU:** The Terengganu government has submitted a proposal to the Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry to construct a public jetty to Pulau Tenggol in Dungun under the First Rolling Plan of the 13th Malaysia Plan.

State Tourism, Culture, Environment and Climate Change Committee chairman Datuk Razali Idris said the project, considered one of the state's priorities, is estimated to cost RM5.8 million and will be implemented in two phases.

"The first phase involves conducting Environmental Impact Assessment and Marine Risk Assessment studies costing RM500,000. The remaining cost covers eight components under the second phase, including jetty construction and estuary dredging.

"The coordinating agency and owner of this project is the Dungun Municipal Council. The aim is to upgrade current facilities and attract more tourists to the island," he said during a question-and-answer session at the state assembly sitting in Wisma Darul Iman yesterday. —Bernama



## Najib's legal team to interview Goldman Sachs ex-banker, court told

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The High Court was told that former Goldman Sachs banker Roger Ng Chong Wa would be interviewed by Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak's legal team in connection with the ongoing 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) trial.

Najib's lead counsel Tan Sri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah informed trial judge Datuk Collin Lawrence Sequerah yesterday that the defence would interview Ng first before calling him as a witness, if necessary.

The development came after DPP Kamal Baharin Omar asked the court for a specific date from the defence on when Ng would need to attend court, should he be required to testify.

In 2023, Inspector-General of

Police Tan Sri Razarudin Husain confirmed that Ng had returned to Malaysia to assist in the probe into the 1MDB financial scandal.

Ng, who faces a 10-year prison sentence after being convicted in New York for aiding in the embezzlement of 1MDB funds, will be extradited to the United States to face charges related to the case.

On Oct 30 last year, Sequerah ordered Najib to enter his defence after ruling that the prosecution had established a *prima facie* case against him, Bernama reported.

Najib, 71, faces 25 charges, including four counts of abusing his position to accept RM2.3 billion in bribes involving 1MDB funds and 21 charges of money laundering involving the same amount.

The hearing continues.

## Thai woman held at KLIA with cocaine worth RM1 million

**PUTRAJAYA:** The Customs Department has arrested a Thai woman suspected of carrying 5.22kg of cocaine worth RM1.05 million at the KL International Airport (KLIA).

Dr Ahmad Taufik Sulaiman, who is performing the duties of Customs assistant director-general (central zone), said the 30-year-old woman was detained at about 7pm on March 18 at the international arrival hall of Terminal 1 when she arrived on a flight from East Africa.

"The woman was detained for

inspection after a scan of her luggage detected suspicious objects and images believed to be dangerous drugs.

"A thorough inspection of her luggage uncovered 16 transparent plastic packets containing a white powder suspected to be cocaine," he said in a statement.

"The *modus operandi* was to conceal the cocaine in a secret compartment of a handicraft bag, which was then sewn shut to avoid detection."—Bernama

## Sin Chew editors suspended over flag gaffe

**PETALING JAYA:** *Sin Chew Daily* has suspended its executive editor-in-chief and deputy chief sub-editor pending investigations over a blunder in printing an illustration that featured an incomplete *Jalur Gemilang*.

This was after police completed recording statements from the duo yesterday to assist in investigations into the publication on the newspaper's front page recently.

Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Razarudin Husain said the process took about three hours at the Classified Crime Investigation Unit office at Bukit Aman.

"The entire process was completed at 3.45pm," he said when contacted.

The executive editor-in-chief was said to have approved the publication of the illustration, while the deputy chief sub-editor was responsible for designing the graphic.

Razarudin said police have received 40 reports nationwide regarding the issue. The case is being investigated under Section 3(1)(c) of the Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act 1963 and Section 4(1)(b) of the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984.

On Tuesday, the Chinese-language daily published a flawed illustration of the *Jalur Gemilang* on its front page in conjunction with coverage of Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Malaysia.

The incident drew criticism from various parties, including His Majesty the King of Malaysia Sultan Ibrahim, who said the newspaper's management and editorial department must be more careful and thoroughly vet materials before publication.

Following the backlash, the newspaper issued an apology, stating that the mistake was a technical error and unintentional.

It vowed to conduct a thorough review and improvement of its procedures, including its use of artificial intelligence, and take disciplinary action against the staff involved in the incident.

The Home Ministry also issued a show-cause letter to the vernacular daily after it was summoned over the case.

The ministry stressed that it will not compromise on matters involving national symbols and will take firm action against any party found to be negligent in publishing content that could threaten public order or security.

It said the omission of the crescent moon from the national flag, symbolising Islam as the religion of the Federation, was a serious oversight that should not have occurred.

"Such an act not only reflects a lack of professional diligence but also risks undermining harmony in our multiracial society," the statement read. — Agencies



Mediha said everyone has a role to play in keeping it safe for youngsters while they are online. — MASRY CHE ANI/THESUN

## 'Protect children from online predators'

► Vital to monitor and learn features of platforms to determine presence of chat rooms that allow contact from strangers, says expert

■ BY IKHWAN ZULKAFLEE  
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**PETALING JAYA:** Children should not be allowed to surf the internet alone as predators are always lurking to prey on them.

While there is increasing awareness among parents on the need to limit their children's access to gadgets, this may not be enough to protect children from paedophiles.

These individuals would engage minors by playing video games or browsing the same content that children today turn to.

"It's important to understand the platforms your children are using. Even if it's an innocent-looking online game designed for kids, take the time to explore it and learn about its features – like whether it includes a chat room.

"You need to know if strangers can contact your children through the apps or games they use for fun," Communications and Multimedia Content Forum CEO Mediha Mahmood told *theSun* in an interview on Monday.

Mediha, a lawyer by training, has some 20 years of experience in regulating the content that Malaysians view.

Despite the popularity of social media, she warned that everyone, including users, has a role to play in keeping it safe for the young.

She also called for more direct action from users when spotting any disturbing content or suspicious activity on the internet.

"Social media platform providers have taken steps to improve content monitoring by using AI to detect harmful material such as cyberbullying, the sharing of harmful content and illegal or unsafe activities.

"Users are also given the ability to report inappropriate content they encounter online. This is where public involvement becomes crucial. With millions of posts uploaded daily, it's impossible to manually screen each one, so community participation is essential," said the lawyer-turned-media specialist.

She said the blame should not be shifted only to social media providers if anything untoward happens.

"Social media platforms wouldn't allow young kids to register an account with them. Their algorithms would not make it easy for minors to sign up.

"So, either these kids found a way to register themselves, or there were parents or guardians who signed them up."

Mediha highlighted the importance of learning about online safety features when allowing children access to the internet.

"For instance, we worked with

Google to educate parents on the harm that may come to their children if they're left alone online, and how the safety features developed by the tech giant can help protect them."

She added that parents should not wait to witness the damage the internet could cause to their children.

"Kids nowadays are not merely content consumers, they actively engage with and are part of the online world, whether through gaming or other social media platforms.

"When the internet was first made accessible to the public, everyone wanted a piece of it, and we made sure the infrastructure was in place to allow access to the World Wide Web.

"But now, we've realised the damage it can cause, and countries around the world are working hard to regulate it. The same goes for other tech developments, such as social media platforms and user-generated AI. We must not wait to see how they affect our children growing up, we must act now."

Malaysia recorded a rise in the number of sexual offences involving children in 2023, an increase of 26.5% compared with 2024.

Of the 1,567 incidents recorded, 67 involved child pornography, 16 sexually communicating with a child and four on child grooming.

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The success of Mak Rusmah Cookies, a Kampung Baru-based business founded in 1985, can be attributed to the generosity of its late founder, Rusmah Makum, and the quality of her festive cookies and traditional treats.

The business began with *kuih bangkit*, a traditional cookie made using a recipe Rusmah learnt during a course she attended in Keramat in the early 1980s alongside the mother of the Tengku Permaisuri of Selangor, Tengku Permaisuri Norashikin.

Today, Mak Rusmah Cookies is managed by Rusmah's granddaughter Nur Farah Nasaruddin, with the company producing a wide selection of both modern and traditional treats.

"My late grandmother was always generous in sharing her knowledge and recipes with her staff. In fact, many of the festive cookie entrepreneurs in Kampung Baru today are former employees of Mak Rusmah Cookies," she said in an interview with Bernama.

Rusmah, who died last year at the age of 85 due to kidney complications, left behind a legacy that Nur Farah is determined to take onto the international stage.

Nur Farah grew up hearing stories about the early days of Mak Rusmah Cookies from the late matriarch, who was born and raised in Kampung Baru.

"In the early stages, my grandmother started on a small scale at home using three small electric ovens and was assisted by two workers. Initially, she only took orders during the festive season. But later, the business operated year-round selling traditional cookies, growing to the point of being able to hire 20 workers," she said.

# Homegrown cookie enterprise reaching for the stars

► Granddaughter of founder determined to continue legacy and expand brand nationwide

Reflecting on what made Mak Rusmah Cookies stand out, Nur Farah said her late grandmother placed strong emphasis on both quality and quantity, key factors in building and maintaining a loyal customer base.

"Grandma always reminded us to fill up the jars fully, ensuring there is no space for the cookies to move around.

"Otherwise, my grandmother would ask the workers and me to refill the cookie jars, with each jar usually containing more than 60 pieces," she said, adding that she began helping her grandmother during her early 20s and eventually took on the business full-time after the passing of her family members and as her grandmother's health began to decline.

She expressed pride in continuing her late grandmother's legacy and is grateful that customers have remained loyal despite the business changing hands.

"Alhamdulillah, many of grandma's customers have remained loyal until now. We have customers

from Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Kelantan, Johor, Perlis and even Singapore. In addition, wholesalers also buy from our shop."

Nur Farah said she also learned from her grandmother the art of warmly interacting with every customer.

"Grandma remembered every customer who ever came to the shop. During her lifetime, she would sit in the chair in front of the house, treating each customer like a child or a friend. Her smile never faded. God willing, I will continue her legacy," said the eldest of three siblings.

As for her future hopes, Nur Farah said she aspires to elevate the brand nationally while preserving the heritage of traditional cookies and keeping such treats from fading into obscurity.

"I also hope to enter international markets and plan to open the shop year-round," she added.

While offering 22 varieties of cookies, Nur Farah said *semperit*, mazola, pineapple tarts, almond London, *makmur* and *suji* Brunei



Nur Farah with two of the best-selling products made by Mak Rusmah Cookies.

— BERNAMAPIC

were the top picks among customers.

While most businesses have raised prices in response to the rising cost of raw materials, Mak Rusmah Cookies has maintained its original pricing, ranging from RM15 to RM27 per jar, depending on the size.

"When we first started, a jar of cookies containing over 60 pieces was sold at RM12. Over the years, prices have gradually increased in line with rising costs. However, we still offer affordable prices, including

wholesale rates, as most of our customers resell the cookies," she said.

With market prices now ranging from RM35 to RM40 per jar, Mak Rusmah Cookies continues to offer an affordable alternative.

Nur Farah said Mak Rusmah Cookies produced 9,000 jars of festive cookies this year with the help of 15 workers, adding that the highest recorded sales peaked at 25,000 jars between 2011 and 2016.

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# PAP unveils election manifesto

► Singapore ruling party to field 32 new candidates

**SINGAPORE:** People's Action Party (PAP) secretary-general Lawrence Wong yesterday launched the party's manifesto, ahead of what is expected to be a tough general election next month.

The prime minister said the manifesto, titled "Changed world, fresh team, new resolve – securing a brighter future for you," outlines the party's plans and promises to all Singaporeans.

He said these include creating a vibrant economy with quality job opportunities, strengthening the education system and ensuring affordable, high-quality housing for all Singaporeans.

Other priorities include building a greener

and more sustainable city, and elevating sports, arts and culture – making them more accessible and enjoyable for everyone.

"... we are stepping up with new resolve. We will fight harder to protect what we have and work even harder to build what we need. We are ready for this new challenge," he said during the launch.

Singaporeans will head to the polls on May 3, with nomination day set for April 24. Candidates will have nine days to campaign, followed by a cooling-off day on May 2, when all campaigning is prohibited.

Wong announced that the PAP will field 32 new candidates in GE2025 – the largest

number in the party's recent history – drawn from diverse backgrounds, including the Singapore Armed Forces, public service, the private sector, academia, unions and social service agencies.

He noted that the party will also be fielding a record number of women candidates, with 13 of them making their electoral debut.

"If elected, a number of our new candidates can become more than backbenchers. They will help to strengthen my team and some of the younger ones will form the core of the next 5G team," he said.

At the event, he named all 32 new candidates such as former Nominated Member of Parliament Syed Harun Alhabsyi and Dinesh Vasu Dash, who implemented Singapore's national vaccination campaign.

Wong emphasised that one of his key

priorities is assembling the best possible team for Singapore. This includes renewing the team by bringing in fresh candidates who can inject new ideas and eventually take on greater responsibilities.

Leading the PAP into his first general election as secretary-general and the prime minister, Wong warned that GE2025 will be a difficult contest, urging candidates to take lessons from recent elections around the world, where incumbent parties have either been unseated or suffered major setbacks.

"There is no safe seat. We must never assume that the PAP will win the election just because we have been in power. We cannot take any vote for granted," he said.

He acknowledged that the cost of living remains a major concern for many Singaporeans. – Bernama



Police detain Congress party supporters protesting in New Delhi on Wednesday. – REUTERS/SPIC

## Congress slams graft charges against Gandhis

**NEW DELHI:** India's main opposition Congress party accused the government of a "vendetta" on Wednesday after a federal agency filed charges against its top leaders in a years-long corruption case.

Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi and his mother Sonia Gandhi were charged as part of an investigation initiated by a member of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

They have denied the allegations and have accused the BJP of using the state apparatus to target its rivals.

Congress lawmaker Abhishek Singhvi said the case was "nothing but vendetta in legal disguise".

He also accused the government of using the Enforcement Directorate – a national agency

that investigates money laundering and financial crimes – of selectively targeting the opposition while sparing its allies.

"Selective justice is nothing but political thuggery," Singhvi said.

The initial 2001 complaint against the Gandhis brought by BJP member Subramanian Swamy accused the Gandhis and others of "usurping" properties.

He alleged that the Gandhis aimed to grab property worth US\$332 million (RM1.5 billion) owned by the publishing firm using fraudulent papers.

Critics in recent years have accused the BJP of using the justice system to target political rivals, with several opposition figures the subject of active criminal investigations.

But BJP lawmaker Ravi Shankar Prasad said

India's judiciary was independent and investigative "agencies are free to work under PM Modi's government".

"They (the opposition) have the right to protest – but what are they protesting about?" Prasad said.

"There is no licence to loot in this country."

Rahul Gandhi also faces several defamation cases and was expelled from parliament in 2023 after a defamation conviction.

He returned months later after his two-year sentence was suspended by the Supreme Court.

He is the son, grandson and great-grandson of former Indian prime ministers, beginning with independence leader Jawaharlal Nehru.

His party has struggled to challenge Modi and has lost the last three national elections. – AFP

## No one to bail out fraud accused

**SINGAPORE:** A British woman from the documentary *Con Mum*, about her allegedly scamming her renowned pastry chef son, told a court here yesterday that she had nobody to bail her out.

Dionne Marie Hanna, 84, was charged this month with five counts of fraud involving three people, according to documents filed with a district court in the city-state.

Prosecutors said her alleged offences involved losses of S\$500,000 (RM1.68 million) at a hearing yesterday.

Her bail was set at S\$50,000.

"I don't have anybody to bail me out," she said in a weak voice over video link from a police station.

Hanna, sitting in a wheelchair, was not represented by a lawyer and was visibly having difficulty hearing the judge.

In the documentary released on March 25, Hanna upends pastry chef Graham Hornigold's life when she emails him and claims to be his biological mother.

She allegedly scams Hornigold as they reconnect, conning him out of hundreds of thousands of dollars, according to the film.

A DNA test at the end of the documentary shows Hanna is indeed his biological mother.

Singapore police said they received several reports from alleged victims after the documentary was released.

One of the charges against Hanna involves her allegedly telling a man in Singapore this year that she was from the Brunei royal family.

She allegedly told him she had terminal cancer and wanted to pass on her wealth to him and his son.

"As part of the arrangement to receive monies for the investment and inheritance, the victims were asked to transfer money for legal fees and opening of overseas bank accounts," the police said this month.

If found guilty of fraud, Hanna faces fines and up to 20 years in prison.

Her next court hearing is scheduled for May 16. – AFP

## Xi arrives in Cambodia

**PHNOM PENH:** President Xi Jinping arrived here yesterday, capping a three-stop tour of Southeast Asia.

Xi arrived after visiting Vietnam and Malaysia as Beijing seeks to strengthen regional trade ties and offset the impact of huge tariffs imposed by the United States.

The Chinese leader touched down at the airport in Phnom Penh, where he was greeted by King Norodom Sihamoni.

Xi is scheduled to go to the palace before holding meetings with former leader Hun Sen and his son, Prime Minister Hun Manet, according to official documents.

China is Cambodia's biggest trading partner and source of investment, and more than a third of Cambodia's US\$11 billion (RM48.54 billion) in foreign debt is owed to China, according to the International Monetary Fund.

And Phnom Penh is among Beijing's most reliable supporters in Asia. Hun Manet on Wednesday described Xi's visit as a display of "iron-clad" friendship.

He said the two countries had "common interests based on the principles of respect for sovereignty, equality and non-interference".

He also said China had played a "pivotal role" in Cambodia's development. – AFP

## Myanmar frees 5,000 prisoners

**YANGON:** Myanmar said yesterday it will release nearly 5,000 prisoners in an amnesty to mark the country's new year festivities.

Civil rights groups say the government has arrested thousands of protesters and activists since its 2021 coup.

Amnesties are regularly announced to commemorate national holidays or Buddhist festivals, but most high-profile political prisoners including deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi remain detained.

A government statement said 4,893 prisoners will be pardoned "to participate in the state-building process, for peace of mind of

people and on compassionate grounds".

Other prisoners would have their sentences reduced by one-sixth, except for those who had committed serious offences.

Around 30 buses exited the gates of Yangon's Insein Prison around noon.

Some of the hundreds on board disembarked outside the gates, reuniting with tearful families holding placards marked with their loved ones' names.

The government said 13 foreign nationals would also be pardoned and deported, without giving details of their identities or crimes. – AFP



# Zuckerberg denies Meta bought rivals to end them

► Landmark antitrust case comes to a close

**WASHINGTON:** Meta chief executive Mark Zuckerberg on Wednesday denied in court that his company bought rival services Instagram and WhatsApp to neutralise them, as his testimony in a landmark antitrust case came to a close.

The case could see the Facebook owner forced to divest itself of the two apps.

During his third and final day on the stand in a federal courtroom in Washington, Zuckerberg took aim at the Federal Trade Commission's main argument – that Facebook, since renamed Meta, devoured what it saw as competitive threats.

The co-founder of Facebook responded “No” when asked by Meta attorney Mark Hansen if his intent was to eliminate rivals with the purchases of photo sharing app Instagram and messaging service WhatsApp.

He explained that Instagram, purchased in 2012, was attractive for “its camera and photo

sharing experience” but added that he “didn’t view it as a broad network really competitive with where we were”.

As for WhatsApp, bought two years later, Zuckerberg testified that he saw the app as technically impressive but its founders as “unambitious” in terms of “maximising the impact that they could potentially have”.

“I basically ended up pushing to add things,” he told the court.

Zuckerberg testified that Facebook put its scale and resources to work building Instagram and WhatsApp into apps now used by billions.

Former Meta chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg testified that the company had to take on an array of rivals, including internet colossus Google, as internet has become increasingly competitive.

“Every time you go on your computer or phone, you have a choice of what you spend your time on,” Sandberg said.

“That’s what all these producers are competing for: your time and attention.”

A key part of the courtroom battle is how the Federal Trade Commission convincingly defines Meta’s market for the judge.

The US government argues that Facebook and Instagram are dominant players in apps that provide a way to connect with family and friends, a category that does not include TikTok and YouTube.

Meta’s attorneys counter that substantial investments transformed these acquisitions into the blockbusters they are today. They also highlight that Meta’s apps are free for users and face fierce competition.

Zuckerberg wrapped some 12 hours of testimony on Wednesday with an assessment of TikTok, which he said has emerged as perhaps the biggest competitive threat for Instagram and Facebook.

Meta has seen the growth of its apps slow as the China-based video-snippet sharing sensation has boomed, so the US tech titan added a TikTok-like Reels feature to fire back in the marketplace, according to Zuckerberg.

“That said, TikTok is still bigger than either Facebook or Instagram, and I don’t like it when our competitors do better than us,” he said.

As video has evolved into a favourite form of online media, particularly on smartphones, YouTube has become serious competition for Meta, the chief executive testified. – AFP

## Film legend Nora Aunor dies, aged 71

**MANILA:** Nora Aunor (pic), considered by many Filipinos as the country’s greatest actress and singer, has died at age 71.

Proclaimed a “National Artist for Film and Broadcast Arts” by the Philippines in 2022, the



once child snack vendor who would go on to star in 170 films will be honoured with a state funeral.

“It is with deep sorrow that we announce the passing of Nora Aunor, our beloved mother, celebrated television and movie actress,” her adopted daughter

Lotlot de Leon announced yesterday.

The cause of death, which took place on Wednesday, was not disclosed.

Her first break came when cast in 1967’s *All Over the World*, a typical teen comedy of the era.

Aunor, who had a darker skin tone compared to the half-Caucasian actresses that dominated local cinema at the time brought a relatability to audiences, earning her the nickname Ate guy, or big sister guy.

She would become a sensation as part of a studio-manufactured “love team” with actor Tirso Cruz III. Together, they were known as “Guy and Pip”.

Critical acclaim followed nearly a decade later with starring roles in the dramas *Tatlong Taong Walang Diyos* (Three Years Without God) and *Minsan’y Isang Gamu-gamu* (Once a Moth), both released in 1976.

