



32% of Malaysians on dating apps: Survey

Modern-day digital platforms offer instant connections, access to global pool of potential matches for those seeking romance, life partners.

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Labour participation up, unemployment down

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Malaysia to stay on positive growth trajectory, driven by strong economic performance despite ongoing external uncertainties, says chief statistician.

More listening, spoken language specialists needed

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Experts say while efforts are made to train additional professionals, accessibility to treatment for infants with hearing problems remains a challenge, especially in rural areas.



Call to axe RM1 ATM fee

The company responsible for imposing the fee is said to have recorded RM544 million in revenue and RM271 million in net profit in 2023. — ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THE SUN

Charge for interbank withdrawals further enriches highly profitable banking industry at expense of consumers, particularly low-income earners: MP

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Terengganu Sultan launches book on Setiu wetlands

KUALA TERENGGANU: The Sultan of Terengganu Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin launched a coffee table book titled *Permata Negeri Terengganu: Setiu Wetlands* on Monday.

Also present at the launch were the Sultanah of Terengganu Sultanah Nur Zahirah and the Tengku Puteri Utama Raja Tengku Datuk Seri Nadhirah Zahrah Sultan Mizan.

The book, published by WWF-Malaysia and CIMB Islamic Bank Berhad, showcases the uniqueness and beauty of the Setiu Wetlands with a collection of photographs and interesting facts, which were the result of research and fieldwork as well as interactions with the local community.

WWF-Malaysia president Tunku Ali Redhaudin Tuanku Muhriz said the book was published to raise awareness about the special nature of the Setiu Wetlands and the importance of its conservation efforts.

"This coffee table book is an important step towards fostering awareness about the Setiu Wetlands as a natural gem that must continue to be preserved for the sustainability of current and future generations."

He said the book is also in appreciation of the local community of Setiu Wetlands, that have for long been the pillars of WWF-Malaysia's conservation efforts. - Bernama

Enhance spirit of unity during Thaipusam, says PM

KUALA LUMPUR: In conjunction with Thaipusam, which was celebrated by Hindus yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has urged all Malaysians to enhance the spirit of togetherness, appreciate diversity and strengthen love.

He said for Hindus, Thaipusam is not just a festival but a symbol of perseverance, determination and sacrifice in undergoing life's trials, and reflects their inner strength and discipline in facing challenges.

"The festival also highlights the spirit of unity in diversity in the context of nationhood. It is a testament to how society can unite in an atmosphere full of respect and togetherness."

"When thousands of Hindus gather to make vows and sacrifices, we witness a manifestation of collective strength. It is a reflection of a society that stands firm in human values, love and mutual understanding," he said in a post on his Facebook page.

Anwar added that in an increasingly uncertain world, the spirit of mutual respect and acceptance of differences must be a pillar of unity.

He said the uniqueness of different cultures and practices makes Malaysia a country rich in heritage and noble values, respected not only in the region but also around the world.

He added that Malaysians are fortunate to be blessed with diversity that can be used to get to know and love one another.

"The country will not be safe and advanced if the points of difference are enlarged and the principle of harmony is set aside. As a result, every different and unique celebration like this should be understood by every peace loving Malaysian who upholds the principle of coexistence."

Anwar added that only by understanding and respecting one another can a civilised, dignified and prosperous country be guaranteed for all. - Bernama

Labour participation up, unemployment down

► Manpower market position showed good growth in 2024, driven by encouraging economic expansion: Chief statistician

PUTRAJAYA: The labour force participation rate (LFPR) last year increased to 70.4% compared with 70% in 2023, said Statistics Department chief statistician Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin.

He said unemployment rate dropped to 3.3% from 3.4% during the same period.

"The Malaysian economy is seen to have remained on a positive growth trajectory in 2024, driven by strong economic performance despite ongoing external uncertainties."

"The country's labour market position showed good growth momentum throughout the year, driven by encouraging economic growth."

