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Residents of Kubu Gajah in Sungai-Buloh moving to higher ground after waking up to rising floodwaters yesterday morning.
— ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

Uniting Asean communities one page at a time

Publishing industry vital in shaping regional narrative via collaboration and global promotion of Southeast Asian literature: Education DG

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Company with initiative for elderly proves 'old is gold'

Eureka moment involving contribution from grandmother of co-founder sparks 'senior interns' programme.

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Sultan Nazrin opens solar technology hall at Perak university

TANJONG MALIM: The Sultan of Perak Sultan Nazrin Shah opened the Solar Arch at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), an open-air hall featuring solar technology, the first of its kind in Malaysia.

Also present was the Raja Permaisuri of Perak Tuanku Zara Salim.

Their Royal Highnesses were greeted on arrival by Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Saarani Mohamad, the university's pro-chancellor Prof Emeritus Tan Sri Dr Zakri Abdul Hamid and its vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Md Amin Md Taff.

Md Amin said a concept by Sultan Nazrin had inspired the university's researchers Synergy Generated Company and UPSI Holdings Sdn Bhd to build Solar Arch, the first mega solar hall in Malaysia with an area of over 12,500sq ft.

"UPSI's Solar Arch, with its zero capex concept, has successfully reduced carbon emissions by 2,800 tonnes per year."

He said the hall saves RM2 million in electricity bills and ceremonial tent rentals of RM500,000 per year, and is able to generate up to RM350,000 yearly through rentals for various events.

He added that the solar arch initiative would also be a catalyst for UPSI to be in the running for the Low Carbon City Award.

"The project is in line with the aspirations of the book written by the Sultan, *Globalisation, Perak's Rise, Relative Decline and Regeneration*."

Sultan Nazrin and Tuanku Zara also witnessed the exchange of an MoU between UPSI, Institut Darul Ridzuan and the Singapore University of Social Sciences in the fields of research, education, law and care economics training.

Their Highnesses also attended a feast in conjunction with UPSI's 2025 Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebration. — Bernama



Sultan Nazrin cutting a cake at a stall set up in conjunction with the university's Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebration yesterday. — BERNAMAPIC

Meeting with Prabowo fruitful: Zahid

► 'Cooperation in *halal* industry, fisheries, higher education, Gaza issue among matters discussed'

JAKARTA: Cooperation in the *halal* industry, fisheries, higher education and the Gaza issue were among the matters discussed during Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi's courtesy call on President Prabowo Subianto on Tuesday.

Ahmad Zahid said both countries had agreed that the *halal* logo of the Malaysian Islamic Development Department could be used for *halal* products exported to Indonesia without requiring a new SOP.

"Malaysia will also recognise Indonesia's *halal* certification for products exported to Malaysia."

"This is a game changer that we must appreciate due to the commitment shown by industry players, especially as it received endorsement from the Indonesian religious affairs minister, and during my discussion with Vice-President Gibran Rakabuming Raka."

Ahmad Zahid said he had also proposed during the meeting that

the *halal* industry forum, to be jointly organised by Malaysia and Indonesia, be held at the regional level.

He added that the intention to establish the Asean Halal Council be conveyed to the Asean Secretariat for approval by member states.

"The Asean Halal Council needs to be established not only to coordinate the issuance of *halal* certificates but also to make Asean a major market for products among Asean countries."

On the issue of fishermen along the maritime borders of both countries, Ahmad Zahid said he and Prabowo agreed that those who crossed into each other's territorial waters should be given a warning first, based on an MoU signed in 2012.

"We urge Malaysian fishermen to continue using the Automatic Identification System and not to switch it off while in the Straits of Malacca because our authorities will be monitoring their position

or location."

He said the matter should be emphasised by the authorities in both countries to ensure that the good relations between the two nations are maintained, Bernama reported.

Ahmad Zahid said they also talked about efforts to promote Malaysian higher education in technical, engineering and professional fields in Indonesia so that more Indonesian students could pursue their studies in Malaysia.

He said both leaders shared the same stance on Gaza, which is for a permanent ceasefire to be implemented and for the entry of humanitarian aid to be facilitated.

"We will jointly call on the international community to unite towards this effort so that reconstruction in Gaza and Palestine can take place."

He expressed satisfaction over his visit as matters beyond the framework of bilateral relations, regional politics and geo-economics and even international affairs had been discussed.

Ahmad Zahid concluded his three-day official visit to the country on Tuesday.

Significant progress made in educational ties with China, says minister

RIYADH: Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Dr Zambray Abdul Kadir said Chinese President Xi Jinping's recent visit to Malaysia is highly significant as it has opened new avenues for collaboration in education, scientific research and various other sectors.

China-Malaysia relations have advanced steadily in recent years, with significant progress in education, he said in an interview with Xinhua in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Zambray said bilateral cooperation in education is growing rapidly, especially in technical and vocational education and training.

He said China's strengths in green technology, electric vehicles and other emerging sectors have provided strong support for Malaysia's educational and industrial development.

Zambray said many Malaysian students are pursuing technical training in China while Chinese universities are expanding their presence and partnerships in Malaysia.

Citing the successful operation of Xiamen University Malaysia as a prime example, he said several top Chinese universities have shown strong interest in

deepening collaboration.

"We are witnessing not only cooperation between universities, but also mutual trust at people-to-people levels," Zambray said, adding that both sides are encouraging youth exchanges.

"These students represent the future of China-Malaysia relations. Investing in education is a strategic investment for the future."

He added that the earlier the two sides cultivate mutual understanding and trust among the younger generation, the stronger the foundation would be for long-term cooperation.

Zambray identified artificial intelligence, augmented reality and green technologies as key areas with strong potential for future collaboration between Chinese and Malaysian universities.

"Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1974, the friendship and cooperation between our two countries have continued to grow."

He said the educational cooperation between the two countries not only benefits both peoples but serves as a model for partnerships among countries of the Global South. — Bernama

Bahasa Melayu asset to further strengthen M'sia-China ties

KUALA LUMPUR: As Malaysia and China marked the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations last year, Bahasa Melayu is emerging as a strategic diplomatic asset to further strengthen bilateral ties.

Since establishing diplomatic ties in 1974, both nations have cultivated strong relations across various sectors, including trade, culture and education.

Among the initiatives is the establishment of the Chair of Malay Studies at the Beijing Foreign Studies University in 2007, which was renamed the Sultan Ibrahim Malay Studies Chair in 2024.

With increasing interest in language and cultural exchange, promoting mutual understanding through these elements is now viewed as a vital instrument of soft power and long-term cooperation.

Pacific Research Centre of Malaysia Principal Adviser Dr Oh Ei Sun said the initiative also aligned with the key objectives of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), particularly the pillar of people-to-people connectivity, alongside infrastructure development and investment facilitation.

"As language is the soul of culture, such exchanges would deepen these ties," he told Bernama recently.

When asked whether Malaysia's effort to promote the Malay language in China should be seen as a soft power strategy, he opined that the effort could, at the very least, produce more Malay speakers in China, which would in turn facilitate future bilateral engagements in areas such as the economy, communication and tourism.

Previously, His Majesty the King of Malaysia Sultan Ibrahim highlighted the growing importance of student exchanges between Malaysia and China, with plans to send more Malaysian students to China to foster educational and cultural ties.

To ensure success of the initiative, Oh emphasised the need for comprehensive language training courses, immersion programmes and internships to deliver tangible outcomes.

Malaysia on track with haj preparations

KUALA LUMPUR: The process of issuing visas for Malaysian pilgrims for the 1446H/2025 haj season by Lembaga Tabung Haji (TH) has reached 45%, said Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) Datuk Dr Mohd Na'im Mokhtar.

"TH is also fully prepared for this year's haj operations, with readiness at nearly 100%. This year, TH is deploying 632 haj personnel, comprising welfare and medical staff with external agencies involved," he said after a visit and engagement session at the Haj Visa Processing Unit to inspect preparations for the management of haj pilgrims' visas for the 1446H/2025 season on Tuesday.

Mohd Na'im also expressed appreciation to the Saudi government for its efficiency in issuing visas and improving the "Nusuk" card system.

This is a huge recognition from the Saudi government of the efficiency of our country's haj management system.

"It is also the result of teamwork between TH and Masyariq Masiah, the provider of facilities and services for Malaysian pilgrims in Saudi Arabia for the past three decades," he said. — Bernama

Call for global promotion of Southeast Asian literature

► Local publishing industry must shape narratives through collaboration, translation to reflect region's rich heritage: Education DG

■ BY HARITH KAMAL
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PETALING JAYA: As Malaysia assumes the Asean Chairmanship this year, the country is positioning itself not only as an administrative leader but also as a cultural and intellectual powerhouse in the region, said Education Director-General Datuk Azman Adnan.

Speaking at the pre-launch of the Kuala Lumpur International Book Fair (KLIFB) 2025 at Menara Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Azman emphasised the crucial role of the local publishing industry in shaping a unified regional narrative through collaboration, translation and the global promotion of Southeast Asian literature.

"This is not just a diplomatic mandate, it's an opportunity for us to lead through knowledge and culture," he said.

He added that Malaysia's leadership in Asean should embody Madani values such as sustainability, mutual respect and compassion.

Azman also highlighted the power of books

to unite Asean communities and amplify the region's voice on the global stage.

"Southeast Asia's voice must stand tall and not be drowned in the currents of globalisation. Publishers and writers must craft stories that reflect the region's rich heritage while resonating with global audiences."

He called for greater investment in translation, co-publishing ventures and content that showcases Southeast Asia's intellectual and cultural identity.

"Malaysia can become a global leader in empowering cultural identity, language and thought."

"A strong reading culture is essential not just for personal development but for national and regional progress," he added.

Azman also commended the Madani Book Voucher 2024 initiative introduced at the previous KLIFB edition, which has benefitted over 3.5 million students.

He expressed hope that the government would continue and expand the voucher programme, which has provided equal access to quality reading material for students, and extend it to teachers as well this year.

In line with these aspirations, KLIFB 2025 is set to be the most ambitious edition yet.

Organising committee chairman Mohd Khair Nqadirin said the fair is targeting a record-breaking 1.9 million visitors, marking a new era of growth and transformation.

"The response from industry players has been overwhelmingly positive."

"Due to strong demand, we've introduced a new hall dedicated to other industry

stakeholders, offering them greater visibility," he said.

Returning as a hybrid event, KLIFB 2025 will combine both physical and digital experiences to reach a wider audience.

"Platforms like TikTok and Shopee will help us broaden access, ensuring that everyone, regardless of location, can be part of this celebration of books," Khair added.

The fair will feature four specially curated pavilions, each highlighting different aspects of national identity and knowledge.

These comprise Pavilion Al-Falah, developed in collaboration with 14 religious agencies, as well as pavilions by the Education Ministry, Higher Education Ministry and National Unity Ministry.

A major highlight will be the debut of the "Galeri Khas Teroka", a space dedicated to tracing Malaysia's publishing journey, from its early days to international recognition.

The event will also mark the return of the Asian Rights Fair, a key regional platform for the exchange of publishing rights and intellectual property.

It will highlight Southeast Asia's creative output and reinforce Malaysia's commitment to fostering cross-border collaboration in the publishing industry.

KLIFB 2025 will take place at the World Trade Centre Kuala Lumpur from May 23 to June 1, running daily from 10am to 10pm.

This year's theme, *Buku: Membaca, Memimpin*, underscores the fair's mission to foster leadership through literacy and cultivate a lifelong love for reading.



Mohamad Yusri trying his hand at an e-sports game during the election campaign on Tuesday. — BERNAMAPIC

BN candidate optimistic of support from fence-sitters

TAPAH: Barisan Nasional (BN) candidate for the Ayer Kuning state by-election Dr Mohamad Yusri Bakir is optimistic that he will be able to gain the support of fence-sitters and those who previously supported the opposing party.

The former teacher said he provided a clear explanation to the group regarding the development and direction of the constituency, through a face-to-face approach throughout the campaign, Bernama reported.

"Although these grey and black areas are indeed difficult to penetrate, I am also trying to approach them and I hope they give me the space and opportunities to put the Ayer Kuning constituency on a better development path."

"Some say they can give (us the vote) this time. They are choosing the BN candidate because what is important to them is development."

On the racial and religious sentiments played

up during campaigning, the Doctor of Philosophy (Islamic Education) graduate said he is more comfortable using a people-friendly approach.

The by-election, which is being held following the death of incumbent Isham Shahrudin on Feb 22, will see a three-cornered contest between Mohamad Yusri, Perikatan Nasional candidate Abd Muhaimin Malek and Parti Sosialis Malaysia candidate Bawani K.S.



Company opens doors for seniors in workforce

► Lifestyle brand's over-50 internship programme proves age is no barrier to purpose, innovation and belonging

BY HARITH KAMAL AND DEEPAKASHMI MANICKAM
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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia is expected to become an ageing nation by 2030, with individuals aged 60 and above projected to make up more than 15% of the population.

This demographic shift is raising concerns about the future sustainability of the workforce.

While many employers remain hesitant to hire older workers, one local brand is challenging that narrative by embracing and advocating their inclusion.

Dododots, a lifestyle brand known for its quirky and colourful pimple patches, gained attention in 2023 after launching internships exclusively for individuals aged 50 and above – proving that age is no barrier to creativity, innovation or community.

Co-founder Ethan Wong recounted that when they first launched the brand in 2021, they had much to learn, a journey that has since shaped their inclusive and forward-thinking approach.

"When we started, we packed everything ourselves. One day, my grandma helped out and gave some really good suggestions.

"That's when we thought: 'Wow, senior citizens actually have so much to contribute.' That small moment sparked a big idea and we put out a call for 'senior interns'.

"Within a week, we received hundreds of applications – some even submitted by children on behalf of their parents," Wong said.

Among those selected was 63-year-old Leslie Mah, now a full-time team member and fondly known as 'Uncle Leslie'.

His daughter had submitted a heartfelt letter on his behalf, describing his passion for work and his strong sense of community.

"She told me over dinner: 'You have an interview coming up.' I said: 'Say what?'" Mah said.

"She said: 'Just a packing job.' I thought, okay – better than staying at home."

Despite decades of experience in production, warehousing and sales, Mah



Mah does not just pack orders, he now manages the entire warehouse. – AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THESUN

initially had doubts about fitting into a startup dominated by younger people.

"I looked up the company, it looked fresh and vibrant. There were only six of them back then. I thought, I'm over 60, can I fit in? Will they accept me?"

Those doubts quickly faded.

"Ethan and Esther (also a co-founder) were so warm during the interview. I could see their vision. Most importantly, they trusted me and that meant a lot."

Now, Mah does not just pack orders, he manages the entire warehouse.

"The office vibe is energetic. It's not like a traditional workplace, which can feel like a pressure cooker. This kind of environment helps with mental health, even for the younger ones," he said.

He added that many senior citizens still want to contribute meaningfully but often lack opportunities.

"People say, go for *tai chi* but that's just 40 minutes. After that, everyone goes home. What do we do for the rest of the day?"

At Dododots, Mah has found both purpose and new skills.

"I'm learning new technology, helping with marketing, even shooting videos using Gen Z slang," he said with a smile.

With 25 team members and more than 70

unique product designs, Dododots offers flexible hours and market-rate pay for its older hires, a conscious decision to promote inclusivity and fairness.

The brand is currently available online and in select stores across Malaysia, with products sold in over five countries via retail partnerships and international shipping.

"It's not about squeezing work out of them," Wong said.

"It's about giving them purpose and making them feel seen. They've got time, wisdom and life experience. It's a win-win."

Looking ahead, Wong hopes to expand the programme further.

"If we grow into production or need legal help, I'd love to bring in retired professionals. There's so much untapped knowledge out there."

To other companies, Mah offers a gentle but firm reminder: "Have more faith in seniors. Many of us can still contribute in meaningful ways."

And to fellow retirees, his advice is equally heartfelt: "Don't be afraid to try new things. Go in with no expectations, and an open heart and open mind to learn."

At the heart of his message is a simple truth about fulfilment and purpose: "When you enjoy it, it doesn't feel like work."

Langkawi pipeline replacement could cost billions, says exco

ALOR SETAR: The cost of replacing the entire undersea pipeline that supplies treated water from the mainland to Langkawi Island could run into billions of ringgit, according to Public Works, Natural Resources, Water Supply, Water Resources and Environment state executive councillor Mohamad Yusuf Munir Zakaria.

Due to the prohibitive cost, he said only repair works are currently being undertaken on the damaged sections.

"For now, we're allocating RM50 million – RM10 million for consultancy services and the remaining RM40 million for repair works," he said in the Kedah State Legislative Assembly yesterday.

He was replying to Teh Swee Leong (PH-Kota Darul Aman), who asked for the estimated cost of replacing the entire undersea pipeline to Langkawi.

Mohamad Yusuf added that since Syarikat Air Darul Aman (Sada) took over the Taliworks Langkawi concession on Nov 1, 2020, a total of 42 new leaks have been repaired using underwater clamp methods.

The total cost of inspecting and repairing both new and existing leaks stands at RM3.1 million.

Inspection and repair works are carried out every two weeks, depending on weather and sea conditions.

He said Sada will also implement a dedicated undersea pipeline repair project to improve the stability of treated water supply to Langkawi.

Currently in its final procurement stage, the project is scheduled to begin in August and is expected to be completed by February next year.

The 36km undersea pipeline, about 30 years old, supplies treated water from the Sungai Baru plant in Perlis to Langkawi Island. – Bernama

First hydrogen training programme launched

KUCHING: Sarawak Skills has officially launched its first hydrogen-related training course – the Hydrogen Fuel Cell Vehicle Safety and Awareness Training – marking a key step in supporting the state government's green economy agenda.

Its executive director Hallman Sabri said Sarawak Skills is currently the only training centre in the state offering a hydrogen-specific programme.

"This initiative not only supports the government's green aspirations but also equips our local talent with the necessary skills for the hydrogen economy," he said in a statement yesterday.

He added that the effort is further strengthened through a strategic partnership with institutions in China, providing access to advanced training modules and international hydrogen technology expertise.

The programme focuses on safety standards and handling practices for hydrogen fuel cell vehicle technologies, in line with Sarawak's transition towards cleaner and more sustainable energy solutions. – Bernama

Mara clarifies sponsorship rejection of individuals with PTPTN loans

KUALA LUMPUR: Majlis Amanah Rakyat (Mara) director-general Datuk Zulfikri Osman has clarified that the agency cannot provide sponsorships to students who have already received financial aid from other sources.

Addressing the case involving medical students at Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah (UniShams), Zulfikri said their applications were rejected because they had secured loans from the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN).

He explained that when applications for the Tertiary Education Sponsorship Programme (TESP) opened last November, the eligibility guidelines clearly stated that recipients of

financial assistance from other agencies would not qualify – a condition that has been in place for decades.

"This is not a new requirement. It's similar to applying for a home loan, you can't finance the same house with two separate banks. Likewise, Mara aims to prioritise Bumiputera students who have yet to receive support from any other sponsor," he said in a statement yesterday.

Zulfikri reaffirmed Mara's commitment to providing study loans to ensure equitable access to quality and competitive higher education.

Since 1999, Mara has sponsored 423 students at UniShams, with 173 currently receiving support across various fields, including 144 in medicine.

As of March 31, a total of 4,510 Bumiputera students pursuing medical studies in Malaysia are being sponsored by Mara.

Earlier, media reports highlighted concerns from parents who claimed that 50 medical students at UniShams were under significant financial pressure after their Mara sponsorship applications were rejected.

They called for urgent intervention from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Mara chairman Datuk Dr Asyraf Wajdi Dusuki.

In a statement, UniShams' chancellor's office acknowledged that some Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) students from the university's 11th cohort who applied for TESP

were either rejected or deemed ineligible.

"Out of 48 MBBS students, 40 applied for Mara's study loan scheme and 30 of them also submitted applications to PTPTN," the statement read.

"All 30 students who applied to PTPTN were approved, with funding covering between 50% and 100% of total tuition fees. The remaining 18 have secured financial support from other sources, such as Mara, foundations, zakat or self-funding."

The university confirmed that Mara informed the management that the students were ineligible for TESP due to the approval of their PTPTN loans. – Bernama

Selangor hit by flash floods

► Sungai Buloh, Petaling Jaya and Subang Jaya worst hit, 86 houses affected

BY DEEPAKSHMI MANICKAM
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PETALING JAYA: Several districts across Selangor were hit by flash floods yesterday morning following continuous heavy rainfall, affecting numerous homes and disrupting traffic along major highways.

The worst-hit areas included Sungai Buloh, Petaling Jaya and Subang Jaya, with a total of 86 houses affected, said Selangor Fire and Rescue Department Assistant Director of Operations Ahmad Mukhlis Mukhtar.

However, he said no evacuations were carried out as water levels had quickly receded in most of the affected areas.

He added that in Kampung Paya Jaras Hilir in Sungai Buloh, 80 houses were inundated, with floodwaters rising as high as three feet.

In Kampung Baru Sungai Buloh, six houses were also affected, with water levels reaching up to two feet. Residents opted not to evacuate as conditions improved.

"A car was trapped in two feet of floodwater at Persiaran Damai in Kampung Kenangan,

Subang Jaya, but no injuries were reported," Ahmad Mukhlis said in a statement.

In Petaling Jaya, a woman in her 50s had to be rescued by the public at Jalan PJU 1A/46 as her vehicle was caught in about 1.5m of water.

In Taman Tun Dr Ismail, part of a wall at an international school collapsed following a landslide yesterday morning.

Kuala Lumpur Fire and Rescue Department operations commander Azkhan Hamdan said no one was injured in the incident.

"Two vehicles and several parts of the school building, including classrooms, the staff room, toilets and the library were damaged," he said in a statement.

In another incident, the Selangor Fire and Rescue Department Operations Centre reported a landslide at a hillside near Jalan Haji Abdullah in Kampung Sungai Merab Luar, Kajang, blocking access to the road.

"The department received an emergency call at 8.50am, and eight firefighters in a fire engine from the Dengkil station were despatched to the scene. No casualties were reported in the incident."

Speaking to *theSun*, National Disaster Management Agency Director-General Datuk Khairul Shahril Idrus said the agency had anticipated thunderstorms based on alerts issued by the Meteorological Department.

"However, it is difficult to predict exactly which areas will be hit by flash floods.

"Many variables contribute to these incidents, such as the intensity of rainfall, the

effectiveness of local drainage systems and even tidal conditions."

He added that inter-agency coordination was managed at the state level, with weather warnings triggering response measures from local councils and emergency units.

Although the monsoon season had ended, Khairul cautioned that localised floods could still occur due to lingering weather instability.

"We are entering a period of lower flood risk, but that does not mean we can let our guard down.

"Flash floods remain a threat when rainfall exceeds certain thresholds."

He urged residents to remain alert and to follow instructions from local authorities during extreme weather situations.

In addition to residential areas, major roads and highways were also affected.

In a statement, PLUS Malaysia Berhad (PLUS) reported flash floods at Km9.1 northbound along the Shah Alam-Subang route had blocked both the left and middle lanes until yesterday afternoon, causing severe congestion that extended all the way to the Setia Alam interchange.

A photo shared by PLUS showed a section of the highway completely submerged, underscoring the intensity of the rainfall.

Additionally, the Shah Alam toll plaza on the Elite Highway was also affected, with floodwaters rendering both the motorcycle and left lanes impassable.

"Multiple areas across Selangor were inundated by the downpour."



A resident of Kubu Gajah in Sungai Buloh salvaging items in her flooded home yesterday. – ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

Court clears ex-banker to testify in 1MDB trial

PUTRAJAYA: The High Court yesterday held that former Goldman Sachs banker Roger Ng Chong Wa may be called as a witness and testify in the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) trial involving former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak, notwithstanding the existence of a restrictive order issued by a United States court.

Judge Datuk Collin Lawrence Sequerah said the Malaysian court is governed by its own jurisdiction and is not subject to the authority of any foreign tribunal.

"This is a public interest case which has proceeded for far too long. This court is not prepared to wait for any variation sought. The US court order, which is a protective order, does not bind this court."

The judge emphasised that he would not defer proceedings pending any application by Ng's counsel to seek a variation of the order

from the US court to facilitate his testimony in the 1MDB trial here.

Najib's lead counsel Tan Sri Muhammad Shafee Abdullah subsequently applied for a brief adjournment to interview the Ng. The court acceded and adjourned the proceedings for half an hour.

Earlier, Ng's counsel Datuk Tan Hock Chua submitted that his client remains bound by a protective order issued by the Eastern District of New York, which prohibits him from being interviewed or providing testimony before the Malaysian court.

"If compelled to be interviewed or testify under the current protective order, the US Attorney has advised that Ng faces exposure to criminal liability and possible sanctions," said Tan.

Muhammad Shafee then contended that the

court may invoke Section 132 of the Evidence Act, which compels Ng to answer questions posed to him in court, with the assurance that such answers shall not expose him to criminal liability.

Ng, who has been convicted in New York for aiding in the embezzlement of 1MDB funds and faces a 10-year prison sentence, is expected to be extradited to the US to face further 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.

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

Pahang records 1,958 dengue fever cases in 2024

KUANTAN: Dengue fever cases in Pahang increased 22% in 2024, with 1,958 cases compared with 1,609 cases in 2023, said Pahang Public Works, Transport and Health Committee chairman Datuk Razali Kassim.

He said Kuantan recorded the highest number of cases (723), followed by Temerloh (404), Pekan (145), Raub (138), Bera (134), Maran (129), Rompin (125), Bentong (83), Lipis (41), Jerantut (27) and Cameron Highlands (nine).

"A total of five deaths due to dengue complications were reported in 2024, compared with two deaths in 2023, which is an increase of 150%," he said at the state legislative assembly meeting at Wisma Sri Pahang yesterday.

He was replying to Hassanuddin Salim (PN-Kuala Semantan) who wanted to know the number of dengue fever cases recorded throughout Pahang in 2024 and the measures taken to control its spread.

Razali said the increase in the number of dengue fever cases last year was in line with the epidemiological wave that increases every four or five years, and also by changes in weather and dengue virus serotypes.