Aunor also recorded hundreds of songs, including 1971’s *Pearly Shells*, said to be one of the Philippine’s top-selling singles ever.

President Ferdinand Marcos described her as “a gift to the Filipino nation”, and the government’s National Commission for Culture and the Arts said she would receive a state funeral at a date to be determined.

Aunor’s daughter Leon later posted on Instagram that the funeral will take place on April 22 at the National Heroes Cemetery. – AFP



**FULL BLOOM ...** A visitor takes a photo on the grounds of Nezu Shrine during the annual Azalea Festival in Tokyo yesterday. About 3,000 azalea plants of about 100 varieties have been planted at the site. – AFP/IC

## California sues to block tariffs

**NEW YORK:** California on Wednesday filed a lawsuit seeking to block President Donald Trump’s tariffs on foreign trading partners, accusing him of abusing his powers and inflicting financial harm on the state and nation.

Trump imposed 10% tariffs on goods from all countries and higher tariffs for countries the administration says have high barriers to US imports, most of which he later paused for 90 days. He also imposed a 145% tariff on China, with exceptions for certain electronics.

The US Constitution vests the authority to impose tariffs in Congress, and the law that Trump cites as authority for his new tariffs, the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), does not allow the president to “tax all goods entering the United States on a whim”, the state said in its lawsuit.

“The new tariff regime has already had devastating impacts on the economy, creating chaos in the stock and bond markets, wiping out

hundreds of billions of dollars in market capitalisation in hours, chilling investment in the face of such consequential presidential action with no notice or process, and threatening to push the country into recession,” the lawsuit said.

California, the world’s fifth largest economy and the largest importer of goods among US states, “bears an inordinate share” of the tariffs’ costs, according to the lawsuit.

White House spokesman Kush Desai said California Governor Gavin Newsom should focus on addressing crime, homelessness and high prices in his state instead of trying to block Trump’s tariffs.

“The entire Trump administration remains committed to addressing this national emergency that’s decimating America’s industries and leaving our workers behind with every tool at our disposal,” Desai said.

In executive orders imposing the tariffs, Trump had invoked laws including the IEEPA,

which gives presidents special powers.

He has said that the United States’ net trade deficit relative to the rest of the world is a national emergency endangering its manufacturing capacity and making it dependent on foreign adversaries.

In Wednesday’s lawsuit, filed in federal court in San Francisco, Newsom and California Attorney-General Rob Bonta, both Democrats, asked a judge to bar the Department of Homeland Security and Customs and Border Protection from enforcing the tariffs.

The administration already faces three similar lawsuits – one in the New York-based Court of International Trade by business advocacy group Liberty Justice Centre seeking to block all of the tariffs, one in Florida federal court by a small business owner seeking to block the tariffs on China and a third filed in Montana by members of the Blackfeet Nation challenging Trump’s tariffs on Canada. – Reuters

## Ex-cop jailed for hounding man

**NEW YORK:** A retired policeman was sentenced on Wednesday to 18 months in prison for his role trying to force the repatriation of a man to China.

Michael McMahon, 57, a retired New York Police Department sergeant turned private detective, was convicted in federal court in June 2023 alongside two co-defendants.

The three men were accused of working in a global operation dubbed “Fox Hunt”, which US authorities said aimed to secretly force the return of Chinese expats.

Beijing has defended the operation as part of an anti-corruption campaign and said its law enforcement agencies follow international laws when abroad.

But Washington has accused the operation of targeting dissidents.

“Between 2016 and 2019, the defendants and their co-conspirators took part in an international campaign to threaten, harass, surveil and intimidate” the unnamed victim and his family, the US Department of Justice said in a statement.

Their aim was “to force him and his wife to return to the PRC to face purported corruption charges,” it said.

McMahon’s co-defendants, Zhu Yong and Zheng Gongying, were sentenced to 24 and 16 months in prison in January.

The former cop was also ordered to pay a US\$11,000 (RM48,547) fine. – AFP



## Trump calls Harvard 'a joke'

**WASHINGTON:** President Donald Trump called Harvard a "joke" on Wednesday and said it should lose its government research contracts after the prestigious university refused demands that it accept outside political supervision.

Trump's administration also threatened to ban the famed seat of learning from accepting foreign students unless it bowed to the requirements, as media reported that officials were considering revoking the university's tax-exempt status.

"Harvard can no longer be considered a decent place of learning, and should not be considered on any list of the World's Great Universities or Colleges," Trump said on his Truth Social platform.

Trump is furious at the institution for rejecting his demand to submit to government supervision on admissions, hiring and political slant.

Other institutions, including Columbia University, have bowed to less far-ranging demands from the administration, which claims that the educational elite is too left-wing.

Harvard rejected the pressure, with its president, Alan Garber, saying that the university refuses to "negotiate over its independence or constitutional rights".

Trump this week ordered the freezing of US\$2.2 billion (RM9.7 billion) in federal funding to Harvard and said the university "should lose its tax exempt status" as a nonprofit educational institution if it did not back down.

CNN and *The Washington Post* reported that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) was making plans to do so following a request from Trump.

White House Deputy Press Secretary Harrison Fields said "any forthcoming actions by the IRS will be conducted independently of the president".

The Department of Homeland Security said "if Harvard cannot verify it is in full compliance with its reporting requirements, the university will lose the privilege of enrolling foreign students". – AFP

## Qatari emir to clinch key deals

**MOSCOW:** Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani arrived in Moscow yesterday for talks with President Vladimir Putin on Ukraine and Middle East issues.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the two leaders would have a "serious conversation" on issues and sign agreements.

"It is difficult to overestimate the role of Qatar in many regional and world affairs. Qatar is our good partner, relations are developing dynamically, contacts between the heads of state are quite frequent," Peskov told reporters.

Qatar has made attempts to mediate between Russia and Ukraine, and has helped arrange the return of children from both countries who were separated from their parents during the war.

Russia and Qatar said this week that the leaders would discuss efforts to find a peace deal to end the war in Ukraine.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly said he wants to end the "bloodbath", but has yet to achieve a breakthrough. Moscow has said it is not easy to agree a settlement.

Qatar's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mohammed Al-Khulaifi told TASS news agency that the emir's talks with Putin would touch on Ukraine, Syria, the Gaza Strip and energy such as liquefied natural gas. – Reuters

# 25 killed in airstrikes on displaced people

## ► Israeli troops to remain in buffer zones

**GAZA CITY:** Gaza's civil defence agency reported yesterday that a wave of Israeli air strikes hit encampments for displaced Palestinians across the territory, killing at least 25 people.

Agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal said a strike targeted several tents in the Al-Mawasi area of the southern city of Khan Younis, resulting in 16 deaths.

"At least 16 martyrs, most of them women and children, and 23 others were wounded following a direct strike by two Israeli missiles on several tents housing displaced

families in the Al-Mawasi area of Khan Younis," Bassal said.

According to Bassal, two additional strikes on other encampments of displaced people killed eight and wounded several more.

Seven were killed in a strike on tents in the northern town of Beit Lahia, while another attack near the Al-Mawasi area killed a father and his child who were living in a tent, Bassal said.

Defence Minister Israel Katz said on Wednesday Israeli troops will remain in the buffer zones they have created in Gaza even after any settlement to end the war.

Since resuming military operations last month, Israeli forces have carved out a broad "security

zone" extending deep into Gaza and squeezing more than 2 million Palestinians into ever smaller areas in the south and along the coastline.

"Unlike in the past, the IDF is not evacuating areas that have been cleared and seized," Katz said in a statement following a meeting with military commanders.

"The IDF will remain in the security zones as a buffer between the enemy and the communities in any temporary or permanent situation in Gaza – as in Lebanon and Syria."

In a summary of its operations over the past month, the Israeli military said it now controls 30% of the tiny Palestinian territory.

In southern Gaza alone, Israeli forces have seized the border city of

Rafah and pushed inland up to the "Morag corridor" that runs from the eastern edge of Gaza to the Mediterranean Sea, between Rafah and the city of Khan Younis.

It already held a wide corridor across the central Netzarim area and has extended a buffer zone all around the frontier hundreds of metres inland, including the Shejaia area just to the east of Gaza City.

Israel says its forces have killed hundreds of gunmen, including many senior Hamas commanders, since March 18 but the operation has alarmed the United Nations and European countries.

More than 400,000 Palestinians have been displaced since hostilities resumed on March 18 after two months of relative calm, according to UN humanitarian agency OCHA, and Israeli airstrikes and bombardments have killed at least 1,630 people.

Medical charity MSF said Gaza had become a "mass grave" with humanitarian groups struggling to provide aid. "We are witnessing in real time the destruction and forced displacement of the entire population in Gaza," said Amande Bazerolle, MSF's emergency coordinator in Gaza. – AFP/Reuters



A vehicle moves along a partially-demolished road ahead of a military bulldozer during an army operation in Tulkarem, West Bank, on Wednesday. – AFP/PIIC

## UN nuclear chief in Tehran for talks

**TEHRAN:** UN nuclear watchdog chief Rafael Grossi met the head of Iran's atomic energy agency, Mohammad Eslami, yesterday ahead of a fresh round of nuclear talks between Tehran and Washington.

Iranian and US delegations are to gather in Rome tomorrow for a second round of Omani-mediated negotiations, a week after the longtime foes held their highest-level talks since President Donald Trump abandoned a landmark nuclear accord in 2018.

There were no immediate details on Grossi's meeting with Eslami, but Iran's reformist *Shargh* newspaper described his visit as "strategically significant at the current juncture".

On Wednesday, Grossi met Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who led the first round of talks with US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff on Saturday.

Araghchi said he had a "useful" meeting with the International Atomic Energy Agency chief.

"The IAEA can play a crucial role in peaceful settlement of the Iranian nuclear file in the coming months," he said.

Araghchi called on the IAEA chief to "keep the agency away from politics" in the face of "spoilers" seeking to "derail current negotiations". He did not elaborate.

Grossi said their meeting was "important".

"Cooperation with IAEA is

indispensable to provide credible assurances about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme at a time when diplomacy is urgently needed," he said on X.

Before heading to Iran, Grossi told French newspaper *Le Monde* that Tehran was "not far" from possessing a nuclear bomb.

On Tuesday, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei cautioned that while the talks with the United States had started well, they could yet prove fruitless.

"The negotiations may or may not yield results," he said.

On Wednesday, Araghchi said Iran's enrichment of uranium was not up for discussion after Witkoff called for a halt.

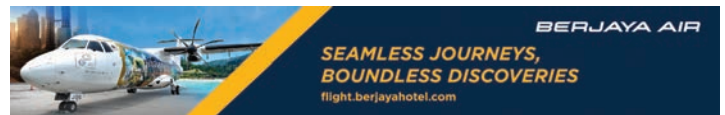
Witkoff had previously demanded only that Iran return to the 3.67% enrichment ceiling set by the 2015 deal.

Araghchi said he hoped to start negotiations on the framework of a possible agreement, but that this required "constructive positions" from the United States.

"If we continue to (hear) contradictory and conflicting positions, we are going to have problems," he warned.

Iran's top diplomat headed to Moscow yesterday on a "pre-planned" visit.

The Kremlin said that Russia stood ready to do "everything" in its power to help resolve the nuclear programme standoff. – AFP



# Preparing teenagers for commitment

## UNDER ONE ROOF

**Q: My son and daughter are 15 and 13, and I am trying to cover all the bases in preparing them for adulthood. Are there any important topics that parents often forget or overlook?**

**Focus on the Family Malaysia:** Parents rightly want their teenagers to learn important life lessons – like managing finances, developing a strong work ethic and more. These are all valuable lessons but there is one important topic that is often overlooked: marriage.

You are probably thinking: “Talk to my teenagers about marriage? I am just hoping to get them through the dating years.” However, conversations about marriage are not something that should be ignored in the teenage years – these early years are actually an ideal time to start laying the groundwork.

Marriage is an enormous life commitment,

yet parents generally do little to prepare their children for it. That is why it is important to weave healthy principles about marriage into their upbringing from an early age.

Boys should be taught what it means to serve, honour and treat their future wives with dignity. Likewise, girls should learn the value of motherhood and how marriage can enrich – not diminish – their identity as women.

Values like these can positively influence even single young adults. They will be better prepared for a healthy dating life, more likely to wait for the right relationship and more open to talking with you or your spouse about their crush – rather than rushing into just any relationship.

Do not wait until your children are deeply involved in a romantic relationship to start talking about marriage. Be proactive – teach them what a healthy relationship looks like, so they are prepared to make wise choices when it matters most.

**Q: How can we help our two-year-old adjust to**

**having a new baby sister? He whines and cries for me constantly, and lately he has been acting out to get our attention. Is this normal?**

**Focus on the Family Malaysia:** Yes, this is perfectly normal. Your older child has been the centre of attention, and now a loud, crying little stranger has suddenly entered his world, demanding much of your time and energy.

There are several strategies you can adopt to smoothen the transition. First, your spouse should take an active, hands-on role with both toddler and baby. This will help your older child feel supported and included, while also giving you a bit of breathing room.

While you are nursing or caring for the baby, your husband can engage your son in fun one-on-one activities that give him his full attention.

Alternatively, he can support you by taking on baby duties – changing, rocking, burping and more – so you can have special time with your son each day.

It is common for parents to notice some

regressive behaviour in toddlers after a new baby arrives. For example, your child might try to climb into the infant’s crib or suddenly “forget” potty training.

One way to address this is by praising your toddler for their “grown-up” abilities and highlighting the advantages of being older.

You may say something like: “You are such a big boy now. You can go to the park and ride the swings while the baby is too little to do that.”

Your son needs to be reassured that he is special and unique. Remind him of your love and praise him generously when he is helpful or kind towards his sister.

**This article is contributed by Focus on the Family Malaysia, a non-profit organisation dedicated to supporting and strengthening the family unit. It provides a myriad of programmes and resources, including professional counselling services, to the community. For more information, visit [family.org.my](http://family.org.my). Comments: [letters@thesundaily.com](mailto:letters@thesundaily.com)**

## The ‘quiet’ handshake that left the deepest mark

### COMMENT by Dr Nahrizul Adib Kadri

**HE** is the only prime minister I have ever shaken hands with.

It was 2004, and I was a young lecturer – ambitious, uncertain and just beginning to find my footing in academia.

I had volunteered to help organise an international conference, more for the experience than anything else. On the day of the opening ceremony, as the guest of honour arrived, there he was: Malaysia’s fifth prime minister, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

He stepped out of the car with a calm presence, gentle smile and the kind of warmth that did not require speeches or slogans. And then, quite unceremoniously, we shook hands.

It was just a brief moment – polite and formal, as expected in these events. But as news of his passing filled my screen, that memory surfaced with unexpected weight. I found myself returning to that simple gesture and the quiet man behind it.

Tun Abdullah Badawi, or Pak Lah as many affectionately called him, was never the loudest voice in the room. In a political landscape often driven by volume and bravado, he offered a different kind of leadership – thoughtful, measured and soft-spoken.

Some may see this as weakness but I have come to believe that his quietness was his strength. It allowed space – for listening, for reflecting, for sincerity.

Looking back, I think that handshake stayed with me not because it was with a prime minister but because it marked the first time I met someone who embodied a value I had come to hold close: to be of benefit to others.

Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) once said: “The best of people are those who bring the most benefit to others” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*). Pak Lah, in many ways, exemplified this.

His tenure as prime minister may not have been the most dramatic but it was defined by a sincere attempt to build, nurture and serve – not for personal glory but for the good of others.

I did not fully appreciate it then. At that time, I was more interested in papers, presentations and figuring out where the

coffee breaks were.

However, over the years, that moment kept coming back to me, especially during moments of doubt. Am I doing enough? Is my work meaningful? Does any of this matter?

Somehow, the answer kept circling back to that same idea: do good work and use it to do good for others. It does not have to be big or heroic. You do not have to be a prime minister to lead or a professor to inspire. You just need to pick a vocation, strive to be your best at it and ask: Who am I helping with this?

That spirit – of quiet service, of purpose rooted in benefit – seems to resonate even more in moments like these.

When someone like Pak Lah leaves us, we remember not just their positions but their posture; not just their achievements but their attitude. His kindness, his humility and his willingness to serve without needing the spotlight – those are the things that remain.

Perhaps that is the lesson I did not realise I had learned from our brief encounter – that being someone of benefit does not always come with applause or headlines but often it is quiet. It is in the background. It is in the decision to lead with integrity even when it is unpopular. It is in showing up, doing the work and going home with a clear conscience. It is in the handshake, not the speech.

I am not saying Pak Lah was perfect – no leader is but in a world often dazzled by charisma and theatrics, his calm decency was refreshing – reassuring, even. He reminded us that leadership can be gentle and that strength does not always roar.

As we offered our prayers and condolences to his family, I found myself grateful; not just for his contributions to the country but for that one small gesture – his outstretched hand to a young lecturer who did not know then how much it would come to mean.

If you are wondering how to move forward in your journey – whether in your career, relationships or just in life – perhaps the answer is this: pick something you care about, give it your best and let it be of benefit to someone else.

You never know whose life you may quietly touch or what small, unassuming moment – like a handshake – may stay with them forever.

**Dr Nahrizul Adib Kadri is a professor of biomedical engineering and principal of Ibnu Sina Residential College, Universiti Malaya. Comments: [letters@thesundaily.com](mailto:letters@thesundaily.com)**



A food product may be hygienic, appealing and well-packaged, yet still pose a risk if it is not designed with the consumer’s age and ability in mind.

## When food becomes a hidden hazard

### COMMENT by Dr Abdullah Amru Indera Luthfi

**IN** conversations about food safety, the spotlight often falls on hygiene, contamination and expiry dates.

These are undoubtedly important but there is another aspect that deserves attention, for example, the physical design of food: its texture, structure and shape.

Over the past few years, we have seen an increase in food products, particularly snacks, designed to appeal to children. These snacks are often small, vibrantly coloured and jelly-like in texture, making them soft, smooth and fun to eat. But in the hands or mouths of a child, these features can become dangerous.

From a food technology perspective, many of these products are made using gelling agents such as konjac, carrageenan or agar, which produce a firm and rubbery texture. These gels are made to hold their shape but because they do not easily dissolve or break down during chewing, a child who swallows such a product whole could experience a blocked airway almost instantly.

This is where a concept often introduced in the classroom becomes highly relevant in real life – rheology, the study of how food flows and deforms under force.

Rheology is essential for understanding how food behaves when it is chewed, swallowed or even when it becomes stuck in the throat.

Foods with high elasticity and low solubility,

for example, can pose choking risks, particularly for young children who are still developing proper chewing and swallowing coordination.

While most food manufacturers follow strict safety guidelines such as HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point), these protocols primarily address biological, chemical and process-related hazards.

Physical risks, such as texture, shape and form, are far less often scrutinised, even though they too can have serious, even fatal, consequences.

This issue is not about placing blame or discouraging innovation but rather about raising awareness of the need to consider food structure as a safety factor, particularly for products intended for vulnerable consumers.

These products may be hygienic, appealing and well-packaged, yet still pose a risk if they are not designed with the consumer’s age and ability in mind.

As technologists, engineers, scientists, educators and members of society, we share a responsibility to ensure that food innovation is paired with sensible, safe, responsible and user-appropriate design.

Whether it is through clearer labelling, improved regulation and better public awareness, we can make room for both fun and safety on the plate.

**Dr Abdullah Amru Indera Luthfi is a lecturer at the Department of Chemical and Process Engineering, Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Comments: [letters@thesundaily.com](mailto:letters@thesundaily.com)**





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# Wild, wild Western Australia

**Solo adventures  
down under - P12**



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social media

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Family  
and parenting

### WEDNESDAY

Fashion  
and beauty

### THURSDAY

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Jacky Cheung to  
perform in KL





Camels at sunset on Cable Beach, Broome.

A view of the Horizontal Falls, Talbot Bay.



# Solo adventures in Oz

➤ Discover Western Australia's picturesque locations

**S**OLO travel is no longer just a niche experience for adventurous souls. In the first quarter of 2024, Airbnb reported a 27% year-on-year increase in solo trips, reflecting its rising popularity. More than just a growing trend, solo adventure offers an opportunity for individuals to connect with themselves, discover new places at their own pace and experience the world on their own terms.

However, while solo travel may seem exciting to some, it can feel daunting for others. That is why choosing the right destination is key to ensuring a fulfilling and memorable experience. Just a short five-hour flight from Malaysia, Western Australia has received international acclaim as one of the top destinations to travel to in BBC's inaugural guide to the 25 best places for travel in 2025.

Whether a first-time or seasoned solo traveller seeking solitude in vast landscapes and pristine coastlines, embarking on thrilling adventures or cultural experiences, or embracing the freedom to explore with flexibility, Western Australia offers something unique for every type of traveller.

Solo adventurers crave excitement and thrive on exploring the unknown. For those constantly seeking the next thrill, explore one of the world's last true wilderness areas, the Kimberley region, where there is a new experience at every turn. From Broome to Kununurra and everywhere in between, there are vastly different adventures that await.

This is a place to enjoy a slow camel ride along a white sandy beach at sunset or experience one of the world's only horizontal waterfalls in stunning red-kissed gorges. The sacred land is deeply intertwined with Aboriginal culture and history, with stories and knowledge passed down through generations. It is where dining under a million stars and soaring over ancient mountain ranges come together to create an unforgettable experience. Once seen, the Kimberley becomes a place impossible to forget, feeling as though it belongs to all who visit.

## For glamorous explorers

With the growing focus on mental health and self-love, solo adventures are becoming a way to unwind and indulge in destinations where self-care, luxury and adventure meet.

A golden staircase at the WA Museum Boola Bardip, Perth.