Mohd Uzir said the country's positive labour market last year was partly due to continued labour demand across various sectors, especially in the private sector.

"The outlook for the Malaysian labour force this year is encouraging, with employment

set to continue increasing consistently, while unemployment is expected to remain low.

"Key sectors such as manufacturing, especially electrical and electronics, as well as the services sector will drive job creation."

Mohd Uzir added that the fourth quarter of 2024 showed a manpower increase of 0.4% to 17.34 million people compared with 17.26 million the previous quarter.

He also said the number of unemployed decreased by 0.2% to 546,900 people compared with 547,900 in the previous quarter, with the unemployment rate remaining at 3.2% compared with the third quarter of 2024.

Mohd Uzir said the lowest unemployment rates in the fourth quarter of 2024 were in Selangor and Kedah (1.7%), followed by Malacca (1.8%), Johor (2.2%) and Penang (2.2%) while nine states recorded an increase in the LFPR.

He said for December 2024, the workforce remained on an upward trend, with an increase

of 0.1% to 17.32 million people compared with 17.29 million in November.

He added that the unemployment rate for that month reached the lowest rate in 116 months at 3.1%, with 544,300 unemployed people recorded compared with 3.2% in November 2024.

The last time an unemployment rate of 3.1% was recorded was in May 2015, Bernama reported.

"By the end of 2024, the Malaysian economy showed resilience and strong growth."

He said the self-employed population category is also on an upward trend, with an increase of 0.4% to 3.12 million people in December compared with 3.11 million in November 2024.

"The number of people working in the service sector increased steadily, especially in wholesale and retail trade activities, arts, entertainment, food and beverage services, recreation and accommodation."

"At the same time, the manufacturing, construction and agriculture sectors also recorded positive employment growth, while employment in the mining and quarrying sectors decreased during the month."



Anwar and Erdogan being greeted by a group of children during an event at the Seri Perdana Complex in Putrajaya yesterday. - BERNAMAPIC

Malaysia, Turkiye exchange 11 MoUs

PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia and Turkiye have exchanged 11 MoUs to enhance cooperation in various sectors, during Turkiye President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's official visit to Malaysia.

The documents, covering key areas such as energy transition, disaster management, defence, trade and media collaboration, were exchanged in the presence of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Erdogan.

The MoU on cooperation in energy transition was exchanged between Deputy Prime Minister and Energy Transition and Water Transformation Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof and Turkiye's Energy and Natural Resources Minister Alparslan Bayraktar.

The National Disaster Management Agency exchanged a MoU with Turkiye's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority, while both countries also formalised a pact on

diplomatic training.

Defence cooperation took a significant step forward with the exchange of two agreements.

The first focused on government-to-government procurement and the establishment of a Joint Committee for Defence Products, with the MoU exchanged between Defence Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin and Turkiye Secretary of Defence Industries Prof Haluk Gorgun.

The second MoU, involving strategic communication systems, was exchanged between Malaysia's National Security Council and Turkiye's Defence Industries Secretariat.

Selangor Aviation and Technology Innovation Sdn Bhd agreed to partner with Turkiye's Defence Industries Secretariat for smart city, traffic and security system solutions.

The Domestic Trade and Cost of Living

Ministry and Turkiye's Trade Ministry exchanged an MoU focusing on consumer protection, market surveillance and inspection.

The Home Ministry also exchanged an agreement for the procurement of a multi-purpose mission ship for the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency from Turkiye's Desan Shipyard.

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission exchanged an MoU with Turkiye's Radio and Television Supreme Council on audio visual media services.

In 2024, Turkiye was Malaysia's third-largest trading partner, largest export destination and fourth-largest import source among West Asia countries.