Razali, who is also Muadzam Shah state assemblyman, said 6,579 out of 680,491 premises inspected were found to be breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

"Of the 6,579 premises found to be positive for mosquito breeding, 4,036 were compounded under the Destruction of Disease-Bearing Insects Act 1975 (Amendment) 2000, with a compound value of RM2 million. A total of 1,161 notices under Section 8 of the same Act were also issued to residents who had potential places for mosquito larvae to breed."

He said the Pahang government, together with the agencies involved had implemented various programmes to control the spread of the disease, such as the Pahang One Hour Clean Up Programme, *gotong-royong* activities and *Ops Ketuk-ketuk* as well as the Search and Destroy 10 Minutes Once a Week campaign.

Meanwhile, Pahang Consumer Affairs and Human Resources Committee chairman Sim Chon Siang said a total of 14 complaints had been received regarding the implementation of the minimum wage order between Feb 1 and March 31.

"The complaints are still being acted upon, either by opening investigation papers or workers being advised to take action at the Industrial Court," he said in reply to Datuk Jasri Jamaludin (PN-Kuala Sentul), who asked about how the minimum wage could help the people. – Bernama

6,400 smuggled fruit saplings seized

KOTA BHARU: The General Operations Force seized 6,400 fruit saplings of various types, suspected to have been smuggled from Thailand, during Ops Taring Wawasan Kelantan in Kampung Lubok Gong, Rantau Panjang on Tuesday.

Southeast Brigade commander Datuk Nik Ros Azhan Nik Ab Hamid said personnel from the 8th Battalion made the seizure after they intercepted a lorry at about 8pm.

"Checks revealed that the saplings were likely infested with harmful pests and diseases. The 44-year-old lorry driver also failed to produce any documents related to the ownership or movement of the plants," he said in a statement yesterday. – Bernama



Concern over **pricey** lab-grown diamonds

➤ Disclosure crucial as average consumers would not be able to tell difference between natural and synthetic stones by sight alone, says jeweller

BY QIRANA NABILLA MOHD RASHIDI
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AMPANG: Once reserved for costume jewellery and non-premium markets, synthetic gemstones are now making their way into mainstream jewellery stores, raising concerns among industry players.

Habib Group executive chairman Datuk Seri Meer Habib said the damage to the reputation of natural diamonds is not due to the emergence of lab-grown alternatives per se, but stems from profit-driven jewellers who sell them at unjustifiably inflated amounts, often without proper disclosure of its origin.

"For example, a natural diamond worth RM10,000 might be compared with a lab-grown gem priced at RM3,000. But that lab-grown stone may be vastly overpriced relative to its actual cost.

"It's not the synthetic diamonds that are the problem, it's the lack of honest disclosure that's hurting the industry."

Meer said with higher profit margins on lab-grown diamonds, some jewellers have started promoting them more aggressively, often without giving customers the full picture.

He said unlike certified natural diamonds, which follow transparent pricing guidelines based on standard characteristics, lab-grown diamonds are often marked up extensively.

Meer said this pricing ambiguity has led to widespread confusion, particularly overseas, where markets in places like Singapore, Europe and the US saw a surge in lab-grown gem sales.

He highlighted that the influx of synthetic diamonds into the global market has also triggered a sharp decline in natural diamond prices, falling by as much as 40%.

"Fortunately, prices have recently begun to recover, a sign that the market may be stabilising as consumers become more aware of



Meer said demand for diamond jewellery remains strong, especially in the Klang Valley, Penang, Johor and tourist hotspots such as Kota Kinabalu and Alor Setar, where sales are boosted by China, Korea and Indonesia tourists. — **AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THE SUN**

the differences between lab-grown and natural stones.

"In contrast, Malaysia's major jewellers, like Habib, have largely refrained from retailing lab-grown diamonds, maintaining a commitment to authenticity," he said.

Meer emphasised that there is nothing wrong with choosing a lab-grown diamond if it suits one's budget or preference, but it should not be priced like a natural diamond as it does not cost nearly as much to produce.

He added that the average consumer would not be able to tell the difference between a natural and lab-grown diamond by sight alone, which is why transparency is critical.

"What's different now, is that synthetic diamonds are being sold as premium products, often at inflated prices. How can something created in a few days be valued the same as one formed over millions of years?"

"At Habib, we have stringent quality control

processes. Every single diamond that comes in is tested in our lab before being offered to customers. We use advanced equipment to analyse formation patterns and other properties to ensure authenticity," he said.

Meer added that diamonds have long been associated with meaningful life milestones such as engagements, weddings and anniversaries, and once customers experience the emotional and symbolic value of natural diamonds, they often return for future purchases.

However, he said the Covid-19 pandemic has led to a significant decline in global diamond demand.

"With fewer orders, many diamond-cutting facilities, especially those with a large workforce have turned to cutting synthetic or lab-grown diamonds.

"These man-made diamonds are chemically identical to natural ones, composed of pure carbon. But they're produced in a laboratory

over a few days, unlike natural diamonds which form under the Earth's surface over millions of years."

Meer said Malaysians, particularly frequent buyers, are well-versed in the fundamentals of diamond quality – the 4Cs (cut, colour, clarity, and carat weight) and are, in fact, more savvy than consumers in many Western countries.

He said demand for diamond jewellery remains strong in Malaysia, especially in the Klang Valley, Penang, Johor and tourist hotspots such as Kota Kinabalu and Alor Setar, where sales are boosted by international visitors from China, Korea and Indonesia.

"Habib has adapted to changing tastes by offering modern touches such as alphabet pendants and charm pieces.

"Diamonds may not offer quick investment returns, but they are a reliable long-term hedge against inflation, retaining value better than cash over time," Meer said.

EDUCATION

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S'pore ruling party secures five seats

► First walkover in nation's general election since 2011

SINGAPORE: The ruling People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore kicked off its general election campaign with five seats secured on nomination day, following an uncontested win at the newly formed Marine Parade-Braddell Heights Group Representation Constituency (GRC).

This marks the first walkover in a Singapore general election since 2011.

The PAP team, comprising Parliament Speaker Seah Kian Peng, National Development and Home Affairs State Minister

Faishal Ibrahim, Tin Pei Ling and newcomers Diana Pang and Goh Pei Ming, was declared elected at the close of nominations at noon, Bernama reported.

"Walkover or not, our mission and goals remain unchanged, which is to do our best and make lives better for residents," Seah told the media after the close of nomination proceedings.

Workers' Party (WP) secretary-general Pritam Singh said the decision not to contest the Marine Parade-Braddell Heights GRC was a hard one.

"This was a very difficult decision for us, and as a small opposition party, we are constantly faced with difficult choices about where and how best to deploy our limited resources, particularly after electoral boundaries are redrawn," he said in a statement

on Facebook.

Pritam added that the party intends to restart its outreach in the GRC after the general election this year.

The Marine Parade-Braddell Heights GRC was created ahead of the elections, following recommendations from the Electoral Boundaries Review Committee.

The constituency was formed by merging areas from Potong Pasir and Mountbatten Single Member Constituencies (SMC), as well as the entire MacPherson SMC and part of the former Marine Parade GRC.

Campaigning will begin after the nomination process concludes. The campaign period will run for nine days before a cooling-off day on May 2. Polling is scheduled for May 3.



Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong arriving at a nomination centre yesterday. — REUTERS/SPIC

Australian opposition leader pledges defence boost

SYDNEY: Australia's conservative opposition party leader Peter Dutton, trailing in polls related to the May 3 election, has pledged to boost defence spending to 3% of GDP within a decade as the Trump administration pushes allies to spend more on security.

"You do not achieve peace through weakness," he said in Western Australia state yesterday, outlining his Liberal Party's defence policy and echoing US President Donald Trump's line of "peace through strength".

His party would offer the US military greater access to northern Australia, he added.

Focusing on the conservative party's strength of national security

in the final stretch of the campaign, the former defence minister said if he was elected, his government would spend AUD\$21 billion (RM\$9 billion) more than Labor on defence to reach 2.5% of GDP over five years and 3% within a decade.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's Labor government in 2023 committed to spend AUD\$368 billion over three decades on Aukus, Australia's biggest ever defence project with the United States and Britain to acquire nuclear-powered submarines.

Labor has previously said it would lift defence spending by AUD\$50 billion over a decade but pledged no new money in this year's national budget.

Liberal defence spokesman Andrew Hastie, a former special forces officer in Afghanistan, said the defence force was suffering a recruitment and retention crisis.

"We are going backwards on Aukus. This is a multi-generational nation-building endeavour and they are failing."

Hastie's Western Australian electorate is near the HMAS Stirling base, where a rotating fleet of four US Virginia attack submarines and a British Astute submarine will be based from 2027.

He said Western Australia needs to lift training and divert mining workers to Aukus submarine construction, adding that Australia's lesson from Ukraine was that nations

Attack on tourists in India kills 26

SRINAGAR: Twenty-six people were killed and 17 injured when suspected militants opened fire at tourists in India's Jammu and Kashmir territory, police said yesterday, the worst such attack in the country in nearly two decades.

The attack took place on Tuesday in the popular destination of Pahalgam in the Himalayan federal territory, which has seen a resurgence in mass tourism as insurgent violence waned in recent years.

It was the worst attack on civilians in India since the 2008 Mumbai shootings, in which more than 160 people were killed.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi cut short his two-day visit to Saudi Arabia and returned to New Delhi yesterday.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman also cut short her visit to the United States and Peru "to be with our people in this difficult and tragic time", her ministry said.

The attack occurred in an off-the-road meadow and those killed included 25 Indians and one Nepalese national, police said.

A little-known militant group called the "Kashmir Resistance" claimed responsibility for the attack in a social media message.

It expressed discontent that more than 85,000 "outsiders" had settled in the region, spurring a "demographic change".

Yesterday, over a dozen local organisations called for a shutdown in the federal territory to protest against the attack on tourists, whose rising numbers have helped the local economy.

Many schools also suspended classes for the day in protest.

Airlines were operating extra flights from Srinagar, the summer capital of the territory, as visitors were rushing out of the region, officials said.

Militant violence has afflicted the Himalayan region, claimed in full but ruled in part by India and Pakistan, since an anti-Indian insurgency began in 1989. Tens of thousands of people have been killed, although violence has tapered off in recent years.

Attacks targeting tourists in Kashmir have been rare. The last deadly incident took place in June last year when at least nine people were killed and 33 injured after a militant attack caused a bus carrying Hindu pilgrims to plunge into a deep gorge. — Reuters

CAMBODIAN POLITICIAN ON TRIAL FOR INCITEMENT

PHNOM PENH: An outspoken Cambodian politician went on trial on incitement charges yesterday in the latest legal case against a prominent opposition figure. Rong Chhun, adviser to the Nation Power Party that was founded in 2023, faces up to four years' jail on charges of incitement to cause serious social unrest. The charges were brought last year after he met victims of land disputes and made comments about Prime Minister Hun Manet's visit to the border area with Vietnam. As he arrived in court, Rong Chhun told reporters that the case against him was "politically motivated". After the hearing ended, he told reporters that he had asked the court to clear him. A verdict is expected on May 5. Rights groups have long accused Cambodia's government of using legal cases as a tactic to silence opposition voices and legitimate political dissent. — AFP

JAPAN PM TO VISIT VIETNAM AND THE PHILIPPINES

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba will visit Vietnam and the Philippines next week, officials said yesterday, as Tokyo seeks to ramp up regional ties after US President Donald Trump's tariff onslaught. The trip from April 27 to 30 follows a Southeast Asia tour by Chinese President Xi Jinping. "Strengthening relations with Southeast Asia, a global growth centre and strategic location, is one of the top priorities of Japanese diplomacy," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said. "Relations with Vietnam and the Philippines are of particular importance, with their populations exceeding 100 million and as they continue their strong economic growth." Despite being a key US ally and the biggest investor in the United States, Japan has been pinched by steep tariffs imposed by Trump. Some Japanese companies are increasingly shifting production to Vietnam and its neighbour Cambodia, partly because of the fallout from the US-China trade war. — AFP

103 BODIES FOUND AFTER COLLAPSE OF MYANMAR CONDO

YANGON: As of Tuesday, 52 people have been rescued and 103 bodies have been recovered from the collapsed Sky Villa condo in central Myanmar's Mandalay region, the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar reported yesterday. The building collapsed after an earthquake struck on March 28, the report said, according to Xinhua. The Myanmar Rescue Team, Mandalay Region Fire Services Department and the Mandalay Region government personnel have been carrying out rescue and clearance operations since March 28 at the collapsed Sky Villa site, it added. The earthquake has caused the deaths of 3,759 people and injuries to 5,107 others, with 114 individuals missing nationwide as of Tuesday, according to Global New Light of Myanmar. — Bernama-Xinhua



Pilgrims gather as three-day lying in state begins

➤ Public allowed to view remains from 11am to midnight at basilica until funeral on Saturday

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis's casket was transferred to St Peter's Basilica yesterday for three days of lying in state, with scores of Catholics and well-wishers expected to pay their respects to the beloved spiritual leader before he is laid to rest.

The body of the Argentine pope, who died on Monday aged 88 after a stroke, will remain there until his funeral on Saturday in the Baroque plaza in front of the basilica.

Francis died in the Casa Santa Marta, where he lived during his 12-year papacy, and his body was moved to its chapel on Monday.

Yesterday, it was taken to the ornate St Peter's at 9am (0700 GMT) in a procession accompanied by a liturgy, psalms and prayers.

His wood casket entered through the central door of the basilica and was placed before the Altar of the Confession.

The public is allowed in from 11am until midnight. Thursday hours are from 7am to midnight while Friday hours are from 7am to 7pm.

The funeral is expected to draw hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, as well as world leaders such as US President Donald Trump, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Britain's Prince William.

After the funeral, the casket will be transported to Francis's favourite church, Rome's papal basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, where his casket will be interred in the ground and marked by a simple inscription: Franciscus.

He will be the first pope in more than 100 years to be laid to rest outside the Vatican.



The funeral is expected to draw hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, as well as world leaders such as US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. – REUTERS/PICT

Italy is preparing for a major security operation for the funeral, with the weekend already due to be busy because of the public holiday on Friday.

Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi said authorities are expecting between 150 and 170 foreign delegations, and tens of thousands of people.

Italy has declared five days of national mourning, which is longer than the three days observed for Polish pope John Paul II in 2005 but less than the week declared for Francis by his native country Argentina.

After the funeral, all eyes will turn to the process to choose Francis's successor as leader of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics.

Cardinals around the world have been sent

letters from the Holy See, instructing them to return to Rome to select a new pope.

Only those under the age of 80 are eligible to vote for a pope in the conclave. The election should begin no less than 15 days and no more than 20 after the death of the pope.

About 60 cardinals of all ages in Rome met on Tuesday to choose the funeral date in a "general congregation".

A second meeting was scheduled yesterday, led by Cardinal Kevin Farrell, who is charged with running the day-to-day operations of the Holy See before a successor is chosen.

Francis's death came less than a month after he was discharged from the hospital, where he spent five weeks battling pneumonia in both lungs. – AFP

BRIEFS

7 KILLED, 12 INJURED IN TURKIYE ROAD CRASH

ANKARA: Seven people were killed and 12 others injured on Tuesday in a minibus-truck collision in east Turkiye's Van province, said Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya. The crash occurred at 4:30pm (1330 GMT) on the highway linking Van and Turkiye's eastern Hakkari province, Yerlikaya said on his social media account. The minibus collided with the box truck coming from the opposite direction, near the Guzeldere tunnel on the Van-Hakkari highway, reported Xinhua, quoting an Anadolu Agency report. All injured passengers were transferred to nearby hospitals and four are in critical condition, said the report, citing local officials. Emergency teams, including police, medical personnel and firefighters, were dispatched to the scene. Traffic collisions claimed 2,713 lives across Turkiye last year, according to the General Directorate of Security. The highest number of crashes occurred in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, with Istanbul alone recording 97,354 incidents. – Bernama-Xinhua

3,000 EVACUATED OVER NEW JERSEY WILDFIRE

MOSCOW: A wildfire in New Jersey has swept across 1,280ha, forcing thousands of residents in Ocean County to leave their homes, the New Jersey Forest Fire Service said, as reported by Sputnik/RIA Novosti. The fire, which started on Tuesday in the Greenwood Forest Wildlife Management Area, was burning in Ocean and Lacey townships and was only 5% contained, the New Jersey fire service said in its latest update on X. The blaze threatened an estimated 1,300 structures and mandatory evacuations were in effect for 3,000 residents. The cause of the wildfire is under investigation. – Bernama-Sputnik/RIA Novosti

Chinese astronaut to lead novice crew to space station

JIUQUAN: China announced yesterday that a veteran astronaut would this week lead two crew members on their first flight to the country's Tiangong space station.

The Shenzhou-20 mission is scheduled to blast off at 5:17pm (0917 GMT) today from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwest China, announced China Manned Space Agency deputy director Lin Xiqiang at a news conference.

At the helm will be Chen Dong, a 46-year-old former fighter pilot and experienced space explorer, who in 2022 became the first Chinese astronaut to stay in orbit for more than 200 days.

Joining Chen will be Chen Zhongrui, a former air force pilot in his early forties, and Wang Jie, a 35-year-old former space technology engineer.

The crew currently aboard the Tiangong space station is scheduled to return to Earth on April 29 after completing handover procedures with the incoming astronauts, said Lin.

China's space programme, the third to put humans in orbit, has also landed robotic rovers on Mars and the Moon.

The Tiangong space station, crewed by teams of three astronauts that are exchanged every six months, is the crown jewel of the country's space programme.

China has ramped up plans to achieve its "space dream" under President Xi Jinping.

Beijing said it aims to send a crewed mission to the Moon by 2030, where it intends to construct a base on the lunar surface. – AFP

Trump: I am entitled to deport migrants without trial

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump on Tuesday said he was "entitled" to deport migrants without a trial, following an order by the US Supreme Court over the weekend temporarily blocking the deportation of dozens of Venezuelans, German Press Agency (dpa) reported.

The US government accuses the Venezuelans in question of being members of the Tren de Aragua criminal organisation and was due to deport them using the Alien Enemies Act 1798, which is a controversial and rarely used law that allows the president to deport foreigners during war or an invasion.

The Supreme Court on Saturday directed the

government "not to remove any member of the putative class of detainees from the United States until further order of this Court", following an urgent application by the American Civil Liberties Union that argued that the individuals had not been afforded due process.

On Tuesday, Trump said he was hoping to "get cooperation from the courts" to deport the "thousands of people that are ready to go out", claiming that "you cannot have a trial for all of these people."

He repeated baseless claims that countries, including Venezuela, are "emptying their prisons into the United States".

"We are getting some very bad people, killers,

murderers, drug dealers, really bad people, the mentally ill, the mentally insane," he said in response to a reporter's question following the swearing-in ceremony for new US Securities and Exchange Commission chair Paul Atkins at the Oval Office.

"We are getting them out and a judge cannot say 'no, you have to have a trial'. The trial is going to take two years. We are going to have a very dangerous country if we are not allowed to do what we are entitled to do."

Last month, US authorities deported more than 200 Venezuelans and dozens of Salvadorans to a notorious high-security prison in El Salvador. – Bernama-dpa

Record voter turnout in Canada advance polls

TRENTON: Elections Canada reported on Tuesday that a record 7.3 million voters cast ballots in the four-day advance polls during the Easter weekend, Anadolu Ajansi reported.

"This is a 25% increase from the 5.8 million electors who voted in advance in the 2021 general election," Elections Canada posted.

While the report did not speculate on the cause of the increase in voter turnout, US President Donald Trump's goal of annexing Canada and tariffs that could cripple the

economy were the main talking points in the 37-day election campaign.

The campaign centred around which party, between the governing Liberals, the main opposition Progressive Conservatives or the New Democratic Party (NDP), could best deal with the mercurial Trump.

Voting day is on April 28 and, with less than a week to go, the governing Liberals under Mark Carney, Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre and NDP leader Jagmeet Singh are hard on the

campaign trail.

While polls showed Poilievre and his party have been far ahead for months, the political landscape changed after the deeply unpopular former prime minister Justin Trudeau announced in January that he would resign.

In a remarkable turnaround, the latest polls released on Tuesday showed that Carney and the Liberals at 42.6% were six points ahead of the Conservatives at 37.1% while the NDP was lagging behind at 10.4%. – Bernama-Anadolu

Drone attacks target civilian infrastructure

KYIV: Russia's large overnight drone attack on east, south and central Ukraine injured at least five people and damaged civilian infrastructure and businesses, Ukrainian officials said yesterday.

The full scale of the attacks, which kept Kyiv and the eastern half of Ukraine awake for several hours around midnight, was not immediately known.

The strikes came as Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky have signalled that they would be willing to negotiate a pact that would ban striking civilian infrastructure.

"A massive Russian drone attack on Poltava left three people injured," Ukraine's emergency service said in a post on Telegram, referring to the central Ukrainian region.

"Solely the city's civilian infrastructure was under attack."

Several fires broke out and residential buildings, enterprises, warehouses and garages were damaged, the emergency service said, posting photos of firefighters battling flames at night.

Two people were injured in a drone attack on civilian infrastructure in the suburbs of the Black Sea port city of Odesa, which also sparked several fires, said southern Ukraine Odesa region governor Oleh Kiper on Telegram.

Large-scale fires also broke out as a result of a Russian drone attack on Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, said Mayor Ihor Terekhov on Telegram.

Air defence units were engaged in repelling attacks on the Kyiv region but there were no reports of potential damage.

There was no immediate comment from Russia on the attacks.

Governor of Russia's Tula region Dmitry Milyaev said air defence units destroyed several Ukrainian drones. – Reuters

Missile launched from Yemen 'likely' intercepted

JERUSALEM: Israel's military said yesterday a missile was "launched from Yemen", where the Iran-backed Houthi rebels have regularly targeted Israel.

Shortly after 4am (0100 GMT), the Israeli army announced that the missile triggered air raid sirens in Haifa and other communities in northern Israel.

"An interceptor was launched towards the missile and it was most likely successfully intercepted," it said on Telegram.

Since the war in Gaza broke out in October 2023, the Houthis have repeatedly fired missiles and drones at Israel in what they say is a show of solidarity with Palestinians.

The Houthi rebel group controls swaths of Yemen and Israel has struck Houthi targets several times inside the country, including in the capital Sanaa.

The rebels have also targeted ships that they accuse of having ties to Israel as the freighters travel on the Red Sea, which is a vital waterway for global trade.

The US military has been carrying out almost daily attacks for the past month, saying it was targeting Houthi "terrorists" to stop attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. – AFP

'Trump's return to power emboldening Israeli leaders'

► Ambitions to annex occupied West Bank reinvigorated: Analysts

JERUSALEM: US President Donald Trump's return to power has emboldened the push of Israeli leaders to increase military presence in Gaza and reinvigorated right-wing ambitions to annex the occupied West Bank, experts said.

After a phone call on Tuesday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump said on social media: "We are on the same side of every issue."

In Gaza, Trump's comeback has meant "big changes" for Israel, said Israeli think-tank Misgav Institute for National Security and Zionist Strategy director Asher Fredman.

"The arms embargo imposed by the Biden administration has essentially been lifted."

"That, together with the fact that the northern front (Lebanon and Syria) now is quiet and we have a new defence minister and a new

(army) chief of staff, is allowing Israel to move forward in achieving its military goals in Gaza."

Fredman said Trump has a good grasp of the situation in Gaza and understands Israel's fight against Hamas.

"If Israel decides to stop the war and have a ceasefire with Hamas, he will support it. But he also listened closely to released hostages, who told him how terrible Hamas treated them, so his instinct is to get rid of Hamas."

Trump has made clear statements on Gaza, demanding the release of Israeli hostages and making plans for the territory, but he has remained silent on Israeli actions in the West Bank, which have escalated since the war began.

Just days after taking office, Trump proposed removing Gaza's 2.4 million Palestinian residents to

Jordan or Egypt, drawing international outrage.

Although he has since appeared to backtrack, the remarks emboldened Netanyahu and Israeli far-right ministers, who continue to advocate implementing the plan.

Analysts said Trump's silence on the West Bank has encouraged hardline ministers who openly dream of annexing the territory, which Israel has occupied since 1967 and Palestinians see as part of their future state.

In March, Israel's Cabinet approved the construction of a road project near the Maale Adumim settlement that would separate traffic for Israelis and Palestinians, a move Israeli NGO Peace Now likened to "apartheid".

Shortly afterward, in a joint statement, Defence Minister Israel Katz and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich described Palestinian construction in the West Bank as a "strategic threat to the settlements".

Smotrich, calling the area by its biblical name, hailed a record year

for "demolishing illegal Arab construction in Judea and Samaria" and said the government was working to expand Israeli settlements, which are illegal under international law.

"Since Trump's election in November, we have started to hear more and more rhetoric about annexation in the West Bank, and seen more and more actions on the ground," said International Crisis Group analyst Mairav Zonszein.

It is a "combination of Trump's specific approach and the people that he has chosen to be around him that have led Smotrich, Katz and others in the Israeli right to be confident that they can move forward with annexation," she told AFP, mentioning for example the new US ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, who has openly backed Israeli settlements.

Sanam Vakil of Chatham House said while Trump "has said he wants to end conflicts, there is not one plan underway. I think there is maybe multiple conflicting agendas."

"There is no criticism, there is no condemnation of Israel's activities, and I think that gives it free rein and confidence to continue its expansionist agenda" in the West Bank, Vakil said.

While Trump and his administration have openly supported many of Israel's policies, particularly regarding the Palestinians, sharp differences are emerging on another key issue, namely Iran.

Vakil said by being flexible on the Palestinian issue, Trump is likely "trying to buy himself some room to manage the Iran file."

The Trump administration has been engaged in indirect talks with Israel's arch-foe Iran on its nuclear programme, a clear departure from Netanyahu's long-standing policy, calling to address the threat through military means.

"Trump is making it clear that the military strategy is not going to be the first way to address the Iran crisis," Vakil said, adding that this has Israelis deeply worried.