An Aboriginal cultural tour at Ngilgi Cave: Ancient Lands Experience with Josh Whiteland from Koomal Dreaming.



Cape Lodge in Margaret River, a private vineyard retreat surrounded by forest and parkland, allows guests to enjoy pristine beaches or the estate's serene swimming pool just minutes away from their bedrooms. During their stay, they can also indulge in innovative dishes with ingredients sourced from local farms and the property's own kitchen garden.

For those craving a truly unique culinary adventure, Margaret River offers truffle tours that complements the region's renowned food scene. At Margaret River Truffle Farm, a new Dig Deep - Truffle Hunt Experience from June to August is now available for booking. This experience invites guests to join trained dogs in the thrilling search for truffles while learning about the production process. After the excitement, visitors can sample a variety of truffle products in the farm shop. For an elevated experience, visitors can opt for the Dig Deep & Eat - The Full Experience tour, which includes the addition of a four small course lunch topped with truffle and a menu

showcasing regionally sourced ingredients.

## For culture buffs

Some solo travellers seek deeper connections with the places they visit, immersing themselves in local culture. Western Australia's cities and towns offer a wealth of enriching experiences for those with a passion for learning about diverse cultures, arts and traditions.

For those seeking a captivating journey through time and country, destinations across Western Australia offer an unparalleled opportunity to connect with the ancient custodians of the land.

Visitors can immerse themselves in the rich traditions and profound connection to nature that defines Aboriginal culture by participating in guided tours, staying in traditional accommodations or camps, or exploring Aboriginal art galleries. These experiences provide a unique and breathtaking way to appreciate the deep spiritual and cultural ties between the indigenous people and the natural world.



Exploring Gantheaume Point, Broome.



Resting among wildflowers at the Coalseam Conservation Park.

## For heritage hunters

For the solo traveller with a passion for heritage, step into the past with a journey through Western Australia's iconic heritage sites, where the stories of the gold rush, colonial legacies and pearling industries come to life.

Dive into the fascinating history of Western Australia, journeying through time at the Museum Boola Bardip, a newly opened arts and culture hub in Perth CBD (Boorloo) that provides a bold, dynamic setting for Western Australia's fascinating stories, history and culture to unfold through state-of-the-art technology and innovative interactive exhibits. Finally, visit Fremantle Prison, the state's only World Heritage-listed building and the only World Heritage-listed site in the Perth metropolitan area.

## For food lovers

For solo travellers in search of the perfect adventure centred around culinary delights, Western Australia offers a feast for the senses, with its vibrant food and drink scene promising delectable experiences at

every turn.

Embark on food and wine trails through regions such as Swan Valley, Perth Hills, Peel, Geographe and Blackwood Valley to discover delicious wines and gourmet delights. Sample different bush tucker fruits, nuts, seeds, herbs and leaves and try some savoury and sweet bush tucker dishes with local Aboriginal guides through Bush Tucker Talk and Tastings. From paddock-to-plate dining with fresh local produce in the Swan Valley to savouring creative, thoughtfully crafted dishes in Perth's lively food scene, each experience is a celebration of Western Australia's culinary diversity.

No matter the type of travel, Western Australia offers a range of destinations that suit diverse travel styles. With its breathtaking landscapes, vibrant wildlife and welcoming communities, Western Australia invites Malaysian solo travellers to explore, relax and discover themselves in the process.

Start planning your solo adventure today!





## MAG posts RM54m net profit in 2024 despite Q4 capacity cut

BY AIMIE SHAZRIE  
[sunbiz@thesundaily.com](mailto:sunbiz@thesundaily.com)

**KUALA LUMPUR:** A sharp 18% capacity cut in the final quarter of 2024 (Q4'24) did not stop Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG) from posting net income after interest and tax (net profit) of RM54 million for the year and its third straight year of operating profit, which amounted to RM113 million.

The capacity reduction, triggered by global supply chain disruptions, extended aircraft maintenance downtime and delays in new aircraft deliveries, hit during what is usually a peak travel period, denting revenue and earnings across the group.

MAG managing director Datuk Captain Izham Ismail said the impact of the reduction has significantly altered the group's financial trajectory.

"With our overall performance for the year, we are really behind because of the capacity cuts we did in Q4. If we had not made those cuts, we estimated that the group's profit could have reached RM580 million. For Malaysia Airlines Bhd alone, the improvement would have been close to RM300 million."

"We ended the year with a strong RM3 billion cash balance and no further shareholder injections," he said at MAG's 2024 financial year performance briefing yesterday.

He said revenue declined by 4% even though capacity was up by 7%.

"Load factor was high at 81% compared to 77% the previous year, but yields dropped because Q4, typically our highest-yielding quarter, was where most of the cuts happened. That eroded the full-year yield. Cargo revenue was also lower as a result of reduced capacity."

As a result, full-year revenue slipped 1% year-on-year to RM13.68 billion, despite a 6% rise in available seat kilometres. The group's earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation stood at RM788 million, while operating profit came in at RM113 million.

A significant contributor to the bottom line was a RM426 million reversal of impairment losses, previously recognised during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, on aircraft, property and other assets. The reversal was attributed to improved load factors, capacity and yield over the past two years.

Meanwhile, Malaysia Airlines' operating profit fell 87% to RM139 million from RM1.09 billion a year earlier, due to reduced capacity and lower yields.

"Despite the setbacks, MAG closed the year with a strong RM3 billion cash balance and no

➤ Aviation group ends year with RM113m earnings from operations and healthy RM3 billion cash balance



Izham (right) and Foong at the Malaysia Aviation Group's 2024 financial year performance briefing in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. — BERNAMAPIIC

additional capital injection from sole shareholder Khazanah Nasional since October 2021. Load factors remained resilient, with passenger load climbing to 80%, up three percentage points from 2023, signalling robust demand in both passenger and cargo segments," Izham said.

The group carried 16.6 million passengers in 2024, up from 14.5 million in 2023, with passenger yield at 30.1 sen, down from 33.3 sen. On-time performance improved marginally to 73% from 72% previously.

Izham said non-airline segments also contributed positively to the group's performance.

"MAB Kargo posted higher operating profit supported by stronger load factors, while

ground handling unit AeroDarat tripled its operating profit on the back of higher flight handling volumes. Amal by Malaysia Airlines recorded a 36% improvement year-on-year," he added.

Despite the operational setbacks, Izham said, MAG is pushing ahead with fleet renewal and network expansion.

"Two new Airbus A330neo aircraft have already entered service on long-haul routes, with eight more expected this year. The group is also set to resume flights to Paris in March 2025, reinforcing its European footprint."

Forward bookings have increased by about 9% year-on-year, driven by strong demand across key markets including Asean, Australia, New Zealand and South Asia, he added.

## Group braces for heightened cost and supply pressures

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG) is bracing for heightened cost escalations across the aviation value chain as US tariffs begin to weigh on aircraft components and supply chain stability, forecasting component price hikes of between 5% and 14% in the near term.

Group chief strategy and transformation officer Bryan Foong Chee Yeong said the US trade measures, combined with global macroeconomic pressures, have introduced a "triple threat" of cost inflation, recessionary demand risks and fragile supply chains.

"We do anticipate cost pressures to come in. The implications of the US tariff regime will hit us on multiple fronts, cost hikes, recessionary fears affecting demand, and a fragile, volatile global supply chain," he said at MAG 2024 financial year performance briefing yesterday.

Foong noted that aircraft parts and components are expected to bear the brunt of the increase, with suppliers already signaling cost-push inflation on critical items.

"This comes at a time when MAG is undergoing active fleet renewal and expansion, making cost predictability a central concern for the group. To manage these challenges, we have instructed our teams to be more disciplined with costs. Fuel hedging, for instance, is being ramped up to 50%, from the current 25–30%, to offer more stability in our cost base," he said.

Foong reiterated that MAG's international network remains a key revenue engine, providing a buffer against volatility in the Malaysian ringgit and allowing the Group to extract higher yields per available seat kilometre.

"We will continue to focus on international flows, which over the past two to three years have contributed significant volume and high-margin revenue to the group," he said.

While MAG continues to invest in customer experience through product and service upgrades, he emphasised that operational agility will be central to navigating 2025, a year the group anticipates will remain highly volatile.

Foong said 2025 will be another challenging year for aviation.

"We are accelerating our transformation and preparing for our next growth phase, but we remain very aware of global risks, including geopolitical instability, disrupted supply chains, and talent shortages," he said, adding that cybersecurity will also be a growing concern.

Foong said talent retention and development remain another focal point for MAG, which acknowledged persistent man-power gaps across the aviation sector. "It is not just us, talent is an industry-wide challenge. But we have plans in place to strengthen our pipeline and improve retention."

Despite these headwinds, he said, MAG is committed to its long-term network strategy and will continue to invest in capacity growth where viable.

"However, we do not rule out tactical adjustments should macroeconomic conditions worsen. We will remain dynamic in how we manage our network and fleet. Being agile in our deployment plans will help us navigate any sudden shifts in demand or cost structures," he added. — by AIMIE SHAZRIE

## No financial impact from handover of MASwings to Sarawak: Izham

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The handover of MASwings to the Sarawak state government will not have any financial impact on the Malaysia Aviation Group's (MAG) profit and loss (P&L) statement,

Group managing director Datuk Captain Izham Ismail said MASwings is not a profit-generating company but a public service obligation organisation.

"It is a zero-sum game to us. To a certain degree, this handover eliminates distraction from the MAG to manage MASwings moving forward," he said during the MAG 2024 financial performance media briefing yesterday.

MAG signed a sale and purchase agreement

with the Sarawak government to formalise the transfer of MASwings' ownership on Feb 12.

The Sarawak government intends to rebrand MASwings as AirBorneo and operate it as a state-owned airline.

Izham said that while the airline does not generate profits, it does receive an annual government incentive.

"What we earn from MASwings is in incentive only, to the tune of about RM10 million per year. On a monthly or daily basis, it's a zero-sum game."

"We don't lose money. We don't make a profit from it," Izham explained.

He emphasised that MASwings operates primarily to ensure rural connectivity under a government-mandated public service obligation.

"So there is no impact to the P&L. It's a zero-sum game. You may ask why we have used MASwings all these years. It's because of the public service obligation of rural air service," Izham said.

He highlighted the role MASwings has played in supporting national building goals, adding that it is MAG's responsibility to ensure the city and rural areas in Sabah and Sarawak remain connected. — Bernama



# Malaysia targets RM200b in property transactions this year

➤ Govt cautiously optimistic about sector's continued growth, mindful of global economic uncertainties

■ BY HAYATUN RAZAK  
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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia is targeting RM200 billion in property transaction value this year, driven by an expanding middle class and sustained demand for residential spaces, said Housing and Local Government Minister Nga Kor Ming (pic).

He said the government is cautiously optimistic about the outlook due to global policy shifts and economic uncertainties, particularly the recent "Liberation Day tariffs" introduced by the United States.

"Moving onto this year, we are optimistic about the sector's continued growth as we aim to achieve RM200 billion in property transaction value, supported by an expanding middle class and sustained demand for residential spaces. However, we are also cautious and

mindful of the challenges ahead," he said in his speech at the soft launch of Asean Real Estate Conference 2025 (Arec 2025) and the 24th International Architecture, Interior Design and Building Exhibition 2025, Malaysia (Archidex 2025) yesterday.

Nga said the recent Liberation Day tariffs introduced by the US have sent shockwaves through global markets, disrupting supply chains, inflating costs, and reshaping investment flows.

"During this period in time, one thing remains certain – and that is uncertainty. We must act quickly and adapt to navigate these challenges effectively."

Nga said strengthening multilateral ties within Asean is more important than ever at this critical juncture.

"With a combined population of 670 million, Asean represents the fifth largest economy in the world.



Amid external pressures such as trade disruptions and geopolitical tensions, our shared vision and commitment to regional cooperation could offer us a source of stability," he added.

Nga said that last year Malaysia's real estate sector reached a decade-high in total transaction value, rising by 18% from RM196.8 billion in 2023 to RM223.2 billion in 2024.

"Malaysia's real estate sector

experienced remarkable growth last year. This was driven by political stability, clear government direction, and the private sector's ability to meet the growing demand for quality interior design and green construction solutions," he added.

According to Nga, Malaysia, as Asean Chair, is set to host more than 20 ministerial level meetings across all Asean pillars, along with more than 50 high-level engagements.

He said this year's Archidex and Arec anticipate RM2 billion in investment value with over 56,000 attendees.

"Last year, we made history by launching the Asean-China Ministerial Roundtable on Construction and Housing in conjunction with Archidex. The event drew 40,336 visitors from over 100 countries and reached more than RM1 billion in transacted value."

Archidex 2025 will be held across two venues: the Malaysia International Trade and Exhibition Centre from July 21 to 24 and the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre from July 23 to 26. This year's edition features close to 1,000 exhibitors, across 36,700 square metres of exhibition space, a 40% increase from last year.



## Oil and gas firm signs US\$100m Islamic financing deal with Brunei banks

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Hibiscus Petroleum Bhd, through wholly owned subsidiary Simpor Hibiscus Sdn Bhd, has signed a long-term US\$100 million (RM441 million) Islamic syndicated financing agreement with Bank Islam Brunei Darussalam (BIBD) and Baiduri Bank.

In a Bursa Malaysia filing yesterday, the company said the agreement supports Hibiscus Petroleum's growth ambitions in Brunei, reinforces its long-term commitment to the country's energy sector, and supports its priorities under Wawasan Brunei 2035.

The financing agreement was signed on Wednesday in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, and witnessed by Brunei's Minister at the Prime Minister's Office and Minister of Finance and Economy II, Datuk Seri Setia Dr Awang Mohd Amin Liew Abdullah.

Hibiscus Petroleum chairman Zainul Rahim said the strategic partnership reflects the company's shared values with its Bruneian counterparts and its vision for sustainable development.

"This is not just a formal agreement; it is an expression of our belief that we see a long-term future in Brunei. It marks a pivotal moment in our collective efforts to foster economic growth, enhance local value and contribute to the sustainable development of Brunei," he said.

BIBD managing director and CEO Awang Junaidi Masri said the bank was honoured to be mandated as lead arranger and structuring bank for the landmark Islamic financing deal.

"This collaboration reflects our commitment to advancing Brunei's economic development and supporting strategic investments that align with the nation's long-term goals," he said.

Baiduri Bank CEO Eng Hui Ti said the agreement underscores a shared commitment to shaping Brunei's energy sector and delivering long-term value to local communities. – Bernama

## Petronas arm, Quaker Houghton team up to supply metalworking fluids

**PETALING JAYA:** Petronas Lubricants International (PLI), the global fluids and lubricants arm of national oil and company Petrolim Nasional Bhd (Petronas), and Quaker Houghton, a global leader in industrial process fluids, have agreed to strengthen their commitment to provide proven products, solutions and services to key industrial sectors in Malaysia and India.

Leveraging the product portfolio and geographic market position of both companies, PLI and Quaker Houghton will provide an expanded range of industrial solutions for customers.

Beginning in the second quarter of 2025, PLI will be the exclusive distributor of Quaker Houghton's broad portfolio of world-class metalworking fluids to customers in the transport and industrial end markets in Malaysia. In India, Quaker Houghton will offer PLI's range of high-performance maintenance lubricants and industrial fluids to its steel

mill customers.

PLI Group chief strategy and transformation officer Domenico Ciaglia said: "PLI is committed to building long-term alliances that will provide greater product availability and service quality for our customers, thus strengthening our position as the partner of choice in global industrial lubricants. We believe that the team at Quaker Houghton shares our vision on being future-focused, and they are uniquely positioned to unlock opportunities with us, both in terms of reaching new markets and in being the partner we need to lead the industry into a new era of effective, sustainable service."

Quaker Houghton EVP, global specialty and chief growth officer Jeewat Bijlani, remarked, "Asia is one of our key markets, and this partnership enables us to provide Quaker Houghton metalworking fluids to a greater number of customers. PLI has the proven experience, reputation, and channels to support the customer



Seated from left: PLI Group industrial managing director Uday Kumar; Domenico; Jeewat; and metals and operating solutions global vice president Karl Kunkel with representatives from both companies at an agreement signing ceremony.

requirements and expand our reach in Malaysia."

This strategic partnership reinforces the companies' shared vision of driving industrial solutions excellence while

meeting the evolving needs of modern manufacturing. PLI and Quaker Houghton will partner and set new standards in performance for industrial applications.

## Malaysia and China to strengthen cooperation in rail industry

**PUTRAJAYA:** Malaysia and China have agreed to strengthen and advance the railway industry through comprehensive cooperation, including rail industry development, sharing of best practices and joint project implementation.

In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Transport (MoT) said the collaboration was formalised through the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between China's

National Railway Administration and the MoT on Strengthening Cooperation in the Railway Sector.

The MoU was signed on Wednesday by Transport Minister Anthony Loke and Chinese Ambassador to Malaysia Ouyang Yujing, in the presence of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"Key areas of cooperation include rail industry development, sharing of best practices, implementation of joint

projects, organising training programmes and conferences, as well as exchange visits between officials and experts.

"This effort paves the way for technology transfer, investment in public transportation systems, and enhanced railway operational efficiency in Malaysia. It is also expected to support the sustainable development agenda by providing an eco-friendly and highly competitive

transport system," the statement said.

The MoT added that this collaboration aligns with the ministry's aspiration to strengthen the national transport network and enhance domestic and regional connectivity, which will contribute to the overall well-being and prosperity of the people and the nation.

"As a key trading partner and investor in infrastructure projects, China is seen as capable of playing a

strategic role in helping Malaysia build an efficient, inclusive and future-oriented transport ecosystem," the statement added.

A total of 31 MoUs and exchange documents were signed between ministries and agencies from both countries yesterday, marking a deep commitment to strengthening bilateral cooperation, particularly in the development of infrastructure and modern transport systems. – Bernama



# Solarvest, HSS and Shizen receive incentive

► Utility-scale solar project under SM01 qualifies for Green Investment Tax Allowance

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Solarvest Holdings Bhd and HSS Engineering Sdn Bhd, together with its Japanese partner Shizen Malaysia Sdn Bhd, announced that its utility-scale solar project under SM01 Sdn Bhd has received approval for the Green Investment Tax Allowance (Gita) incentive from the Malaysian Investment Development Authority (Mida).

This milestone marks a significant step in Malaysia's drive to promote sustainable investments and showcases international collaboration in developing clean energy infrastructure.

The official handover ceremony took place at the Malaysia Pavilion during Malaysia's Investment, Trade and Industry Week at Expo 2025 Osaka, Japan.

Gita, a strategic initiative by the Malaysian government, aims to promote investments in green technology. With the approval of this incentive, the 29.99MWac solar photovoltaic project in Kedah is expected to benefit from enhanced financial returns and improved project viability.

SM01 is a Corporate Green Power Programme (CGPP) project jointly owned by Shizen Malaysia Sdn Bhd (49%), Solarvest Asset Management Sdn Bhd [subsidiary of Solarvest Holdings Bhd] (33%), and HSS Engineering Sdn Bhd (18%). Shizen Malaysia, a unit of Shizen Energy Inc, is a renewable energy company from Japan renowned for its expertise in solar and wind development across Asia. The collaboration with Shizen highlights Solarvest's commitment to fostering cross-border partnerships that bring world-class innovation and environmental stewardship to

Malaysia.

Solarvest executive director and group CEO Davis Chong Chun Shiong said: "We are honoured to receive the Gita approval from Mida, which underscores the government's confidence in our capabilities and commitment to clean energy. This incentive boosts the financial sustainability of the SM01 project and demonstrates the value of international collaboration, particularly with our esteemed Japanese partner Shizen. As we accelerate our involvement as a renewable energy infrastructure developer, we remain focused on delivering impactful, reliable, and commercially viable clean energy projects in Malaysia by leveraging international partnerships and innovation-driven solutions."

Mida investment promotion and facilitation deputy CEO Sivasuriyamoorthy Sundara Raja said this partnership shows Malaysia's strong push for sustainability and strengthens its position as a top green investment hub.

He added the SM01 project aligns perfectly with their National Energy Transition Roadmap, demonstrating how international collaboration can accelerate their journey towards a low-carbon future.

"Mida remains dedicated to facilitating such high-impact green initiatives that not only contribute to environmental sustainability but also drive economic growth and technological advancement in Malaysia's renewable energy sector," said Sivasuriyamoorthy.

Shizen Malaysia Sdn Bhd CEO Reza Ikram said that Malaysia's stable economic environment and supportive government policies

create a conducive landscape for renewable energy investments.

"The Gita incentive is an enabler that enhances investor confidence by improving return potential. Our collaboration with renowned Malaysian local partners such as Solarvest and HSS further reinforces our trust in Malaysia's green investment ecosystem. As a Japanese renewable energy developer and investor, our focus is on delivering affordable and reliable clean energy to corporate off-takers by financing large-scale clean energy projects. We are proud to partner with Solarvest and HSS in advancing sustainable energy solutions that support the environmental ambitions of both Malaysia and Japan. This collaboration represents a meaningful step forward in strengthening Japan-Malaysia cooperation in renewable energy through strategic international partnerships," he added.

HSS executive vice-chairman cum acting group CEO Tan Sri Kuna Sittampalam said: "We are proud to be part of the project driving Malaysia's key clean energy initiative. We welcome the government's support in the form of the Gita incentive, which enhances the financial viability of the SM01 project. As an engineering and project management partner, HSS is committed to advancing high-impact infrastructure that supports Malaysia's sustainable development agenda. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with Solarvest and Shizen to deliver innovative and resilient renewable energy solutions for the future."

Themed "Weaving a Future in Harmony," the Malaysia Pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka serves as a platform to showcase the country's inclusive, innovative, and sustainable vision, while promoting its position as a regional hub and premier destination for trade and investment, especially in high-growth sectors such as sustainable green technology.