The total trade between Malaysia and Turkiye was recorded at RM24.13 billion in 2024, an 18.7% increase from 2023. - Bernama

Fresh call for **abolition** of RM1 ATM fee

➤ Practice places unnecessary financial burden on low-income earners while banks and firm imposing charge making huge profits, says MP

■ BY QIRANA NABILLA
MOHD RASHIDI
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: The debate over the RM1 interbank ATM withdrawal fee has resurfaced, with Pasir Mas MP Ahmad Fadhli Shaari calling for its immediate abolition on grounds that it places an unnecessary financial burden on Malaysians, particularly low-income earners.

Ahmad Fadhli said the fee, imposed on every interbank ATM withdrawal, has led to substantial profits for the banking industry at consumers' expense.

"Imagine, the RM1 fee is being charged on every interbank ATM withdrawal. So, how much profit is being accumulated by the banking

system in a single day as a result of such a 'capitalist system'?"

"We will push the government to abolish this fee to prevent further exploitation of Malaysians."

In an exclusive report by *theSun* in December last year, the Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations (Fomca) called on banks to absorb the RM1 charge for each interbank withdrawal instead of forcing customers to pay, especially since the banks are making huge profits.

Financial reports for 2023 showed that among Malaysia's top four banks by asset size, Maybank's net profits grew by 17.5% to RM9.35 billion, CIMB's rose by 28.3% to RM6.98 billion, Public Bank's increased by 9% to RM6.6 billion and RHB Bank's expanded by 4.8% to RM2.81 billion.

According to Bank Negara Malaysia's (BNM) 2024 Payment Statistics: Payment Channels, Malaysians use ATMs twice a month on average.

Assuming that all transactions involve interbank cash withdrawals, each individual would be charged RM24 per year just because their bank's ATM is not available near them.

This does not take into account customers who access multiple banks.

"A common concern is that the fee disproportionately affects low-income earners and rural folk, who rely on cash transactions and need to withdraw small amounts of money frequently," Fomca CEO Saravanan Thambirajah had said.

"When their bank's ATM is not available, they are forced to use the ATMs of other banks, incurring the RM1 fee each time.

"There needs to be greater regulatory oversight, with BNM playing a central role in ensuring fee structures are fair."

Economic analyst Dr Aimi Zulhazmi Abdul Rashid said while there are costs involved in the information technology and security infrastructure that is needed for daily account reconciliation between banks and BNM, such expenses should not be passed onto consumers.

"To meet the goals of the government's economic plan for high-income status by 2027, policies must address the needs of all segments of society.

"The public deserves to know what the actual cost of a transaction is as it concerns their cost of living."

Ahmad Fadhli claimed Payments Network Malaysia Sdn Bhd, the entity responsible for imposing the fee, has recorded RM544 million in revenue and RM271 million in net profit in 2023, primarily from the RM1 charge.

He said since its introduction, the fee has contributed to an accumulated profit of RM1.43 billion.

"Calls to abolish the fee echoes the sentiments of many Malaysians, particularly those in the B40 and M40

groups, which form the vast majority of Malaysians.

"This seemingly small charge represents a significant burden on those least able to afford it, while simultaneously generating substantial profits for the banking system.

"It's a system that appears to disproportionately benefit the wealthy at the expense of the struggling masses," he said.

In April 2020, the government waived the RM1 withdrawal fee at all Malaysian Electronic Payment System Sdn Bhd machines during the Covid-19 pandemic, but it was reinstated in February 2022.

"The government's previous decision to waive the fee in 2020 demonstrates an understanding of the financial pressures faced by Malaysians. The subsequent reinstatement of the fee in 2022 feels like a step backwards, a move that prioritises profit over the well-being of the people.

"It's time for a change," Ahmad Fadhli said.



HOLY RITUAL ... Hindu devotees carrying pots filled with milk at Batu Caves in Selangor during Thaipusam yesterday.
—ADIB RAWA YAHYA/THESUN

No risk of AI replacing human tasks, say experts

KUALA LUMPUR: Artificial intelligence (AI) does not pose a significant threat to society as it cannot fully replace human tasks, serving to complement the functions by enhancing speed, efficiency and overall productivity in the workplace.