On Saturday, Netanyahu appeared to push back against Trump's diplomatic initiative, saying he remains "committed to preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons". – AFP



Residents inspecting bulldozers and other vehicles at the Jabalia municipality garage that were destroyed by Israeli bombardment in Gaza. – AFP/IC

French minister visits Iraq in regional tour

BAGHDAD: French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot was set to meet officials in Baghdad yesterday as part of a regional tour to push for a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The French foreign ministry said Barrot, who will also visit Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, is on a tour to help "prepare for the international conference for the implementation of the two-state solution" that Paris will co-organise in June with Riyadh.

French President Emmanuel Macron said France planned to recognise a Palestinian state,

possibly as early as June.

He expressed hope that this would "trigger a series of other recognitions", including of Israel.

Iraq has long recognised a Palestinian state but has never recognised Israel and does not have formal relations with it.

For decades, the formal recognition of a Palestinian state has been seen as the endgame of a peace process between Palestine and Israel.

Barrot will meet his counterpart Fuad Hussein and Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani in

Baghdad before heading to the northern autonomous Kurdistan region to meet its leaders.

The visit to Baghdad would allow France to prepare for the third version of the Baghdad Conference on regional stability, which Paris has been co-organising with Baghdad since 2021.

It also aims to confirm "France's commitment to the stability of Iraq and its role" in maintaining regional balance.

Additionally, it would allow "France to reaffirm its commitment to continue the fight against" the

Islamic State (IS) group, especially "in a context of transition in neighbouring Syria" and Washington's decision to halve the number of its troops in Syria.

France has deployed troops in Iraq as part of the US-led international coalition set up to fight IS.

Baghdad is seeking to end the coalition's mission and replace it with bilateral military partnerships with members of the coalition, saying its own forces can lead the fight against the weakened extremists. – AFP

COMMENT

by Dr Zuraini Md Ali and Datin Dr Nor Hayati Hussain

Rekindling the power of the printed word

IN an age where attention spans flicker and digital screens dominate, there remains a quiet, enduring magic in the printed word – the crisp turn of a page, the whisper of paper and the rich scent of ink.

On World Book Day, observed annually on April 23, Malaysians are reminded that books are not merely objects; they are companions, teachers and doorways into different times, cultures and dimensions.

This global celebration invites us to pause, unplug and return to the joy of reading – a joy especially crucial for the younger generation growing up in the era of touchscreens and TikToks.

Reading builds more than vocabulary; it nurtures empathy, imagination and independent thought. Whether it is a graphic novel, a science book or a retelling of local folklore, each page turned adds a brick to the foundation of a curious, well-rounded mind.

In Malaysia, the importance of reading runs even deeper. The very first word revealed in the *Qur'an* was "Read". This divine command – "Read in the name of your Lord who created" (*Surah Al-Alaq*, 96:1) – reminds us that the pursuit of knowledge is a sacred act, blessed by faith and encouraged by culture.

Every time a child picks up a book or a student dives into research, they are continuing a spiritual and intellectual tradition rooted in reverence.

And perhaps there is no better place to honour that sacred act than the National Library of Malaysia. Nestled in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, the library is not just a building – it is a living narrative, one that intertwines culture, architecture and national identity.

Designed by the late Datuk Dr Ikmal Hisham Albakri, the library's iconic roof mimics the *tengkolok*, a traditional



The National Library of Malaysia is not just a building – it is a living narrative, one that intertwines culture, architecture and national identity. – PIC BY WIKIMEDIA

Malay headgear once worn by warriors and royalty. In this powerful gesture, knowledge is visually tied to leadership and intellect to heritage.

Step inside and you will find more than rows of books. You will discover interactive archives, quiet reading zones, storytelling corners and exhibitions that showcase rare Malay manuscripts. It is a place where students can trace their roots and imagine their futures – often in the same visit.

World Book Day is celebrated here, not with hushed reverence, but with vibrancy and fun. Each year, the library bursts to life with storytelling sessions by local authors, cosplay contests, creative writing workshops, book-themed quizzes and even art projects where children imagine and draw their dream library.

Nationwide, schools join the movement with book donation drives, reading challenges and social media campaigns like #MyBookMyWorld, where students share their favourite reads and why they matter.

At the heart of it all is the vision of Ikmal, who once believed that

buildings could be storytellers. In designing the National Library, he gave Malaysia more than just a place to read – he gave the nation a symbol of curiosity, intellect and continuity.

Every visitor, whether a child hearing their first fairy tale or a researcher poring over manuscripts, becomes part of that ongoing story.

Let us make World Book Day more than a date on the calendar. Let us turn it into a personal ritual and a national movement. Visit the library. Borrow a book. Share a story. Write your own. Because in the end, every great adventure begins with a reader, and that reader could be you.

Dr Zuraini Md Ali is an associate professor at the Building Surveying Department, Faculty of Built Environment, Universiti Malaya. Datin Dr Nor Hayati Hussain is an assistant professor at the School of Architecture, Faculty of Built Environment, Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology and an active member of Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

COSWAY

Enriching Lives The Smarter Way

LETTERS letters@thesundaily.com

Better driving starts with patience, courtesy

OUR roads can become dangerous when drivers ignore basic courtesy and safety.

During the recent Raya holidays, many Malaysians spent long hours on the highways to *balik kampung*.

While traffic jams are expected during peak periods, what made the journey even more frustrating were the recurring bad driving habits that seem to resurface year after year.

One of the most common problems is lane hogging. The right lane is meant for overtaking yet many drivers use it as their personal cruising lane. This not only blocks faster vehicles but also causes congestion and often leads to risky overtaking on the left. It only takes one inconsiderate driver to disrupt the flow for everyone else.

Some lane hogs may think they are doing nothing wrong because they are driving at the speed limit. However, road safety is not just about speed – it is also about awareness, common sense and respect for other users.

If a vehicle approaches from behind, it does not necessarily mean the driver is being rude or aggressive – sometimes, they are just want to pass. Giving way is the courteous and safe thing to do.

A simple flash of headlights is often misunderstood. While many see it as rude or offensive, it is usually just a signal – a polite way of saying, "Please let me through".

Taking it personally or reacting with ego only creates unnecessary tension. Giving way costs nothing but only shows maturity, confidence and respect for others on the road.

Another issue we see too often is the belief that driving a luxury or expensive car gives

someone more rights than others.

Whether you drive a compact car or a high-end model, traffic laws apply equally to everyone. Yet, we still see drivers who behave as if they are above the rules – refusing to give way, misusing the emergency lane or cutting into traffic without signalling. These actions do not reflect style or status – they reflect selfishness and a lack of road courtesy.

We also cannot ignore the dangerous habit of using mobile phones while driving. During traffic jams, many people reach for their phones to check messages or scroll through social media. But just a few seconds of distraction can cause an accident. If it is truly urgent, pull over at a rest area. No message is more important than your life or the lives of others.

These driving problems are not limited to the festive season – they happen every day on highways and in city traffic.

Driving better should be part of our daily routine. Driving is not a competition – it is not about who can get ahead or who drives a bigger car. It is a shared responsibility that affects everyone on the road. A little patience, proper signalling and basic courtesy can go a long way in creating a safer journey for all.

Let us make good driving habits the norm, not the exception. Whether it is a festive season or an ordinary day, let us show kindness, stay alert and drive safely. Not just for ourselves but for everyone around us.

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Cultivating a lasting presence

CONFIDENCE is often misunderstood. People chase it, lose it and sometimes fake it – believing it is a fixed state, something we either have or don't.

But, real confidence is not about always feeling bold or certain. It is about cultivating a presence that is stable, adaptable and sustainable, no matter the circumstances.

One of the first things to understand about self-confidence is that it is not about force; it is about energy. When you enter a room, people react to you before you even say a word. Your posture, presence and even silence shape the way others perceive you.

When you feel aligned within yourself, that internal stability radiates outwards. Small adjustments – like standing tall, making eye contact or speaking with intention – can shift how others respond to you. People unconsciously attune to certainty, not hesitation.

Many believe confidence is about talking louder or proving something. In reality, quiet assurance often carries more weight than forced bravado. Being composed, decisive and comfortable in your own space naturally draws respect.

Confidence does not require permission or applause, it comes from self-trust and alignment.

Another fundamental aspect of sustainable confidence is understanding that the world does not revolve around you, and that is a good thing. When people fixate too much on themselves, worrying about how they are perceived and whether others approve of their actions, they drain their own energy.

Sustainable confidence happens when you shift focus outwards, towards contribution, engagement and the bigger picture. The less you obsess over how you are viewed, the more grounded and present you become.

A powerful way to reinforce confidence is through raising your vibration. Energy is contagious and people naturally gravitate towards those who embody certainty and authenticity.

If you carry hesitation or doubt, others can unconsciously pick up on it. But when you step into your space with clarity and presence, it shifts the dynamics. This does not mean suppressing insecurity, it means recognising it and choosing to act with intention anyway.

Being a trendsetter is another way to cultivate lasting self-confidence. Many people wait for approval before making choices, following trends instead of setting them. But real confidence is about choosing what resonates with you, regardless of whether anyone else is doing it yet.

This applies to how you speak, dress, express ideas and navigate the world. People respect those who move with purpose rather than hesitation. When you lead with conviction, others follow. Sustainable self-confidence is not an act, it is a

practice. Some days it comes easily while other days require effort.

The key is consistency, choosing to show up fully, even when doubt creeps in. Confidence is built through action, taking small steps that reinforce self-trust.

So, what does this look like in everyday life?

First, carry yourself like you belong because you do. Stand tall, hold space and speak with presence. Your body language can tell people how confident you feel before words are ever spoken.

Second, practise being comfortable with silence. You don't need to fill every gap in conversation or prove yourself constantly. Some of the most confident people are those who know when to listen instead of talk.

Third, stop waiting for the perfect moment. Confidence grows through action, not avoidance. Start before you feel ready because experience is what builds self-assurance.

Fourth, detach from external validation. Confidence based on approval is fragile. The most

empowered individuals trust themselves even when no one is cheering them on.

Finally, remember that confidence is not about comparison. The only person you need to measure progress against is yourself. If you focus on alignment rather than competition, your confidence will remain steady rather than dependent on circumstances.

At its core, sustainable self-confidence is a commitment to showing up for yourself. It is knowing that even in moments of doubt, you have the tools to navigate through. It is reflected in the way you carry yourself, the energy you bring into a space and how you contribute beyond your self-image.

And the best part? It is entirely within your control.

Dr Praveena Rajendra is a certified mental health and awareness practitioner specialising in narcissistic abuse recovery. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com



MIND THE MIND
BY DR PRAVEENA RAJENDRA

LETTERS letters@thesundaily.com

Is protest the right solution?

ON April 18, one Malaysian news portal drew considerable public attention with its striking headline: "Heads must roll – Perkasa protests outside *Sin Chew* office."

This protest was ignited by a notable error made by *Sin Chew* concerning an incomplete illustration of the *Jalur Gemilang*, Malaysia's revered national flag, prominently displayed on the front page of their most recent publication.

The *Jalur Gemilang* is far more than just an emblem; it represents the spirit, identity and honour of the Malaysian people, encapsulating their shared history, aspirations and cultural diversity. Therefore, the breach of such an important national symbol has understandably spurred strong emotions and reactions among citizens, fuelling a sense of urgency and passion regarding the issue.

While the gravity of this oversight should not be underestimated, given that it relates to the dignity of the Malaysian flag and national identity, it leads us to a crucial question: Is protesting the most effective means of articulating discontent in this situation?

It is important to note that the newspaper has already issued a public apology for its mistake. *Sin Chew* acknowledged the significance of the error and expressed regret, thereby demonstrating accountability and a commitment to rectify the situation.

This brings us to a deeper inquiry: Does expressing dissent through protest genuinely exemplify loyalty to the nation? Is it truly effective to resort to demonstrations, especially when there exist other peaceful and constructive avenues that could foster understanding and improve education among citizens about

their country's identity and the importance of national symbols?

Instead of taking to the streets, engaging in constructive dialogue may serve to enlighten individuals about the significance of the *Jalur Gemilang* and its representation of national pride.

By creating platforms for education, perhaps through community forums, workshops or campaigns, we can cultivate a deeper appreciation for our national identity and the values that the flag embodies.

In a multicultural and diverse society like Malaysia, promoting unity, awareness and understanding through calm discussions and educational efforts may prove to be of greater benefit than escalating tensions through public demonstrations.

Such an approach will encourage a more inclusive and respectful way of addressing grievances while facilitating a broader comprehension of what it truly means to be a citizen of this proud and vibrant nation.

Ultimately, as Malaysians, we must reflect on how we can best uphold and celebrate our national values and identity. In doing so, we should also consider how we respond to lapses in representation or moments of irresponsibility that can impact our shared cultural heritage.

Striving for unity and fostering understanding among all citizens should be our goal, ensuring that our actions align with the principles we aspire to uphold as a nation. It is through thoughtful engagement and education that we can truly honour the spirit of our beloved *Jalur Gemilang* and strengthen the bonds that unite us as Malaysians.

Datin Wan Hiyati Ibrahim
Observer
Kuala Lumpur

Help our unsung heroes with medical, welfare aid

READING the news and watching interviews with two of our former international sports stars – both now facing serious health challenges – reminds us of the Herculean effort and relentless training required of every athlete who dedicates themselves to representing our nation on the world stage.

While their achievements bring pride and honour, the long-term impact on their health is often overlooked.

Many believe our sports heroes have served the nation with the same patriotic pride as our military personnel and deserve similar benefits, such as pensions and healthcare.

Unfortunately, the reality is stark – retired national and international athletes often receive only minimal support. When health crises strike, they are left to seek help on their own, adding to the strain of caring for themselves and their families.

Yakeb (Yayasan Kebajikan Atlet Kebangsaan), the National Sports Association and the Youth and Sports Ministry respond to calls for help when possible but such case-by-case aid is not enough to support long-term illnesses or costly specialist treatments.

Yakeb continues to operate under an outdated welfare model, offering limited assistance through government hospitals. However, this support is often inadequate, especially for bedridden athletes or those unable to work, falling short of today's medical costs and treatment standards.

As journalist Frankie D'Cruz put it: "When our sports legends suffer, the nation must rise to their aid. It is our moral duty to cherish, support and honour those who have given so much."

These stories should inspire empathy and action from those in positions of authority to provide proper support for athletes who have proudly represented Malaysia.

Groups like My Sports Flame – formed by former sportswriters – have shown such compassion, consistently standing by our international athletes.

In 2023, My Sports Flame partnered with Yakeb to raise funds for cancer treatment and financial aid for 13-time World Cup golfer M. Ramayah.



Saravanan, who has been diagnosed with progressive motor neurone disease, urgently needs medical care, medications, treatments and therapies.

Stories like that of two-time paralympic bronze medalist P. Mariappan, who struggled with severe hardship, and former Asean para-swimmer Koh Lee Peng – once a 7-gold and 3-silver medalist – seen selling newspapers and tissues on the streets, highlight the urgent need for better support for our national athletes.

While former athletes like Koh were praised by the public for their honest efforts to make a living, what they truly need are real job opportunities and access to skills training.

Today, attention turns to G. Saravanan, Malaysia's golden racewalker who made history by winning the country's only Commonwealth Games gold in the 50km walk in 1998.

After retiring at 31, Saravanan dedicated himself to coaching, leading Perak junior walkers to nine gold medals at the Malaysia Games (2001–2009) and later mentoring Penang's young athletes. In 2021, he was tragically diagnosed with progressive motor neurone disease.

Since then, Saravanan's speech has become slurred and difficult, and the muscles in his legs are wasting away as

he fights an unwinnable battle. Tragically, he now stands largely abandoned by a system that fails to fully support athletes in crisis. His urgent needs include the rising costs of medical care, medications, treatments and therapies. Surely, our system can do more for these heroes.

Another athlete in need of assistance is former national Men's Squash Champion Kenneth Low, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, a progressive, degenerative neuro-muscular disease.

Once ranked fourth in Asia and 38th in the world, Low's health deteriorated after his diagnosis. He worked as a cleaner to make ends meet but after suffering a stroke, he now faces cognitive and memory difficulties, along with issues with coordination and motor skills.

It is essential that we properly care for our unsung national heroes by providing comprehensive medical and welfare services, including a pension scheme, to support them in retirement after their years of service to our nation.

Sathasivam Sitheravellu
Former International Athlete
Seremban

Unit price index of steel declines in March

➤ Lower in almost all parts of Malaysia, biggest drop is in Perak

PETALING JAYA: March 2025 recorded a decrease in the unit price index of steel between negative 0.1% and negative 4.2% for almost all areas in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak compared to the previous month.

The highest decrease was recorded in Perak (-4.2%), followed by Selangor, W.P. Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan and Kuching (-2%), respectively.

Apart from that, Chief Statistician Malaysia Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin said that the unit price index of steel & metal sections showed a decline between negative 0.1% to negative 1.1% for almost all areas in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak in March 2025 as compared to the previous month.

The highest decrease was recorded in Kuching (-1.1%).

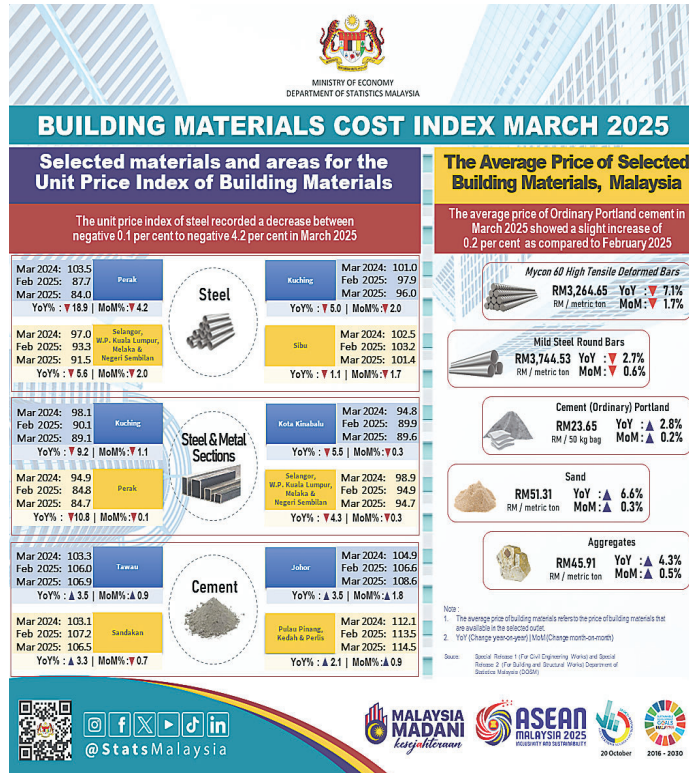
In addition, the unit price index of sand registered a slight increase between 0.1% to 1.4% for almost all areas in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak in March 2025 as compared to the previous month. The highest increase was recorded in Pahang (1.4%), followed by Selangor, W.P. Kuala Lumpur, Malacca & Negeri Sembilan (1.3%) and Perak (1.1%).

Concurrently, there was an increase in the price index per unit of cement in March 2025 as compared to the previous month for several areas namely Johor (1.8%), followed by Penang, Kedah, Perlis and Tawau (0.9%), respectively. Meanwhile, the unit price index for cement remained unchanged for other areas.

An annual comparison for the period of March 2024 and March 2025 indicated that the unit price index of cement increased between 0.2% to 4% for almost all areas in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. The highest increase was recorded in Selangor, W.P. Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan and Sandakan (4%), followed by Johor (3.5%) and Pahang (3.3%).

Nevertheless, an annual comparison of the unit price index of steel recorded a decrease between negative 1.1% to negative 18.9% in March 2025 as compared to the same month last year for almost all areas in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. The highest decrease in the unit price index of steel was recorded in Perak (-18.9%).

Mohd Uzir said that the average price per



Country View upbeat on FY25, backed by Iskandar's growth

BY HAYATUN RAZAK
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PETALING JAYA: Country View Bhd is optimistic about the prospects in FY25 with the growing potential of Iskandar Malaysia as a key economic hub, driven by large-scale infrastructure projects and strong foreign interest.

The group said it is well-positioned to navigate the evolving market landscape and deliver value to stakeholders.

"For the coming financial year 2025 (FY25), the property market in Johor Bahr remains poised for continued growth, driven by robust infrastructure developments, increasing foreign and domestic investments, together with government support to spur economic growth," it said.

With core development in the Iskandar Malaysia region, the group said it is strategically positioned to capitalise on these opportunities while maintaining their commitment to sustainable and responsible development.

"Key infrastructure projects such as the Gemas-Johor Bahru Electrified Double-Track Rail Project (Gemas-JB EDTP) and the Johor Bahru-Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS) Link that is currently ongoing, when completed, are expected to further enhance cross-border connectivity and economic activity.

"Together with ongoing initiatives like the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) and the Forest City Special Financial Zone (SFZ), these growth drivers are set to boost demand for residential, commercial, and industrial properties in Iskandar Malaysia," said the company.

Additionally, it said increased foreign interest, particularly from Singaporean investors, continues to support the upward trajectory of the real estate sector, especially in Iskandar Malaysia.

"With relatively lower property prices compared to Singapore, the Iskandar Malaysia region remains an attractive destination for both investment and homeownership," it added.

While the outlook remains positive, the group said it remains mindful of external challenges such as global economic uncertainties that could lead to fluctuating prices of commodities and materials, volatility of currencies, shifts in inflation, fluctuating interest rates, and investor sentiment.

"Our group will remain vigilant in monitoring market dynamics, adopting a prudent financial strategy, and continuously refining our product offerings. This includes enhancing quality amenities, incorporating sustainable designs and features that meet customer expectations, optimising the timing of our launches, and staying adaptable to changing market conditions," it said.

The group plans to launch the remaining affordable housing units under the Rumah Mampu Milik Johor and the Perumahan Komuniti Johor A schemes in Taman Nusa Sentral in FY25.

Sunway Flora 2 brings new urban living experience to Bukit Jalil

KUALA LUMPUR: Master Community Developer Sunway Property has unveiled Sunway Flora 2 — the latest addition to its highly sought-after Bukit Jalil address, strategically designed to meet the evolving needs of modern urban dwellers.

Part of the Sunway Flora Signature Series, Sunway Flora 2 builds on the success of its predecessor (Sunway Flora), which achieved an 80% take-up rate in less than two years.

"We're excited to introduce Sunway Flora 2, a development designed to reflect our brand promise — With You For Generations. We

continuously seek innovative ways to build communities that align with evolving lifestyles and aspirations. Sunway Flora 2 embodies this approach, offering sustainable, inclusive spaces that support multigenerational and pet-friendly living, ensuring our developments remain relevant, nurturing, and future-ready," said Sunway Property CEO Chong Sau Min.

Slated for launch in April 2025, with indicative prices starting from RM568,000, Sunway Flora 2 is an eco-conscious residential development designed using Sunway Property's hallmark

Sunway Design and Development Architecture.

Spanning 3.5 acres and offering 686 residential units across two towers, Sunway Flora 2 caters to Malaysia's growing demand for future-ready homes that prioritise both comfort and convenience. Units range in size from 764 sq ft to 1,259 sq ft, with layouts offering 2 to 4 bedrooms. Each residence is designed with expansive living areas up to 20ft wide and bedrooms are thoughtfully positioned to maximise natural light and ventilation.

Sunway Flora 2 meets the increasing demand

for environmentally responsible developments with features designed to promote green living. Urban farming areas and landscaped gardens bring greenery into the heart of the city, while energy-efficient designs and smart ventilation help lower household energy use. The development also incorporates rainwater harvesting and sustainable drainage systems to support long-term water conservation. Additionally, residents will have access to 14 electric vehicle charging stations, supporting greener mobility and aligning with Sunway Property's commitment to sustainability.



Berjaya Food to open Iceland's first-ever Starbucks retail stores in Reykjavik in May

PETALING JAYA: Berjaya Food Bhd (BFood) through subsidiary Berjaya Food International is set to introduce Iceland's first-ever Starbucks retail stores in Reykjavik in May, under an operating licence granted by Starbucks Coffee Company.

This expansion marks the first entry of a Malaysian public-listed food and beverage company into the Icelandic coffee market.

Opening in May in the heart of the city, the first store will be located at Reykjavik's bustling main shopping street, known for its vibrant mix of boutiques, bars, restaurants and cafes. The

second store will be opened later at a lively hub for food, shopping and culture, playing a key role in shaping the diverse community of Reykjavik's new harbour district. The opening dates and exact locations will be announced in due course.

"We are thrilled to finally bring Starbucks to Iceland and hope that these stores will be a destination for excellent coffee and a third place for the community," said BFood Group CEO Datuk Sydney Quays.



BERJAYA
BERJAYA FOOD BERHAD

"As we introduce the iconic Starbucks Experience and warm Malaysian hospitality, we are also committed to empowering the local community by creating job opportunities and sourcing from local businesses," he added.

The company remains dedicated to upholding Starbucks' promises that customers in other markets have come to know, with the goal of serving the world's finest coffee, and to contribute positively to

the community.

"We're pleased to expand our presence in the Nordic markets alongside our trusted and long-term business partner, Berjaya Food Berhad, and contribute to the vibrant local coffee community in the region," said Duncan Moir, president of Starbucks Europe, Middle East and Africa.

"Building on our 26-year relationship with BFood, we are excited to further connect with more customers over a handcrafted Starbucks beverage and make impactful investments in our green apron partners (employees) as well as the community," he added.

Uganda keen to tap M'sian palm oil expertise

BY JOHN GILBERT
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KUALA LUMPUR: Uganda's journey in palm oil is just beginning and the republic is keen on tapping Malaysian expertise in cultivation and development of the commodity, Minister of Energy and Mineral Development Ruth Nankabirwa Ssentamu said.

"We have only recently started planting oil palm trees, and it is still in its early stages. But when you fly into Malaysia, it is an entirely different story. Oil palms almost entirely dominate the landscape. It is hard to comprehend the scale of it until you see it first-hand.

"What is the story behind Malaysia's success with palm oil? How did they get to where they are today?

"My minister of agriculture is here with us, and it is a conversation we need to have, because there is much we can learn from Malaysia's experience," she told reporters at the Uganda Pearl of Africa Business Forum and Expo 2025 yesterday.