## ECRL hits 81% progress on Kota Bharu–Selangor line

**PASIR PUTEH:** The East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project is now on track for completion by December 2026, with the entire alignment from Kota Bharu to Selangor recording a work progress of 81.07% as of last month.

The work progress of the project is 90% in Terengganu and 86% in Pahang.

Malaysia Rail Link Sdn Bhd (MRL) CEO Datuk Seri Darwis Abdul Razak said the Kelantan government played an important role in ensuring the smooth implementation of the project, especially in resolving issues related to land acquisition.

"The work progress of the 43km alignment in Kelantan has achieved 88.86%, contributing significantly to the progress of the overall project. The testing and commissioning process is expected to begin in June 2026.

"Track laying works have also shown positive developments, with significant progress achieved in Kelantan, Terengganu and parts of Pahang involving the 400km alignment from Tunjong, Kota Bharu, to Maran in Pahang," he said.

He told reporters this after

inspecting the progress of the project at the Pasir Puteh ECRL station site yesterday.

Darwis said the construction of two ECRL stations in Kelantan namely in Tunjong and Pasir Puteh also recorded encouraging progress, reaching 69 and 68% respectively.

Work on both stations is expected to be completed by May next year.

According to him, most of the issues raised by residents including flash floods in Pasir Puteh, have been addressed through engagement sessions with the Land and District Office, local authorities and the state government since last year.

"We are committed to resolving every issue to ensure that this project benefits the people and can be completed on schedule," he said.

The 665km ECRL project crosses the East Coast states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang before connecting Selangor on the West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

The Kota Bharu–Gombak ECRL line is slated for completion in December 2026, with operations starting January 2027. – Bernama

## Alliance Bank provides green financing for UOA's Duo Tower

**KUALA LUMPUR:** UOA Development Bhd has signed a MoU with Alliance Bank Malaysia Bhd to introduce the Alliance Green Properties Financing for Duo Tower, Bangsar South.

This financing solution is aimed at encouraging the ownership of green-certified properties while supporting sustainable community development.

Notably, Duo Tower is the first commercial project to sign a MoU for this green financing scheme with Alliance Bank, marking a significant milestone in the push for eco-friendly real estate development.

This collaboration underscores a shared commitment to sustainability and sets a new benchmark for future commercial projects seeking green financing solutions.

The collaboration comes as Duo

Tower, the latest strata office development in Bangsar South, Kuala Lumpur makes its debut. This cutting-edge development features two corporate office towers soaring over 30 stories, embodying the principles of biophilic architecture. Designed by the master developer of Bangsar South, Duo Tower seamlessly integrates functionality, sustainability, and aesthetics, redefining the modern workplace experience.

The Alliance Green Properties Financing aligns with Alliance Bank's Acceler8 growth strategy, which focuses on expanding its reach within the consumer segment, particularly in property financing.

Borrowers will enjoy a preferential rate, making sustainable property ownership more accessible.

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## AMD says US rule on chips to China could cost it US\$800m

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Chip developer Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) on Wednesday said it expects new US licensing requirements for semiconductors exported to China to cost it as much as US\$800 million (RM3.5 billion).

The Silicon Valley company's earnings warning, filed with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), came a day after rival Nvidia notified regulators that it expects a US\$5.5 billion hit this quarter from licensing requirements on the main chip it can legally sell in China.

Shares in both companies were down by about 7% at the close of formal trading on Wednesday.

The new US export control measure applies to MI308 graphics processing units (GPUs) designed for high-performance applications like gaming and artificial intelligence, AMD said.

AMD said in the filing that it "expects to apply for (export) licences but there is no assurance that licences will be granted".

The US\$800 million earnings blow it forecast would come from charges in "inventory, purchase commitments

and related reserves", it added.

US officials last week told Nvidia it must obtain licences to export its H20 chips to China because of concerns they may be used in supercomputers there, the Silicon Valley company said in a SEC filing.

The United States had already restricted exports to China of Nvidia's most sophisticated GPUs, tailored for powering top-end artificial intelligence models.

Nvidia was told the licensing requirement on H20 chips would last indefinitely, it said in the filing.

CEO Jensen Huang has said publicly that the AI chip powerhouse will balance legal compliance and technological advances under Trump, and that nothing will stop the global advancement of artificial intelligence.

"We'll continue to do that and we'll be able to do that just fine," the Taiwan-born entrepreneur told reporters late last year.

Trump's predecessor Joe Biden restricted Nvidia from selling some of its top AI chips to China, which the United States sees as a strategic competitor in high tech. — AFP



Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba gesturing towards reporters as AMD chairman and CEO Lisa Su smiles at the start of their meeting at the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP/IC

## Trump touts 'big progress' in tariff talks with Japan

➤ Asian stocks rise despite Powell's warning on impact of levies

**HONG KONG:** Tokyo led Asian stocks higher yesterday as optimism over Japan-US trade talks offset Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell's warning that Donald Trump's tariffs could force officials to choose between fighting inflation or unemployment.

Investors are keeping a nervous eye on Washington for the next three months as governments scramble to cut deals to avert crippling tariffs the US president unveiled on his April 2 "Liberation Day" but then delayed for 90 days.

With Japanese companies the biggest investors into the United States, Tokyo's negotiations are of particular interest to markets — with some describing it as the canary in the coal mine — and traders took heart from early signs.

Trump posted on social media that there had been "Big Progress!" and Tokyo's envoy Ryosei Akazawa said: "I understand that the US wants to make a deal within the 90 days. For our

part, we want to do it as soon as possible."

And while Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba warned that the talks "won't be easy," he said the president had "expressed his desire to give the negotiations... the highest priority".

Hopes that Trump's blistering tariffs can be pared back have helped temper some of the disquiet on markets after a rout at the start of the month fuelled by talk of a global recession and an upending of historic trading norms.

Some have said there were rumblings that the target of his most painful measures could be open to dialogue, with Bloomberg reporting that China wants to see some measures beforehand, including reining in some cabinet members' anti-Beijing comments.

Shares in Tokyo rose more than 1% with Hong Kong, Singapore and Mumbai, while Shanghai, Sydney, Seoul, Wellington, Bangkok and Jakarta were also up. Taipei edged down along with London, Paris and Frankfurt.

However, uncertainty continues to prevail on trading floors after a selloff on Wall Street — and gold hitting a fresh record above US\$3,357 — sparked by Powell's warning over the impact of the tariffs.

He said that, while the Fed's employment and inflation goals were largely in balance at this point, policymakers could find themselves in the "challenging scenario" depending on

how things evolve.

"Tariffs are highly likely to generate at least a temporary rise in inflation," the Fed chief told the Economic Club of Chicago, adding that the inflationary effects "could also be more persistent".

He added: "You'll probably see continued volatility."

Chris Weston at Pepperstone said: "Powell has again frustrated some, who perhaps optimistically felt he might change the messaging from his recent communicate and to open the door to cuts in the June (policy) meeting, a factor that is priced at 80% by interest rate swaps traders."

The World Trade Organisation warned on Wednesday of "severe negative consequences" for the world because of the trade war, with boss Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala saying she was "very concerned" and that China-US volumes could collapse as much as 81%.

Oil prices extended gains after Washington on Wednesday sanctioned a second China-based "teapot" refinery for purchasing Iranian crude as it continues its "maximum pressure" campaign against Tehran.

The State Department said the measures against Shandong Shengxing Chemical were part of the US president's campaign to "drive Iran's illicit oil exports" to zero. — AFP

## 'Unprecedented' uncertainty to hit S. Korea's growth: Central bank

**SEOUL:** South Korea's central bank chief said yesterday that annual growth is expected to fall short of a recent forecast due to sweeping US tariffs and the fallout from the ex-president's martial law declaration.

President Donald Trump's threatened 25% tariffs on the export-dependent South Korea have rattled Asia's fourth-largest economy, sending Seoul-listed shares tumbling and pushing the currency to its weakest level since 2009.

The country has also seen months of political chaos, triggered by ex-president Yoon Suk Yeol's December attempt to suspend civilian rule, which culminated in his removal from office and new elections on June 3.

"This year's annual growth rate is now expected to fall short of the 1.5% forecast made in February," Bank of Korea (BOK) Governor Rhee Chang-yong told reporters.

"The tightening of tariff policies, which is much stronger than initially projected, will likely further weigh on growth prospects."

"Political uncertainty has dragged on longer than expected, delaying the recovery of economic sentiment."

Sluggish domestic demand, along with unprecedented factors such as large-scale wildfires which tore through swaths of the country's southeast late March, had also contributed to the downturn, Rhee said.

The BOK held its interest rate steady at 2.75% yesterday, its third straight decision to keep rates unchanged after a 0.25 percentage point cut in February.

Given the "significant uncertainty" due to US tariffs and the government's push for economic stimulus, "the board judged it appropriate to keep the base rate unchanged for now while closely assessing changes in domestic and external conditions".

He said tariff-related "uncertainty" has grown to an "unprecedented level".

"The intensity of US tariff policies and the swift shifts in responses from major economies are evolving so rapidly that it is currently difficult to even establish a baseline scenario for forecasts." — AFP

## Profit-booking pulls gold off all-time high

**BERLIN:** Gold prices retreated yesterday as investors booked profits after bullion hit an all-time high, with traders assessing tariff negotiations between the US and Japan.

Spot gold was down 0.8% to US\$3,317.63 an ounce, as of 0717 GMT (RM3.17pm in Malaysia). Bullion has gained over 2% so far this week.

US gold futures shed 0.5% to US\$3,330.60.

Bullion hit a record high of US\$3,357.40 earlier in the session and has risen more than 27% so far this year.

"The retreat is largely driven by short-term profit-taking following the sharp rally over the past week. A temporary stabilisation in US bond yields and a modest recovery in the US dollar have also added to the pressure," said Alexander Zumpfe, a precious metals trader at Heraeus Metals Germany.

"Markets are now in a wait-and-see mode ahead of further clarity on tariff policies and central bank commentary, prompting some investors to lock in gains."

"The volatility in both the equity and bond markets could also push investors to increase the weighting of gold within their portfolio," Global X analyst Trevor Yates said.

"We maintain our bullish stance on gold, though a pull-back towards US\$3,050 per ounce looks possible after a recent swift price rally," analysts at ANZ noted.

Spot silver dipped 1.4% to US\$32.28 an ounce, platinum shed 0.7% to US\$960.92, and palladium fell 1.9% to US\$953. — Reuters



# ABB to spin off **robotics** business for 2026 listing

► Move is biggest shake-up at Swiss group since sale of power grids to Hitachi

**ZURICH:** Swiss industrial group ABB yesterday announced plans to spin off its entire robotics division in the biggest shake-up at the company since it sold its power grids business to Japan's Hitachi in 2018.

The business is the world's second-biggest industrial robot maker after Japan's FANUC Corp and competes with rivals including Yaskawa and Germany's Kuka.

It generated sales of US\$2.3 billion (RM10 billion) in 2024, equivalent to 7% of ABB's total, but has struggled in recent quarters as the automotive sector – a big buyer of robots – has seen subdued demand.

As a result, the robotics division's profit margin of 12.1% last year was well below the group level of 18.1%.

ABB intends for the business to start trading as a separately listed entity in the second quarter of 2026, with shares in the new company distributed to ABB investors as a dividend.

CEO Morten Wierod said he saw limited synergies for the robotics business with the rest of ABB and that the business would benefit from being measured more directly against its peers.

"It is our view that a spin-off will optimise both companies' abilities to create customer value, grow and attract talent and both will benefit from a more focused governance and capital allocation," Wierod said.

The plan was supported by Investor AB, ABB's biggest shareholder with a 14.3% stake.

"The planned spin-off is an industrially logical step, creating two companies with

further sharpened focus, strong potential for continued profitable growth and long-term value creation for their shareholders," said Investor CEO Christian Cederholm.

Bank Vontobel analyst Mark Diethelm said the spin-off would make ABB a pure electrification and automation company, which he saw as a positive development.

The announcement came as ABB reported better-than-expected profit during its first quarter, with operational earnings before interest, tax and amortisation (EBITA) rising 13% to US\$1.59 billion.

The figure, which beat analyst forecasts for US\$1.48 billion, was boosted by a higher profit margin and a 120 million Swiss franc (RM648 million) gain from the sale of some property to the city of Zurich.

Sales rose 1% to US\$7.94 billion in the three months to the end of March, missing analyst forecasts for US\$8.16 billion in a company-gathered consensus. – Reuters

## UK's Sainsbury's expects flat profit this year

**LONDON:** Sainsbury's, Britain's second largest supermarket group after Tesco, yesterday reported a 7.2% rise in annual profit but forecast little or no growth in its new financial year as it faces a step up in competition.

The group, which has a UK grocery market share of 15%, forecast retail underlying operating profit, its preferred metric, of "around" £1 billion (RM5.8 billion) for its 2025/26 year, versus £1.036 billion made in the year to March 1, 2025, which was in line with expectations.

Prior to the update, analysts had on average been forecasting £1.08 billion for 2025/26.

"We are committed, above all else, to sustaining the strong competitive position we have built," chief executive Simon Roberts said.

The group expected to continue to grow grocery volumes ahead of the market, and had started the year with "good trading momentum," it said.

Last month Asda, the UK's number three player, flagged the start of a potential price war, saying it would take a hit to profits to finance price cuts aimed at reversing a slide in its market share.

Tesco responded last week, forecasting 2025/26 adjusted operating profit in a range up to £500 million lower than analysts' consensus expectations prior to its update.

It said it was sending a message that it has the firepower to deal with "whatever comes our way".

Sainsbury's, whose shares have fallen 9% so far this year, said retail sales rose 3.1%

in 2024/25 to £31.6 billion, with robust food sales offsetting weakness in general merchandise.

Fourth-quarter like-for-like retail sales rose 3.7%, having been up 2.8% in the third quarter.

Sainsbury's has won market share thanks to a strategy of matching discounter Aldi's prices on key items and providing better prices for members of its Nectar loyalty scheme, financed by cutting costs.

It says it has also improved the quality and innovation of its products and its customer service.

It plans to buy back at least £200 million of shares in 2025/26 and also return proceeds of £250 million from the disposal of its bank via a special dividend. – Reuters

## United Airlines does not expect US levies to hit prices of new planes

**NEW YORK:** United Airlines said on Wednesday it does not anticipate a direct impact on prices of its new aircraft as a result of tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump.

"We are closely monitoring the potential impact on prices we would pay for aircraft" but "we don't currently anticipate a meaningful direct impact from tariffs relating to aircraft purchases", United president Brett Hart said during a conference call on its first-quarter earnings.

"As a reminder, Boeing accounts for the majority of our future total order book and most of our Airbus 321neo are produced in Alabama," in the southern United States, he said.

Noting that United is Boeing's second-largest customer after the US government, the airline's CEO Scott Kirby said this could even represent an opportunity to "actually strengthen the partnership" with Airbus, even if the European firm must import some parts for its US assembly line.

Tariffs are "a pretty minor issue for us", he said.

Regarding the airline's business, chief commercial officer Andrew Nocella said there was a decline in domestic flights and in the main cabin.

He specified that occupancy during off-peak hours – before 7am or after 8pm – which is usually 30% lower than peak was instead 40% lower in the first quarter.

This explains the airline's decision to reduce its domestic flight capacity by 4% starting in the third quarter and to retire 21 aircraft early.

"We are seeing modest declines in non-US origin passenger volumes for the second quarter," Nocella said, reporting a 6% decline year-on-year for European travellers and a 9% drop in those from Canada.

For the Premium cabin, bookings "have remained solidly positive for international flights and flatish for domestic flights", he said.

United announced better-than-expected results on Tuesday, achieving its best first-quarter performance.

Between January and March, it generated record revenue of US\$13.21 billion – an increase of 5.4% year-on-year. – AFP

## Hermes to pass on tariff costs to American customers

**PARIS:** French luxury group Hermes said yesterday it would hike its prices in the United States to offset the impact of 10% import tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump.

Famous for its Birkin handbag, silk scarves and leather goods, the increases would take effect on May 1, said the group's finance chief Eric Halgouet.

Halgouet did not say by how much prices would be raised, but he said the move would "fully offset" the tariffs impact.

"It will be a complementary price increase that we are currently finalising, but which will allow us to neutralise this impact," he told reporters during an earnings presentation.

Hermes, also known for the "H" logo on its belts and other goods, usually raises prices once a year and had already announced worldwide increase of between 6% and 7% earlier in 2025.

Hermes overtook French rival LVMH as the world's most valuable luxury group this week after the share price of the Louis Vuitton maker sank on disappointing earnings.

Hermes posted global sales of €4.1 billion (RM20.7 billion) in the first quarter of 2025, an 8.5% increase from the same period last year.

Sales in the Americas region jumped 13.3% to €695 million, with double-digit growth in the United States, Canada, Mexico and Brazil.

Trump imposed a 10% tariff on imports from around the world this month, but he delayed higher duties on dozens of other countries, including a 20% levy for goods from the European Union. – AFP



A customer looking at fresh produce inside a Sainsbury's supermarket in Cobham, Britain. – REUTERS/SPIC

# TSMC net profit jumps 60.3% in Q1

## ► Chipmaking titan says no change in 'customer behaviour' after US tariffs

**TAIPEI:** Taiwanese chipmaking titan TSMC reported yesterday a surge in net profit for the first quarter and forecast robust demand for artificial intelligence technology, despite the spectre of US tariffs on the critical sector.

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company is the world's largest contract maker of chips that have become the lifeblood of the global economy, powering everything from smartphones to missiles.

Demand for chips has soared in recent years on demand for AI technology, but there are fears US President Donald Trump's

far-reaching tariffs could drive up consumer prices and hurt chipmakers.

TSMC said its net profit for the first three months of 2025 rose 60.3% from a year ago to NT\$361.56 billion (RM48.9 billion).

That beat expectations for NT\$346.76 billion, according to a Bloomberg News survey of analysts.

Net revenue for the quarter soared nearly 42 percent to NT\$839.25 billion on-year, also beating forecasts, figures released by the company last week showed.

The first quarter ended before Trump's so-called "Liberation Day" tariffs on April 2.

TSMC chairman and chief executive C.C. Wei said the company had not detected "any change in customer behaviour" so far.

"We continue to expect our full-year 2025 revenue to increase by close to mid-20s percent in US dollar terms," Wei said.

The chief executive added that AI-related

demand was also expected to be "robust".

"We might get a better picture in the next few months, and we will continue to closely monitor the potential impact to the end market demand and manage our business prudently."

TSMC, which counts Nvidia and Apple among its clients, has been in the cross-hairs of Trump, who has accused Taiwan of stealing the US chip industry.

There had been hopes in Taiwan that TSMC's plan to invest an additional US\$100 billion (RM440 billion) in the United States would shield the island from new tariffs.

Trump still imposed a 32% duty on Taiwanese imports as part of his sweeping tariffs on global trade partners – which he later paused for 90 days – but it excluded semiconductors.

Now, Washington is pushing forward with plans to slap import levies on

semiconductors and chip-making equipment, with the launch of "national security" probes into the industry.

Taiwan's Minister of Economic Affairs Kuo Jyh-huei said on Tuesday the government would carry out simulations to gauge the possible impact of US tariffs.

Taiwan already pledged to increase investment in the United States, purchase more US energy and boost defence spending to more than 3% of GDP in a bid to head off Trump's tariffs.

Also clouding the outlook for TSMC was a report that it planned to form a joint venture with Intel to operate the American company's chipmaking facilities.

Wei said yesterday "TSMC is not engaged in any discussion with other companies regarding any joint venture, technology licensing or technology transfer and sharing". – AFP



A traveller standing next to a closed BluSmart booking counter at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi yesterday. – REUTERS/SPIC

## BluSmart, Indian rival to Uber, suspends operations

**NEW DELHI:** Indian electric cab service BluSmart, seen as a rival to Uber, suspended services yesterday, two days after the country's market regulator alleged its co-founder misused funds at an affiliate company and bought a luxury apartment with money allocated for electric vehicles.

BluSmart rode India's clean energy boom but its sudden suspension puts the livelihood of thousands of drivers at risk.

With more than 8,000 taxis, it set up charging hubs in cities like New Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru to take on Uber and Ola, both ride-hailing services that largely use gasoline-powered fleets.

"We've decided to temporarily close bookings on the BluSmart app," the company said in an e-mail to customers yesterday, without giving any reasons.

Amid concerns expressed on social media about customer funds blocked in BluSmart wallets, the e-mail said the company will only "initiate a refund within the next 90 days if services do not resume before then".

BluSmart and the co-founder, Anmol Jaggi, did not respond to requests for comment.

The company, backed by bp ventures, an arm of British oil giant BP, told Reuters in 2023 it had a 9% market share in New Delhi.

The service became hugely popular – especially for airport rides – as BluSmart enticed customers with assurances of cleanliness and reliability.

Its drivers, for example, were not allowed to cancel bookings, unlike Uber.

The Delhi Airport yesterday announced BluSmart's suspension in an advisory.

The suspension put thousands of its drivers without work overnight.

After 32-year-old Mohammed Akhlaq completed his last ride in New Delhi late on Wednesday, he was asked by BluSmart officials to bring the car to the nearest hub as there was a "technical issue", he told Reuters.

"Once I parked the car, I was asked to hand over the keys and not come to work," he said, adding his elderly parents, wife and two children depend on his monthly income of about US\$400 (RM1,760).

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) barred Anmol and his brother Puneet Jaggi from the stock market this week and

ordered a forensic investigation into their listed solar energy company, Gensol, which used to procure electric vehicles and then lease them for the ride-hailing service.

Anmol is one of several co-founders of BluSmart, and the managing director of Gensol.