Universiti Utara Malaysia School of Multimedia Technology and Communication dean Assoc Prof Dr Mohd Khairie Ahmad said while jobs remain relevant amid AI's evolving landscape, emphasis must be placed on investing in developing industry leaders and workers with enhanced skills.

He said skill mastery can reduce the likelihood of job losses in sectors previously considered highly vulnerable to AI.

"Routine and repetitive jobs or services are identified as being at risk of AI disruption. These include customer service, data entry, telemarketing, accounting, medical analysis, legal research, as well as manufacturing roles such as production operators, quality inspectors and administrative assistants."

Khairie was responding to findings from the

Ipsos Predictions Survey 2025, conducted across 33 countries.

The survey ranked Malaysia among the nations with the highest concerns over job losses due to AI.

According to the report, nearly 73% of respondents in Malaysia believe AI would lead to significant job losses, compared with the global average of 65%.

The concern arose following several reports on job risks due to AI, including a forecast by the World Economic Forum (WEF), which predicts that AI and automation could replace approximately 85 million jobs worldwide by 2025.

However, Mohd Khairie noted that many overlook the potential for new job opportunities created by AI, which will ultimately benefit a larger workforce.

"Interestingly, the WEF also estimates that AI would create 97 million new jobs globally. As for Malaysia, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Chang Lih Kang previously said AI would impact 30% of employment in

the country over the next decade.

"However, the country is projected to require nearly 500,000 skilled workers in the technology and technical sectors.

"Because of this, I see an urgent need for industry leaders and workers to upskill and reskill in AI to adapt to this technology," he said.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Department of Electrical, Electronics and System Engineering associate professor Dr Sawal Hamid Md Ali said many might not expect that low-skilled workers, seen as vulnerable to job displacement, can adapt to AI to enhance their work efficiency.

"For example, clerks can use AI to streamline their work, such as in drafting texts, letters and other documents, and graphic designers can leverage the technology to generate initial drafts. The same applies to different sectors.

"The creative industry is said to be affected, which is debatable because human creativity holds greater value than AI-generated outputs," he said. — Bernama

Ministry denies 2026 car price hike reports

KUALA LUMPUR: The Finance Ministry, together with the Investment, Trade and Industry Ministry and the automotive industry, is reviewing the vehicle valuation method to ensure that tax is imposed fairly, neutrally and consistently.

On reports about a significant increase in vehicle prices expected to start in 2026 due to new excise tax regulations, the ministry said the reports are inaccurate.

Local financial portal The Edge recently reported, citing industry sources, that the automotive industry has secured another extension on the proposed revision of excise duty for locally assembled (completely knocked down) cars until Dec 31.

Local automotive portal Wap Car reported that the Malaysian Automotive Association confirmed the open market value (OMV) excise duty revision will be deferred to January next year.

"The postponement of the revised OMV excise duties is only for a year, and if implemented, it could lead to a price increase," it reported in January. — Bernama

Smart tech draw in agriculture sector

JITRA: The adoption of smart agriculture technology not only eases farming tasks for agri-entrepreneurs but also sparks interest among potential new entrants to the industry, said Digital Minister Gobind Singh Deo.

He said the use of digital technology in crop production, in line with the Fourth Industrial Revolution policy, such as Internet of Things, big data analysis and AI, has the potential to attract more parties to venture into agriculture.

"Malaysia is undergoing rapid digital transformation. Technology has proven effective in boosting the country's competitiveness, accelerating economic growth and opening up new opportunities for the people," he said during a visit to the AI Technology-Based Aquaculture (Digital AgTech) site, as part of the Malaysia Digital Tour, in Ayer Hitam on Monday.