Uganda is inviting investors from Malaysia to establish partnerships and tap into various resources in the African country, particularly in agriculture, tourism, science, technology and digital transformation.

Ruth Nankabirwa said Uganda sees significant potential for collaboration with Malaysia, particularly in the mineral development sector.

She said Malaysia has already begun mineral extraction, and there are opportunities for both countries to share experiences and strategies.

"Uganda has implemented one of the most robust regulatory frameworks for the mineral sector on the African continent, with a strong emphasis on value addition. In the oil and gas sector, Uganda is already working with Malaysia's Petronas through the Uganda National Oil Company, and there is a clear desire to deepen this partnership.

"Uganda is on the verge of commencing oil production, and there is much to share - from technical insights to challenges faced. Both countries are transitioning away from fossil fuels, yet Uganda and Malaysia continue to rely on the revenue these resources provide to fund development."

Ruth Nankabirwa said Uganda is actively advancing its energy and mineral development initiatives, creating significant opportunities for international collaboration and investment.

Among the key projects is the Kabalega

► Republic invites investors, highlights agriculture, tourism, science, technology, digital transformation, energy and minerals



Ruth Nankabirwa speaking at a press conference following the official opening of the Uganda Pearl of Africa Business Forum and Expo 2025 in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. On the right is Uganda High Commissioner to Malaysia Betty Oyella Bigombe. - **BERNAMAPIC**

Petrochemical Industrial Park, strategically positioned to benefit from Uganda's oil refinery.

"As the refinery is developed, a wide range of industrial opportunities will emerge. For instance, by-products such as ammonium nitrate can support the production of fertilisers, opening doors for investment in petrochemicals and agro-industrial inputs.

"The industrial park itself will also require a variety of support services, including hospitality and logistics, presenting further business potential. Additionally, the park is home to Uganda's second international airport, enhancing its connectivity and strategic importance," she said.

Beyond the refinery, Ruth Nankabirwa noted that Uganda is preparing to announce new licensing rounds for oil exploration.

She said that to date, only 40% of the country's petroleum potential has been explored, leaving 60% untapped.

"Companies interested in entering the sector will have opportunities to acquire new exploration blocks, including some that have been returned by TotalEnergies SE, a French multinational integrated energy and petroleum

company, and are now open for reallocation.

"On the mineral side, investors can partner with the Uganda National Mining Company to develop mines across a range of mineral resources.

"These developments form part of Uganda's broader strategy to promote value addition and sustainable resource management while positioning the country as a key player in regional energy and mineral markets," Ruth Nankabirwa said.

With Malaysia's annual exports to Uganda reaching US\$250 million (RM1.1 billion), the expo is poised to deepen trade relationships and introduce Uganda as the prime investment destination in East Africa.

The Uganda Pearl of Africa Business Forum and Expo 2025 showcases the seriousness of investment and trade ties between Uganda and Malaysia, with the presence of four of Uganda's key Cabinet ministers.

Organised by the High Commission of Uganda to Malaysia and World-One Business Federation, the two-day event presents an opportunity for stakeholders to connect directly with Uganda's top policymakers to explore opportunities and forge strategic partnerships.

Miti committed to finding best solution in US reciprocal tariffs issue: Tengku Zafrul

KUALA LUMPUR: The Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry (Miti) is committed to seeking the best solution for mutual benefit with regard to US reciprocal tariffs, said Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz, who is currently in Washington.

"Before meeting with senior US government officials, I held discussions with the Miti team here. We reviewed strategies and recent efforts to strengthen Malaysia-US trade relations," he said in a social media post.

"We are committed to finding the best solution for our shared interests," he added.

The minister is scheduled to meet with US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and other officials in Washington today.

In a recent media briefing, Tengku Zafrul said the Malaysian delegation would also take the opportunity to meet with several business chambers, companies, and interest groups to explain the country's stand on the tariff issue, as well as the feedback received from the Cabinet.

"We need to be there to clarify how Malaysia, as a neutral country, plays a key role in the semiconductor and electrical and electronics sectors. Our goal is to demonstrate that Malaysia supports industries in the US rather than posing a threat to them," he explained.

Tengku Zafrul is accompanied by Miti deputy secretary-general (trade) Mastura Ahmad Mustafa and other ministry officials. Miti representatives at the Malaysian embassy in Washington will also join the delegation.

At a media briefing last week, Tengku Zafrul said that although the visit is focused on Malaysia, he will take the opportunity to express Asean's stance on the tariff issue, particularly the outcomes of the recent special meeting of Asean economic ministers.

The Indochina Asean member countries have been the hardest hit by these tariffs, with Cambodia facing a combined base and reciprocal tariff rate of 49%, followed by Laos (48%), Vietnam (46%) and Myanmar (44%).

Thailand faces a 36% tariff, Indonesia 32%, Brunei and Malaysia both at 24%, the Philippines 17%, and Singapore has a base tariff of 10%.

Except for China, the reciprocal tariffs are under a 90-day suspension period.

In a separate post titled "Seeking a Fair and Equitable Trade Solution", Tengku Zafrul said he held productive discussions in Washington with US ambassador (Apec senior official) Matt Murray.

"Malaysia comes as a constructive partner, not only in bilateral contexts but also as Asean chair in 2025 and a committed Apec member. We appreciate the openness of the US to listen and its readiness to continue structured discussions for our mutual benefit," Tengku Zafrul said. - **Bernama**

Continue to seek opportunities abroad, Malaysian firms urged

► **Fadillah encourages companies to extend sharing of technology and expertise too**

ISTANBUL: Major Malaysian companies are encouraged to continue exploring investment opportunities abroad to strengthen business collaboration and, more crucially, to extend the sharing of technology and expertise, said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof.

Fadillah, who is also Energy Transition and Water Transformation Minister, said expertise and experience-sharing through cooperation with foreign countries benefits Malaysia tremendously.

Citing Tenaga Nasional Bhd's (TNB) investment in Turkiye's energy company Gama Enerji AS, Fadillah said it exemplifies the deep business ties between the two countries.

"Although TNB is not the majority shareholder, it is involved in its management and is also developing or expanding TNB's investment at the international level," he told Bernama on Tuesday night.

"We want to encourage more companies to explore and seek partners who can help extend their knowledge, technical skills, and technology back to Malaysia, in addition to the energy and water sectors, which are our focus," he said.

Earlier, Fadillah visited Gama Enerji in Ankara during his two-day official working visit to Turkiye which started on Tuesday. Malaysia's amba-



The Malaysian delegation led by Fadillah (third, left) holding a meeting with Turkiye officials led by Bayraktar (third, right) to explore potential cooperation in the field of energy transition in Ankara on Tuesday. — **BERNAMAPIC**

ssador to Turkiye, Sazali Mustafa Kamal, and TNB's chief of new energy, Mohd Zarihi Mohd Hashim, were also present.

Fadillah said he would also visit Turkish floating power plant operator Karpowership. The company is interested in investing and sharing expertise with Malaysia, particularly Sabah's power generation.

"Karpowership comprises vessels that serve as power generators. They are mobile and can be deployed anywhere to supply electricity using gas, liquefied petroleum gas and other fuels.

"They are very interested because

they are aware, for example, of Sabah's electricity supply shortages. Therefore, they can deploy vessels for power generation wherever needed," Fadillah said.

He added that he would personally inspect the construction and installation site of the vessels to assess their energy supply capabilities.

"I want to see their capabilities, because sometimes we need a backup. So at the very least, we know there's an alternative. If there's a shortage, we can get support. But this is not a commitment yet — it's more an exploration," he said.

Fadillah also said Malaysia and

Turkiye are working to move beyond an exchange of letter of intent related to energy sector cooperation, particularly in renewable and nuclear energy for power supply purposes into a memorandum of understanding.

Fadillah said this was among the matters discussed during his meeting with Turkiye's Energy and Natural Resources Minister, Alparslan Bayraktar, in Ankara on Tuesday.

Fadillah will lead the Malaysian delegation to the Summit on the Future of Energy Security in London to be held today and tomorrow, after his visit to Turkiye.

Petronas signs 11 MoUs to strengthen local OGSE sector

PETALING JAYA: Petroleum Nasional Bhd (Petronas), through Malaysia Petroleum Management (MPM), has signed 11 memorandums of understanding to strengthen Malaysia's oil and gas services and equipment (OGSE) sector through two key initiatives — Yard Transformation and Productivity Enhancement, and the Skilled Trade Champion.

The agreements leverage collaboration with industry players to enhance the performance of fabrication yards through modernisation and to cultivate a highly skilled local workforce, ultimately positioning Malaysia to meet the evolving demands of the sector.

As part of the Yard Transformation and Productivity Enhancement initiative, Petronas signed five MoUs with leading local fabrication yard contractors: Brooke Holding Sdn Bhd, Ocean Might Sdn Bhd, Muhibbah Engineering (M) Bhd, Malaysia Marine and Heavy Engineering Holdings Bhd and Sapura Fabrication Sdn Bhd.

Under the Skilled Trade Champion initiative, six MoUs were signed with key industry players, including pan-Malaysia maintenance, construction and modification contractors, hook-up and commissioning contractors and the Malaysia Offshore Support Vessel Owners' Association.

These partnerships focus on strengthening critical offshore trades such as rigging, blasting and painting, scaffolding, welding, joint-making, and seafaring. The initiative also prioritises the upskilling of Malaysian seafarers to cultivate a greater number of qualified officers in offshore marine operations.

Transport Ministry personnel get to test drive BYD Sime Motors' EVs

PETALING JAYA: Driven by its commitment to accelerate electric vehicle (EV) adoption in Malaysia, BYD Sime Motors — the official distributor of BYD cars in Malaysia and the No. 1 BEV brand in the country — is partnering with the Ministry of Transport (MoT) to advance the nation's low-carbon mobility agenda.

A key focus of this collaboration is reducing carbon emissions through increased EV adoption in Malaysia.

This partnership introduces a six-month programme called *Jom Pandu BYD Bersama MoT*, supported by BYD Sime Motors' partner, Gentari Sdn Bhd via Gentari Green Mobility Sdn Bhd, which has installed two EV chargers at the MoT headquarters, the initiative allows the ministry's personnel to test drive BYD's full range of EV models.

Through this initiative, BYD Sime Motors will loan its full EV lineup to MoT, including BYD Sealion 7, BYD SealL, BYD Atto 3 Ultra, BYD M6, and BYD Dolphin. This partnership allows

MoT personnel to test drive these vehicles. It also aims to enhance awareness of EV ownership and usability.

Sime Motors managing director for Southeast Asia Jeffrey Gan said: "BYD Sime Motors is proud to be at the forefront of this initiative in leading Malaysia's transition to electric mobility together with the Ministry of Transport. We remain focused on our goal of supporting the Ministry's carbon emissions reduction efforts.

"Through this immersive experience, we hope to encourage greater adoption of electric vehicles, not only by the public but also within government mobility use."

BYD Sime Motors, in partnership with Gentari, has installed two 22kW AC chargers at the ministry's headquarters in Putrajaya. To date, Gentari operates over 530 EV charging points nationwide, actively contributing to the national target of 10,000 public chargers by 2025, in line with the National Energy Transition Roadmap.

PropNex Property XPO 2025 projected to rake in RM60m sales

■ **BY HAYATUN RAZAK**
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KUALA LUMPUR: Real estate agency PropNex Malaysia is projecting RM60 million in sales from PropNex Property XPO 2025 to be held in July, up from the RM38 million recorded last year.

PropNex Malaysia CEO Marcus Teng said the higher target is driven by strong early momentum as well as interest from foreign buyers, particularly from China and Singapore.

"Even when we had our first stop last month in Cheras, we organised it there and, to our surprise, we recorded RM30 million in sales that day," he told reporters at the PropNex Malaysia Convention 2025 on Tuesday.

Teng said the optimistic projection is also supported by improving regional connectivity and pro-investment policies.

"Our Ministry of Tourism recently announced that China-Malaysia visa-free entry for up to 90 days is

extended for five years. That's a major move that will benefit cross-border investment."

He added that he has consistently seen strong interest from Singapore, stating that many Singaporeans are keen to retire in Malaysia.

"With the RTS (Rapid Transit System) Link set to begin operations by end-2026, Johor will boom as connectivity between both countries improves."

However, Teng said he expected 60-70% of the demand will still be driven by locals and the remaining 30% coming from foreigners.

PropNex Property XPO 2025 will take place on July 26 and 27 at the Connexion Conference and Event Centre in Bangsar South, Kuala Lumpur.

Now in its seventh edition, Property XPO is the largest multi-sector property exhibition in Asean by a single real estate agency.

Teng said that with over 5,000 listings expected, up from 3,000 recorded last year, and a line-up of top

developers, financial partners, and real estate experts, the two-day expo will offer access to some of Malaysia's most attractive and diverse real estate opportunities.

This year, PropNex aims to make history by achieving the highest number of multisector property listings ever presented by a single agency at a property expo. This feat is currently under Asean Records Official Attempt status.

Teng said the expo will showcase a broad spectrum of listings, ranging from commercial and land projects to sub-sales, auctions, and industrial properties.

"The official record attempt reflects our mission to bring together key knowledge, experts, and opportunities to help Malaysians make empowered property decisions."

Another key highlight is the Malaysian debut of the Property Wealth System, developed by PropNex Singapore executive director Kelvin Fong.

Royal Brunei starts new chapter with AirAsia MOVE

► Partnership brings more flight choices and smoother booking experience to travellers

KUALA LUMPUR: Royal Brunei Airlines, the national carrier of Brunei Darussalam, has become the latest direct airline partner on AirAsia MOVE, giving customers a wider choice of network across Asia, the Middle East, Australia, and the UK.

AirAsia MOVE flights OTA (online travel agent) head Yeoh Sai Ho, and Royal Brunei Airlines sales and marketing manager (West Malaysia) Noor Hidayah Abdullah commemorated this partnership with a signing ceremony held at AirAsia MOVE's headquarters recently.

To mark the occasion, AirAsia MOVE and Royal Brunei Airlines are offering an exclusive deal where customers can enjoy up to 35% off return flights to Brunei, Manila, Beijing, Taipei and more destinations when booking by April 30. Travel period runs from April 18 to Nov 30.

AirAsia MOVE CEO Nadia Omer said: "We're excited to welcome Royal Brunei Airlines into our expanding network of direct airline partners. This collaboration adds more flight choices for travellers and strengthens our commitment to offering a seamless, all-in-one travel booking experience."

Meanwhile, Noor Hidayah said that this



Yeoh (left) and Noor Hidayah at the event to commemorate the partnership.

partnership with AirAsia MOVE enhances the accessibility of their flights and improves the overall booking experience.

"The intuitive interface of the AirAsia MOVE app simplifies the process, making travel planning effortless for our passengers," she added.

Aside from Royal Brunei Airlines, AirAsia MOVE partners directly with over 70 notable airlines partners on its platform. Aside from that, AirAsia MOVE users can conveniently

choose from over 900,000 hotels across the globe to complete their travel plans, along with first and last-mile connectivity through airport transfers, and other ancillary travel products such as online duty-free shopping, travel insurance and more. All of these services are encapsulated by the AirAsia Rewards loyalty programme, allowing users to earn and redeem AirAsia points for every transaction across the whole ecosystem within the app.

EdgePoint Towers unveils its first solar hybrid site

KUALA LUMPUR: EdgePoint Towers Sdn Bhd has launched its first solar hybrid site, marking a significant step towards advancing sustainable energy solutions in Malaysia's telecommunications sector.

In a statement yesterday, EdgePoint said the new solution provides up to 100% of the energy required to operate telecommunications equipment, reducing dependence on diesel fuel.

The site, which has a 5.9-kilowatt peak (kWp) capacity, operates autonomously using photovoltaic (solar) energy, complemented by battery storage, the company said.

CEO Muniff Kamaruddin said the solution is important for remote and difficult-to-reach areas such as transport corridors like highways, tunnels, bridges or terminals.

"This deployment is expected to reduce the site's annual carbon emissions by approximately 78%, while also ensuring seamless connectivity for travellers along the highway."

"By integrating solar power into telecommunications infrastructure, we are reducing reliance on non-renewable energy sources, lowering operational costs, and significantly decreasing emissions," he said.

As the company expands its renewable energy initiatives, Muniff said EdgePoint Tower aims to set new benchmarks for energy-efficient telecom infrastructure in Malaysia, helping its partners transition to greener operations without compromising connectivity, network quality, and reliability.

By end-2025, EdgePoint aims to complete more solar and hybrid sites nationwide, reinforcing its commitment to green telecom infrastructure. — Bernama

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Prasarana, Hitachi Rail to upskill 1,000 Malaysians

➤ Initiative focuses on electric bus operation, rolling stock maintenance and cybersecurity

BY **AMIE SHAZRIE**
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: Prasarana Malaysia Bhd has launched a long-term workforce development initiative that aims to train 1,000 Malaysians over five years in rail and smart mobility disciplines, as part of its strengthened commitment to the National Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Policy 2030.

Group CEO Mohd Azharuddin Mat Sah said the initiative named Prasarana TVET Programme, supported through a strategic partnership with Hitachi Rail, positions Prasarana at the forefront of public transport talent development in the country.

"The new programme is set to roll out in the fourth quarter of 2025, likely by November, which will focus on three core areas of electric bus operation, rolling stock maintenance and cybersecurity.

"Participants will receive the nationally recognised Malaysian Skills Certificate (Sijil Kemahiran Malaysia or SKM), preparing them for real-world roles in the increasingly technical landscape of urban mobility.

"We are not just building rail systems, we are building people. This initiative will equip 1,000 individuals over the next five years with the skills to lead Malaysia's smart transport transformation," he told reporters at the memorandum of understanding signing ceremony between Prasarana and Hitachi Rail, yesterday.

He remarked that the TVET programme will span between 9 to 12 months, blending theory-based learning, technical training, and on-the-ground exposure across Prasarana's operational and maintenance sites.

"Participants will undergo extensive hands-on training, which includes site visits to operations

control centres and depots, ensuring they gain critical insights into the real-time dynamics of running urban rail systems.

"This is not a short, introductory course, it is a full commitment to developing skilled professionals," he said.

He noted that the programme will enroll an average of 200 participants per year, culminating in a total of 1,000 trainees by 2030.

"These individuals will be selected from a mix of school leavers, vocational students, diploma holders, and university graduates, ensuring inclusivity across educational backgrounds.

"This is our talent pipeline. By nurturing them early, we identify potential and bring them into the ecosystem, something that is essential given our scale consists of five MRT lines, 1,000 buses, and over 13,000 employees across the country," he explained.

Additionally, he said Prasarana is also running a parallel Protege programme, which includes two streams, a marketing-focused pathway, and the Prasarana TVET Programme.

"The latter involves immersive

field-based learning experiences designed to familiarise young talent with the operational demands of the rail industry.

"Currently, 57 participants are enrolled across the two Protege streams, with around 29 individuals per cohort.

"These placements include structured learning with a focus on personal and professional development.

"This partnership with Hitachi Rail is more than a corporate alliance, it is a shared vision to build local expertise, reduce talent gaps, and uplift the prestige of technical careers in Malaysia."

As the country advances toward becoming a regional smart mobility leader, Mohd Azharuddin said the Prasarana-Hitachi collaboration is expected to significantly support national goals in economic competitiveness, innovation, and sustainable development.

"This is how we support the national TVET policy, not just in spirit, but through action. We believe in nurturing a generation that can carry forward the vision of smart, inclusive, and sustainable transportation for Malaysia."

MCE clinches multiple contracts totalling RM120.67 million

KUALA LUMPUR: MCE Holdings Bhd has secured multiple new contracts with a combined value of RM120.67 million.

The contracts were awarded to MCE's subsidiaries, with Multi-Code Electronics Industries (M) Bhd securing projects from JVIS USA LLC (JVIS) and Perodua, while MCE Hengtuo Sdn Bhd was awarded the contract from Proton.

MCE continues to gain traction in its push to grow its export market presence, securing a RM69.59 million supply contract with JVIS, a Michigan-based automotive components supplier serving top-tier global carmakers.

The 60-month contract, which follows an earlier engagement, underscores JVIS's continued trust in MCE as a long-term supplier and will see MCE supplying mechatronic components for a vehicle model in the US market, with production scheduled to commence in the first quarter of the financial year ending July 31, 2027.

The newly secured domestic contracts include with Perodua, comprising multiple projects valued at about RM41.33 million for its two upcoming models, an electric vehicle (EV) and an internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicle.

MCE will supply a range of electronic and mechatronic components, with the EV model running for 36 months starting in Q2 FY2026, and the ICE model over 72 months beginning in Q1 FY2027.

In addition, MCE has secured a 60-month supply contract with Proton for mechanical and mechatronic parts for a new car model, valued at approximately RM9.75 million. The project will begin in the first quarter of the financial year ending July 31, 2026.

"These contracts reflect the trust that leading automakers, both at home and abroad, have placed in MCE to deliver advanced and cost-effective automotive components," MCE group managing director Dr Goh Kar Chun said.

Sirim expands services to China

KUALA LUMPUR: Sirim Bhd is seeing strong growth in China, thanks to the close and growing relationship between Malaysia and China.

China President Xi Jinping's recent official visit to Malaysia has opened up more opportunities for Malaysian companies like Sirim to grow in the Chinese market and strengthen its global brand as "Your Partner for Innovation".

Under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, Sirim has worked closely with China's Hunan Pilot Free Trade Zone Standard Cooperation and Innovation Centre to reduce technical trade barriers.

Through this partnership, over 140 Chinese companies have entered the Malaysian market faster, thanks to shared standards and quicker certification.

One of the key drivers of this success is Sirim Huasheng, a joint venture between Sirim QAS International and Hunan Sirim Huasheng Inspection and Certification Co Ltd, established to serve as Sirim's official marketing and service arm in China.

It helps China firms understand and meet Malaysian and Asean standards by providing faster, more cost-effective testing, inspection and certification services.

March inflation increases at slower rate of 1.4%

PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia's inflation increased at a slower rate of 1.4% in March 2025 with the index points standing at 134.1 as against 132.2 in the same month of the previous year.

The increase of inflation in March 2025 was driven by a slower increase in the group of personal care, social protection & miscellaneous goods & services, 3.6% (February 2025: 3.7%), followed by restaurant & accommodation services, 2.9% (February 2025: 3.5%); housing, water, electricity, gas & other fuels, 1.9% (February 2025: 2.3%); alcoholic beverages & tobacco, 0.8% (February 2025: 0.9%) and furnishings, household equipment & routine household maintenance, 0.2% (February 2025: 0.3%).

Chief Statistician Malaysia Datuk Sri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin said inflation for both education (2.2%) and recreation, sport & culture (1.7%) recorded a higher increase as compared to February 2025.

Meanwhile, food & beverages (2.5%), insurance & financial services (1.5%), health (1.0%) and transport (0.7%), increased at the same rate as recorded in the previous month.

In addition, information & communication and clothing & footwear, remained at a negative territory registering negative 5.4% and negative 0.2% respectively.

The food & beverages group which contributes 29.8% of the total CPI weight increased by 2.5% in March 2025 (February 2025: 2.5%).

The expenditure class of ready-made food & other food

products not elsewhere classified registering 3.1% (February 2025: 3.2%) was also the main contributor to the increase in the subgroup of Food at home.

Fresh coconut milk and instant coconut milk increased to 29.4% (February 2025: 27.0%) and 11.7% (February 2025: 8.7%) respectively.

The increase in coconut prices in the Malaysian market since the end of last year until early 2025 is not only due to the reduction in local coconut supply but also attributed to the supply shortage globally due to the coconut off-season.

Meanwhile, the inflation rate for milk, other dairy products & eggs expenditure class was in the negative range at negative 1.1% as compared to negative 0.8 per cent in the previous month.

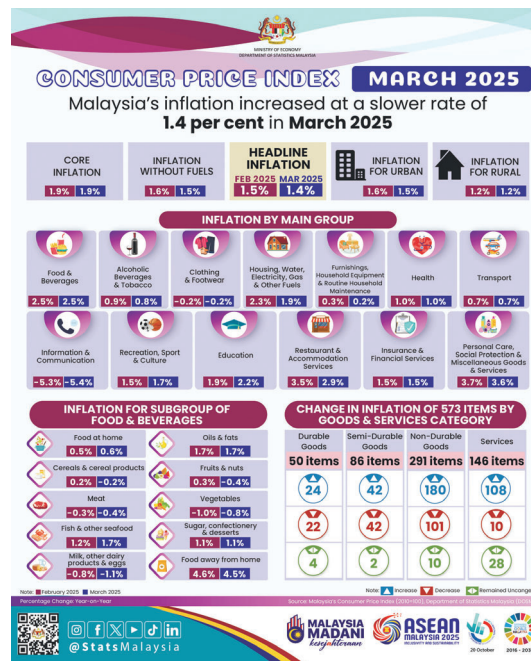
Fresh milk and full cream milk declined to negative 2.4% and negative 1.4% respectively in March 2025.

Full cream powdered milk also dropped to negative 1.4% as compared to negative 1.0% in February 2025.

The egg expenditure subclass remained at a negative rate registering negative 3.4% (February 2025: -3.3%).

Mohd Uzir said that, with regards to inflation at the state level, 12 states recorded increases below the national inflation rate of 1.4% with Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan recording the lowest increase at 0.6% in March 2025.

However, four states recorded increases above the national inflation level namely Johor (2.1%),



Selangor (1.8%), Negeri Sembilan (1.7%) and Malacca (1.6%).

All states registered an increase in the inflation of food & beverages.

The increase was recorded by Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya at

3.6%, followed by Negeri Sembilan (3.4%), Selangor (3.3%), Johor (2.9%), Sabah (2.9%), Malacca (2.8%), Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan (2.8%), Terengganu (2.6%) and Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur (2.5%).

Beijing says door for trade talks is 'wide open'

► Stocks rally after Trump hints at lower China tariffs, tones down attacks on Fed

HONG KONG: Equities rallied with Wall Street yesterday after Donald Trump said he had "no intention" of firing the head of the Federal Reserve and that eye-watering tariffs on China would be slashed drastically.