There is "a complete breakdown of internal controls and corporate governance norms in Gensol... the fund diversion primarily occurred in the context of electric vehicle (EV) purchases intended for leasing to a related party," SEBI said in its order this week.

"Funds availed by Gensol as loans for procuring EVs were, through layered transactions, partly utilised for buying a high-end apartment in The Camellias, DLF, for US\$5 million, it added, referring to one of India's most expensive luxury apartment complexes.

Other alleged diversion of funds by Anmol, according to the market regulator, included utilisation of funds for "personal use", and a US\$30,379 payment which "appears to be related to purchase of golf set", the order stated. – Reuters

## China to rely on AI in education reform bid

**HONG KONG:** China will integrate artificial intelligence (AI) applications into teaching efforts, textbooks and the school curriculum as it moves to overhaul education, authorities said in an official paper released on Wednesday.

The move targeting pupils and educators across primary, secondary and higher levels comes as the world's second-largest economy looks to boost innovation and find new sources of growth.

Promoting artificial intelligence would help "cultivate the basic abilities of teachers and students", and shape the "core competitiveness of innovative talents", the Education Ministry said.

For students, such basic abilities range from independent thinking and problem-solving to communication and cooperation, it said in a statement on its website.

Use of artificial intelligence would also lead to more innovative and challenging classrooms, it added.

The effort comes after Chinese universities launched AI courses and widened enrolment after the DeepSeek startup drew global attention in January with the launch of a competitive large-language model cheaper to develop than US peers.

That month, China also unveiled its first national action plan to attain a "strong-education nation" by 2035, aiming to harness innovation efficiencies in reaching the goal. – Reuters

## Bridgestone halves value of bond offering

**TOKYO:** Japan's Bridgestone has more than halved the value of a planned bond offering to around ¥50 billion (RM1.5 billion), two sources with knowledge of the matter said.

The company has also decided to do away with the proposed seven year term in the bond offer series that also included other tenors, the sources added.

Underwriters are still testing demand for the issuance, said the sources, who declined to be named as the information is not public.

Bridgestone declined to comment on the deal. The sale by the tyre maker, which has an investment grade credit rating, is seen as a litmus test for market sentiment.

Across Asia, bond issuance has been muted in the past week since President Donald Trump's tariffs sparked ructions in the US Treasuries market, making issuance more expensive across investment grade and high-yield bonds. – Reuters



# MARKET ROUND-UP: APRIL 17

## Bursa Trade Statistic

Source: Bursa Malaysia, Inter-Pacific Research

17 April 2025

Participation		Retail (19.49%)	Institution (36.18%)	Foreign (44.33%)
Net (in RM mil.)		Net (in RM mil.)	Net (in RM mil.)	Net (in RM mil.)
<b>-21.76</b>		<b>+37.93</b>	<b>-16.16</b>	
Bought (in RM mil.)	Sold (in RM mil.)	Bought (in RM mil.)	Sold (in RM mil.)	Bought (in RM mil.)
303.60	325.36	602.79	564.86	707.18
				723.34

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

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**Sources:** Bursa Malaysia, Bernama, shareinvestor.com and websites

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## Bursa Indices

INDEX	CHANGE
FBMEMAS	11,000.30 +36.57
FBMKLCI	1,483.27 +6.35
CONSUMER PRODUCTS	490.02 +4.81
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS	144.23 +0.75
CONSTRUCTION	251.61 +0.21
FINANCIAL SERVICES	17,780.90 +63.23
ENERGY	655.35 +8.60
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	476.26 +3.12
HEALTH CARE	1,861.44 +15.74
TRANSPORTATION	963.68 -0.59
PROPERTY	946.04 -6.40
PLANTATION	7,143.15 -41.30
FBMSHA	10,813.90 +39.03
FBMACE	4,558.13 +42.90
TECHNOLOGY	44.37 +0.50
<b>TURNOVER: 2.409 bil</b>	<b>VALUE: RM1.607 bil</b>

## Bursa rallies to close higher, tracking regional gains

**BURSA** Malaysia rebounded from early losses to close higher yesterday, supported by the upbeat performance of regional peers amid improved investor sentiment.

At 5pm, the FBM KLCI added 6.35 points, or 0.43%, to 1,483.27 compared to Wednesday's close of 1,476.92.

The benchmark index opened 1.75 points lower at 1,475.17 and moved between 1,473.21 and 1,487.27 throughout the day.

In the broader market, gainers outpaced decliners 455 to 354, while 467 counters were unchanged, 1,134 untraded, and 19 others suspended.

Turnover slipped to 2.4 billion units valued at RM1.6 billion from 3.00 billion units valued at RM1.65 billion on Wednesday.

Rakuten Trade Sdn Bhd equity research vice-president Thong Pak Leng said the FBM KLCI resumes its uptrend in tandem with the strong performance across the region.

"Investor sentiment is improving on China President Xi Jinping's recent tour of Southeast Asia — encompassing visits to Vietnam, Malaysia, and Cambodia — strategically aimed at reinforcing economic ties amid escalating trade tensions with the United States.

"This diplomatic initiative is perceived as a move to counterbalance the impact of substantial US tariffs on Chinese exports and to foster regional alliances," he told Bernama.

Heavyweights CIMB Group climbed 5 sen to RM6.76, Tenaga Nasional rose 4 sen to RM13.48, while Maybank, Public Bank, and IHH Healthcare added 3 sen each to RM9.87, RM4.33, and RM6.85 respectively.

Among the actives, NexG increased 5.5 sen to 31.5 sen, Tanco Holdings climbed 1 sen to 86 sen, MY E.G. Services and Pertamina Digital added half-a-sen each to 91 sen and 14.5 sen, respectively, while NationGate Holdings slipped 1 sen to RM1.16.

## Top 20 Actives

STOCKS	CLOSING [RM]	+/- [RM]	+/- [%]	VOLUME ('00)
HSI-CWC4	0.090	-0.005	-5.26	1,813,503
HSI-PWD2	0.110	-0.010	-8.33	1,579,019
HSI-PWFK	0.155	-0.020	-11.43	884,005
HSI-CWEI	0.155	+0.005	+3.33	565,011
HSI-CWEP	0.105	-0.010	-8.70	547,961
NEXG	0.315	+0.055	+21.15	486,928
PERTAMA	0.145	+0.005	+3.57	441,278
HSI-CWEK	0.095	+0.005	+5.56	421,510
MYEG	0.910	+0.005	+0.55	326,149
TANCO	0.860	+0.010	+1.18	271,907
99SMART-CP	0.030	+0.005	+20.00	256,535
NATGATE	1.160	-0.010	-0.86	244,930
HSI-PWFO	0.150	-0.020	-11.77	232,603
VELOCITY	0.080	-	-	225,289
SUMI	0.190	+0.005	+2.70	223,800
HSI-CWCT	0.070	-0.005	-6.67	219,249
EKOVEST	0.295	-0.020	-6.35	219,186
XIAOMI-C36	0.095	+0.005	+5.56	210,157
MYEG-C6Y	0.015	+0.010	+200.00	200,000
RL	0.350	-	-	191,491



## Top 20 Gainers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING [RM]	+/- [RM]	VOLUME ('00)
NESTLE	81.600	+4.560	2,526
HEIM	26.820	+0.440	2,576
MPI	15.200	+0.320	889
LPI	14.080	+0.240	142
KLUANG	5.620	+0.190	1
PANAMY	13.200	+0.160	91
LYSAGHT	2.640	+0.150	93
005655	1.000	+0.120	76
BKAWAN	19.000	+0.120	11
DLADY	27.600	+0.120	50
TIMWELL	0.475	+0.115	178
MBMR	5.480	+0.110	1,569
SP500-H53	1.580	+0.110	1,046
ARANK	0.530	+0.100	401
PICHEM	3.170	+0.100	37,624
MRDIY	1.630	+0.090	174,493
SBAGAN	5.590	+0.090	90
CHINTEK	7.980	+0.080	39
99SMART	2.180	+0.070	111,893
AMEREIT	1.700	+0.070	703

## Top 20 Gainers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING [RM]	+/- [%]	VOLUME ('00)
MYEG-C6Y	0.015	+200.00	200,000
99SMART-CB	0.010	+100.00	149,391
CIMB-CIW	0.010	+100.00	20,531
NEXG-C66	0.040	+100.00	19,770
TAKAFUL-CZ	0.010	+100.00	3
99SMART-CR	0.025	+66.67	1,000
YINSON-WA	0.025	+66.67	126,854
FCPO-PW06	0.100	+53.85	10
99SMART-CV	0.030	+50.00	7,680
ARTRONIQ-WA	0.015	+50.00	318
CIMB-CIX	0.015	+50.00	26,695
H8GLOB	0.090	+50.00	190,002
MRDIY-C38	0.030	+50.00	3,000
PBBANK-C10	0.045	+50.00	2,101
RENEUCO-WA	0.015	+50.00	410
99SMART-CW	0.035	+40.00	4,283
NEXG-WB	0.165	+37.50	168,816
99SMART-CA	0.100	+33.33	20,240
ANCOMNY-CT	0.020	+33.33	5,000
HIBISCS-C74	0.040	+33.33	10,165

## World Stocks/Commodities

INDEX	CLOSING	DAILY CHANGE	DAILY CHANGE (%)
DJIA [US]	39,669.39	-699.57	-1.73
S&P 500 [US]	5,275.70	-120.93	-2.24
NASDAQ [US]	16,307.16	-516.01	-3.07
NYSE [US]	18,245.65	-184.39	-1
EURO STOXX 50 [EUR]	4,934.96	-31.54	-0.64
FTSE 100 [UK]	8,206.48	-69.12	-0.84
DAX [GER]	21,211.15	-99.87	-0.47
NIKKEI 225 [JPN]	34,377.60	457.2	1.35
TOPIX INDEX [JPN]	2,530.23	32.2	1.29
HANG SENG INDEX [HK]	21,395.14	338.16	1.61
CSI 300 [CHN]	3,772.22	-0.6	-0.02
MSCI ASIA PACIFIC	176.39	-1.53	-0.86
SHANGHAI SEI COM [CHN]	3,280.34	4.34	0.13
KOSPI INDEX [SK]	2,470.41	22.98	0.94
SENSEX INDEX [IND]	78,566.00	1,521.71	1.98
ASX 200 [AUS]	7,819.14	60.23	0.78
ALL ORDINARIES INDX [AUS]	8,021.90	60.17	0.76
FBM KLCI	1,483.27	6.35	0.43
STRAITS TIMES INDEX [S'PORE]	3,719.65	57.2	1.56
WTI [US\$/BBL]	62.94	0.47	0.75
BRENT [US\$/BBL]	66.27	0.42	0.64
GOLD [COMEX] [US\$/T OZ]	3,337.40	-9	-0.27
SILVER [COMEX] [US\$/T OZ]	32.72	-0.58	-1.73
PLATINUM [US\$/T OZ]	963.06	-8.84	-0.91
COPPER [COMEX] [US CENTS/LB.]	464.35	-9.25	-1.95
COPPER 3MO [LME] [US\$/MT]	9,283.50	39.5	0.43
CORN [US CENTS/BU.]	490.75	-1	-0.2
WHEAT [US CENTS/BU.]	562.5	1.5	0.27
SOYBEAN OIL [CBOT] [US CENTS/LB.]	48.06	0.06	0.13
COCOA [ICE] [US\$/MT]	8,116.00	110	1.37
RUBBER [S'PORE] [US CENTS/KG]	166.6	1.6	0.97

As at 5pm, April 17

## Top 20 Losers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING [RM]	+/- [RM]	VOLUME ('00)
UTDPLT	22.000	-0.500	6,469
KLK	20.000	-0.200	3,117
ALIBABA-C39	0.010	-0.190	1,001
F&N	25.620	-0.180	398
AJI	13.820	-0.160	37
HLIND	13.400	-0.160	279
EUROSP	2.500	-0.150	39
GENP	4.880	-0.120	6,651
KESM	2.690	-0.110	226
AMBANK	5.060	-0.100	94,391
CVIEW	1.800	-0.100	70
NEXG-C68	0.050	-0.100	4,820
GENM-C3L	0.070	-0.080	1,320
PETDAG	18.980	-0.080	1,804
PPB	11.500	-0.080	4,089
YTLPOWER-C84	0.075	-0.075	100
HSI-PWD1	0.315	-0.070	6,135
MASTER	3.010	-0.070	322
MAXIS-C54	0.080	-0.070	200
NIKKEI-HL	1.400	-0.070	144

## Top 20 Losers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING [RM]	+/- [%]	VOLUME ('00)
ALIBABA-C39	0.010	-95.00	1,001
HSI-PWD0	0.015	-72.73	90
99SMART-CU	0.005	-66.67	10
NEXG-C68	0.050	-66.67	4,820
MYEG-C71	0.025	-64.29	114,002
GCB-C18	0.030	-53.85	230
GENM-C3L	0.070	-53.33	1,320
HSI-PWBE	0.005	-50.00	2,188
HSI-PWDZ	0.015	-50.00	700
OCR-WE	0.005	-50.00	11,499
PHB	0.005	-50.00	19,128
YTLPOWER-C84	0.075	-50.00	100
MAXIS-C54	0.080	-46.67	200
FBMKLCI-HA2	0.015	-40.00	3,505
HSI-PWDP	0.030	-40.00	3,915
KGB-CJ	0.015	-40.00	1,400
GCB-C16	0.025	-37.50	500
FRONTKN-C40	0.035	-36.36	30
HSI-CWAI	0.010	-33.33	11,092
HSI-PWDN	0.020	-33.33	410

# MARKETS/FROM THE BROKERS

SUNBIZ presents extracts of a selection of commentaries and research reports received from stockbrokers on counters that could be of interest to investors.

Compiled by SunBiz Team

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## Petronas Carigali names T7 unit as EPCC panel contractor

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Energy solutions provider T7 Global Bhd's wholly owned subsidiary Tanjung Offshore Services Sdn Bhd has been awarded a letter of appointment (LoA) from Petronas Carigali Sdn Bhd.

Under this LoA, T7 Global will be a panel contractor for the engineering, procurement, construction, and commissioning (EPCC) of remote operations for Petronas. The appointment is valid for a period of five years till 2030. The scope of work includes design engineering, facility modification, asset integration and system commissioning.

As a panel contractor, T7 Global said in a statement yesterday that it will play a key role in supporting Petronas' efforts to transform and digitalise its assets, an initiative aimed at enhancing efficiency and safety in offshore operations.

T7 Global executive chairman Tan Sri Dr Nik Norzrul Thani said this appointment reflects Petronas' commitment to digital transformation and reinforces their dedication to innovation and operational excellence.

"With our expertise, we are confident in delivering solutions that will drive operational improvement and long-term progress. We look forward to contributing to Petronas' digital transformation journey over the next five years," he added.

Over the past few months, he said T7 Global has secured multiple key contracts.

"Within our energy division, we have secured maintenance, construction and modification, and jack-up rig contracts from several customers. Meanwhile, our industrial solution division was awarded a contract by the Defence Ministry to provide radar systems," he added.

## Ringgit up slightly as US dollar weakens amid tariff tensions

**THE** ringgit closed marginally higher against the US dollar yesterday, driven by a weaker greenback amid global trade tensions, said an analyst.

At 6pm, the local note appreciated to 4.4050/4095 versus the greenback from Wednesday's close of 4.4085/4135.

Bank Muamalat Malaysia Bhd chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid said the situation with the US tariffs remains highly fluid as Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the Asean countries this week.

"The weakening of the greenback was surprising as the US dollar, a safe haven currency, would normally thrive during heightened uncertainties.

"Such dynamics would complicate how traders and investors would position themselves in times like this," he told Bernama.

SPI Asset Management managing partner Stephen Innes said traders were on a wait-and-see mode for the ringgit yesterday.

Meanwhile, the ringgit was traded mostly higher against a basket of major currencies.

It gained versus the Japanese yen to 3.0849/0883 from 3.0861/0898 at the close on Wednesday and appreciated against the British pound to 5.8331/8391 from 5.8488/8554 previously, but eased vis-a-vis the euro to 5.0102/0154 from 5.0072/0129 on Wednesday.

At the same time, the local note performed better against most Asean currencies.

It edged up versus the Singapore dollar to 3.3562/3601 from 3.3537/3578 at Wednesday's close, strengthened against the Thai baht to 13.2211/2417 from 13.2547/2773 on Wednesday and firmed vis-a-vis the Indonesian rupiah to 261.6/262.0 from 261.8/262.2 previously.

## Exchange Rates

FOREIGN CURRENCY	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.4760	4.3420	4.3320
1 Australian Dollar	2.8660	2.7500	2.7340
1 Brunei Dollar	3.4100	3.3100	3.3020
1 Canadian Dollar	3.2250	3.1390	3.1270
1 Euro	5.0990	4.9340	4.9140
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.6640	2.5650	2.5490
1 Singapore Dollar	3.4100	3.3100	3.3020
1 Sterling Pound	5.9240	5.7360	5.7160
1 Swiss Franc	5.5280	5.2920	5.2770
100 UAE Dirham	123.2700	116.9000	116.7000
100 Bangladesh Taka	3.7600	3.5020	3.3020
100 Chinese Renminbi	61.6700	59.0600	N/A
100 Danish Krone	70.0000	64.4100	64.2100
100 Hongkong Dollar	58.2700	55.3800	55.1800
100 Indian Rupee	5.3200	4.9900	4.7900
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0275	0.0249	0.0199
100 Japanese Yen	3.1490	3.0490	3.0390
100 New Taiwan Dollar	N/A	N/A	N/A
100 Norwegian Krone	43.4400	39.9400	39.7400
100 Pakistan Rupee	1.6200	1.5200	1.3200
100 Philippine Peso	8.0200	7.5600	7.3600
100 Qatar Riyal	124.0400	117.7500	117.5500
100 Saudi Riyal	120.5900	114.4800	114.2800
100 South Africa Rand	24.6100	22.2200	22.0200
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	1.5400	1.4200	1.2200
100 Swedish Krona	47.3000	43.0500	42.8500
100 Thai Baht	14.1300	12.5300	12.1300

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

## 99 Speed Mart Retail Holdings Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM2.39



Source: Bloomberg

**ONE** of the fastest growing grocery retail formats in Malaysia is mini markets – it is a format that is strategically positioned to capture the steady growth in domestic consumer spending. This is thanks to the daily essential-oriented product mix and widely scattered locations throughout the country. As the market leader, 99SMART has built a giant store network (FY24: 2,778 stores) by leveraging on its proven business model and entrenched brand equity. Such fundamentals and market dominance will appeal to investors seeking companies demonstrating a defensive earnings profile.

Outlet expansion will be the primary growth driver for 99SMART in the medium term, and we deem the company's target of 250 new outlets pa achievable. This is considering the growing consumer preference on smaller-format stores for grocery shopping, coupled with a shift towards chain mini-market operators at the expense of independent players. In addition, we believe there are still opportunities in underpenetrated regions for 99SMART to tap on.

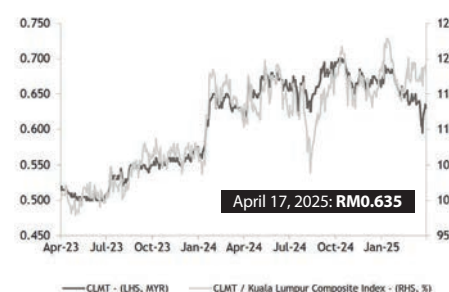
99SMART's efforts to diversify its sourcing options could be a strategic move to enhance its product offerings to cater to a larger group of customers. Meanwhile, we view the introduction of bulk sales platform – 99 Bults – as another avenue to expand its addressable markets. This is as the bulk purchase discounts and conditional free deliveries may entice customers it is unable to serve well enough with the retail model.

Risks to our recommendation include reputational or brand risks and more intense-than-expected competition.

BUY with RM2.39 TP. – **RHB Research, April 17**

## CapitaLand Malaysia Trust

Buy. Target price: RM0.75



Source: Maybank Investment Bank

**Q1'25** net profit was RM37.5 million (+12% YoY, +6% QoQ), underpinned by a +7.6% YoY increased in revenue to RM120.4 million. YoY growth was driven by positive rental reversions, step-up rents, and the full-quarter contribution from the Glenmarie Distribution Centre. Ex-Klang Valley malls led the rental growth with a +7.8% YoY uplift. Despite higher property operating expenses (+5% YoY) from increased service charges (at strata malls i.e. Queensbay Mall and Sungei Wang Plaza) and higher marketing costs, NPI rose 9.6% YoY to RM70.1 million.

CLMT's retail portfolio remains resilient, with Q1'25 tenant sales up 5.3% YoY. We expect rental reversions in FY25 to remain in mid to high single digit range, supported by upcoming renewals at higher-performing ex-Klang Valley malls. Festive spending lifted Q1'25, but outlook stays cautious amid macro uncertainties.

We maintain our FY25 forecasts for now, pending completion of its industrial property acquisitions. The proposed assets in Elmina Logistics Hub, Nusajaya Tech Park and Senai Airport City are expected to complete in 2H'25, which may lift gearing to 0.44x (from 0.41x as of end-March) and contribute an estimated RM19.4 million in annual gross rentals (~4% of FY26 revenue). Upon completion (by 2H'25), CLMT's proportion of industrial and logistics will rise from 2.8% to 7.9% of total assets under management, and is expected to contribute 9% of FY26 NPI.

There are several risk factors to our earnings estimates, target price and rating for CLMT. Rental, occupancy, cost, and rate changes may reduce CLMT's earnings. 31% of CLMT's gross rental income is due for renewal in 2025, while 15% of debt is on floating rates.