Gobind said the agricultural sector was often associated with dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs and was commonly seen as a high-risk sector with low returns on investment. — Bernama



Call for more listening, spoken language specialists

➤ Experts highlight shortage, with only three operating nationwide amid rising cases and accessibility challenges

BY **QIRANA NABILLA MOHD RASHIDI**
 newsdesk@thesunday.com

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Association of Speech-Language and Hearing has urged the government to recruit more listening and spoken language specialists as there are only three in the country – two in Peninsular Malaysia and one in East Malaysia – with a population of 34.1 million.

Speaking in conjunction with Kids' Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Health Month, which falls in February, its listening and spoken language specialist and speech-language therapist Hee Han Hui highlighted the urgent need for more professionals, particularly in rural areas where accessibility remains a challenge.

"These specialists play a critical role in helping deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHH) children develop their communication skills. They work closely with parents to guide children in audition, speech, language, cognition, social interaction and literacy development."

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad recently said the Universal Newborn Hearing Screening (UNHS) programme diagnosed 987 infants with hearing problems in 2023.

Hee said research shows children who receive appropriate intervention before their first birthday achieve the best results in language, cognition and social skills.

She explained that early diagnosis, coupled with access to hearing technology, auditory-verbal therapy or sign language instruction, is crucial in helping children reach their full potential.

"With UNHS now in place, most children with hearing problems are detected early, which is a positive development but just the first step. Access to timely diagnosis, treatment and long-term support is just as critical."

Beyond medical intervention, Hee said



Hee said research shows children who receive appropriate intervention before their first birthday achieve the best results in language, cognition and social skills. – **ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN**

many DHH children still face social stigma, with some being judged for using hearing devices, while parents are often criticised for their communication choices.

She also pointed out that accessing hearing aids, cochlear implants and therapy remains a financial and logistical challenge for many families.

Sunway Medical Centre consultant paediatric ENT specialist Dr Priatharinsy Velayutham agreed that there is an urgent need for more trained professionals, despite the presence of about 800 certified audiologists in the country.

"This means our 34.1 million population only has one audiologist for every 42,500 people. This number is grossly inadequate compared with the 1 to 500 ratio we require."

Priatharinsy said hearing loss falls into two categories – congenital, in which about 50% of cases are inherited, and acquired, which may be caused by loud noises.

In Malaysia, between one and three children per 1,000 are affected by hearing loss, with ear infections being the most common cause among school-age children.

"The World Health Organisation reported that about 466 million people worldwide suffered hearing loss in 2020. This figure is

expected to almost double by 2050."

Priatharinsy warned that noise-induced hearing loss, once linked to industrial environments, is now increasingly caused by personal devices such as smartphones and headphones.

She stressed that delayed intervention can lead to irreversible hearing damage, with many individuals suffering 50% hearing loss by the time they seek help or consult a specialist.

"Key barriers to early detection include a lack of awareness, parental denial, delays in diagnosis – particularly in rural areas where access to hearing checks may be limited – and financial constraints.

"Parents may not realise that exposing adolescents to more than 80 minutes of headphone use puts them at a 4.7 times higher risk of hearing loss compared with those who use them less frequently."

To better support children with hearing impairments, Priatharinsy called for more hearing screenings in schools to detect hearing loss at the earliest possible stage, especially in rural areas.

"Teachers would benefit from additional training in areas such as the use of hearing devices and stronger collaboration with parents to enhance communication and learning."

Two wild elephants relocated from Orang Asli village

SUNGAI SIPUT: The Perak Department of Wildlife and National Parks (Perhilitan) has successfully relocated two wild elephants believed to have destroyed crops and homes in Kampung Orang Asli Talang in Pos Perwor.

Sungai Deka Elephant Conservation Centre (SDECC) chief Mohd Happy Mohd Noor said the male and female elephants, aged 20 and 25 respectively, and weighing over two tonnes, were captured at about 10.30am on Feb 5.

The operation, involving about 20 personnel from Perhilitan's Elephant Capture Unit from Perak and Johor, as well as the SDECC, was carried out successfully with the assistance of two female decoy elephants, Suria and Indah.