Global markets, already upended by a trade war, were battered further at the start of the week by fears the US president was looking to remove central bank boss Jerome Powell for not cutting interest rates, calling him a "major loser" and "Mr. Too Late".

Observers warned such a move would have dealt a blow to the Fed's independence and sparked a crisis of confidence in the world's top economy, sparking a sell-off of US assets and another global crisis.

However, Trump looked to temper those fears on Tuesday, saying: "I have no intention of firing him."

"I would like to see him be a little more active in terms of his idea to lower interest rates – it's a perfect time to lower interest rates," he said.

"If he doesn't, is it the end? No."

The remarks gave a much-needed shot of

relief to investors, helped by the president's comments later indicating a more conciliatory approach to the trade war with China.

Washington has imposed tariffs of 145% on a range of products from China, while Beijing has replied with 125% duties on imports from the United States.

But Trump acknowledged on Tuesday that the US levies were at a "very high" level, and that this will "come down substantially".

"They will not be anywhere near that number," he said, but added that "it won't be zero".

That came after Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told a closed-door event in Washington that he expected a de-escalation soon in the United States' tariff standoff with China, which he said was not sustainable.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said later that "the president and the administration are setting the stage for a deal," noting that "the ball is moving in the right direction".

China President Xi Jinping also warned yesterday that tariff and trade wars "undermine the legitimate rights and interests of all countries, hurt the multilateral trading system, and impact the world economic order".

However, Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said later in the day that "the door for talks is wide open".

Investors welcomed the developments from Washington with open arms.

Hong Kong stocks surged on the back of a rally in tech firms including Alibaba and Tencent.

Tokyo, Sydney, Seoul, Wellington, Singapore, Mumbai, Manila, Jakarta and Bangkok also advanced, while London, Paris and Frankfurt were also sharply higher.

Taipei jumped more than 4%, helped by a 7% surge in chip titan TSMC.

However, Shanghai edged down.

Gold, which had hit a record high above US\$3,500 on Tuesday on a rush to safety, retreated to sit around US\$3,300, while the dollar clawed back some of its recent losses against the pound, euro and yen.

Oil prices were also boosted more than 1%, having taken a recent hit by fears over the economic fallout from the tariffs standoff.

The gains followed rallies of more than 2% for all three main indexes in New York.

"While it is still early days, the mood in the market is evidently shifting and what was a strong 'sell America' vibe flowing through markets ... has in part reversed," said Pepperstone head of research Chris Weston.

He added that Trump's comments on Powell "should go some way to allaying fears of a major policy mistake".

Investors were unmoved by the International Monetary Fund's decision to slash its global economic growth outlook by 0.5 percentage points to 2.8% this year, citing the effect of Trump's tariff policies. – AFP

India starts increasing palm oil buying as prices fall below soyoil's

MUMBAI: India has started raising palm oil purchases after a lull of five months as a correction in prices has made the tropical oil cheaper than rival soyoil, encouraging refiners to place orders to replenish inventories, four dealers told Reuters.

Higher purchases by India, the world's biggest buyer of palm oil, will support benchmark Malaysian palm oil futures, which have fallen nearly 10% so far in 2025.

"Indians had pulled back on buying palm oil because it was too pricey. But now that it's cheaper than soyoil, refiners are placing orders," said Sandeep Bajoria, CEO of Sunvin Group, a vegetable oil brokerage.

Crude palm oil (CPO) is currently being offered at about US\$1,050 a ton, including cost, insurance and freight (CIF), in India for May delivery, compared to around US\$1,100 for crude soyoil, dealers said.

Indian buyers started trimming purchases from December as palm oil's premium over soyoil jumped above US\$100.

India imported 1.57 million tons of palm oil from December to March. Shipments for April are expected to be around 350,000 tons, bringing the average monthly imports for the five-month period to 384,712 tons.

India imported an average of more than 750,000 tons of palm oil each month during the marketing year that ended in October 2024, said the Solvent Extractors' Association of India.

The country's palm oil imports are likely to rise above 500,000 tons in May and exceed 600,000 tons in June. From July to September, the monthly average could be more than 700,000 tons, dealers said.

India buys palm oil mainly from Indonesia and Malaysia. – Reuters

Huayou to replace LGES in Indonesian EV battery project

JAKARTA: China's Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt is replacing South Korea's LG Energy Solution as a strategic investor in one of Indonesia's major EV battery projects, the country's Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Bahil Lahadalia said yesterday.

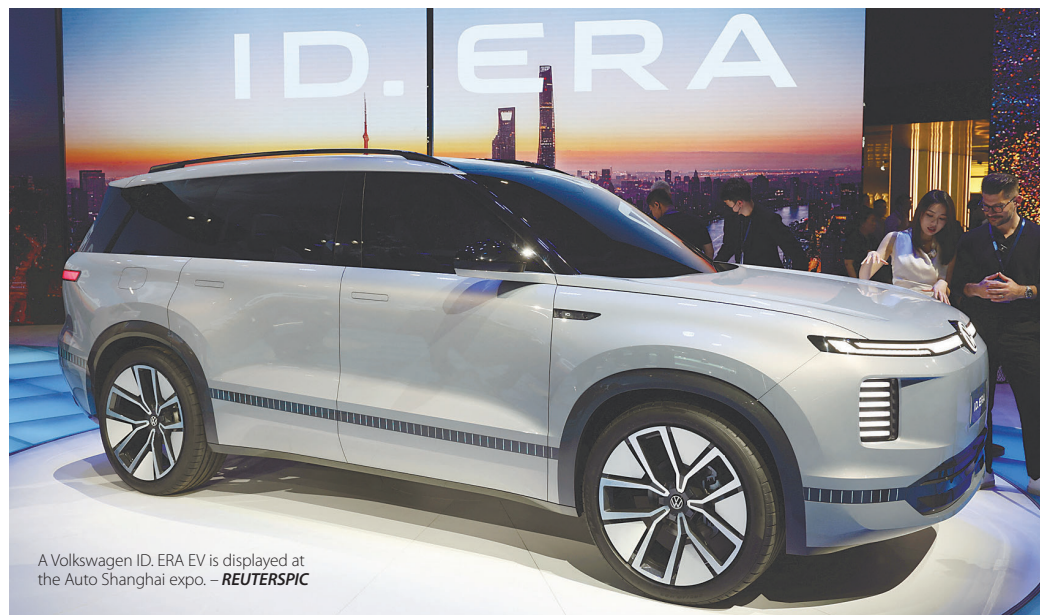
LGES on Monday announced its withdrawal from the 142 trillion rupiah (RM37 billion) project. Indonesia is keen to develop domestic processing industries to produce batteries and EVs to take advantage of its rich mineral resources.

"Change of investors is a common dynamic in large-scale projects," Bahil said in a statement, adding that there will be no change to the underlying plans for the project.

Huayou would be collaborating with Indonesian state-controlled firms on the project.

Bahil said Indonesia remains committed to using its mineral resources domestically, and the government will ensure a smooth transition for the project.

A ground breaking ceremony for a part of the project is planned for later this year. – Reuters



A Volkswagen ID. ERA EV is displayed at the Auto Shanghai expo. – REUTERS/PIC

Auto Shanghai showcases new electric vehicle era

SHANGHAI: The world's largest auto expo opened its doors yesterday in Shanghai, showcasing the new electric world order even as mounting trade barriers risk dampening China's global ambitions.

With nearly 1,000 exhibitors present, foreign carmakers are raring to show they can keep pace with the ultra-competitive Chinese firms that dominate the sector's electric frontier.

Vying to shore up sliding sales in a market they used to dominate, German firms pitched themselves yesterday as building cars "in China for China".

Volkswagen, the largest foreign group operating in China, unveiled a series of new electric vehicles (EVs) and a driver assistance system developed

especially for the Chinese digital ecosystem.

The group says it will launch more than 20 electric and hybrid models for the country by 2027.

At the BMW booth, a foreign executive conducted a conversation in Mandarin with an AI assistant, before CEO Oliver Zipse rolled onstage in a futuristic white SUV from the upcoming "Neue Klasse" series.

A separate version specifically tailored for China will be launched next year.

"At BMW we will continue to advocate for... open markets," Zipse said, adding that "global challenges require global cooperation" in an apparent reference to the current trade turmoil set in motion by Donald Trump's administration.

Foreign brands are up against cutthroat competition from dozens of local rivals.

Beijing's historic backing of EV and hybrid development has seen the domestic market flourish, with analysts considering it younger-leaning and more open to novelty.

Auto Shanghai, which runs until May 2, will see a flurry of launches – luxury SUVs, saloons and multi-purpose vehicles.

Exhibitors at the show range from state-owned behemoths, start-ups such as Nio and Xpeng, tech giants with skin in the game such as Huawei, and consumer electronics-turned-car company Xiaomi.

The domestic contest has pushed Chinese

companies to develop faster and fostered technological innovation.

However, the effect of the crowded market on individual firms can be harsh – some start-ups have gone bust, while brands including SAIC Motor, BYD and Geely are engaged in a brutal price war.

Many Chinese automakers have looked to grow their sales in markets such as Europe, Latin America and Southeast Asia to safeguard their future.

There are still potential roadblocks though. Nio on Tuesday said it had underestimated the difficulties of expanding into Europe, blaming logistical hurdles and noting tariffs would have an impact on price competitiveness. – AFP



➤ Musk to reduce White House work to focus on electric vehicle maker

NEW YORK: Elon Musk will significantly scale back his White House work next month to focus on Tesla, the billionaire announced on Tuesday as the electric vehicle maker reported a 71% drop in first-quarter profit.

"Probably in the next month, my time allocation to DOGE will drop significantly," Musk said at the outset of an earnings conference call, referring to his work for the "Department of Government Efficiency".

The comments came as Tesla reported profit of US\$409 million (RM1.8 billion) following a drop in auto sales that analysts said reflected brand damage due to Musk's work for President Donald Trump in slashing the US federal workforce.

Revenue fell 9% to US\$19.3 billion.

The firm retreated from its 2025 guidance, citing unpredictability over trade policy and demand.

"Uncertainty in the automotive and energy markets continues to increase as rapidly evolving trade policy adversely impacts the global supply chain and cost structure of Tesla and our peers," the company said.

"This dynamic, along with changing political sentiment, could have a meaningful impact on demand for our products in the near-term."

On the positive side, Tesla said it was on track to launch new vehicles "including more affordable models" in the first half of 2025.

Tesla also confirmed in a press release that a planned launch of its Robotaxi for autonomous driving in Texas remained "on track" by June.

Musk reiterated his bullish outlook on the long-term prospects for Tesla, highlighting its leadership in key growth areas – robotics, autonomous driving and artificial intelligence.

Musk, the world's richest person, donated more than US\$270 million to Trump's 2024 presidential campaign.

Analysts have warned of significant brand damage to Tesla from Musk's leadership role in

Tesla pulls 2025 guidance after Q1 profit plunges 71%

DOGE, which has granted itself access to government databases with sensitive personal information and implemented thousands of job cuts.

The shakeup to US government operations has led to questions about programmes like the Social Security retirement benefit and the continuation of programmes like hurricane forecasting and humanitarian aid.

Since Trump returned to the White House, Tesla has been targeted for consumer boycotts and vandalism while sales have dived across many markets and prices of used Teslas have plunged in a sign of the brand's unpopularity.

On the call, Tesla chief financial officer Vaibhav Taneja described the reaction as "unwarranted hostility to our brand".

Musk said the work for DOGE was "mostly done", adding he would not exit government work entirely.

"I think I'll continue to spend a day or two per week on government matters, or as long as the president would like me to do so, and as long as it is useful.

"But starting next month, I'll be allocating far more of my time to Tesla."

Besides its image, Tesla pointed to tariffs as another headwind for the company, while noting the EV maker is better situated than rivals that rely extensively on imported vehicles in the US.

The Trump administration has enacted 25% tariffs on imported autos.

"I will weigh in with my advice with president, which he will listen to but then it's up to him, of course, to make his decision," Musk said of Trump.

"I've been on the record many times as saying that I believe lower tariffs are generally a good idea for prosperity." – AFP



A member of climate protest group Extinction Rebellion spray painting anti-DOGE messages on the outside of a Tesla showroom in New York. – AFP/IC

Trial testimony reveals OpenAI interest in Chrome: Reports

NEW YORK: OpenAI is ready to buy Chrome if Google is forced to sell its popular browser as part of antitrust trial, a top executive testified on Tuesday, according to media reports.

OpenAI product manager Nick Turley revealed the startup's interest in the world's most popular internet browser while testifying in court in Washington.

Turley spoke in front of a judge who will decide what remedies to impose on Google after making a landmark decision last year that the tech giant maintained an illegal monopoly in online search.

US government attorneys have urged Judge Amit Mehta to force Google to sell off its Chrome browser, arguing artificial intelligence is poised to

ramp up the tech giant's online search dominance.

Google countered in the case that the US government has gone way beyond the scope of the suit by recommending it be forced to sell Chrome and holding open the option to force a sale of its Android mobile operating system.

The legal case focused on Google's agreements with partners such as Apple and Samsung to distribute its search tools, noted Google president of global affairs Kent Walker.

"The DOJ chose to push a radical interventionist agenda that would harm Americans and America's global technology leadership," Walker wrote in a blog post.

"The DOJ's wildly overbroad proposal goes miles beyond the court's decision."

A Bloomberg analyst has estimated the price of Chrome browser, which has more than three billion users, at US\$15 billion (RM66 billion) or more.

Turley said during his testimony that OpenAI had approached Google about integrating its search technology into ChatGPT artificial intelligence power digital assistant but was rebuffed, according to media reports.

Google is among the tech companies investing heavily to be among the leaders in AI, and is weaving the technology into search and other online offerings.

The DOJ case against Google regarding its dominance in internet search was filed in 2020.

Mehta ruled against Google in August 2024 and the tech giant has appealed. – AFP

Volvo cuts North America market outlook

STOCKHOLM: Truck maker Volvo reported a bigger-than-expected fall in first quarter profit yesterday and lowered its North America truck market outlook, pointing to increased uncertainty around tariffs and their impact on global trade.

The Swedish group said it now sees the North American heavy truck market at 275,000 new vehicles this year.

Its previous forecast, from January, was for 300,000 new heavy trucks.

It repeated a market outlook for 290,000 new heavy trucks in Europe, adding however that current market conditions meant forecasts are subject to significant uncertainty.

Operating profit was 13.3 billion crowns (RM6.1 billion) against a year-earlier 18.2 billion and a mean forecast in an LSEG poll of analysts of 14.8 billion.

"Sales of vehicles were 9% lower than in Q1 2024 and as the quarter went by, there was increased uncertainty surrounding tariffs and their effect on global trade," CEO Martin Lundstedt said in a statement.

Lundstedt said uncertainty around trade tariffs and emissions legislation had caused US customers to adopt a wait and see approach.

"In the fast-changing geopolitical landscape, it is too early to assess the full implications from the imposed tariffs."

He said Volvo was working to adapt production capacity and commercial terms to mitigate the effects from tariffs and their impact on demand. – Reuters

UK posts much bigger budget deficit than expected

LONDON: Britain's government borrowed almost £15 billion more in the financial year that just ended than official budget forecasters had estimated a month ago, according to data that heaped more pressure on the public finances.

Public sector net borrowing for the 2024/25 financial year was £151.9 billion (RM887 billion), the Office for National Statistics said yesterday.

In its forecasts published in March, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) had projected a budget deficit for the financial year ending in March of £137.3 billion.

With Finance Minister Rachel Reeves' budget plans hinging on a tiny buffer against the government's self-imposed fiscal rules – equivalent to less than 1% of annual spending – investors are watching public sector finance data more closely.

British government bonds have become increasingly volatile in recent years, reflecting unease in financial markets over Britain's mix of low growth, high debt interest costs and persistent inflation.

"We will never play fast and loose with the public finances, that's why our fiscal rules are non-negotiable," said Deputy Finance Minister Darren Jones in a statement.

As a percentage of economic output, the budget deficit in 2024/25 was 5.3%, up from 4.8% in 2023/24.

The OBR last month projected a reading of 4.8% for the year just ended.

Alison Ring, director of public sector and taxation at the ICAEW professional body for chartered accountants, said tax hikes enacted on

businesses this month should help the public finances later this year – at least in theory.

"Unfortunately, the public finances remain vulnerable to the economic headwinds caused by those tax rises that, together with a global trade war, are likely to put significant pressure on the chancellor," Ring added, referring to Reeves.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies think tank said the data showed the risk of running a budget with only £10 billion of room to spare before running afoul of the fiscal rules by 2029/30.

In March alone, the government borrowed £16.444 billion, the ONS said, compared with the median forecast of £16 billion in a Reuters poll of economists.

Debt interest costs in March stood at £4.3 billion – a record for the month. – Reuters

Source: Bursa Malaysia, Inter-Pacific Research

Participation

Retail (19.18%)

Institution (40.87%)

Foreign (39.95%)

Net (in RM mil.)

Net (in RM mil.)

Net (in RM mil.)

1111

03-15

255

-23.52

-243.67

+267.1

100

References

1000

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

Need Some Ideas?

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

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('000)
ENRA-WA	0.005	-92.86	48
HSI-PWD9	0.045	-76.32	40,000
GENM-C3F	0.005	-66.67	900
GCB-C20	0.070	-65.00	600
MYEG-C7Q	0.010	-60.00	47,000
CYPARK-CH	0.065	-56.67	1,200
ALIBABA-C39	0.005	-50.00	1,946
FBMKLCI-HA2	0.005	-50.00	2,610
HSI-PWFD	0.570	-50.00	200
MAHSING-C74	0.005	-50.00	6,107
MI-C25	0.005	-50.00	2,841
PHB	0.005	-50.00	15,579
SMTRACK	0.005	-50.00	1,100
TENAGA-C2S	0.005	-50.00	1,199
HSI-PWBK	0.065	-43.48	56
INARI-C3L	0.085	-43.33	14,747
WPRTS-C31	0.085	-43.33	10,000
GENETEC-CJ	0.025	-37.50	5,000
HSI-PW0V	0.085	-37.04	36,961
HSI-PWFH	0.300	-36.17	65,265

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 delivers first LNG cargo to Vietnam

KUALA LUMPUR: Petronas through its subsidiary Petronas LNG Ltd (PLL) concluded the delivery of its first Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) cargo to PetroVietnam Gas (PV Gas) recently.

This delivery signifies the beginning of PLL's cooperation with PV Gas, a unit of PetroVietnam (PVN), paving the way for future collaboration to support Vietnam's energy security needs and the country's energy transition masterplan towards a more sustainable future.

Building on the foundation established by the memorandum of cooperation (MoC) signed on Nov 8, 2023 between Petronas and PVN, this collaboration exemplifies the commencement of a new chapter for both companies. The MoC serves as a framework for fostering long-term collaboration, with LNG supply being one of the key focus areas.

The LNG cargo was delivered from the Petronas LNG Complex in Bintulu, Sarawak to the Thi Vai LNG Terminal in Ba Ria-Vung Tau Province. The cargo was carried by *Seri Ayu*, an LNG vessel chartered from Petronas' subsidiary MISC Bhd.

Petronas vice-president of LNG Marketing & Trading Shamsairi Ibrahim said, "As the global LNG market becomes increasingly dynamic, Petronas remains committed to supporting PVN in meeting Vietnam's electricity demand and serving its industrial customers. This inaugural LNG delivery marks an important milestone in our partnership and lays the groundwork for even greater collaboration in the future, ensuring energy security and contributing to Vietnam's energy transition."

Looking ahead, Petronas and PVN will continue to explore new avenues for LNG business collaboration, in alignment with the principles of the MoC.

Ringgit slips against US dollar on positive signal from Trump

THE ringgit ended marginally lower against the US dollar yesterday as the greenback strengthened on the back of renewed optimism surrounding US-China trade talks, said an economist.

Bank Muamalat Malaysia Bhd chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid said this happened following comments from President Donald Trump signalling a possible reduction in tariffs if China is open to negotiation.

At 6pm, the local currency eased to 4.3880/3925 against the greenback, compared with Tuesday's close of 4.3835/3905.

He added that while the gesture was positively received by financial markets, the actual impact on trade dynamics and currency movements will depend on concrete developments in the negotiations.

"It remains to be seen whether such tactics would yield the desirable outcome. At least, there are signs that the US President is willing to make concessions in the current standoff, which has been well accepted by the financial markets," he told Bernama.

Back home, the ringgit traded firmer against a basket of major currencies.

It rose against the Japanese yen to 3.0925/0959 from 3.1206/1260 at Tuesday's close, firmed against the British pound to 5.8457/8517 from 5.8590/8683, and strengthened versus the euro to 5.0102/0154 from 5.0362/0442.

The local note traded mixed against Asean currencies.

It appreciated against the Singapore dollar to 3.3478/3515 from 3.3523/3579, strengthened against the Thai baht to 13.1251/1457 from 13.1930/2212, but fell against the Philippine peso at 7.75/7.77 from 7.73/7.75 and decreased against the Indonesian rupiah at 260.0/260.5 compared with 259.9/260.5 on Tuesday.

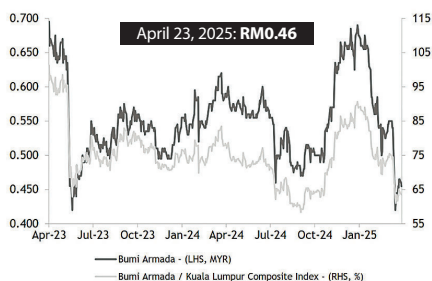
Exchange Rates

FOREIGN CURRENCY	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.4770	4.3410	4.3310
1 Australian Dollar	2.8770	2.7590	2.7430
1 Brunei Dollar	3.4100	3.3090	3.3010
1 Canadian Dollar	3.2320	3.1440	3.1320
1 Euro	5.1020	4.9350	4.9150
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.6850	2.5840	2.5680
1 Singapore Dollar	3.4100	3.3090	3.3010
1 Sterling Pound	5.9590	5.7670	5.7470
1 Swiss Franc	5.4740	5.2360	5.2210
100 UAE Dirham	123.2900	116.8700	116.6700
100 Bangladesh Taka	3.7610	3.5010	3.3010
100 Chinese Renminbi	61.6300	59.0100	N/A
100 Danish Kroner	70.0400	64.4300	64.2300
100 Hongkong Dollar	58.3100	55.3900	55.1900
100 Indian Rupee	5.3400	5.0100	4.8100
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0275	0.0249	0.0199
100 Japanese Yen	3.1510	3.0490	3.0390
100 New Taiwan Dollar	N/A	N/A	N/A
100 Norwegian Krone	44.1700	40.6000	40.4000
100 Pakistan Rupee	1.6200	1.5200	1.3200
100 Philippine Peso	8.0300	7.5600	7.3600
100 Qatar Riyal	124.1400	117.8500	117.6500
100 Saudi Riyal	120.6400	114.5200	114.3200
100 South Africa Rand	24.9600	22.5400	22.3400
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	1.5300	1.4100	1.2100
100 Swedish Krona	48.0800	43.7500	43.5500
100 Thai Baht	13.9400	12.3500	11.9500

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

Bumi Armada Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM0.78



Source: Maybank Investment Bank

BUMI Armada's Q1'25 results is expected to be released in May 2025. We expect a business-as-usual quarter for the group and to deliver a quarterly core net profit of RM200-250 million driven by stable uptime from all of its floating assets, barring any unforeseen cost swings. However, we believe that earnings for FY25 is likely to be frontloaded in Q1'25 as FPSO Kraken has officially entered into its "extension period", where daily charter rates will drop by 70% beginning April 1, according to EnQuest.

With that, the group's quarterly earnings should normalise from Q2'25. As at end-Q4'25, Bumi Armada's net debt position and net gearing declined over 19 consecutive quarters to RM2.3 billion and 0.37x respectively end-Q1'20: (RM8.7b; 2.95x). We expect this positive trend to continue with strong operating cash flow, and this should help the group to: i) reduce its finance costs; ii) make financial room for potential job wins/other ventures in the future. Also, in Q4'24, Bumi Armada announced its first dividend payout in 9 years, testimony of its improving financial strength.

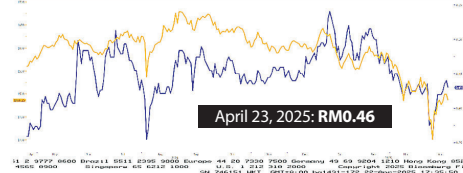
We believe a new L&O FPSO win to Bumi Armada would serve as a re-rating catalyst to replenish its orderbook and earnings visibility. However, key risks include: i) global oil majors holding back capex over the near-term due to the crude oil price volatility evidently since March 2025; and ii) an unforeseen disruption in any of Bumi Armada's assets, affecting its uptime and revenue recognition.

Bumi Armada engages in the operations, engineering, and maintenance services to oil and gas companies.

BUY with RM0.78 TP. – **Maybank Investment Bank, April 23**

Inta Bina Group Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM0.87



Source: Bloomberg

INTA is slated to release its Q1'25 results by the end of May 2025. Based on our full-year earnings forecast, we anticipate quarterly net profit to range between RM9.1 million and RM11.5 million, representing approximately 20% to 25% of our FY25 projection. This also implies a healthy YoY growth of approximately 29% to 62%, supported by robust progress billings, largely driven by INTA's record-high new job wins of RM1.2 billion in FY24 and an unbilled order book currently standing at around RM1.7 billion.

Looking ahead, we believe INTA is well on track to meet our new job replenishment assumption of RM1 billion for the remainder of FY25. Our channel checks indicate that the group's tender book currently stands at approximately RM3 billion. Assuming a success rate of c.25%, this could translate into contract wins of around RM750 million. Coupled with YTD secured jobs totalling RM181 million, this supports our full-year replenishment forecast. Concurrently, INTA is actively exploring strategic expansion into the southern region, with a particular focus on Johor Bahru. We view this as a well-timed and deliberate move to capitalise on the thriving Johor property market, fuelled by rising private investment flows and renewed investor interest following the establishment of the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ).