BUY with RM0.75 TP. – **Maybank Investment Bank, April 17**

## Gamuda Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM5.83



Source: Bloomberg

**GAMUDA's** subsidiary in Australia, DT Infrastructure (DTI) is partnering with Aul Energy to deliver early works for Carmody's Hill Wind Farm project in South Australia. The proposed wind farm will comprise 42 turbines that will generate up to 256MW of electricity, and includes a 118MW battery energy storage system. GAM's renewable energy (RE) exposure in Australia via early contractor involvement packages has good prospects, backed by Australia's National Renewable Energy Priority List, which includes 56 projects.

The said early works that DTI, which is GAM's fully owned subsidiary, is involved in includes pre-construction surveying and design activities. Once such early works are completed, the project will reach a 30% design level in preparation for a final investment decision by late CY25, after which, construction works are anticipated to commence in early CY26.

Recall that DTI secured an early contractor involvement (ECI) package for the 228MW Boulder Creek onshore wind farm project (comprising 38 turbines) in March 2024 before being awarded the A\$740 million civil works package in Sept 2024. Given that Carmody's Hill Wind Farm project has a higher generating capacity of 256MW compared to the Boulder Creek project, we expect the project value to be at least A\$740 million. We estimate that the value of early works should be at least A\$15 million, assuming that the works are not more than 2% of projected overall costs of at least A\$740 million. DTI's involvement in the early works of the Carmody Hill Wind Farm may also give it a higher chance of being a part of the EPCC works for the said project.

BUY with RM5.83 TP. – **RHB Research, April 17**



# Get most out of ringgit when travelling

➤ Malaysians should pick destinations where currency stretches furthest

**M**ALAYSIANS love a great travel deal, especially as travel fairs and flash promotions ramp up ahead of mid-year holidays, but new research has found Malaysians are overlooking a key part of their travel planning: How far their ringgit goes when they land.

As Malaysians hunt for the best travel deals, a recent survey by Wise has found nearly a third (29%) of respondents spend more than two days comparing hotel and accommodation options, 34% search for the best flight deals and 40% focus on researching itineraries and must-visit spots.

However, this focus risks Malaysians getting a bad deal by ignoring the thing that matters most – how far their money goes when they land at their travel destination.

In fact, 70% of Malaysians prioritise the cost of hotels and accommodation, while 69% focus on flight prices – but only 41% consider how much local currency they get for every ringgit.

This over-prioritisation on hotels and flights means Malaysians may not be getting the most for their money. Malaysians risk choosing holiday destinations where their ringgit does not go very far – and this is made worse by Malaysians using old school payment methods.

The majority of Malaysians (96%) still rely on traditional money changers, who charge unfavourable exchange rates. Meanwhile, 65% use their local bank cards abroad, despite 67% of respondents knowing that banks apply hidden exchange rate markups and foreign transaction fees as high as 3%.

"Malaysians work hard to score cheap flights and hotel deals, but



Most Malaysian travellers still rely on traditional money changers, who charge unfavourable exchange rates.

where you go and how you spend matter just as much. Malaysians need to consider where their ringgit stretches the furthest, with places such as Indonesia, Vietnam and Japan offering great value. And, perhaps most importantly, they need to stop getting ripped off when they spend abroad. Most travellers still use outdated spending methods overseas, getting hit by marked-up exchange rates and hidden fees that quietly eat into their budgets," said Wise senior product manager Yee Won Nyon.

The research, conducted by Vase.ai from March 27 to April 4 gathered responses from a total of 1,014 participants from the Vase.ai proprietary online panel. The survey focused on understanding

travel behaviours, spending habits and preferences for travel deals among Malaysians.



About 34% search for the best flight deals and 40% focus on researching itineraries and must-visit spots.

– PICS FROM PEXELS

## Sungai Nipah Time Tunnel Museum captures tragic moment in history

**THE** tragedy of the Nipah virus outbreak that claimed more than 100 lives in several villages around Bukit Pelanduk about 27 years ago remains a dark memory that is difficult to erase in the minds of local residents.

To commemorate the tragedy and ensure that the danger is not lost on future generations, a museum known as the Sungai Nipah Time Tunnel Museum was opened in Kampung Baru Sungai Nipah seven years ago.

Kampung Baru Sungai Nipah Village Development and Security Committee chairman Cheng Khai Lee, 37, said the museum, which displays key moments from the beginning of the outbreak to the recovery process, has received an encouraging response from visitors.

"The event is memorialised in the museum to educate the community about the history and resilience of the community in the past when facing

the crisis. It is interesting for the public to experience. (In fact) the father of the museum chairman is said to be the first individual to contract the virus (bat-to-human transmission through consumption of the infected date palm sap).

"Every month, there will be people coming to this museum, especially school and university students. The school holidays are the busiest. It is not open every day. Anyone who wants to come must make an appointment," he said after visiting the museum.

Cheng said on average, there are almost 400 visitors to the museum every year, including from outside Negeri Sembilan, who want to learn more up close about the incident which wiped out the swine farming industry in Bukit Pelanduk.

Speaking about the incident, Cheng said he was 10 years old at the

time and recalls his mother telling him to pack up as they had to move because the village was closed and tightly guarded by police and soldiers.

"It is bittersweet to remember, many died because of the virus, in addition to the large herds of pigs being culled," he said.

Meanwhile, resident Winnie Lee Le Hoong, 50, said the establishment of the museum was important to raise awareness and educate the public to understand the history of the incident as well as to ensure that it does not recur.

"It is great, this museum is full of information and items from that time including newspaper clippings, old agricultural tools and photos of the incident, so it can give the public a vivid impression. The livestock of two of my uncles were also disposed of due to the Nipah outbreak at that time," he said. – Bernama



The Sungai Nipah Time Tunnel Museum aims to educate visitors about the tragic Nipah virus outbreak that occurred 27 years ago and spread to several villages around Bukit Pelanduk. – BERNAMAPIC





**A**S spring unfolds, Taiwan's largest field of pristine white calla lilies comes into full bloom in Yangmingshan Bamboo Lake, marking the start of the Bamboo Lake Calla Lily Festival 2025.

This floral event spans 100 days, with calla lilies and hydrangeas blooming in succession, making it a highlight of the year in Bamboo Lake. From March to April, the fields are draped in a dreamy sea of white calla lilies, followed by vibrant hydrangeas from May to June, creating a breathtaking spectacle for flower lovers and spring-summer travellers alike.

Bamboo Lake's Calla Lily Festival has been a signature event for over 20 years, with the Hydrangea Festival now celebrating its 13th year. This year, the festival embraces the theme "A World of Imagination", inviting visitors to step into a breathtaking floral wonderland meticulously designed by local farmers. Through creative landscape artistry, the event transforms nature into a mesmerising spectacle, offering an immersive and unforgettable experience.

During the festival, visitors can fully embrace Bamboo Lake's distinctive "Flower Viewing, Creek Exploration, Cultural Walks and Outdoor Feasts" experience. Strolling through picturesque flower fields, joining guided ecological tours and participating in hands-on DIY craft workshops provide an up-close connection to nature.

Food lovers can savour locally sourced mountain delicacies and delightful afternoon tea, ensuring a well-rounded sensory journey that makes this festival a must-visit seasonal highlight.

#### Feature highlights

This year's festival showcases two standout floral installations: Tree Frog Dream House, a whimsical creation that incorporates charming tree frog elements into its design, adding a playful and imaginative touch – and Wheel of Love, a



Tree Frog Dream House (left) and Wheel of Love.  
– PIC FROM  
TAIPEITRAVELNET

## Floral getaway for photo enthusiasts

► Bamboo Lake Calla Lily Festival 2025 provides plenty of Instagram-worthy backdrops

romantic centrepiece designed as the backdrop for couples to capture picture-perfect moments in an enchanting, dreamlike setting. Both installations not only embody the festival's theme but also blend the symbolic meanings of the featured blooms. Calla lilies represent purity and sincere love, and hydrangeas symbolise family, unity and togetherness. Whether visiting with

family or a loved one, visitors can embrace the beauty of these artistic displays while creating cherished memories in the breathtaking floral wonderland.

As flowering seasons are influenced by weather and other natural factors, visitors are encouraged to plan their trip accordingly to enjoy a serene and immersive experience in nature.

## Blooming 'flower economy'

**THE** Heze Peony International Communication Forum in Heze City, East China's Shandong Province, shed light how the peony industry drives the local development and promotes cultural exchanges, highlighting the Heze Peony Festival's important role in enhancing friendship, and strengthening cooperation and cultural exchanges.

In 2000, China Agricultural University graduate Li Xiaohui returned to his hometown in Heze, Shandong Province, and began working in the peony industry.

Through years of dedication, he expanded his family's small peony field into a larger modern industrial park with facilities for seedling cultivation, flower processing, cold storage and research.

Beyond growing his own business, Li trained and supported hundreds of local farmers in peony cultivation, playing a key role in poverty alleviation and boosting the region's peony industry.

The thriving peony industry has enabled Heze, the peony capital of China, to foster four major development sectors focusing on seedling breeding, flower cultivation, deep processing and cultural tourism.

The 2025 World Peony

Conference and the 34th Heze International Peony Cultural Tourism Festival, collectively referred to as the 2025 Heze Peony Festival, officially kicked off last week. Featuring four sub-forums and 29 activities, the festival will last one month.

#### Blooming flower economy

As the world's largest peony planting and scientific research and processing base, in recent years, Heze has continued to tap the advantages of peonies in areas such as variety cultivation, industrial expansion and cultural and tourism integration.

The city has currently cultivated nine colour systems, 10 flower shapes and 1,308 varieties, with its planting area and number of varieties ranking first globally.

Besides the peony, Heze has developed the cultivation of other flowers such as herbaceous peony, rose and gerbera jamesonii. Last year, the city's sales of fresh-cut herbaceous peonies reached 120 million pieces, which were exported to more than 20 countries and regions in the world.

For industrial development, Heze has built a complete industrial chain from planting and processing to tourism and cultural creativity.

Having more than 120 peony production and processing



The 2025 Heze Peony Festival has started last week.

enterprises and 20 scientific research institutions, the city has developed over 260 peony-derived products – ranging from seed oil, cosmetics and cultural products. Last year, the total output value of the peony industry reached 13 billion yuan (RM7.83 billion).

As Heze's most beautiful business card, peony has become a powerful engine for the high-quality development of cultural tourism, said Shandong Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism head Yu Jiannan.

#### Promoting cultural exchanges

On Wednesday and Thursday, the Heze Peony International Communication Forum was held. A series of activities, such as the digital interpretation of paintings that converts static paintings into dynamic images and digital images of peonies generated by ChatGPT, have injected new impetus into the international dissemination of peony culture through technological empowerment.

In recent years, Heze has deeply explored the values of peonies and

actively created a friendly cultural symbol for global communication.

The city has established overseas sub-venues of the Peony Festival in countries such as the Netherlands, Japan and South Korea.

It has also set up peony culture communication stations in Brazil, Malaysia, Romania and other countries, and held award events related to the flower to introduce them to more than 50 Belt and Road partner countries, offering an intriguing window into the popular perception of peony culture.





Perry kissing the ground upon return to Earth. — AFPIC

## Star journey

► Katy Perry roars into space with all-female crew on Blue Origin rocket

**P**OP star Katy Perry and five other women launched into space on a Blue Origin rocket and successfully returned to Earth earlier this week, marking the first all-female spaceflight in more than 60 years.

The crew lifted off from West Texas at 9.31am ET (1331 GMT) and travelled to the edge of space, where they experienced a brief period of weightlessness before returning to Earth in a flight lasting around 11 minutes, according to a live broadcast by Blue Origin, the space company founded by billionaire Jeff Bezos.

The spaceflight was a high-profile success for Bezos's New Shepard launch vehicle, which has been developed for space tourism.

The six-person crew also included Bezos's fiancée Lauren

Sanchez, CBS host Gayle King, former Nasa rocket scientist Aisha Bowe, scientist Amanda Nguyen and film producer Kerianne Flynn.

King said when the crew returned to their seats after weightlessness, Perry sang the Louis Armstrong's *What a Wonderful World*.

"I feel super connected to love," Perry said after landing back on Earth.

Perry was holding a daisy, a flower she took into space, to remind her of her daughter Daisy.

Among celebrities in attendance at the launch pad were a tearful Oprah Winfrey, a close friend of King, and show business personalities Kris Jenner and Khloe Kardashian.

It was the first all-female spaceflight since Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, the first



The all-female group on board Blue Origin's latest flight into outer space. — AFPIC

woman in space, orbited Earth during a nearly three-day solo flight in 1963.

Blue Origin does not disclose the average cost of a seat on one of its rockets. On its website, the company said potential passengers have to pay US\$150,000 (RM662,000) in the form of a refundable deposit to start the "order process". In 2021, the company revealed the highest bid for a seat on its New Shepard spacecraft was US\$28 million. That

same year, *Star Trek* actor William Shatner flew free of charge as a guest of Blue Origin.

In 2018, Reuters reported the company was planning to charge passengers at least US\$200,000 for the ride. Blue Origin says on its website it aims to radically reduce the cost of access to space, with its rockets designed for reusability.

Britain's Warwick Business School professor of strategy and organisation Loizos Heracleous

estimated each launch of the New Shepard costs between US\$1 to US\$3 million.

"Even ignoring development cost, there are six seats so each passenger would have to pay around (US\$500,000) for this to be a financially viable ongoing business.

"It will take a long, long time before space tourism can be a financially sustainable business available to the public at large," Heracleous said. — Reuters

**UNIVERSAL** will build its first European theme park in Britain, Prime Minister Keir Starmer said last week, unveiling a mega deal that could create thousands of jobs and attract millions of tourists.

"Today we closed the deal on a multi-billion-pound investment that will see Bedford home to one of the biggest entertainment parks in Europe," Starmer said in a statement, referring to the English market town north of London.

No precise figures were given for the accord that was struck with US communications giant Comcast, which owns Universal, after years of discussions with UK leaders.

There are currently five Universal theme parks around the globe. The first was opened in 1964 in Hollywood, based around the original film studios, followed later by an East Coast park in Orlando. Three others are in Asia — in Beijing, Osaka, Japan and Singapore.

Visitors to Europe's first Universal park could enjoy rides and shows based around beloved movie characters such as Shrek, Minions, dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park* and the world of boy magician Harry Potter.

The new park could create some 28,000 jobs, including 20,000 during construction, and represent a £50 billion (RM292 billion) boost to the UK economy by 2055, Starmer's office said in a statement. Some 80% of the employees would come from the local area, the statement added.

## UK to host Europe's first Universal theme park



An estimated 8.5 million people would visit in its first year, planned for 2031, making it the largest attraction in Britain. — AFPIC

An estimated 8.5 million people would visit in its first year planned for 2031, making it the largest attraction in Britain.

"We could not be more excited to take this very important step in our plan

to create and deliver an incredible Universal theme park and resort in the heart of the UK," said Comcast president Mike Cavanagh.

In 2023, Comcast bought a 200ha site of a former brickworks, south

of Bedford, some 80km north of London.

Universal said it would work with local colleges and universities to train the next generation of hospitality workers, with apprenticeships and internships.

The area is linked by a train ride of about an hour from St Pancras station, which also houses the Eurostar serving links to Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam.

Among the plans for the new park, are a 500-room hotel as well as rides, shows and a large dining complex. The proposals will be subject to a planning decision from the Housing, Communities and Local Government Ministry.

Universal has yet to release details of the rides, but media reports have indicated a possible attraction themed around *Paddington Bear*, which is now a major film franchise.

The whole attraction would be intended to rival Disneyland Paris, which drew some 10.4 million visitors in 2023.

"From *Wicked* to *Minions*, Universal is behind some of the biggest blockbusters of recent years," said Culture Minister Lisa Nandy.

She added that the "landmark investment is fantastic news for our economy, UK tourism and the British public, who will be able to enjoy the biggest and best theme park in Europe on their doorstep".

News of the deal comes just a few days after the government signed off on the expansion of nearby Luton Airport that serves destinations across Europe. — AFP



# Siti Nurhaliza records OST for *Telaga Suriram*

➤ Songstress completes theme tune to movie in under 30 minutes

**T**HE recording of the theme song for the horror film *Telaga Suriram*, titled *Sesal*, took less than 30 minutes and was flawlessly delivered by Malaysia's national songstress Datuk Seri Siti Nurhaliza Tarudin.

The three-minute track, composed by Nurzaidi Abd Rahman, centres around the themes of a mother's suffering and vengeance, aligning with the narrative of the film directed by Osman Ali, which is set to premiere on May 1.

Siti, who has been crowned *Biduanita Negara*, said the recording process went smoothly as the melody and lyrics were easy to connect with, especially since the message resonated deeply with her maternal instincts.

"The melody was easy to grasp, and the lyrics were simple to understand. The recording was also aided by the guidance of the composer and production team, making it easier for me to internalise the song."

"As a mother myself, I could really feel the emotions of regret and sorrow. *Alhamdulillah*, the recording went smoothly and did not take long," she told a press conference launching the film's original soundtrack (OST) and music video.

According to the nation's number one singer, performing a film's OST is a way for her to continue contributing to the music industry while strengthening her artistic legacy.

"To me, singing OSTs for films or dramas is a way to stay relevant and

reach younger generations. This phenomenon helps artistes remain visible with strong support from fans of the film or drama itself.

"If a drama runs for many episodes on TV, the theme song keeps playing and becomes widely recognised. It is the same with films – if the reception is strong, the song will stay alive in people's memories," said Siti.

Meanwhile, director Osman Ali said no other singer could convey the grief of losing a child as effectively as Siti.

"I am truly honoured Siti agreed to sing this song. Choosing the right song took quite some time due to detailed discussions, but in the end, we created the best track for the film," he said.

*Telaga Suriram* is about a missing child believed to have fallen into a well, incorporating mystical elements, local beliefs and the emotional turmoil of a mother consumed by regret. – Bernama



Siti says the song resonated deeply with her maternal instincts. – BERNAMAPIC



*Telaga Suriram* is scheduled to hit local screens. – BERNAMAPIC

## Local horror flick to spook fans this May

**TAKING** nearly three years to complete, the horror film *Telaga Suriram* is set to hit cinemas nationwide starting May 1.

Highlighting myths and mystical beliefs still held by certain rural communities, the film – produced by Odissi Creative Sdn Bhd and directed by Osman Ali – is based on the disappearance of a child believed to have fallen into a well.

"We were drawn to this story because it combines mystical elements with age-old beliefs passed down through generations," said Osman in a statement.

He said the film is different from other horror films because, in addition to the usual scare tactics or ghostly elements, *Telaga Suriram* portrays the reality of communities still tied to old myths and beliefs.

He added that during the filming process – mostly conducted in traditional village areas – the crew faced various challenges, including

eerie occurrences.

"The locations we chose all had their own mystical stories, so there were indeed spooky incidents such as mysterious voices."

"Additionally, some crew members felt they were being watched or saw strange apparitions. However, we considered all of it part of the job's challenges," he said.

The film's producer Yus Yusop said the idea to produce the horror film stemmed from his interest in folklore rich with historical and mystical elements.

He said the film took a long time to complete because they emphasised precision during filming and post-production.

Featuring some of the biggest names in Malaysia, including Maya Karin, Scha Alyahya, Farid Kamil, Ellie Suriaty and child actress Puteri Rafasya, *Telaga Suriram* is set to spook fans this May. – Bernama

## Streaming fest for this weekend

**LOOKING** for a show to discover or binge-watch this weekend? Between technological nightmares, feminist revolts and the excesses of social media, here are five onscreen stories that are sure to disrupt, question, fascinate and entertain. Hold on to your hats, because sometimes reality can surpass fiction.

**Black Mirror – Season 7 (Netflix)**  
What if technology was out to get you? The cult anthology show returns with a new series of episodes in which every screen, every app, every algorithm becomes an existential threat. From the psychological thriller to the sci-fi fable, *Black Mirror* maintains its magic formula with a star cast, razor-sharp writing, and the ability to play on your mind for days after viewing.

**Cast:** Issa Rae, Awkwafina, Cristin Milioti, Will Poulter and Tracee Ellis Ross.

**Your Friends and Neighbours (Apple TV+)**

Imagine being a recently divorced hedge fund manager, lost in the storm of your life, only to discover that your neighbours are living an existence as luxurious as it is mysterious. That is exactly what happens to our protagonist who, after losing his job, finds himself stealing from his neighbours in upmarket Westmont Village. But behind these impeccable facades, he discovers secrets far darker and more dangerous than he ever expected. The show blends suspense, betrayal and mystery, in a setting where everything seems perfect on the surface, but where deeper troubles lurk behind the smiles.

**Cast:** Jon Hamm, Amanda Peet, Olivia Munn and Hoon Lee.

**The Handmaid's Tale – Season 6, final season (Hulu)**

The cult TV show is bowing out. After years of oppression, rebellion, grief and hope, June Osborne is set to wage her last battle. More political, more direct, this final season is an indictment of all forms of subjugation. Elisabeth Moss plays the starring role magnificently and every episode is a warning that should no longer be ignored.

**Cast:** Elisabeth Moss, Yvonne Strahovski, Ann Dowd, Bradley Whitford and Max Minghella

**Doctor Who – Season 2 (Disney+)**

The Doctor is back and he is not alone. This brand-new season sees the arrival of Belinda Chandra, a new curious and determined companion, on an intergalactic journey that quickly goes off the rails. The duo cannot get back to Earth – something, or someone, is stopping

them. They must confront stranger creatures, more vicious enemies and ever-more puzzling paradoxes. *Doctor Who* proves once again that it has more than one Tardis-based trick up its sleeve.

**Cast:** Ncuti Gatwa, Millie Gibson and Varada Sethu.

**Bad Influence: The Dark Side of Kidfluencing – docuseries (Netflix)**

They may get millions of views, but who is looking out for them? This three-part documentary series explores the world of kidfluencing, where children become living marketing commodities, often in the hands of their own parents. The case of Piper Rockelle, a tween YouTube star, is at the heart of the investigation, with accusations of abuse, chilling testimonies from former members of her "Squad," and echoes of a cult-like atmosphere. It is a dizzying dive into the excesses of a world where the "like" button can have very real consequences. – ETX Studio



The sixth season of *Black Mirror* is the number one show globally on Netflix, with over 11 million views in the first week. – NETFLIXPIC



# New films, new stories

► Latest flicks to enjoy at cinemas near you

BY YASMIN ZULRAEZ

**F**ROM explosive action thrillers to heartfelt family dramas and long-awaited anime finales, 2025 is shaping up to be a standout year for cinema. With major local releases such as *Blood Brothers*, international sensations such as *Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle* and Disney's nostalgic return with *Lilo & Stitch*, moviegoers have plenty to look forward to. Whether you are after adrenaline, emotion, or a bit of both, this year's film lineup promises something for everyone.

## **Blood Brothers brings Malaysian action to new heights**

Premiered: April 10

Directed by Syafiq Yusof and Abhilash Chandra, *Blood Brothers* is already earning its place as one of the biggest local action hits of the year. Featuring a powerhouse cast including Syafiq Kyle, Sharnaaz Ahmad, Syazwan Zulkifly and Shukri Yahaya, the film revolves around Arif, a loyal bodyguard accused of betrayal, who is forced to turn to his estranged brother to clear his name.

The film's explosive two-minute trailer has captured online attention with its emotionally-charged fight scenes and gritty narrative. Set against a backdrop of betrayal and loyalty, *Blood Brothers* is not just a showcase of top-tier action, it is a story of brotherhood tested to the extreme. With edge-of-your-seat pacing and stylish cinematography, this is Malaysian cinema at full throttle.

crafted by animation powerhouse Ufotable.

Picking up after the Hashira Training Arc, the story plunges Tanjiro and his comrades into Muzan Kibutsuji's stronghold, the Infinity Castle, for an all-out final battle between humanity and demons. Known for its breathtaking visuals, emotional depth and heart-pounding action, this first instalment promises an unforgettable experience for anime fans around the world.

*Infinity Castle* is only the beginning. With the second and third parts of the *Demon Slayer* finale expected to follow in 2026, fans are already gearing up for what could be anime's most ambitious cinematic trilogy yet. Following *Mugen Train*'s record-breaking success, this new arc has the potential to cement *Demon Slayer* as one of the most beloved anime franchises in global history.

The film will release in over 50 countries across multiple dates from mid-August to late September, including the Philippines, Australia, India, Brazil, France and Germany. Crunchyroll and Sony are setting a new standard for anime movie distribution with a simultaneous rollout and screenings in Imax and large formats.

## **My Parents' Midlife Crisis gives voice to family struggles, self-discovery**

Release date: May

In time for post-Raya reflection, *My Parents' Midlife Crisis* is set to deliver a heartwarming and thought-provoking local drama. The film marks the directorial debut of Joey Lee, whose script earned acclaim at the Busan Asian Film School and received support from international film bodies such as Arri and Finas.

Starring Jojo Goh and Douglas Lim, the story follows a 13-year-old girl named Velonica, trapped in the tension between her traditional father and her mother Sandra, who unexpectedly finds passion and conflict through competitive cycling. What begins as a family drama evolves into a narrative about second chances, dreams reignited and the cost of societal expectations.

Completed in just 21 days, the film has already been tested with early audiences and garnered positive feedback. Lee's poignant exploration of Asian family dynamics, backed by stellar performances and sharp writing, positions this as a must-watch Malaysian indie release.



Syafiq (right) and Sharnaaz face off in a high-stakes battle of loyalty and betrayal in Malaysia's biggest action film of the year.



Tanjiro and the Hashira descend into Muzan's lair in the epic first instalment of *Demon Slayer*'s final trilogy.

## **Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba - Infinity Castle**

Release date: Aug 14 (Malaysia)

Global anime phenomenon *Demon Slayer* kicks off its trilogy conclusion with *Infinity Castle*. Set to debut in Malaysia and other parts of Southeast Asia this August, the film represents the beginning of the series' final arc,



Goh (left) takes on a powerful role as a mother rediscovering her identity through cycling and self-liberation in *My Parents' Midlife Crisis*.

## **Lilo & Stitch returns with live-action twist**

Release date: May 22

Disney continues its live-action reimaginings with *Lilo & Stitch*, directed by Dean Fleischer Camp (*Marcel the Shell with Shoes On*) and starring Sydney Elizebeth Agudong as Nani, with newcomer Maia Kealoha as Lilo. The film brings the heartwarming tale of a mischievous alien and a lonely Hawaiian girl to a new generation, blending humour, action and tear-jerking family moments.

Returning to voice the beloved alien is Chris Sanders, *Stitch*'s original creator,

alongside a star-studded cast including Zach Galifianakis, Courtney B. Vance and Hannah Waddingham. The newly released teaser promises a mix of nostalgic callbacks and modern storytelling, while still holding to the original's themes of belonging, family (*ohana*) and identity.

With a visually rich Hawaiian backdrop and updated CGI effects, *Lilo & Stitch* is expected to charm longtime fans and first-time viewers alike when it hits theatres this May.

Whether you are drawn to swords and demons, gunfights and betrayal, family cycling dramas or alien hijacks, the film lineup is a journey you would not want to miss.



Stitch returns in Disney's live-action remake, reuniting with Lilo for a new adventure about family and belonging.



# Heavenly King returns



The concert will showcase a multi-dimensional stage design enhanced by cutting-edge holographic projections and immersive 3D visuals.

**F**OLLOWING the success of his six sold-out concerts in 2023, the "Heavenly King of Cantopop" Jacky Cheung is set to return to Malaysia.

Cheung will perform in Kuala Lumpur as part of his 60+ Concert Tour from Aug 15 to 17 at the Axiata Arena, Bukit Jalil. The venue will be transformed into a stage for three unforgettable nights of world-class entertainment.

As a defining icon of Chinese pop music, Cheung's voice has soundtracked generations, transcending time and borders. Recently, he achieved an unprecedented milestone during his 60+ Concert Tour in Haikou, China - his 218th show marked his 1,000th solo concert worldwide, cementing his status as a legend in Chinese music history.

Reflecting on this feat, Cheung shared: "These 1,000 concerts are not just a number - they represent 40 years of passion and dedication.

## ➤ Jacky Cheung to bring 60+ Concert Tour to Kuala Lumpur from Aug 15 to 17

Music's power lies in the emotions it carries, and I am deeply grateful to my fans for making this journey possible."

From vocal brilliance to cultural influence, Cheung remains the gold standard in Chinese pop - inspiring artistes and fans alike.

### Multi-sensory spectacle redefining live entertainment

The Jacky Cheung 60+ Concert Tour in Kuala Lumpur aims to be an evolution in live performance, offering audiences an elevated and reimagined concert experience.

Supported by a world-class international production team, the show features a sophisticated,

multi-dimensional stage design enhanced by cutting-edge holographic projections and immersive 3D visuals.

Combined with a state-of-the-art sound system and intelligent lighting technology, every aspect of the production is curated to deliver a powerful, multi-sensory spectacle. The aim is just not to put on a concert, but a masterfully crafted artistic experience that redefines the boundaries of live entertainment.

Presented by Maybank and Golden Destinations, and organised by Star Planet, tickets will go on sale from next Friday. Pre-sale tickets are limited and will be available on a first-come, first-served basis.

## Peder Elias drops track *Call My Name*

**FRESH** from performing in Malaysia, Norwegian artiste and songwriter Peder Elias Eriksrud Kjørholt has released *Call My Name* via Sony Music.

Elias said: "*Call My Name* is a song about wanting to be there for someone, especially if they are going through hard times. I lead a busy life, but it would really break my heart if the people closest to me did not trust me to drop anything to be with them if they need me."

The 28-year-old wrote *Call My Name* in London with Alex Charles, Ryan Bickley and producer Freedro (Zara Larsson, The Chainsmokers) and shared that the collaboration and creative process was seamlessly organic.

"We work well together, and the whole creative process felt

right from the start. Not because it is effortless, but because I feel challenged in a good way. And on a personal note, it feels as if *Call My Name* shows how I am maturing as a person and a songwriter.

"As much as I rely on talking with those closest to me when life overwhelms me, I have always taken a lot of comfort in the music. Making it and listening to it. And that is what I hope my music can do for others. I cannot describe how motivated and privileged I feel when fans share stories of how my music and lyrics have touched them and even impacted their lives. It is such an honour to know that my music helps them through difficult times," he said.

After recently showcasing his sense of humour with *If I Got a*

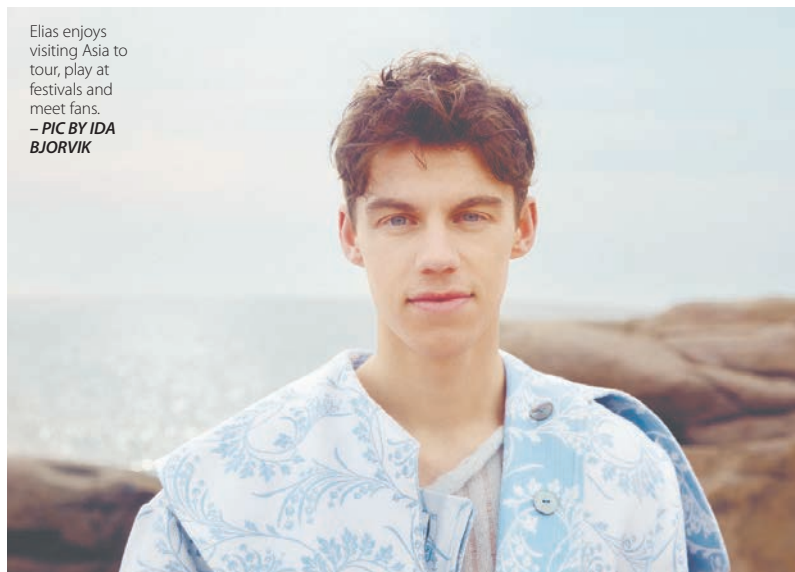
*Dollar*, *Call My Name* is even closer to Elias's heart and he is excited to share it with whoever needs to tell someone that they are here for them or who simply needs to feel comforted.

Elias recently toured Southeast Asia, including Malaysia.

"On the day of release, I am actually travelling between Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and Manila in the Philippines. I have never been to Malaysia before, but I visited the Philippines last year and had a great time doing promo and meeting fans. And tasting the fantastic desserts. I think I would like to celebrate the release with *leche flan* and *halo-halo*, which I have craved since I first tasted them," he said.

*Call My Name* is available for streaming.

Elias enjoys visiting Asia to tour, play at festivals and meet fans.  
- PIC BY IDA BJORVIK



Snow Man is a nine-member Japanese group that debuted in January 2020.

## Snow Man releases best-of album for download, streaming

**SNOW** Man has now made its best-of album *The Best 2020-2025* available on digital download and streaming platforms.

Originally released to mark the fifth anniversary of its debut, the album was first issued on CD as the group's very first greatest hits collection. It became the first album in the history of Japan's Oricon Daily Album Ranking (as of Jan 21) to sell one million copies on its first day and the first in the group's history to surpass 1.5 million cumulative sales.

The digital release features 61 tracks, including *SBY*, the theme

song for the currently screening film *Trillion Game*, starring Snow Man member Ren Meguro. It also includes the first solo songs from each of the group's nine members, all 11 singles that have been released since debut, lead and sub-leads tracks from its four albums and a curated selection chosen by the group and fans.

To celebrate the digital release, Snow Man is hosting a special download campaign on iTunes. Fans who download even a single track from the album will receive an exclusive digital wallpaper.









## Talking points ahead of Saudi Arabian GP

**THIS** weekend's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix is the final leg of the first "triple header" of the season. From Suzuka in Japan, to the desert of Bahrain, Formula One now pitches up on the shores of the Red Sea in Jeddah.

Here's a look at five talking points ahead of the fifth round of the 24-race season:

### Advantage McLaren

Oscar Piastri put in a faultless display from pole last Sunday in Sakhr in which he took three wins out of four for the British marque. That moved the cool as ice Australian to within three points of championship leader and teammate Lando Norris.

With Max Verstappen, only sixth, and Red Bull struggling to keep tabs on the world constructors' champions, the 2025 title could well develop into a battle between the two McLaren men.

The team has always been insistent on "papaya rules", theoretically meaning no favouritism between the pair, but that even-handed policy will be put under intense pressure if the season develops into a battle between the two gifted drivers.

### Red Bull to bounce back?

Red Bull's problems in Bahrain were well documented, and they will be desperate to bounce back on one of their favourite hunting grounds, with Max Verstappen winning in Jeddah in 2022 and 2024.

"Bahrain was quite a difficult weekend for us and didn't really go our way at all. We had some issues that set us back and we still have a lot of work to do on the car to get us where we need to be," said the four-time champion.

He slipped to third in the standings, eight points behind Norris, after trailing in over half a minute behind Piastri in Sakhr.

"We have a final push with this being the third race and final weekend of the triple header so hopefully we can find more pace and bring out a performance similar to Japan (his only win of the season)," he added.

### The circuit

Sunday's race presents a radically different test for car and driver than last week in Bahrain. The fastest street circuit on the calendar offers multiple chances for overtaking, in stark contrast to the most famous street circuit of them all, Monaco.

With a record 27 corners and three DRS (drag reduction system) zones it can be counted on to serve up plenty of drama, with the walled sides leaving little room for error. All the ingredients then for a thrilling race under floodlights on Jeddah's Corniche.

### Golf in the Gulf for Gasly

Alpine finally got off the ground in Bahrain, with Pierre Gasly picking up their first points of the season in seventh. "It's great to leave Bahrain with points on the board after three challenging races at the start of the season," reflected the French driver.

He celebrated his bold show by following Rory McIlroy's emotional Masters triumph at Augusta. "I really enjoyed staying up late to watch the end of the Masters and I'm delighted for Rory McIlroy, one of our investors, to finally secure the green jacket. Congratulations to him!"

### Toto praise for Russell

George Russell will be hoping to concentrate on the job he's paid to do – driving – rather than as a part-time electrician. The Briton, enjoying his best ever start to a season, took second last Sunday despite a myriad of issues he had to contend with in the cockpit in the closing stages.

"It was a superb drive from him under extreme pressure," marvelled Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff.

Russell's teammate Kimi Antonelli did not enjoy the rub of the green and finished out of the points for the first time in his debut season.

"It has been easy to forget that Kimi is in the very earliest stages of his F1 career given his performances so far. Bahrain will prove an important milestone in his continued development," Wolff remarked.

AFP

## Max rumour spreading like wildfire

**SPECULATION** within F1 that Max Verstappen will leave Red Bull at the end of 2025 is said to be gathering pace.

The Dutchman's future appears in serious doubt after he needed a late overtake on Pierre Gasly to manage P6 in Bahrain, with his race plagued by pit-stop errors from his team.

The reigning world champion has also been angered by the treatment of Liam Lawson, who was demoted back to Racing Bulls just two races into the season.

To exacerbate matters, a challenge for a fifth straight drivers' title currently appears unlikely given McLaren's superior pace.

Indeed, the 27-year-old has already been linked with a number of rival teams despite being contracted to Red Bull until 2028.

Critically, however, Verstappen is said to have a clause in his deal that allows him to leave after this campaign if the team does not produce certain performance levels.

According to Sky Sports' Simon Lazenby, F1 insiders already believe he will drive for Aston Martin in 2026.

"Everybody's talking about it in the paddock," Lazenby said. "There's no two ways about it. You go up to people from Dutch media, and some of them are saying, 'We think it's done already'."

"Others are saying he's in discussions. This is the nature of it. Names will remain anonymous, but there are some that are saying he's going off to Aston Martin."

Lawrence Stroll's team has yet to emerge as a serious contender in F1.

However, the Canadian billionaire has invested heavily in their project, with a view to targeting a title challenge when the sport's regulations undergo changes next year.

A move to Aston Martin would also reunite Verstappen with iconic engineer Adrian Newey. After 18 years with Red Bull, he left to become technical director for Stroll, and his departure has been cited as a pivotal factor in Red Bull's struggles.

Despite the perceived problems, Verstappen remains third in the standings and is just eight points off overall leader Lando Norris.

He's won once in four races, taking the chequered flag in Japan earlier this month. – Express Newspapers

## All eyes on Oscar

*Aussie Piastri can take F1 championship lead from Norris in Jeddah*

**O**SCAR PIASTRİ will become Australia's first Formula One championship leader in 15 years if the McLaren racer wins for the third time this season in Saudi Arabia on Sunday.

The 24-year-old, one of four drivers who could end the weekend on top after a tiring "triple header" run of races on three successive weekends, is the only repeat winner so far in 2025.

Piastri has the momentum, the confidence and the car to beat leading teammate Lando Norris as he seeks to add Jeddah's fast and floodlit street circuit to Shanghai and Bahrain on his victory list.

Currently three points adrift of Norris, who has led since the Melbourne opener, Piastri won in Bahrain from pole position with the fastest lap last Sunday.

He beat his teammate in Jeddah last year, finishing fourth to Norris's eighth, and is now a step away from emulating manager Mark Webber, who led the standings with Red Bull in 2010.

"Jeddah is a track I really enjoy and have good memories of from past visits. I'm determined to hit the ground running in Saudi," said Piastri.

Norris, who was highly self-critical of his performance in Bahrain despite four podiums from four starts, is also

keen to pick up speed in the fifth edition of the race on the shores of the Red Sea.

"Congrats to Oscar and the whole McLaren team. And I'll try step it up for next weekend," he said last Sunday.

Red Bull's four-times world champion Max Verstappen, winner in Japan but eight points behind Norris, will seek to deny McLaren at a circuit that has been good to him in the past.

The Dutch 27-year-old

was the winner last year, and in 2022, but this time he is more of an outsider after a tough night under the floodlights in Bahrain.

"Typically, there is less tyre degradation at this circuit, so it naturally should be a better race for us," he said.

"We have a final push with this being the third race and final weekend of the triple header so hopefully we can find more pace and bring out a performance similar to Japan."

George Russell is the fourth possible leader, albeit 14 points adrift of Norris at present, with the Mercedes driver on fine form but still chasing a first win of the year.

"Jeddah poses a different challenge," said team boss Toto Wolff. "It would be foolish to try and predict the likely order but we will be aiming to fight for the podium once again."

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, who set the fastest lap in Jeddah last year, is fifth overall and 45 points behind Norris.

Further back, the weekend is an anniversary for Haas rookie Oliver Bearman who made a sensational debut at the Jeddah circuit with Ferrari as a stand-in last year.

The Briton has started his first full season strongly, scoring points in three of four races including 10th from last place in Bahrain.

"I'm very excited to return to Jeddah, it's the first repeat race of my career which is pretty cool," he said.

"Having had the experience of last year was very nice and helpful and was a highlight of my life so far, having my debut with Ferrari, that track will always hold a special place in my heart." – Reuters

## Brundle reveals Russell concern amid Verstappen speculation

■ BY JACK RATHBORN

**GEORGE RUSSELL'S** Mercedes future has left Martin Brundle "quite worried" after speculation over Max Verstappen's future.

The Formula 1 world champion's recent struggles with Red Bull have sparked talk of a move away, with Mercedes linked due to Toto Wolff's history with the Dutch driver.

Red Bull struggled at the Bahrain International Circuit with a brake issue, which resulted in a sixth-place finish and the 27-year-old declared "nothing went well".

Helmut Marko failed to dampen speculation when admitting there is "concern is great" about his future amid talk of an escape

clause in his contract.

Wolff spurned a chance to sign the four-time champion back in 2014 before his move to Red Bull and Brundle is adamant the Mercedes chief would not fail a second time should he become available, which could leave Russell's future in doubt due to Kimi Antonelli's potential.

"I think if Max Verstappen sprung into the marketplace, I would be quite worried for George, actually, because Kimi is obviously their man for the future," Brundle said on Sky Sports.

"So there's a lot of ifs in there. George is doing a great job for him as team leader, but Toto missed Max once, I don't think that he'll

miss him a second time should he get the opportunity."

While Marko underlined the need to provide Verstappen with a competitive car to challenge Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri in the McLaren.

"The concern is great," he said. "As I said, improvements have to come in the near future so that he has a car with which he can win again. We have to create a basis with a car so that he can fight for the World Championship."

"It's clear. We must make progress that is not expressed in points, but on the stopwatch. With such a performance, it won't be anything to do with the World Championship." – The Independent



Oscar Piastri.  
– REUTERS/SPIC



SCAN ME

**DECLAN RICE** said Arsenal are on course for "special things" after beating Real Madrid 2-1 in the Santiago Bernabeu yesterday to cruise into the Champions League semifinals 5-1 on aggregate.

Rice's two stunning freekicks in the first leg set the Gunners on their way to dethroning the defending European champions.

The England international also won man of the match in the second leg as goals from Bukayo Saka and Gabriel Martinelli secured a famous win in Spain.

"It's such a special night for this club, it's a historic night for this club. We have an objective in this competition, we want to play

## Rice 'knew' Gunners would dethrone Madrid

the best teams and we want to win this competition," Rice told *TNT Sports*.

"There was a lot of talk coming here about them coming back because they've done it so many times before.

"But we had so much belief and confidence from that first leg that we could come here and win the game.

"We knew we were going to suffer but we knew we were going to win."

Arsenal will face Paris Saint-Germain in their first Champions League semi-final since 2009.

The London club have never won European football's top prize and last won the Premier League back in 2003/04.

However, Rice, who joined from West Ham for a club record £105 million (RM578m) in 2023, believes major trophies are just around the corner for Mikel Arteta's men.

"It's massive. I sensed before I signed for the club that we were on an upwards trajectory," he added.