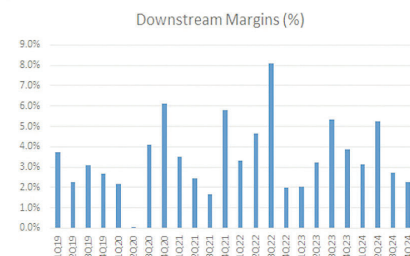
To recap, the group acquired a 2.7-acre parcel in Bukit Jelutong in Dec 24 and, more recently, entered into a Sale and Purchase Agreement with Zikay Properties Sdn Bhd to acquire 100% equity interest in Aliran Restu Sdn Bhd (ARSB) for RM5 million. These acquisitions are part of INTA's broader strategy to expand into property development. We understand that the management will focus on affordable housing offerings while leveraging internal construction capabilities to strengthen its profitability margins. Notably, the development plan for the Bukit Jelutong project has been submitted to the relevant authorities, with approvals expected by end-CY25.

BUY with RM0.87 TP. – **TA Research, April 23**

Plantation

Overweight

SDG's quarterly downstream margins



Source: Company data, RHB

WE recently visited Johor Plantations Group's (JPG) oil palm estates and SD Guthrie's (SDG) downstream facilities in Johor. These two players are leaders in plantation sustainability, and have solid certificates (both are 100% RSPO- and MSPO-certified). Overall, we expect both companies to record robust earnings growth YoY this year – on higher ASPs, new product lines, and rising efficiency.

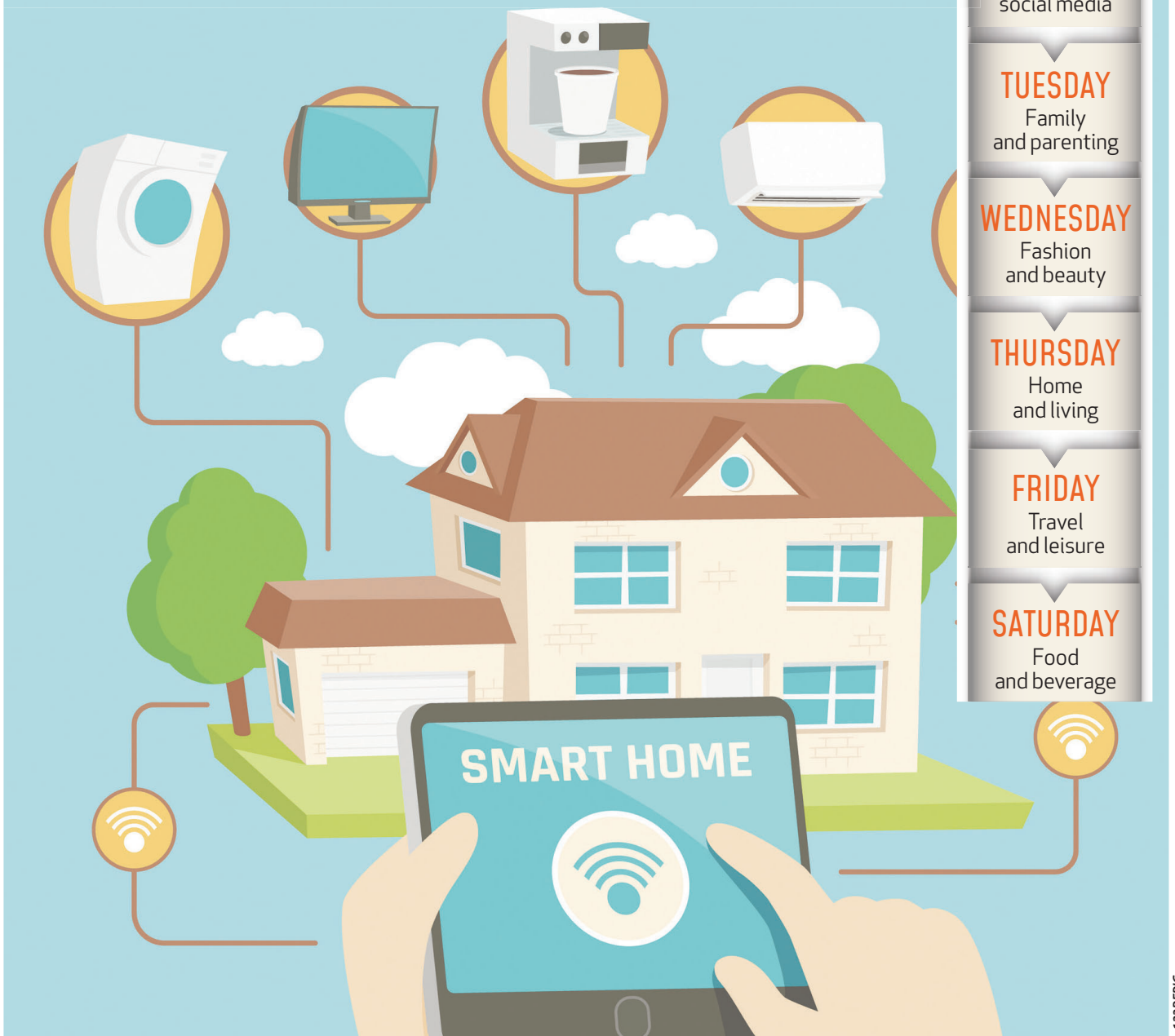
We visited JPG's Basir Ismail and Kuala Kabong estates in Johor. Despite the two estates being located near each other, yields vary due to soil type – Basir Ismail land contains mineral soil, while the oil palms in Kuala Kabong are planted on peat soil, which has a soft and spongy texture. This prevents oil palms from receiving enough nutrition, as the trees will start to bend and strain due to their weight as they age. We also visited JPG's Sedenak mill, which has a processing capacity of 90 tonnes per hour. Within the mill complex, there is also a biomethane plant to capture palm oil mill effluent (POME) and a palm fibre oil extraction (PFOE) plant to produce red palm oil.

SDG's Pasir Gudang refinery is more of a specialty fats plant. Our visit to SDG's downstream refinery in Pasir Gudang was interesting, as this plant is more of a specialty fats plant than a bulk refinery, with differentiated products making up >50% of its sales volume of 120k tonnes a year. The specialty fats products it produces include confectionary fats (cocoa butter substitutes, cocoa butter equivalents, chocolate spread etc) and bakery fats (cake and cream margarine, bakery shortening, margarine, etc), amongst others. – **RHB Research, April 23**



Convenient *lifestyle*

Latest tech making homes smart - **P22**



WEEKLY FOCUS

MONDAY

Technology and social media

TUESDAY

Family and parenting

WEDNESDAY

Fashion and beauty

THURSDAY

Home and living

FRIDAY

Travel and leisure

SATURDAY

Food and beverage

INSIDE

p23

Essential tips during open house

p24

Sakamoto blends realism with action

p25

Local film makes waves at Cannes

p26

Homegrown Mechamoto enters China



Smart living, smarter tech

➤ AI-driven devices revolutionising how Malaysians interact with homes

BY YASMIN ZULRAEZ

SMART homes are no longer a futuristic concept, they are becoming an everyday reality. At the core of this transformation lies artificial intelligence (AI), which is now embedded in everything, from security systems and TVs to household appliances and routers. With global brands such as Midea, Trio, Samsung and Xiaomi introducing AI-integrated products to Malaysian homes, the shift towards more intuitive and personalised living experiences has never been more tangible.

Midea unveils AI-powered air cons
Air conditioner manufacturer Midea has launched four new air conditioner series in Malaysia, equipped with AI-powered smart energy-saving systems, advanced graphene anti-corrosion technology and intelligent home integration.

The Avigator, Numen, Celest and Glory Pro series are considered new benchmarks for air conditioners that will empower Malaysian households with efficiency, durability and eco-conscious comfort.

Featuring the industry's first Ecomaster AI algorithm, the new four new models, with a single tap, can achieve up to 49% extra energy savings compared with standard models. Effectively, it eliminates the traditional trade-off between Eco mode's weak cooling

and energy efficiency.

Midea's integrated Energy Management System empowers users to take control of their consumption. With real-time power monitoring, monthly electricity reports and predictive alerts when nearing preset usage thresholds, users can track and optimise cooling usage via the Midea app.

To provide durability, particularly for Malaysia's tropical climate, Midea's inverter air conditioners are equipped with PrimeGuard 6 Anti-Corrosion Technology. It offers all-around protection for indoor and outdoor units, where critical components such as heat exchangers, copper tubing and PCBs are shielded from damage caused by heat, humidity and corrosion.

Fittingly, Midea's Cool Flash mode in the models is a good option for Malaysian weather, enabling the air conditioners to cool spaces by 6°C in just 10 minutes. Designed for whole-room coverage and extreme temperatures, this mode is ideal for Malaysia's hot and humid climate.

The Avigator, Numen, Celest and Glory Pro are now available across Malaysia via Shopee, Lazada and authorised Midea Proshops nationwide, with the models ranging from 1.0HP to 2.5HP that cater to various room sizes and cooling needs. All units are backed by a warranty programme.

AI security at doorstep: Trio and 360 Botslab lead

A smart home's most vital components are security and Trio Sales & Services Sdn Bhd is bringing the best of AI-driven surveillance to Malaysia through its partnership with 360 Botslab. Under the 360 Smart Life Group, this launch introduces a line-up of indoor and outdoor cameras designed to elevate peace of mind.

At the heart of the collection is the C221 indoor camera, priced at RM329, which has an impressive 5MP resolution, dual-band WiFi and eight AI-powered functions, including face recognition, pet detection, cry detection and area intrusion alerts. It is a family-first device that adapts to dynamic household needs.

For outdoor security, the W312 camera is a standout. Retailing at RM339, it features 360-degree rotation, 4MP resolution, full-colour night vision, IP66 water resistance and noise reduction, ensuring clarity and coverage in any condition. For wider properties, the W302 outdoor camera (RM449) offers dual wide-angle lenses for expansive monitoring. This launch marks a significant leap forward in making advanced AI security accessible and adaptable for Malaysian homes.

Samsung's AI vision: From walls to washers

AI's role in home living goes far beyond security, as seen in Samsung's new Generative Wallpaper for their 2024 Neo QLED and QLED TVs. This feature, available via Ambient Mode, uses AI to generate custom 4K visuals that complement a user's home decor and mood.

Whether it is a festive theme such as "Happy Holiday" or a sleek ambient scene, the AI generates visuals that blend smoothly into the home environment. Already available in South Korea, North America and Europe, a global rollout, including Malaysia, is expected this year.

On the appliance front, the Samsung Bespoke AI Laundry Combo is redefining home chores. Designed over three years and built with customer insights, the washer-dryer combo offers voice control via Bixby, a seven-inch touchscreen and intelligent AI Energy Mode that reduces energy consumption by up to 60% on washing and 30% on drying. With Knox security protection and UL Solutions' "Diamond" level Internet of Things (IoT) Security Rating, it sets the benchmark for safe, energy-efficient AI appliances.

Its minimalist "Monobody" design, created from a single sheet of metal, also earned accolades at the iF Design Awards 2024, showcasing how Samsung blends functionality with elegance.

Xiaomi expands AIoT ecosystem in Malaysia

Tech powerhouse Xiaomi is also expanding its AIoT (AI + IoT) offerings in Malaysia, with a suite of new products that combine portability, performance and intelligence.

Starting with mobility, the Xiaomi 212W HyperCharge Power Bank 24500 (RM469) is a powerhouse with 24,500mAh capacity and triple-port fast charging. For those needing something lighter, the 10,000mAh 22.5W Lite (RM79) offers portability without compromising on speed.

Both power banks include AI-driven safety features such as temperature control and short-circuit protection.

For those seeking entertainment and productivity on the move, the Xiaomi Smart Audio Glasses (RM469) offer open-ear audio with noise cancellation and a 10-hour battery life. Designed with comfort in mind, they also include dual sound leakage protection for privacy and interchangeable frames for style flexibility. Replacement kits are available at RM169.

Connectivity is also smarter with Xiaomi's new Router BE3600 (RM249), a Wi-Fi 7 entry-level model offering speeds of up to 3570Mbps. With a Qualcomm quad-core processor and support for up to 128 devices, it is ideal for high-traffic households. The BE3600 Pro Mesh System offers whole-home coverage at RM309, supporting Mesh networking, adaptive ports and family-friendly internet protection tools.

Bringing it all together

What all these innovations reveal is a clear shift: AI is no longer a niche bonus, but the backbone of smart home design. Whether it is recognising a baby's cry, tailoring your TV visuals or saving energy while doing laundry, AI is silently powering a new standard of convenience, safety and customisation.

In Malaysia, brands such as Trio, Samsung and Xiaomi are making these once-high-tech luxuries not only accessible, but essential. As AI technology matures and adapts to local lifestyles, the homes of tomorrow are already here: Intelligent, secure, stylish and most importantly, human-centred.



Transform your Samsung TV into a personalised 4K art display with AI-powered visuals that blend in with your living space.



Botslab's C221 indoor camera (left) and W302 outdoor camera.



Air conditioner from the Avigator series by Midea.



Xiaomi's Router BE3600 (left) and Mesh System BE3600 Pro.

Open house essentials

► Tips to hosting cherished festive get-togethers

RAYA season in Malaysia is a time of joy, togetherness and plenty of food! It is a time when hosting open houses is a common tradition, bringing family and friends together in celebration. However, for many, the experience can be overwhelming – from preparing meals to managing guests and cleaning up afterwards.

Thankfully, a little planning and the right home essentials can make things much easier. Here is how you can easily and affordably tackle common struggles.

Budget-friendly presentation

The highlight of every open house is food – the classic pineapple tarts, *ketupat* served with rich *rendang* and refreshing *sirap bandung*. For a memorable small gathering, wow your guests by elevating your presentation without breaking the bank. Serve your yummy desserts in glasses you already have at home. Add visual flair to drinks with rosemary sprigs and dispense them from a decorative jar with a tap or serving bowl. Even in tight spaces, shelf inserts or serving trays allow you to beautifully line up your spread, effectively doubling your display area.

Storage

Whether you are catering or serving home-cooked meals, food storage is a must-have. Home chefs should prep and store ingredients efficiently so they are not rushing on the day of the event and leftovers can be kept fresh and ready for reheating.

Another common issue is a lack of storage space for serving dishes and tableware. A rolling cart is useful to transport dishes, drinks and cutlery from the kitchen to the dining area, from one guest to another. This minimises repeat trips and keeps everything within reach.

Festive practicality

Hot beverages such as *teh O* and *teh tarik* are staples at any Raya gathering, but constantly reheating drinks can be a hassle. A vacuum flask keeps coffee, tea or other warm drinks at the ideal temperature for a long time, eliminating the need to reheat or re-boil water, saving electricity. Lanterns or candles create a warm and welcoming ambience and best of all, can be repurposed for every celebration.

Make every seat count

With guests coming and going throughout the day, seating can become a concern. But fret not – there are plenty of tricks to create extra room. Foldable chairs and floor cushions are space-saving and can be easily stored when not in use. Knowing guests might prefer to relax on the floor, consider preparing small side tables at various corners of the room for guests to set down their plates and drinks. Otherwise, tray tables and stools are excellent makeshift surfaces for most purposes.



Lanterns add a festive vibe.



Prep and store ingredients in food containers.



A living room helper that can be used for serving food and drinks on-the-go.

Dealing with mess

Want to avoid a mountain of dishes and trash post-party? One way to make cleanup easier is by having a waste sorting system in place. Encourage guests to dispose of recyclables and food waste in separate bins, making your job easier. Pro tip: Clearly marked bins simplify the process and turn cleanup into a team effort.



Plan ahead for the table space you need for all the food and drinks you intend to serve.

Curtains, extra linens and cushion covers also need to be put away after the celebrations. Instead of stuffing them into random corners of your home, place them in storage cases to keep everything neatly packed until the next open house rolls around.

This article is contributed by Ikea.

Acer water heater focuses on safety, efficiency

ACER Malaysia's new Acerpure Aqua WH1 water heater series – designed to elevate daily routines with a focus on safety, convenience and energy efficiency – has been expanded with the arrival of the Acerpure Aqua WH1, WH1Pro and WH1Lite models.

The Acerpure Aqua WH1 series comes equipped with multiple layers of protection to safeguard users such as lightning surge protection and a highly sensitive residual current device (RCD). With a 15mA sensitivity, the RCD continuously monitors electrical current and instantly cuts off power in the event of any imbalance, preventing electric shocks.

Designed for optimal performance and ease of use, the Acerpure Aqua WH1 series' energy-saving silent DC pump significantly reduces energy consumption by up to 60% compared to conventional AC pumps. It also maintains an exceptionally low noise level of less than 45dB. Integrated low water pressure pump boosters ensure dependable operation even with minimal

water flow to provide uninterrupted showers.

The series features a powerful 4.5kW heating element, providing quick heating and ensuring ideal water temperatures even during cold or rainy days. The electronic variable power temperature control allows for straightforward adjustments to the water temperature to the desired warmth.

An upgraded anti-scalding thermal safety design regulates water temperatures within safe limits. It automatically cuts off heating at 55°C and has a secondary safety cut-out at 90°C to prevent abnormal overheating. Furthermore, a built-in auto water flow sensor device switch ensures the heating element only activates when there is sufficient water pressure, preventing overheating caused by blockage.

The Acerpure Aqua WH1 series is priced from RM359. Customers can pre-order one from RM199 at the Acer eStore and the Acerpure official store on Shopee until next Wednesday.



The water heater comes equipped with multiple layers of protection to safeguard users such as lightning surge protection and a highly sensitive RCD.

Nate Bargatze to host Emmys

COMEDIAN Nate Bargatze, one of the US's most successful stand-ups, will host this year's Emmy Awards, organisers announced.

The funnyman is being handed the reins of television's most prestigious prize show for its 77th edition, which takes place in Los Angeles in September and will be broadcast on US network CBS.

"It is a huge honour to be asked to host such an iconic awards show and I am beyond excited to work with CBS to create a night that can be enjoyed by families around the world," Bargatze said in a statement.

Last year's show was hosted by the well-received father-and-son pairing of Eugene and Dan Levy, for an evening that saw a boost in viewing figures compared with previous editions.

The Television Academy, which hands out the prizes, will be hoping that Bargatze's growing popularity and everyman persona will add to the show's appeal.

"Nate is one of the hottest comics in the business with a remarkable and hilarious brand of comedy that deeply resonates with multi-generational audiences around the globe," Television Academy chair Cris Abrego said.

"We are thrilled to be able to leverage his one-of-a-kind perspective to entertain TV fans watching this year's Emmy telecast."

Bargatze is on something of a career roll, playing to sell-out audiences in the US and seeing success around the world through his Netflix specials.

His six stand-up specials have included *The Greatest Average American*, which earned him a Grammy nomination for best comedy album. — AFP



Stand-up comic Bargatze has been playing to sell-out audiences in the US. — AFP/PPC

ALBUM REVIEW

Ultimate chill pill

■ BY **RBALA**

THE latest album from indie-pop queen Sharon Van Etten has her teaming up with The Attachment Theory, which is quite a surprise given her previous six solo efforts relied on a rotating cast of friends and sessionists as backing musicians.

An invitation to jam, a peculiarity which Van Etten admits to being alien to, resulted in two songs from an initial session. Pleased at the fruitful outcome, the 44-year-old American chanteuse and the Attachment Theory continued with this blueprint and the result is one of the year's most enchanting alternative pop releases.

At the very forefront is Van Etten's haunting and ethereal vocals, inviting all and sundry to wrap themselves in a blanket of melancholy. Recalling the sounds of Alison Goldfrapp and Cat Power, this album is almost a throwback to 90s chillout albums — designed for the comedown after a hard night raving to big beats at some abandoned warehouse.



Haunting and ethereal, Van Etten invites listeners to wrap themselves in a blanket of sweet melancholy. — PICS FROM FACEBOOK @SHARONVANETTEN

This is music to zone out to. The sort of album you stick on after a hard day's toil, letting its cool vibes wash over you like the sound of gentle rainfall outside your window. But this does not mean the album is mere background music. Instead, it invites listeners to just sit back and soak in the atmospheric vibes.

Opening two tracks *Live Forever* and *Afterlife* deal with mortality, which sets the mood

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SCAN ME

TV SHOW REVIEW

Family man assassin

➤ *Sakamoto Days* blends brutal action with slice-of-life charm, comedy

■ BY **MARK MATHEN VICTOR**

NETFLIX continues to build on its impressive licensed anime library with *Sakamoto Days*, an action comedy revolving around a retired legendary assassin turned small convenience store owner and family man.

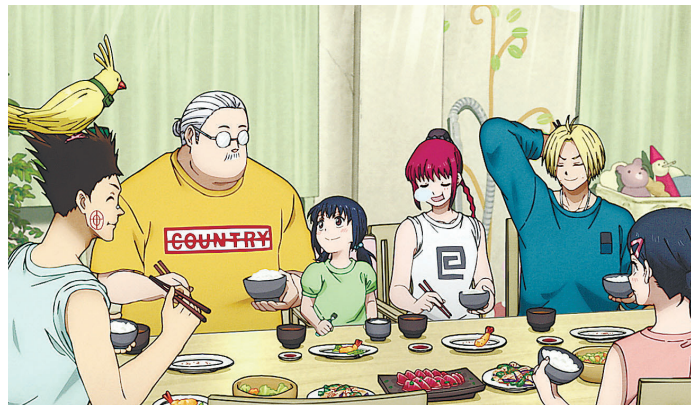
Once a feared figure in the Japanese underworld, Taro Sakamoto (Tomokazu Sugita) in the present operates a family-owned convenience store in a quiet part of Tokyo. After getting married and becoming a father, Sakamoto is unrecognisable from his days as a bachelor assassin, having gained an estimated 70kg in excess weight.

Sakamoto Days kicks off when Shin Asakura (Nobunaga Shimazaki), a clairvoyant hitman reluctantly locates him, with the order to either successfully convince Sakamoto to return to the underworld or if failing to do so, to snuff out the portly ex-assassin's life.

Based on Yuto Suzuki's manga series, *Sakamoto Days* bears a lot of similarities with other fictional works, especially recent ones such as the films *Nobody* and *John Wick*. What sets the animation apart is the Japanese eccentricities common in manga and anime, along with the story's heavy emphasis on the family unit.

There is also the comedy that comes from juxtaposing a stoic, mostly quiet character such as Sakamoto with the other more colourful and expressive characters, such as Asakura. As his clairvoyance is always "turned on," he is constantly reading the minds of others and it gives a window for the series to inject humour by having Sakamoto think of hyper-violent things to shut Asakura up.

The series' action and art style are also commendable, with the latter being more stylistic than adhering to more typical Japanese animation. For a better idea of what this means, think of how different Studio



Sakamoto's family grows beyond just his wife and daughter by the end of the season.



The series is rife with visual humour involving the martial feats of an overweight former hitman. — PICS FROM NETFLIX

Ghibli films look compared to say, *Dragon Ball*.

Unfortunately, the show has a minor flaw: as the first season keeps introducing new characters with each episode, Sakamoto's relationship with his wife Aoi and their daughter Hana gets slightly sidelined in terms of screentime.

The few scenes they share together, such as the flashback of Aoi giving Sakamoto an

ultimatum to stop killing by threatening to jump off a building to show him the value of life, are great, but few and far in between.

Given the first season's finale involves the dangerous antagonist Slur helping four serial killers escape to hunt down Sakamoto, Aoi and Hana may get pushed out of the frame further in exchange for more action scenes in the second season.

Sakamoto Days is streaming on Netflix.

straight away as Van Etten's melancholia-drenched vocal chords set the tone of this ultra-chilled long player.

The Attachment Theory is unobtrusive with its playing and allow Van Etten's singing to take centre stage. However, that does not mean it is bland or boring. It is anything but as the trio fashion interesting soundscapes peppered with lots of electronic elements to keep proceedings intriguing. Think Beck at his most eclectic but not as busy and you will sort of get the picture.

Even when things are taken up a notch and the band hit an uptempo vibe, Van Etten's vocals still remain centre stage, taking listeners on an aural journey that is akin to albums such as Spiritualized's *Ladies and Gentlemen, We are Floating in Space*. Yes, it is that good and certainly deserves comparisons with chill-out classics such as that.

Channeling the spirit of prime-era Talking Heads, the Attachment Theory take the art-funk template to new albeit restrained heights on tracks such as *Southern Life* and *Somethin' Ain't Right*, with a bass line that is guaranteed to get toes tapping.



Released via the Jagjaguwar label, the album is available on major streaming platforms.

There are no vocal histrionics on the entire album as Van Etten's singing barely rises above a whisper. It is all very calm and composed — all very grown up in fact. But at no point does this record meander into mediocrity or middle-of-the-road banality. It just delivers top notch chill-out anthems in an almost lazy manner but therein lies its charms. Effortless brilliance is something to be marvelled and celebrated.

Make absolutely no mistake, this album is one of the best to drop in 2025 so far — every home should own it. At the very least, it should be on the playlists of those who simply enjoy great music. Essential stuff.

Malaysian short film makes Cannes history

► Tamil-language tale *Bleat!* among those selected for Critics' Week

ANANTH Subramaniam's *Bleat!*, a Malaysian Tamil-language film, will compete at the 64th edition of Critics' Week (*La Semaine de la Critique*), running from May 14 to 22, alongside the 78th Cannes Film Festival.

Founded in 1962 by the French Syndicate of Cinema Critics, Critics' Week is the Cannes Film Festival's most selective sidebar programme, renowned for spotlighting breakthrough filmmakers such as Wong Kar Wai, Alejandro González Inárritu and Julia Ducournau.

The selection marks a milestone for Malaysian cinema as *Bleat!* becomes the first Malaysian short film selected for Cannes across all sections. Prior to this, only four Malaysian feature films have been selected: *Tiger Stripes* (2023), *The Tiger Factory* (2010), *Karaoke* (2009) and *Kaki Bakar* (1995).

Bleat! is an international co-production led by Choo Mun Bel of Sixtyfour Pictures (Malaysia), Bradley Liew of Epicmedia Productions (the Philippines) and Dominique Welinski (France), with international sales managed by Belgium-based Hors Du Bocal.