"This club is going to do special things in the coming years. We all fully believe in it, we

have full trust in this manager - he's unbelievable!

"Semifinals is massive for us and we want to take tonight in."

Madrid rarely threatened to overturn their first leg deficit but Rice and Arsenal had to survive a scare after he was initially penalised for a foul on Kylian Mbappe inside the penalty area in the first half.

After a lengthy VAR check, the spot-kick was eventually ruled out and a yellow card that would have ruled Rice out of the first leg of the semi-final was rescinded.

"I knew it wasn't a penalty," said Rice. "He just fell to the floor." - AFP

## SHORTS

### No limits for Milan: Pavard

**BENJAMIN PAVARD** said that Inter Milan can go as far as they want after the France defender helped fire the Italians into the semifinals of the Champions League.

Inter will face Barcelona in the last four thanks in large part to Pavard's thumping header in the 61st minute at a soaking San Siro.

Pavard's header ensured Inter went through 4-3 on aggregate and kept alive Inter's dreams of winning the Serie A, Champions League and Italian Cup treble.

"We're not putting any limits on how far we can go. We have a great squad with really good players and a great staff," said Pavard.

"There's no limit, we want to win and we want to go through."

Pavard's exhausted France teammate Marcus Thuram admitted that the entire Inter team was "all a bit dead" at the final whistle after a thrilling night of football in soaking and blustery conditions in Milan.

Thomas Muller said that he and his Bayern teammates were disappointed to not contest the final at their home stadium in Munich after the Germans failed to beat Inter at the San Siro for the first time.

"I gave everything, we gave everything. We played against the best team in Italy who have only conceded two goals in the Champions League before facing us," Muller told *DAZN*.

"I saw players who fought on the pitch and showed a lot of energy... The fans saw that we gave everything. It's a pity for us because the final was in Munich, but the Champions League is not a picnic."

### Saka, Carvajal in tunnel shoving match

**ARSENAL** star Bukayo Saka shoved Real Madrid's Dani Carvajal during a tense exchange as the two sides headed for the Bernabeu dressing rooms at half time.

Saka suffered a humiliating penalty miss early in the game, with his cheeky Panenka attempt easily saved by Thibaut Courtois.

Going into the break goalless in the second leg, after building up a 3-0 aggregate lead in the first leg, Arsenal stars could still be forgiven for being on edge given Madrid's history of late Champions League turnarounds.

And Carvajal seemingly tried to play on that by getting a reaction from Saka during a frosty 10-second interaction. It initially appeared to be friendly, as Carvajal patted Saka on the face and the Arsenal winger leaned in to hear what he was saying.

But it quickly became tense as Carvajal grabbed Saka's hand to stop him walking off. When Saka broke free of Carvajal's grip, the Real Madrid man walked after him and put a hand on his neck, which prompted his Arsenal rival to lash out with a shove before they were separated by a crowd of coaches and security guards.

# Inter dream of treble glory

*Italian champions reach Champions League semis after draw against Bayern*

**I**TER MILAN'S treble dream is alive and kicking after reaching the semifinals of the Champions League yesterday thanks to 2-2 draw with Bayern Munich, as the Serie A giants won a pulsating last-eight tie 4-3 on aggregate.

Italian champions Inter will face Barcelona in the semis after goals in the space of three minutes from captain Lautaro Martinez and Benjamin Pavard cancelled out a Harry Kane strike for Bayern which levelled the tie in the 52nd minute.

Eric Dier's looping header in the 76th minute earned Bayern a draw on the night in soaking and blustery Milan but that wasn't enough for Vincent Kompany's side to continue their bid to be crowned kings of Europe for a seventh time.

Simone Inzaghi's side came through in awful conditions at the San Siro where a combination of heavy rain and driving winds affected both teams' ability to play their best football, but added uncertainty and tension to an already highly-charged occasion.

"It's a wonderful evening, experienced at our stadium, in front of our fans, against a very strong team," Inzaghi said.

"We had to play two great matches, giving everything we had. The boys were fantastic - this is a victory to share with the entire Inter family.

"We move forward in this long season that's giving us so many emotions.

"Doing well on this stage is even more satisfying because Bayern never dropped their intensity, but we responded blow for blow."

Inter are still on for a repeat of the Serie A, Champions League and Italian Cup treble won under Jose Mourinho in 2010, as they are also three points ahead of Napoli in Italy's top flight and face AC Milan in the semifinals of the domestic cup.

Yesterday's win showed that Inter are more than capable of reaching the final of Europe's elite club competition, as they did two years ago when they were narrowly beaten by

Manchester City.

"We don't give up, we have personality and heart and intelligence. We were definitely on the back foot at times today but we showed again today that we can do great things," Martinez told *Amazon Prime*.

"We think about winning everything at the start of every season, because if we don't then we shouldn't play this sport. That's our mentality," added Martinez.

Bayern had won all three of their previous Champions League away matches at Inter, but after Pavard crashed home his first goal for the club in the 61st minute there was no way back

for the injury-hit Bundesliga leaders, whose the chance to win the Champions League in Munich slipped through their grasp.

"When you look at how the two games went, we wouldn't have wished for a lot different, except the goals we conceded," said Kompany.

"That's football, that's life." - AFP/Agencies



Inter Milan's Marcus Thuram (right) fights for the ball with Bayern Munich's Kim Min-Jae during their Champions League quarterfinal match. - AFP/PIA

## Newcastle continue flying form

**NEWCASTLE UNITED** turned on the style in the absence of head coach Eddie Howe to rout Crystal Palace and ease themselves into third place in the Premier League table.

The Magpies swept the Eagles aside in a game which had promised to be much more taxing as efforts from Jacob Murphy, Harvey Barnes, Fabian Schar and Alexander Isak either side of Marc Guehi's own goal and Nick Pope's penalty save from Eberechi Eze provided the perfect tonic for Howe as he continues his recovery from pneumonia.

A 5-0 victory at St James' Park left Newcastle four points adrift of second-placed Arsenal and five clear of Chelsea in sixth in the race for Champions League football ahead of Sunday's (12.30am) trip to Aston Villa.

Stand-in Newcastle boss Jason Tindall told

Howe to concentrate on getting better after yesterday's win and said he was happy to take on the responsibility of drawing up a masterplan to get the Magpies into Europe.

"We had to do the preparation all last week ourselves because obviously Eddie was in hospital and he needed to rest and recover, so we had minimal contact, and that's been the same for preparations for this game and the remaining games whilst he's not here.

"The last thing Eddie needs or wants is the stress of having to think about football and tactics and everything else that he would need to try to manage from home because that won't get him better in a quick enough period.

"We know the expectations, we know the demands, everybody. We've been working together now 17 years, so we know each other

like clockwork.

"We know what's expected to be able to go out there and deliver performances that we pride ourselves on."

When it was suggested to him that management was easy, Tindall said with a smile: "I'm not sure about that."

"It's certainly not easy. But the lads have gone out and delivered two excellent performances in the space of a few days and I'm delighted with that."

It proved a sobering evening for Palace boss Oliver Glasner and his players as they attempted to bounce back from Saturday's 5-2 defeat at Manchester City.

Asked what had gone wrong, Glasner said: "Everything, to be honest, everything went wrong." - The Independent



## RESULTS &amp; STANDINGS

**CHAMPIONS LEAGUE (QUARTERFINALS, 2ND LEG):** Inter Milan 2 (Martinez 58, Pavard 61) Bayern Munich 2 (Kane 52, Dier 76) - Inter win 4-3 on agg, Real Madrid 1 (Vinicius 67) Arsenal 2 (Saka 65, Martinelli 90+3) - Arsenal win 5-1 on agg.

**ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE:** Newcastle 5 (Murphy 14, Guehi 38-og, Barnes 45+2, Schar 45+8, Isak 58) Crystal Palace 0.

TOP 5	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	32	23	7	2	74	31	76
Arsenal	32	17	12	3	57	27	63
Newcastle	32	18	5	9	61	40	59
Nottm Forest	32	17	6	9	51	38	57
Man City	32	16	7	9	62	42	55

## Van Dijk signs new Liverpool contract

**LIVERPOOL** captain Virgil van Dijk yesterday committed his future to the Premier League club, signing a new two-year contract.

The Dutch defender follows Mohamed Salah in ending months of speculation by extending his stay at Anfield, with fans preparing to celebrate winning the Premier League title.

"I'm very happy, very proud," said Van Dijk who, like Salah, would have been out of contract at the end of the season.

"There are so many emotions obviously that go through my head right now speaking about it.

"It's a proud feeling, it's a feeling of joy. It's just incredible. The journey I've had so far in my career, to be able to extend it with another two years at this club is amazing and I'm so happy."

Van Dijk, who has made 314 appearances for Liverpool, said last month that he had "no idea" if he would remain at Anfield but on Sunday hinted that he was set to carry on.

The imposing centreback, 33, had been linked with a move to Paris Saint-Germain but said his heart had been set on staying at Liverpool.

"It was always Liverpool," he said. "That was the case. It was always in my head, it was always the plan and it was always Liverpool."

"There wasn't any doubt in my head that this is the place to be for me and my family. I'm one of Liverpool."

"Someone called me the other day an adopted Scouser - I'm really proud to hear these things, it gives me a great feeling."

Van Dijk, who arrived from Southampton in January 2018, has been instrumental in Liverpool's rise back to the top of the English and European game.

He won the Premier League, Champions League, FA Cup, two League Cups, the Uefa Super Cup and the Club World Cup under former manager Jurgen Klopp.

With new deals confirmed for Salah and Van Dijk, the future of England defender Trent Alexander-Arnold remains unresolved.

Alexander-Arnold, who returned to Liverpool training on Wednesday after a month out because of injury, is out of contract at the end of the season and has been heavily linked with a move to Real Madrid.

Liverpool, in Arne Slot's first season in charge, are on the brink of winning a record-equalling 20th English top-flight title.

The Reds are 13 points clear of Arsenal with just six games remaining and could wrap up the title this weekend if the Gunners lose. - AFP

# JDT maintains 100% record

League champions wraps up season unbeaten with victory in Kuching

**JOHOR DARUL TA'ZIM (JDT)** once again closed their Super League campaign with an unbeaten record for the third consecutive season after defeating Kuching City FC 2-0 at the State Stadium in Kuching on Wednesday night.

JDT's goal machine, Bergson Da Silva, didn't wait long to open accounts albeit from the penalty spot as early as the fifth minute after Arif Aiman Mohd Hanapi was brought down inside the penalty box.

The visitors once again showed their fangs when Colombian-born player Romel Morales managed to score JDT's second goal in the 26th minute.

JDT continued their onslaught in the second half while Kuching City FC too had set up dangerous attacks but both teams failed to score goals.

Wednesday's victory saw JDT, who are the league champions this season, end the Super League competition with 70 points and with an unbeaten record after 24 matches while Kuching City FC are in fourth place with 36 points.

Brazilian striker Da Silva claimed the Golden Boot with 32 goals.

Since joining JDT in 2021, he has scored 105 times - just one short of Indra Putra Mahayuddin's all-time record.

JDT, who also lifted the FA Cup this year, are now aiming to complete a domestic treble when they face Sri Pahang in the Malaysia Cup final at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil next week.

Former national football team head coach Datuk K. Rajagobal hopes the final next Saturday will be a thriller.

Rajagobal, who also previously helmed the Brunei national team, acknowledged that JDT under Hector Bidoglio are the favourites, but noted that Sri Pahang have also shown consistent and commendable form throughout this season.

"JDT are a consistent side, not only in the Malaysia Cup but also the Super League. They have a strong squad and win almost every match."

"Still, Sri Pahang have had a good run this season. Both teams deserve to be in the final. JDT will be the favourites, but anything can happen in

football.

"I hope both teams deliver an exciting performance for the fans. Everybody is looking forward to this final, and I hope we'll see something surprising," he told reporters at the MYSkills U-17 Championship press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Nevertheless, he believes Sri Pahang are well-prepared to take on the Southern Tigers, as they aim to lift the prestigious trophy at the Bukit Jalil National Stadium.

Meanwhile, former national goalkeeper M. Pavalamani also expressed hope that Sri Pahang would spring an upset over JDT to offer a refreshing twist for local football fans.

"JDT are definitely the favourites, but if Sri Pahang can overcome them, it will make for a more thrilling final," he said.

The 2024-2025 Malaysia Cup final will be a repeat of the 2014 edition, when Sri Pahang emerged victorious after edging out JDT 5-3 on penalties. - Bernama

## Decision on Pocket Rocketman's future to be revealed

**THE** decision regarding national track cycling ace Datuk Mohd Azizulhasni Awang's (pic) future will be officially announced in the next 48 hours, said Malaysian National Cycling Federation (MNCF) president Datuk Amarjit Singh Gill.

Amarjit said a joint press conference, involving Youth and Sports Minister Hannah Yeoh, the MNCF and Azizulhasni, is scheduled for tomorrow at 4.30pm and full details regarding plans for the 2017 men's keirin world champion will be revealed.

"I think Azizulhasni has had discussions with the Minister (Yeoh), and I've also had a discussion with him. The idea was that we were supposed to have a press conference in March, during the fasting month."

"But due to timing, I think it's going to be on Saturday," he told reporters after the press conference on the four-year sponsorship agreement between the Asian Cycling Confederation (ACC) and local sports apparel company, iSports, in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Amarjit, who is also the ACC president, said the MNCF will support whatever decision made by Azizulhasni, better known as "The Pocket Rocketman".

"I think he has contributed a lot to the country but I don't want to say anything more. The more I speak, the more I may blurt out," he said.



The 36-year-old is the face of the national track cycling squad and one of Malaysia's most decorated athletes, having won an Olympic silver medal at Tokyo 2020 and an Olympic bronze medal at Rio 2016, both in the men's keirin event.

Azizulhasni, who last competed at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, was disqualified from the first round of the men's keirin event for overtaking the demy (motorbike pacer) before it left the track, while he also failed to qualify for the sprint quarterfinals after finishing third in the 1/8 repechage round.

Meanwhile, Amarjit said the sponsorship deal worth US\$70,000 (about RM309,000) by iSports reflected the ACC's broader vision to elevate the standard of cycling in Asia and marked a proud moment for Malaysia.

"Malaysia is not only playing host to many international sporting events but is also emerging as a strategic hub for cycling development in the region. This partnership underscores both regional unity and Malaysia's rising influence in the sport," he added.

Genuine Marketing Enterprise director Goh Seng Too, representing iSports, shared his pride in being part of the collaboration, saying it was deeply committed to delivering high-quality products for athletes and teams competing in ACC events. - Bernama

## SHORTS

### Line up not confirmed

**THE** coaching team has yet to confirm the starting 15 players who will carry the national men's 15s rugby squad's challenge in their first playoff match of the 2025 Asia Rugby Championship (ARC) against Sri Lanka tomorrow.

However, national forwards coach Faiz Ali said all players appear ready to face Sri Lanka, and the coaching team now just needs to select the best 15 to take the field.

"We're already in Colombo, and we can see the players are calm and prepared to face Sri Lanka on Saturday."

"The best 15 players will start the match, but we need to discuss and assess the team as a whole to ensure we field the strongest lineup against Sri Lanka," he said in a video message shared with the media yesterday.

The match against Sri Lanka is crucial as it is the national squad's last hope to remain in the ARC 2025 Premier Division, with a loss resulting in relegation to Division One.

The Bunga Raya 15s finished last in the 2024 ARC campaign after losing to South Korea (5-55), Hong Kong (6-70) and the United Arab Emirates (19-62).

### New teams set to shake up MIHL

**FIVE TEAMS**, comprising three men's and two women's sides, will make their debut in the fourth edition of the Malaysia Indoor Hockey League (MIHL), scheduled to take place at Stadium Putra, Bukit Jalil from tomorrow to April 27.

In the men's category, JM Hawks, RMR HC and Johor will join as newcomers in MIHL 2025 alongside seven other teams - defending champions Maybank, Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB), Armed Forces HT (ATM), Perlis Mighty Lion, Terengganu Hockey Team (THT) and Malaysian University (MU).

Meanwhile, in the women's division, PDRM Blue Warriors and JM Auroras will be making their first appearance, competing against eight other teams including defending champions DBKL HT, MOHC-MHA, Malaysian University (MU), BNHC KL, Wipers, CS Mustang HT, and Mutiara-MSSPP-PSHA-UNITEN.

Malaysian Hockey Confederation (MHC Indoor Hockey Committee chairman, Shurizan Mansor said the inclusion of new teams this season is expected to intensify competition in MIHL compared to previous editions.

"This league will serve as a platform for club players to showcase their high-level skills in indoor hockey."

"National players, who are also representing their respective clubs, can guide their teammates with the latest techniques and tactics," he said in a

statement yesterday.

He added that the newly developed court, designed specifically for indoor hockey, will offer a unique experience for both players and fans.

### Anita Azrina is new SIC chief

**DATIN** Anita Azrina Abdul Aziz has been appointed as the chairman of Petronas Sepang International Circuit (SIC), the first woman to hold the post.

SIC, in a statement yesterday, said Anita Azrina replaced Tan Sri Azman Yahya, who had been helming SIC since 2016.

Anita Azrina, who has over 30 years' experience in motorsports and corporate strategy, is known for leading the Petronas landmark global Formula 1 sponsorship with Mercedes AMG Petronas.

"It is a great honour to take on this role at a time of exciting transformation."

"I thank Azman for his exemplary leadership and look forward to working with the board and team to build SIC into a global motorsports and innovation hub," she said in the statement.

Youth and Sports Minister Hannah Yeoh welcomed Anita Azrina's appointment, citing her experience in motorsports and brand leadership.

She also praised Azman's leadership as visionary, noting that he transformed SIC into a world-class motorsports destination.





# theSun Sports

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SCAN ME



## All Guns blazing

Arteta targets Champions League glory after Arsenal knock out Real Madrid

Arsenal's Bukayo Saka (top) scores his team's first goal against Real Madrid's Thibaut Courtois during their Champions League quarterfinal second leg match. - AFP/PIC

**A**jubilant Mikel Arteta said the momentum is with Arsenal to win the Champions League following their historic victory against Real Madrid at the Bernabeu.

Bukayo Saka, who missed a first-half penalty, opened the scoring midway through the second period before Vinicius Junior responded just two minutes later only for Gabriel Martinelli to crown a famous 2-1 win on the night, and a crushing 5-1 aggregate victory, in stoppage time.

Arsenal, who will face Paris St. Germain for a place in the semifinals, made history by becoming the first English team to win in the Bernabeu twice, following Thierry Henry's masterclass here nearly two decades ago.

And Arteta said: "The feeling that we have is a reality. We are ready to compete against anybody. And now we have to continue to do that because we have some momentum now."

"We are in the semifinal for only the third time in our history, and I am proud of the manner and the way we did it."

"Not only by the way we played, but also with the circumstances and the amount of injuries we have had."

"It was my first time as a coach in this dugout, and I realised after three minutes that in this stadium, anything is possible."

"They are the specialists of creating chaos and belief. But my players showed their own maturity and it is a night to be very proud of."

Arsenal held a 3-0 advantage following Declan Rice's supreme set-piece double at the Emirates last week, and Saka had the opportunity to kill the tie as early as the 13th minute when Arsenal were awarded a penalty after VAR spotted a foul on Mikel Merino by Raul Asencio.

Captain Martin Odegaard took the ball before handing it to Saka. But Arsenal's star man fluffed an attempted Panenka with Real Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois palming the poor penalty away.

with his left arm.

"I would have liked to slap him (Saka)," joked Arteta. "But the player has to make the decision, and he was bold enough to do it."

"That could have been a turning point emotionally in the game because it gave them a lot of belief."

"But then the way he handled the situation, and the way he played afterwards was incredible."

Ten minutes later, Real thought they had a penalty of their own when Rice grappled with Kylian Mbappe in the box and the France forward dropped to the deck. However, referee Francois Letexier overruled his original decision and Arsenal survived.

Arteta also revealed he phoned Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola ahead of yesterday's fixture.

Arteta, who spent four seasons as Guardiola's No. 2 at the Etihad, said: "I called him this morning because I am here thanks to him."

"As a player and a coach he has been an inspiration to me. I had four amazing years with him, and I will always be grateful to him."

For Real Madrid, the defeat places doubt over Carlo Ancelotti's future as manager of the Spanish giants.

"Maybe the club decides to replace me, and maybe it could be this year, or next year when my contract is over," said the former Chelsea boss, who has won three of his five Champions League titles as a manager with Real.

"But when I am done here, I will be grateful to this club. That could be tomorrow, 10 days, one month or in one year, but if my contract ends or doesn't end, I really don't care."

"We have managed the bright side many times and we have won titles, but we need to manage the dark side, too."

"And we need to accept it because over the two games, Arsenal have been better than us."

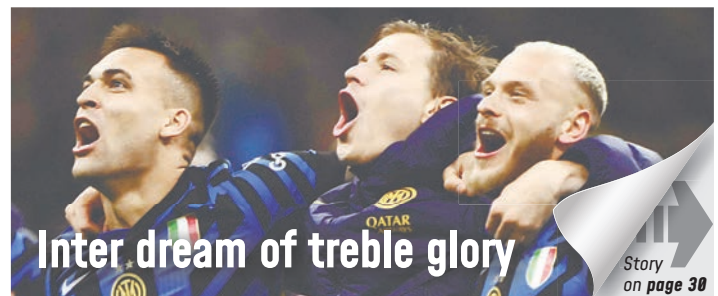
There were some sour grapes from Real captain Lucas Vazquez, who claimed Arsenal "did almost nothing" in the first half and merely "came to defend", but Arteta revealed a classy response from Ancelotti.

He said: "Ancelotti told me that he hopes Arsenal win the Champions League." - The Independent/Agencies



All eyes on Oscar

Story on page 29



Inter dream of treble glory

Story on page 30