Authentic Malaysian-Tamil story

Set in a suburban Malaysian-Tamil community, *Bleat!* is about an elderly Malaysian Tamil couple who discovers their male goat, set for ceremonial slaughter, is pregnant. Torn between faith and the expectations of their



Writer-director Ananth says the film is a love letter to the strength and resilience of his people.

community, they struggle to decide whether to slaughter it or face the wrath of the gods. The film stars Tharmasegaran MS Maniam, Pannerselvam Evarani and Big Boy the goat.

Film writer and director Ananth said: "I have always had an inescapable feeling about my Malaysian Tamil culture. Growing up, especially during those awkward puberty years, I wrestled with questions about who I was and where I fit in. The expectations felt heavy, sometimes impossible and my community always seemed to be in a constant state of change. So, I turned myself into a goat and threw myself into the middle of all that inevitability – and somehow, that became a film about what makes being Malaysian Tamil so special."

Ananth said his filmmaking-style has always been about questioning the norm.

"My filmmaking has always been about peeling back the layers of tradition, questioning why things are the way they are, and finding humour and heartache in the process. Now that *Bleat!* is in *Semaine de la Critique*, I hope it resonates with other minority kids who have felt that same inner conflict, offering a little comfort in knowing they are not alone. More than anything, this film is a love letter to the strength and resilience of my people."

International collaboration with regional pride

"*Bleat!* is the fifth short film Ananth and I have made together. When he first shared the script with me, I was immediately drawn to its absurdity, warmth and cultural specificity. The mix of music, humour and a suburban Tamil backdrop created a cinematic language that felt unmistakably Malaysian. We worked meticulously through each phase of development and I am incredibly proud of the emotional depth and playful spirit this film brings to the screen," said Choo.

"This is Southeast Asian storytelling at its most specific and universal. *Bleat!* reflects our region's diversity, wit and layered humanity," Liew added.

From France, Welinski commented: "The voice Ananth brings is refreshingly distinct and we are proud to see this story take its place at Cannes, where bold new cinema belongs."

Bleat! follows Malaysia's growing international film presence. In 2023, director Amanda Nell Eu's *Tiger Stripes* won the Critics' Week Grand Prize for a feature film. *Bleat!* continues this momentum – this time, making history in the short film category.

Jackson Wang drops GBAD remix

JACKSON WANG has joined hands with Japanese trio group Number_i for a remix of the artiste's latest drop *GBAD (Number_i Remix)*, which is a fresher take on city-pop sounds – think synths and pounding bass.

The track features a new verse from Wang, in which he explores the idea of his success being purposeless and perhaps, he may have missed something along the road. This opens a new narrative for the "I do not care" vibe that the song carries throughout and another rabbit hole for the fans to plunge themselves into as they break down *GBAD (Number_i Remix)*.

Number_i adds another layer to a rather laid back track as the synths give it a J-pop feel. Like strolling down Tokyo's streets on a rainy night. Produced by Dem Jointz, Wang and Justin Tecson, the track stands apart from the original with prominent synths.

The collaboration came about after the 2024 Coachella Music Festival, following Wang and Number_i's joint performance of *GOAT*. This partnership signals the beginning of a powerful new cross-cultural partnership.

The artistes, who share similar artistic visions, forged a bond that led to this collaboration, blending their distinct styles into a vibrant new sound for the fans.

GBAD was released last month as a prelude to Wang's upcoming album *Magic Man 2*, which is set for release this year. After its release, *GBAD* was well received by fans and casual listeners alike as the music video surpassed 31 million views on YouTube.

The song dropped after Wang released his single *High Alone* earlier this year. The track



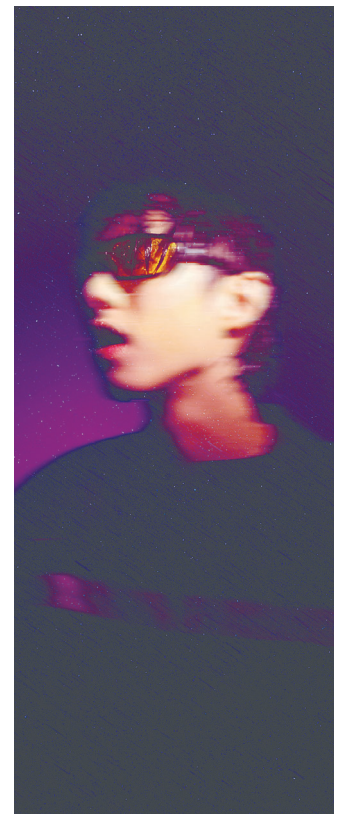
GBAD (Number_i Remix) adds prominent synths to the bass heavy song.

quickly rose to number one on Apple Music in 22 countries and regions, solidifying Wang's position as an international and versatile artiste.

After a successful couple of years, fans have

been excited to delve deeper into the Magic Man lore as Wang explores different facets of this persona.

GBAD (Number_i Remix) can be streamed on all music platforms.



Ruin My Life is available for streaming.

EaJ releases new single

KOREAN-AMERICAN artiste EaJ has dropped his new single *Ruin My Life*, following his last EP *When The Rain Stopped Following Me* in 2024.

After vowing audience who rocked up to Imagine Dragons's tour, EaJ is presenting a bolder and wiser side for his fans to decode as he dives in headfirst into the chaos of love and heartbreak.

Ruin My Life is a daring reintroduction to EaJ's ever-evolving sound as an artiste. Layered with glitchy, futuristic melody, *Ruin My Life* is a sonic paradox that will not leave your comfort playlist.

The layered track reveals an emotional turbulence shielded underneath notes of euphoria as it explores the tension between desire and self-preservation. *Ruin My Life* strikes a chord with fans that knows all to well about the reckless thrill of holding onto someone who will be the very reason of your ruin.

A love story painted in neon lights and warning signs, *Ruin My Life* is an anthem for the lovers, hopeless romantics and adrenaline chasers. For the artiste himself, *Ruin My Life* is not just another add to his discography but a statement of taking leaps and reinventing oneself.

2025 may just be the 32-year-old most ambitious year, as he takes the rein to write the perfect musical for his journey. A former member of Day6, EaJ has established himself as a solo artiste in Los Angeles, US.

Typically known for his indie, alternative and R&B music such as *Car Crash* and *Typical Story*, EaJ continues to renew his sound while building a dedicated fanbase across Asia, as his songs have clenched a spot in the Spotify Viral 50 charts in the Philippines and Taiwan.

The artiste has also headlined multiple festivals across Asia, including 88rising's Head in the Clouds in Jakarta and Manila. His growing fanbase in Asia also allowed him to embark on an Asian tour last year, with sold-out stops in Manila, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Bangkok.

Ruin My Life can be streamed on all music platforms.



Comedian Jo Koy is known for his uniquely relatable comedy inspired by his colourful family.

Jo Koy returning to tickle M'sia

GLOBAL COMEDY icon Jo Koy returns to Kuala Lumpur on June 18 at Mega Star Arena with his critically acclaimed tour *Just Being Koy*, promising fans a night of non-stop laughter, cultural comedy gold and unfiltered realness.

Presented by LOL Asia and Bohm Presents, this marks Jo Koy's much-awaited comeback to Malaysian shores.

Recognised as a master of stand-up, Jo Koy has come a long way from his humble beginnings performing in a Las Vegas coffee house to selling out arenas across the globe. His uniquely relatable comedy inspired by his colourful family has won over audiences worldwide, turning everyday moments into comedic gold.

The comedian has been shattering records at some of the world's most prestigious venues. In 2022, he sold out the Climate Pledge Arena in Seattle (over 14,000 tickets) and closed his tour with a record-breaking show at Tacoma Dome (over 19,000 tickets). He remains the only comedian to sell out six shows at The Forum in Los Angeles and two shows at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas. Back in 2017, he made history by selling 23,000 tickets across 11 sold-out shows at the Neal S. Blaisdell Concert Hall in Honolulu, earning him his own Jo Koy Day (Nov 24) proclaimed by the city's mayor.

Beyond the stage, Jo Koy has also appeared on the silver screen. He starred in the 2022 Universal Pictures film *Easter Sunday*, a comedy inspired by his life and stand-up material. In 2023, he appeared in Disney's *Haunted Mansion* and lent his voice to Netflix's animated films *Monkey King* and *Leo*.

Jo Koy's comedic talent has also been on display on Netflix. In 2023, he inked a two-special deal with the streaming giant, kicking off with *Jo Koy: Live From Brooklyn*, filmed at The Kings Theatre. His unfiltered takes on energy vampires, mumble rap and the art of emoji flirting have solidified his place as one of comedy's biggest names. With four highly rated Netflix specials – including *Live From The Los Angeles Forum*, *Comin' In Hot*, and *Live From Seattle* – Jo Koy has captivated millions. His first variety special *Jo Koy: In His Elements* showcased Filipino-American talent in an electrifying Manila-set performance.

Barbarik to rock Zepp KL this June

LOCAL rock band Barbarik is gearing up for its debut concert to celebrate the release of its first album *Peluru Cokelat*, which was launched on Nov 9 last year.

The band's guitarist JoBranko said the concert, titled *Barbarik Pentas Peluru Cokelat*, is scheduled to take place at 8.30pm on June 28 at Zepp Kuala Lumpur, featuring live performances of songs from the album for the first time.

"Our goal in producing *Peluru Cokelat* was to show that we are serious as a band – not just a project group or riding on our past legacy.

"With new material, we are able to move forward and strategise more effectively to remain on the radar of the local mainstream music scene. If fans listen to *Peluru Cokelat*, they will understand that this is Barbarik's true identity," he said in a statement on Tuesday.

The two-hour concert will feature around 20 songs – old and new – and promises a high-energy experience for the audience. – Bernama

LOCAL animation company Monsta's popular animated series *Mechamato* is making its debut in China, with streaming set to begin on Youku soon.

The series' entry into the world's largest entertainment market is a major breakthrough not just for Monsta, but for the Malaysian animation industry as a whole.

With *Mechamato*'s unique blend of high-energy action, inventive robotics and universally appealing characters, the series is primed to capture the hearts of audiences in China and become the next big hit.

"*Mechamato* will soon be airing in China through a new partnership with Youku. This partnership extends far beyond broadcasting, paving the way for thrilling ventures into licensing and merchandising that will elevate our brand to new heights. We look forward to working more closely with partners in China and building strong, long-term relationships in the region," said Monsta CEO Nizam Abd Razak.

Efforts by the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation, which has been actively driving the global growth of Malaysia's



Mechamato is set to be streamed on Youku.

➤ Malaysian animated series hits new milestone



Mechamato features clever storytelling, heartwarming friendships and a cool robot sidekick.

animation industry, were central to *Mechamato*'s success.

This marks a bold milestone for the series following its success penetrating more than 75 countries and airing across 10 different broadcasters in Japan alone.

Previously, the *Mechamato* movie earned the distinction of being the highest-grossing animated film ever produced in Southeast Asia.

In 2023, it also became the first non-Japanese anime to win the prestigious Tokyo Anime Award – solidifying its place as a trailblazer in global animation.

CELEBRATING a decade since its debut, *Jagat*, the acclaimed Malaysian Tamil cult film directed by Sun-J Perumal, is set for a theatrical re-release on May 23.

Two new Tamil films directed by Sun-J, *Macai* and *Neer Mel Neruppu*, are also set to be released this year.

Originally released in 2015, *Jagat* made waves for its portrayal of marginalised Malaysian Indian communities.

"Now, a decade later, the film returns to the big screen. The re-release will be followed by two new additions to Sun-J's creative universe," film distribution company PoketPlay Films said in a statement.

While each film stands independently in terms of genre and narrative, they are spiritually connected through

Cult film *Jagat* set for re-release in cinemas



In *Jagat*, protagonist Appoy is seen stepping into a life of crime. – PIC FROM FACEBOOK @JAGATTHEMOVIE

the character named Appoy – the protagonist in *Jagat* – and the pivotal decision he makes at the climax of the original film.

In *Jagat*, Appoy is seen stepping into a life of crime. The two new films imagine

alternate realities stemming from that key moment.

Neer Mel Neruppu explores a scenario in which Appoy becomes a studious youth who later grows into a filmmaker, reflecting on identity, love and self-expression. In contrast,

Macai envisions Appoy's deeper descent into the criminal underworld, involving drugs and violence.

Macai is set to premiere on July 24, while *Neer Mel Neruppu* will be released on Sept 18. – Bernama



SCAN ME

Classified

THURSDAY
APR 24, 2025
T: 03-7784 6688
F: 03-7785 2625
E: sunconnects@thesundaily.com

322 Notices

DALAM MAHKAMAH SESEYEN DI BUTTERWORTH, DALAM NEGERI PULAU PINANG. GUAMAN SIVIL NO. PB-AS2NCC-58-03/2025

ANTARA

PUBLIC BANK BERHAD
(NO. SIVARAKAT 196501006672 (8463-1))

... PLAINTIFF

DAN

OUI KEAN SHYONG
(No. K. P. 740708-07-5395)

... DEFENDAN

OUI KEAN SHYONG
(No. K. P. 740708-07-5395)
No. 47, Lorong Jernih 6
Taman Jernih
14000 Bukit Mertajam
Pulau Pinang

dan/atau

OUI KEAN SHYONG
(No. K. P. 740708-07-5395)
No. 1-49, Megamall Pinang
2828, Jalan Baru, 13600 Seberang Perai Tengah
Pulau Pinang

NOTIS IKLAN

Kepada:-

Ambil Perhatian bahawa satu Writ bermeterai bertarikh 03-03-2025 telah dikeluarkan ke atas kamu dalam Mahkamah Seseyen di Mahkamah Seseyen di Butterworth, Pulau Pinang dalam Guaman Sivil No. PB-AS2NCC-58-03/2025 oleh Public Bank Berhad yang mempunyai alamat di No. 87, Lebuhraya, 10200 Pulau Pinang dan dipertingkatkan bahawa Writ bermeterai tersebut bersama dengan Pernyataan Tuntutan bertarikh 03-03-2025 disampaikan kepada kamu secara penyampaian ganti dengan menyampaikan kertas-kertas kausa bersama dengan Perintah untuk Penyampaian Ganti bermeterai di Papan Notis Mahkamah Seseyen di Butterworth, Pulau Pinang dan pada satu bahagian yang jelas kelihatan di alamat-alamat terakhir yang diketahui iaitu pada No. 47, Lorong Jernih 6, Taman Jernih, 14000 Bukit Mertajam, Pulau Pinang, dan/atau No. 1-49, Megamall Pinang, 2828, Jalan Baru, 13600 Seberang Perai Tengah, Pulau Pinang dan memasukkan satu iklan dalam suatu surat khabar tempatan Bahasa Inggeris iaitu "The Sun" untuk satu (1) terbitan dan bahawa penyampaian dan pengiklanan itu hendaklah didaftarkan sebagai penyampaian yang sempurna dan cukup bagi Writ tersebut dalam tempoh masa tujuh (7) hari dari tarikh arkh penempatan dengan kos penyampaian ganti menjadi kos dalam kausa.

Jika kamu berhasrat untuk membeli terbitan tersebut kamu mestilah hadir sama ada secara sendiri atau melalui peguamanda kamu di hadapan Mahkamah Seseyen di Butterworth, Pulau Pinang pada 16-05-2025 jam pukul 9.00 pagi. Jika kamu ingkar hadir sedemikian, satu penghakiman boleh dibuat terhadap kamu oleh Mahkamah.

Bertarikh 24 April 2025.

Peguamcara Plaintiff

Notis ini dikeluarkan oleh Tuan Wong & Loh, Peguamcara Plaintiff yang beralamat di 44, Jalan Cantonment, 10350 Georgetown, Pulau Pinang.

322 Notices

Pawnbrokers' forfeited pledges under Section 23 of the Pawnbrokers' Act 1972
Pawnbrokers' (Control and Licensing) Regulations 2004

The above will be sold by public auction during the first week of May 2025 at 10.00 A.M. No. 211 Macalister Street, Penang for articles pawned in July 2024 and earlier commencing from the date and time stated below:-

Date	Time
06.05.2025 (Tuesday)	10.00 A.M

Note: Interested bidders are to register with the licensed auctioneer 7 working days before the auction date.

*Term and conditions apply.

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JOHOR BAHRU
MS. Anne Lim
TEL: 013-770 6699
FAX: 07-355 5549

322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF NEWQUEST LOGISTICS SDN BHD Company No. 201401021551 (1097637-K) (IN MEMBERS' VOLUNTARY WINDING UP)

The following Special Resolution was duly passed by the members of NEWQUEST LOGISTICS SDN BHD on the 24th April 2025 in accordance with Section 439 of the Companies Act, 2016.

'That the Company be wound up voluntarily pursuant to Section 439 of the Companies Act, 2016 and that Mr. Hor Yuen Foong of No. 2-29, PV 128, Jalan Genting Kelang, 53300 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan be and is hereby appointed Liquidator for the purpose of such winding-up'

Dated this: 24th April 2025

Signed
(NG SIOK HUEY)
DIRECTOR

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF NEWQUEST LOGISTICS SDN BHD Company No. 201401021551 (1097637-K) (IN MEMBERS' VOLUNTARY WINDING UP)

Notice is hereby given that the creditors of the above named Company, which is being voluntarily wound up, are required on or before 24th May 2025 (30 days from advertised date) to send in their names and addresses with particulars of their debts and claims and of any security held by them, and the names, addresses of their solicitors (if any) to the undersigned Liquidator at No. 2-29, PV 128, Jalan Genting Kelang, 53300 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan and if so required by notice in writing from the said Liquidator, are to come in and prove their debts and claims at such time and place as shall be specified in such notice or in default thereof they shall be excluded from the benefit of any distribution made before such debts or claims are proven.

Dated this: 24th April 2025

Signed
Hor Yuen Foong
Liquidator

322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF SF FRESH TRADING SDN BHD Company No. 201801030516 (1282542-K) (IN MEMBERS' VOLUNTARY WINDING UP)

The following Special Resolution was duly passed by the members of SF FRESH TRADING SDN BHD on the 24th April 2025 in accordance with Section 439 of the Companies Act, 2016.

'That the Company be wound up voluntarily pursuant to Section 439 of the Companies Act, 2016 and that Mr. Hor Yuen Foong of No. 2-29, PV 128, Jalan Genting Kelang, 53300 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan be and is hereby appointed Liquidator for the purpose of such winding-up'

Dated this: 24th April 2025

Signed
(Lim Wai Soon)
DIRECTOR

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF SF FRESH TRADING SDN BHD Company No. 201801030516 (1282542-K) (IN MEMBERS' VOLUNTARY WINDING UP)

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Dated this: 24th April 2025

Signed
Hor Yuen Foong
Liquidator

Rahul powers Delhi to big win over Super Giants

INDIA'S KL Rahul hit an unbeaten 57 to steer Delhi Capitals to an emphatic eight-wicket win over Lucknow Super Giants and get his side back to winning ways in the IPL yesterday.

Chasing a modest 160 for victory, Delhi rode on Rahul's 42-ball knock and a second-wicket partnership with Abhishek Porel, who hit 51, to achieve their target with 13 balls to spare at Lucknow's home ground.

Delhi, with six wins in eight matches, bounced back from their previous defeat to table-toppers Gujarat Titans and are second in the 10-team table.

Seam bowler Mukesh Kumar set up victory with his four wickets as he helped pull Lucknow back from 87-0 to 110-4 and then a below-par total of 159-6.

"Once we picked up two quick wickets, we got the momentum and all the bowlers did well to restrict them under 160," Delhi skipper Axar Patel said.

In reply, Delhi lost Karun Nair for 15, bowled by Aiden Markram, a part-time off spinner, but Abhishek and Rahul combined to get the chase on track in their

stand of 69.

Markram struck again to get the left-handed Abhishek out after his 36-ball knock, which was laced with five fours and one six.

Rahul stood firm and along with Axar, who made 34, put on an unbeaten stand of 56 to steer the team home with a winning six from Rahul.

Rahul hit his third fifty of the season to go past 5,000 runs in the IPL – making him the quickest player to achieve the feat in the T20 tournament.

Earlier, openers Markram (52) and Mitchell Marsh (45) combined the right dose of caution and aggression to steer Lucknow to 87 inside 10 overs.

Skipper Rishabh Pant dropped himself down to No. 7 but faced just two balls before being bowled by Mukesh on the final delivery of the innings.

"We knew we were 20 runs short," said Pant.

"In Lucknow, the toss plays a big part. Whoever is bowling first, they get a lot of help from the wicket. We just had to stay back, we just couldn't get it away." – Reuters

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Korda **focused** on the present

Defending champion chases first win of season at Chevron Championship

NELLY KORDA heads into her title defense in the Chevron Championship seeking her first victory of 2025, a stark contrast to the blistering early pace of her 2024 campaign but one that doesn't bother the world No. 1 at all.

"I would say last year is last year," Korda said yesterday as she prepared for the first women's major of the year to tee off today at Carlton Woods in suburban Houston.

"This is a brand new year. What I achieved last year, no one can take that from me. That's always going to be such a great memory, but it's a fresh week and a fresh mindset."

Last year Korda withstood a tension-packed back nine to beat Maja Stark by two strokes and claim her fifth victory in five starts – matching an LPGA Tour record set by Nancy Lopez in 1978 and equalled by Annika Sorenstam from 2004-05.

Korda would go on to win seven titles in a spectacular 2024 campaign.

But she has just two top-10 finishes in five starts this season, having opted to skip the LPGA's Asian swing after a runner-up finish

in the Tournament of Champions in January and a tie for seventh in the Founders Cup in February.

Korda said she needed the rest, and while she faded from contention at the LA Championship last week to finish tied for 16th, the 26-year-old American says that aspects of her game are coming around.

"Then just need my putter to click a little bit more to make those putts. I think that's where it's been lacking, is the putts that I was making last year I'm just not making as many this year."

"But that's just golf. I've gone through waves like this before, and if I just continue working at it, hopefully it does click."

Unlike last season, no one has emerged as a dominant force so far in 2025 with the first eight LPGA events producing eight different winners.

All eight are in a Chevron field that features 24 of the top 25 in the world

rankings.

They include world No. 3 Lydia Ko of New Zealand, the winner of the 2016 edition of the Chevron – when it was still held in California.

Ko claimed her 23rd career title at the HSBC Women's World Championship in Singapore.

World No. 2 Jeeno Thitikul of Thailand finished runner-up to Ko there and while she is seeking her first title of the year she has five top-10 finishes in six starts.

Fourth-ranked Lilia Vu, the 2023 Chevron champion, returns after missing her title defense last year because of a back injury that caused her so much pain she wondered if she would be able to play tournament golf.

"I would say I'm in a much better place than I was last year," said Vu, who is wearing a red shirt with "MILLE" on it.

was last year, said Va, who made a triumphant return to competition last June.

at the Meijer LPGA Classic. - AFP

[illegible]

Osaka out of Madrid Open



FOUR-TIME Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka crashed out of the Madrid Open in the first round yesterday with a 6-4, 2-6, 6-4 defeat by Lucia Bronzetti.

The Japanese former world No. 1, ranked 55th, battled back with a strong second set after losing the first, but eventually came up short against her determined Italian opponent.

"From the outside maybe it seems easy but when you're on the court against a great champion like her it's always difficult – I'm proud with how I managed the match," said Bronzetti.

"She hit the ball very strong... I tried to make some variation in my game like drop shot, I got a lot of points with that."

Osaka, who is still finding form after a 15-month break from tennis and last played at the Miami Open in March, secured two break points in the fourth game of the first set which she spurned.

Bronzetti broke in the seventh and served it out, before Osaka responded strongly.

The 27-year-old secured three breaks of serve and conceded one to force a decider.

Osaka immediately conceded a break and despite wrestling back on serve at 3-3 when she took her fifth break point of the game, was broken herself again straight away.

Bronzetti triumphed when Osaka slipped as she tried to reach a cross-court shot.

The Italian will face American world No. 5 Madison Keys in the second round.

"I played against her two times, it's going to be a real tough match like today," said Bronzetti. – AFP

PSG stay unbeaten in Ligue 1

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN were held to a 1-1 draw at Nantes in a rearranged Ligue 1 game yesterday, a result which maintains their unbeaten domestic record this season with the Champions League semifinal against Arsenal on the horizon.

It looked like Vitinha's first-half strike might be enough for PSG, who have already secured a fourth consecutive Ligue 1 title, to leave the Stade de la Beaujoire with the victory.

However, Nantes hit back to equalise with six minutes remaining through their Brazilian midfielder Douglas Augusto, earning the hosts a precious point in their battle for survival.

PSG might still have won the game at the death, but a header by substitute Goncalo Ramos from a Desire Doue cross came back off the crossbar.

Nevertheless, the draw means they have still not lost a game against domestic opposition since May last year, and leaves them just four Ligue 1 matches away from becoming the first team ever to complete a French top-flight campaign without losing.

The closest a team has ever come to doing that remains Nantes, who went undefeated through their first 32 matches before suffering their only loss on the way to becoming champions in 1994/95.

The result also allowed Paris to extend their run without losing away from home in Ligue 1 to 39 matches since February 2023 – AC Milan's run of 38 away games unbeaten in Serie A between 1991 and 1993 was previously the record in Europe's leading leagues.

"Today is a special day for us, beating AC Milan's record. I congratulate my players for that," said PSG coach Luis Enrique.

Nantes are now four points clear of the relegation zone with four games to play, and three of their remaining matches will be at home.

"I am proud because I didn't expect such a performance from my players. We didn't just defend well but we also played good football and created chances," said Nantes coach Antoine Kombouare.

"We never let our heads go down. It is a really well-deserved point," added Kombouare, who described PSG's unbeaten away record as "monstrous". – AFP

Title within reach

Olmo fires Barcelona seven points clear of Madrid after Mallorca win

BARCELONA inched closer to the La Liga title with a 1-0 win over Mallorca yesterday which took them seven points clear of Real Madrid.

Spain international Dani Olmo slotted home to help Barcelona turn

up the heat on second-placed champions Madrid, who visit Getafe overnight.

Hansi Flick's side, aiming for a potential quadruple, outplayed the visitors but could not extend their lead at the Olympic stadium as goalkeeper Leo Roman made save after save.

With Sunday's

(4am Malaysian time) *Copa del Rey* final against rivals Real Madrid in mind, Flick rested several of his usual starters.

The coach handed former teenage prodigy Ansu Fati his first start since October and deployed Hector Fort on the left of the defence, with Ferran Torres up front in place of injured top scorer Robert Lewandowski.

"We had a good game, the whole team, there were a lot of rotations today with players who hadn't played for a while and I'm really happy for them," Gavi told *Movistar*.

"Their goalkeeper had a great game, we had so many chances but that's football, they're not going to make it easy."

Barcelona created several chances in the first half and could hardly believe the score was goalless at the break.

Gavi's deflected shot hit the post, while Torres fired over after Olmo played him in.

Fati also fired narrowly off target as the hosts turned the screw, and Roman saved from teenage star Lamine Yamal, before Fort's shot was blocked as Mallorca rode their luck.

Now 22 and struggling for minutes at Barca, Fati drilled wide of the near post when he might have tested the increasingly-busy Roman, before Mateu Morey blasted home at the other end but was offside.

Barcelona left the pitch frustrated but swiftly took the lead at the start of the second half, with Olmo firing home less than a minute in, after a long string of passes.

Fati came close to a second but Roman palmed his drive to safety. Flick sent on Raphinha and Fermin Lopez to try and finish the job.

Yamal should have added Barcelona's second when the excellent Pedri sent him through, but Roman made yet another save.

It was Roman's first appearance in the league in 2025 for Mallorca and although he and his side left without a point to show for it, another save to deny Lopez towards the end underlined his outstanding display.

"The coach has a huge problem deciding (between Roman and usual goalkeeper Dominik Grief)," said Mallorca defender Jose Copete.

"Leo's been training really well, he hadn't played for so long, and you just have to see how he played in a tricky game like today's." – AFP



Barcelona's Fermin Lopez (right) in action with Mallorca players during their La Liga match. – REUTERSPIX

'Sinner doesn't deserve any hate'

■ BY FLO CLIFFORD

JACK DRAPER has publicly backed Jannik Sinner as the Italian prepares to make his return from a three-month doping suspension, saying he "doesn't deserve any hate".

Sinner was cleared of fault or negligence by an independent panel and initially received no suspension after testing positive for the banned substance clobetol last March.

However, Wada appealed the lack of suspension to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (Cas).

The body accepted that he did not intend to cheat and accepted his argument that a member of his support team accidentally transferred the substance onto him during a massage, but argued that Sinner was responsible for his entourage.

Wada eventually reached a settlement with the world No. 1, imposing a three-month ban, rather than going ahead with the planned hearing.

The timing of the suspension – allowing Sinner to return in time for his home event, the Italian Open, later this month, and causing minimal disruption to his preparations for the clay-court grand slam at Roland-Garros – raised some eyebrows, with players including Nick Kyrgios critical of perceived favouritism towards the ATP Tour's top player.

"I think Jannik is a really, really genuine, nice

person," Draper, a personal friend of Sinner's, told *The Guardian* and *BBC Sport* ahead of his own return to action at the Madrid Open this week.

"And on top of that, he's obviously an unbelievable player. In this situation, I'm sure that he would have absolutely zero idea of anything. That's just the way life goes – sometimes there's mistakes.

"In terms of actually how I feel about him as a person, I think it's important for people to know and recognise that the guy's very, very kind-hearted and a good human being. So he doesn't deserve any of the hate that he gets."

The three-time major champion has been allowed to return to formal training in recent days, following Wada rules, which permit it from one month before the end of a suspension.

Draper was the first player to practice with Sinner since he entered the final month of his ban, with the pair training together in Monte Carlo shortly after Draper's tight three-set, third-round loss at the clay-court tournament there.

"If you can train with anyone, it's got to be probably the best in the world, right? He's obviously had a bit of time off, but he's playing at an incredible level still.

"I'm looking forward to having him back on the tour, because I think his presence has been missed," Draper added. – *The Independent*

Ferrari boss shrugs off Hamilton's struggles

■ BY KIERAN JACKSON

FERRARI boss Fred Vasseur insists he is "not too worried" about Lewis Hamilton's struggles so far this season – adding that analysis of the *Scuderia*'s form dipping "dramatically" is "***** bull****".

Hamilton, 40, has endured a difficult start to his £50 million (RM275m) a year time at Ferrari, failing to finish higher than fifth in five races, though he did win the sprint race in China.

The seven-time F1 world champion has repeatedly voiced his frustrations at being unable to adapt to the SF-25 car, following 12 years with Mercedes.

Yet having finished seventh in Saudi

Arabia on Sunday – with teammate Charles Leclerc on the podium – the Briton admitted that he "couldn't blame the car" for his position in Jeddah.

Hamilton lies seventh in the drivers' standings and already trails championship leader Oscar Piastri by 68 points. Yet Ferrari team principal Vasseur believes it is a "positive" that Hamilton is so downbeat.

"I will give him support and we will start

straight away to find solutions," Vasseur said, after the race in Saudi.

"I am not too worried. Have a look at what he did in China or what he did in Bahrain the previous week or even in the first part of the session last weekend. The potential is there for sure.

"He's down because he finished seventh and his teammate is on the podium. It is positive that Lewis is down because if he was happy, it wouldn't be normal."

Questioned further on the *Scuderia*'s "dramatic" slump in form – from a position where they finished second in last year's constructors' championship – Vasseur reacted firmly.

"Dramatically?" he said. "We have done five races so far. I know

have done five races so far. I know that you won't have the big headlines tomorrow that Fred said this, but this is ***** bull****."

"You have ups and downs. When we have an up, we are not world champions. When we are down, we are not nowhere."

Hamilton was lost for words after finishing the Saudi race where he started, in seventh place.

Questioned if he had any idea why the car wasn't working for him, Hamilton simply responded: "No." – *The Independent*



SHORTS

Wilshere to take over at Norwich

FORMER Arsenal and England midfielder Jack Wilshere has been appointed as interim manager of Norwich City after the Championship side announced the sacking of head coach Johannes Hoff Thorup.

Thorup had been appointed in May 2024 to replace David Wagner, though he departs the club after three successive defeats. The Canaries currently sit in 14th, and are 13 points off the playoff positions.

Wilshere, who joined the club in October 2024 after leaving a role within the Arsenal academy, will

act as caretaker manager for the remaining two matches of the season.

Wilshere's two matches in charge will see him face Michael Carrick's Middlesbrough before a final-day clash against relegation-threatened Cardiff City, who are currently managed by Wilshere's former Arsenal teammate Aaron Ramsey after the Welshman was appointed interim boss last week.

Devils to trigger Cunha, Delap release clauses

MANCHESTER UNITED reportedly intend to trigger the release clauses of two Premier League

stars as soon as the summer transfer window opens on June 1.

Ruben Amorim's lacklustre attack is set to be significantly bolstered and Ineos are prepared to show that they mean business by getting two deals wrapped up with plenty of time before the 2025/26 season.

United will look to pay Matheus Cunha's clause of £62.5 million (RM344m) and Liam Delap's of £30 million (RM165m) on the same day.

They are aware of interest from their English rivals in both targets but will hope to beat their fellow European giants to the punch.

That's according to the *Daily Mail*, who claim

that Cunha is one of United's main targets and a deal is thought to be very close after fending off interest from Newcastle in the Brazilian forward.

Cunha, who was spotted talking with Amorim after Wolves defeated United 1-0 at Old Trafford on Sunday, is expected to play as a No. 10 in the Portuguese boss' 3-4-3 shape.

That allows room for another centre-forward to come in and compete with Joshua Zirkzee and Rasmus Hojlund.

Ipswich's Delap is the first-choice option for that role and his £30 million release clause becomes active if Kieran McKenna's side are relegated.

Emery's Rashford dilemma

Villans made aware of forward's problem after Man Utd loanee 'let club down'

GRAEME SOUNESS has questioned whether Aston Villa should sign Marcus Rashford permanently from Manchester United this summer.

Rashford has made a positive impact at Villa Park, but Souness harbours concerns over his price tag and the knock-on effect his earnings would have on the club's wage structure.

The 27-year-old has scored three goals and provided six assists in 16 games since joining Unai Emery's squad on loan in January.

Emery has regularly started Rashford ahead of Ollie Watkins as Villa push for a top-five Premier League finish and prepare for an FA Cup semifinal against Crystal Palace. However, Souness has urged the Villans against boosting United's financial situation by triggering their £40million option to buy at the end of the season.

He wrote in his *Daily Mail* column: "Has he really pulled up any trees in his time on loan? Unai Emery will know more having seen him up close.

"He has started him in key games, but has he really done enough? Aston Villa know this is a huge transfer for Manchester United.

"If they pay the £40 million (RM220m) fee, it gives United greater headroom with Profit and Sustainability to buy in the summer, so why should Villa do United any favours?

"They know how desperate United are, so they'll likely bid low. Villa won't want to match his wages as they'll have everyone else knocking on the manager's door asking for over £300,000 (RM1.65m) a week."

On top of the potential issue impacting Villa's wider wage bill, Souness has also raised doubts about Rashford's attitude.

The Liverpool icon wouldn't be surprised if Rashford "reverts to the same moody individual who struggled to turn up for Manchester United".

He added: "This is a Manchester boy who had to leave his boyhood club. They gave him a big, big contract, and he let them down big time.

"What is different in his life? Are the same people supposedly responsible for looking out for him still around? Can you trust him is the biggest question.

"Aston Villa are a huge football

club that have to be in the Champions League, and for that, you need players you can rely on."

Souness is right about at least one thing. United are relying on Rashford's transfer fee to fund their summer transfer business.

If Villa opt against signing the England international permanently, Ruben Amorim will likely push to offload him elsewhere.

Speaking about the possibility of triggering Rashford's option-to-buy clause, Emery admitted on April 15 it's "difficult to plan it now" and it "depends on the circumstances and what happens in the next weeks".

Former Man City financial adviser Stefan Borson exclusively told *Football Insider* the decision is likely more dependent on Villa qualifying for the Champions League as opposed to their profit and sustainability (PSR) position.

But back in January, there was another team showing their interest in the 27-year-old - Catalan giants Barcelona.

Now, reports from Spain are suggesting that should Villa not take up their option to bring Rashford back permanently, his preferred destination would be Barcelona, and not Man United.

Spanish outlet *Sport* contends that Barca do not consider Rashford a priority at this stage, but they are thought to be in the market for a forward at the end of the current campaign. - Express Newspapers/Agencies



Rashford

WINNING NUMBERS da macai

Draw Date: 23/04/25 (Wed) Draw No: 5903/25 Venue: WISMA GENTING, KL

1+3D SUPER1+3D

1st Prize	7443
2nd Prize	5887
3rd Prize	5386

Starters	Consolation
9436 6132	2445 5166
8436 6934	0805 0801
5246 8685	9684 9226
4346 6880	2107 4858
9190 8521	5134 0220

1+3D Jackpot

Jackpot 1 RM21,068,380.00

7443 + 5887	5887 + 7443
7443 + 5386	5386 + 7443
5887 + 5386	5386 + 5887

Jackpot 2 RM214,138.00

Winning pair matches any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of 10 Starter Prizes.

3+3D Bonus

1st Prize	Bonus	1st Prize Bonus
147 443 +	GOAT	RM110,000.00
2nd Prize	Bonus	2nd Prize Bonus
815 887 +	HORSE	RM952,611.00
3rd Prize	Bonus	3rd Prize Bonus
615 386 +	MONKEY	RM2,021,506.00

Starters	Consolation
759 436 236 132	332 445 645 166
728 436 126 934	090 805 750 801
545 246 378 685	429 684 889 226
314 346 406 880	822 107 524 858
319 190 558 521	645 134 600 220

3D

1st Prize	2nd Prize	3rd Prize
443	887	386

3D Jackpot

Jackpot RM1,111,389.60

443 + 887 + 386	887 + 386 + 443
443 + 386 + 887	386 + 443 + 887
887 + 443 + 386	386 + 887 + 443

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STM LOTTERY SDN. BHD.
196901000090 (8420-D)

TOTO 4D PRIZE PAYMENTS GUARANTEED IN FULL

1st Prize	0143
2nd Prize	1217
3rd Prize	7144
Special	2659 9663
	5112 3904
	2401 2103
	0414 6905
	7237 8884
Consolation	6712 9473
	5253 1541
	2245 9279
	9622 7596
	0292 3783

4D JACKPOT

Jackpot 1 RM 11,048,066.21

0143 1217	1217 0143
0143 7144	7144 0143
1217 7144	7144 1217

Jackpot 2 RM 170,473.71

Winning combination of any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of Special prizes.

4D Zodiac

1st Prize	0143	+	
2nd Prize	1217	+	
3rd Prize	7144	+	DOG
4th Prize	Special Prize	+	
5th Prize	Consolation Prize	+	
6th Prize	Any 4D drawn number	+	

TOTO 5D & 6D PRIZE PAYMENTS GUARANTEED IN FULL

1ST	6 0 2 3 6
2ND	1 2 3 9 0
3RD	1 0 6 4 3
4TH	0 2 3 6
5TH	2 3 6
6TH	3 6

6D

1ST	8 6 1 6 4 4
2ND	8 6 1 6 4
3RD	8 6 1 6
4TH	8 6 1
5TH	8 6

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RESULTS & STANDINGS

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE: Manchester City 2 (Silva 7, Nunes 90+4) **Aston Villa 1** (Rashford 18-pen).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	33	24	7	2	75	31	79
Arsenal	33	18	12	3	61	27	66
Man City	34	18	7	9	66	43	61
Nottm Forest	33	18	6	9	53	39	60
Newcastle	33	18	5	10	62	44	59
Chelsea	33	16	9	8	58	40	57
Aston Villa	34	16	9	9	54	49	57
Bournemouth	33	13	10	10	52	40	49
Fulham	33	13	9	11	48	45	48
Brighton	33	12	12	9	53	53	48
Brentford	33	13	7	13	56	50	46
Crystal Palace	33	11	11	11	41	45	44
Everton	33	8	14	11	34	40	38
Man Utd	33	10	8	15	38	46	38
Wolves	33	11	5	17	48	61	38
Tottenham	33	11	4	18	61	51	37
West Ham	33	9	9	15	37	55	36
Ipswich	33	4	9	20	33	71	21
Leicester	33	4	6	23	27	73	18
Southampton	33	2	5	26	24	78	11

Note: Top five qualify for Champions League; bottom three relegated.

LA LIGA: Valencia 1 (Guerra 57) **Espanyol 1** (Pardo 40), **Barcelona 1** (Olmo 46) **Mallorca 0**.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	33	24	4	5	89	32	76
Real Madrid	32	21	6	5	65	31	69
A. Madrid	32	18	9	5	53	27	63
A. Bilbao	32	15	12	5	49	26	57
Villarreal	31	14	10	7	55	42	52
Real Betis	32	14	9	9	45	40	51
Mallorca	33	12	8	13	31	38	44
Celta Vigo	32	12	7	13	47	49	43
Sociedad	32	12	6	14	32	36	42
Vallecano	32	10	11	11	35	39	41
Osasuna	32	9	14	9	39	46	41
Getafe	32	10	9	13	31	29	39
Espanyol	32	10	9	13	35	41	39
Valencia	33	9	12	12	37	49	39
Sevilla	32	9	10	13	35	43	37
Girona	32	9	7	16	39	51	34
Las Palmas	32	8	8	16	38	52	32
Alaves	32	7	10	15	34	46	31
Leganes	32	6	11	15	29	48	29
Valladolid	32	4	4	24	23	76	16

Note: Top five qualify for Champions League; bottom three relegated.

FRENCH LIGUE 1: Nantes 1 Paris Saint-Germain 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
TOP 6							
Paris SG	30	24	6	0	83	28	78
Marseille	30	17	4	9	62	42	55
Monaco	30	16	6	8	57	35	54
Lille	30	15	8	7	47	32	53
Nice	30	14	9	7	56	38	51
Lyon	30	15	6	9	58	41	51

CHAMPIONS RELEGATED

Harimau Malaya can end Vietnam jinx: Cklamovski

HEAD COACH Peter Cklamovski is confident that Harimau Malaya have what it takes to defeat Vietnam when the two sides meet in a crucial Group F match of the 2027 Asian Cup Qualifiers at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil on June 10.

While acknowledging the strength of the Vietnamese team, the 46-year-old Australian tactician believes Malaysia can rise to the occasion with the right preparation and mindset.

"It's not easy to beat Vietnam but it's not impossible, and we'll give everything to do just that," he told reporters when met at the Malaysian Football League (MFL)-Football Association of Malaysia (FAM)-Amateur Football League (AFL) Raya Open House at the Wisma FAM in Kelana Jaya yesterday.

Cklamovski stressed that the upcoming

centralised training camp which is expected to begin as early as May 16, will be crucial for his players to recover from a long league season and gear up mentally and physically for the high-stakes encounter.

"We'll go into camp fully focused, determined and ready to make Malaysians proud again by the way we play and work hard to get a result."

"It's important we get our preparations right because that's an off-season period. The players can freshen up and then we'll enter camp, get everything in order and be ready for a tough game against a tough opponent," he said.

"We've got a big game coming up. Get behind the team. This is about all of us – the players, the fans, and the country. We're building something special."

He also revealed that plans are underway to organise at least one or two friendlies at home to help the team find their rhythm ahead of the qualifier.

Cklamovski replaced interim head coach Pau Marti late last year, who stepped in following the departure of Kim Pan-gon.

The 46-year-old Australian worked closely with Tottenham Hotspur and former Australia head coach Ange Postecoglou during Australia's triumphant AFC Asian Cup 2015 campaign.

Malaysia have lost their last five encounters against Vietnam in all competitions, with the most recent meeting ending in a 3-0 defeat in the group stage of the 2022 Asean Cup (formerly known as AFF Cup).

In the Group F opening games last month, Vietnam trounced Laos 5-0 while Malaysia defeated Nepal 2-0. – Bernama



NATIONAL women's singles shuttler K. Letshanaa is smashing her way to the Sudirman Cup 2025 in Xiamen, China, slated to be held April 27-May 4.

After making her debut at the 2023 edition in Suzhou, China, Letshanaa is showing a new level of confidence, saying she is more than ready for her second shot at the prestigious tournament.

The world No. 52 credited her previous outing and the team's stronger bond this time around for giving her the extra edge she needed to step up.

"Obviously (more confidence). It's the second Sudirman Cup. It's not like the first one. It's going to be a better experience and a better connection with the players."

"I've also been playing with these teammates for such a long time. That's the most positive point at this time," she said when met after the Sudirman Cup 2025 centralised training camp in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Letshanaa added that if the coach entrusts her with a chance to play ahead of Malaysia's top women's singles player, Goh Jin Wei, in Xiamen, it would motivate her even more.

"I think the main thing is to be motivated, not to be nervous or scared. As long as I give my best, I think it's a good thing for Malaysia and the team," she said.

During her Sudirman Cup debut in Suzhou, Selangor-born Letshanaa featured in two matches, securing a straight-sets victory over Australia's Tiffany Ho (21-19, 21-12) in the group stage before falling to world No. 1 An Se Young of South Korea (10-21, 13-21) in the semifinals.

Meanwhile, national mixed doubles shuttler Hoo Pang Ron said he is focusing on sharpening both tactical variety and mental resilience with partner Cheng Su Yin as they gear up for the 2025 Sudirman Cup, following a mixed season.

After finishing runners-up at the China Masters 2024 last December, Pang Ron-Su Yin has managed just two quarter-final appearances in seven tournaments this year.

Malaysia, drawn in Group C, will kick off their campaign against France on April 28, followed by matches against Australia on April 29 and third seeds Japan on May 1.

Only the top two teams from each group will advance to the quarterfinals. – Bernama

Hakim Danish not guaranteed Moto3 ride yet: SIC

TEENAGER Muhammad Hakim Danish Ramli is on the right track to compete in next season's Moto3 World Championship through his collaboration with team MT Helmets, said Sepang International Circuit (SIC) chief executive officer Azhan Shafrihan Hanif.

However, he stressed that the 17-year-old's spot is not guaranteed yet and would depend on his current performance.

"InshaAllah, the seat for Hakim Danish is already there under MT Helmets. It's his to lose and he has to earn it," Azhan Shafrihan said.

"Sometimes, when the ticket (to compete) is right there, their performances do not match up."

"I feel that it is unfair (to guarantee anything) because many other riders also deserve to be given an opportunity."

"But, for now, Hakim Danish is the frontrunner to fill that spot next year. We can set certain key performance index (KPI), including a podium finish in JuniorGP and at least a top-three finish in the Red Bull Rookies Cup," he added.

Azhan Shafrihan told reporters this after the signing of the Letter of Understanding between SIC and Aeon Credit Service (M) Berhad (Aeon

Credit) at the Tun Razak Exchange (TRX) in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Azhan Shafrihan said the SIC is in talks with the Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS) to obtain financial support and open up opportunities for private-sector sponsorship to help realise Hakim Danish's participation in Moto3.

"We have informed (SIC Racing Team manager) Zulfahmi Khairuddin that we need to be prepared in terms of the budget next year."

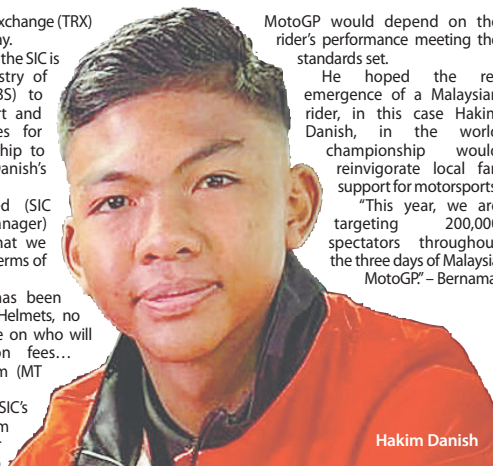
"Although a spot has been made available by MT Helmets, no decision has been made on who will bear the participation fees... whether it will be them (MT Helmets) or us," he said.

He also said that the SIC's plan to feature Hakim Danish as a wildcard rider in the Oct 24-26 Malaysia

MotoGP would depend on the rider's performance meeting the standards set.

He hoped the re-emergence of a Malaysian rider, in this case Hakim Danish, in the world championship would reinvigorate local fan support for motorsports.

"This year, we are targeting 200,000 spectators throughout the three days of Malaysia MotoGP!" – Bernama



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GROUP 2	3 6 9 9 6 OR 6 9 9 6 9
GROUP 3	3 6 9 9 OR 9 9 6 9
GROUP 4	3 6 9 OR 9 6 9
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Consistency is key

City's bad season cannot be salvaged, says Guardiola even after Villa win

Aston Villa's Morgan Rogers (left) in action with Man City's Nico O'Reilly during their English Premier League match yesterday. - REUTERS/PIC



Title within reach

Story on page 29



Confidence riding high

Story on page 31

PEP GUARDIOLA says that this season has been "bad" for Manchester City and no results from now until the end of the season will be able to change that.

City defeated Aston Villa 2-1 at the Etihad Stadium yesterday to move up to third in the Premier League after Matheus Nunes struck the winner in the fourth minute of stoppage time.

Bernardo Silva's early opener for City had been swiftly cancelled out by Marcus Rashford's penalty after 18 minutes.

The club are also in the FA Cup semifinals and can end the season with some silverware despite their struggles to challenge for the League title.

Guardiola, who praised his team's performance against Villa, revealed that he believes this season cannot be salvaged by winning a trophy and that consistency in the Premier League is the only thing that defines success for him.

"The season has been bad," he told *Sky Sports* after City's win over Villa. "It's not going to happen in the last month and a half."

"The season has not been good, it doesn't matter if we reach the final (of the FA Cup), or have an incredible time against Nottingham Forest or qualify for the Champions League."

"The reality is that what makes you feel the season is good is the Premier League, not the Champions League, not the FA Cups, it is the consistency in the Premier League

and we have not been (consistent). But, it happens.

"Sometimes you have bad seasons for many reasons that everybody knows. Until the end you try to limit the damage."

Guardiola then explained why he was so animated on the touchline following Nunes' winning goal and claimed he is not accustomed to winning games so late on.

The City boss added: "I think the last-minute winning games belong to Liverpool especially how many times they did it under Jurgen (Klopp) and Arsenal with Mikel (Arteta)."

"We are not used to it so I'm really happy for the goal we scored at the end because we are into the last four or five games against the Champions League contender like Aston Villa."

"Aston Villa are a team that in the last month have proved they are one of the best teams in Europe and we played really good in all departments."

"Football is emotion, for the fans, for the players, for ourselves. We have a lot of pressure for the club."

"In the last two games, Everton away and here with Villa were so difficult and the players were unbelievable."

"I was so happy, I have to admit it. Football, if you are in this business, you live the disappointments but there are always good moments."

"The team fought a lot, the performance was really good. It's a fantastic team and we were able to

do it."

In the build-up to the game, Guardiola had referred to the remaining five League matches as "finals", with City to follow the Villa game by hosting Wolves and Bournemouth either side of playing at Southampton, before concluding their top-flight campaign at Fulham.

Villa had gone into the contest with their 3-1 Champions League loss at PSG earlier this month the only match they had not won in their last 11 in all competitions, with Saturday's 4-1 thrashing of Newcastle their fifth successive league victory.

"I can feel a little bit disappointed but overall, I have to feel and tell the players I'm proud of them, everything we are doing," Villa manager Unai Emery said.

"We can analyse this match and try to use positive things, positive energy for Saturday (Sun 12.15am - FA Cup semifinal against Crystal Palace), for the rest of the season, and try to continue working hard to be in Europe."

"Today we lost but (there are) still matches to play, still points to play (for). We will have chances to get the Champions League."

Regarding Rashford, who scored his fourth goal since joining on loan from Manchester United in February, he added: "I am so, so happy with him. He's performing very well. Keep going - now Saturday, hopefully, he can help us again." - The Independent

City manager Pep Guardiola celebrates after Matheus Nunes (not pictured) scored their second goal during yesterday's match against Aston Villa. - REUTERS/PIC