"This relocation was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved the transfer of the elephant named Yong Shida on Saturday, while the second phase, involving Yob Talang, was completed on Monday," he said.

A 50-second video that was widely shared recently showed an Orang Asli villager's house severely damaged by the wild elephants.

Other residents claimed to have suffered losses of about RM20,000 due to damage to furniture and electrical appliances.

Mohd Happy confirmed that both elephants, which were in good health, have been relocated to Royal Belum State Park in Gerik.

He urged residents not to take matters into their own hands or provoke wild elephants, as they could become aggressive and pose a threat to lives.

"The most important thing is to keep plantations and farms clean as overgrown areas can attract elephant herds.

"If you spot wild elephants in any area, please report it immediately to Perhilitan for further action." – Bernama

Discussions on undersea cable to be finalised soon

SINGAPORE: The construction method for the 1,000-megawatt (MW) undersea electricity transmission project from Sarawak to Singapore is expected to be finalised in the first quarter of this year, Sarawak Premier Tan Sri Abang Johari Abang Openg announced.

He also anticipates this will be followed by a conditional agreement between Malaysia and Singapore.

"We are still in discussions on the construction method for the cable. I anticipate that these discussions will be concluded within the first quarter of this year, followed by the potential signing of an agreement between Malaysia and Singapore," he said.

The matter was also deliberated during a bilateral meeting chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and his Singaporean counterpart Lawrence Wong.

Abang Johari noted that the undersea cable installation involves various technical aspects, including procurement and deployment, given that only three such undersea cables exist worldwide.

During a meeting with Singapore's Foreign Minister Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, he also discussed the establishment of a Singapore consulate-general office in Kuching, Sarawak.

He had previously confirmed that the setting up of the consulate-general office was agreed upon during the 10th Malaysia-Singapore Annual Leaders' Retreat in 2023. – Bernama

Sarawak scales up commercial green hydrogen production

KUCHING: Sarawak is scaling up commercial green hydrogen production by leveraging its abundant hydropower resources to meet Asia's growing demand for clean fuel, said Premier Tan Sri Abang Johari Abang Openg.

He highlighted that the state's partnership with Japan, South Korea and China had expanded Sarawak's hydrogen supply chain, positioning it as a leader in the Asia-Pacific green hydrogen economy.

He noted that the integration of carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) will unlock new low-carbon economic opportunities.

"We will continue engaging with global stakeholders to grow low-carbon industries, develop sustainable infrastructure and drive innovation in clean energy solutions," he said during a lecture at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies-Yusuf Ishak Institute in Singapore on Monday.

Sarawak aims to boost electricity generation

capacity to 10 gigawatts (GW) by 2030 and 15GW by 2035, strengthening its position as a green energy powerhouse in Asean.

The increased capacity will support industries, advance green technologies and enable regional electricity exports.

"Sarawak aims to be the battery of Asean by supplying clean energy and enhancing cross-border interconnectivity. Through the Asean power grid initiative, we are strengthening regional energy security while exploring storage solutions to optimise supply and distribution."

In his lecture, "Envisioning a Low-Carbon Future: Sarawak's Journey Towards Sustainable Development", Abang Johari underscored how strong policies, community engagement and global collaborations have driven Sarawak's progress towards sustainable development.

He explained that in 2021, the state government introduced the post Covid-19 development strategy (PCDS) 2030 as a

roadmap for achieving prosperity, inclusivity and environmental sustainability within five years.

"At the midpoint of PCDS 2030, we are already seeing results, reflecting Sarawak's ability to turn strategy into action. One of our most significant milestones is surpassing the World Bank's high-income threshold ahead of schedule, reinforcing Sarawak's position as an economic hub for trade and investment."

Sarawak has also implemented bold policy reforms, including the enforcement of the Land (Carbon Storage) Rules 2022 for CCUS and the Natural Resources and Environment Ordinance 2024 to enhance resource governance.

"While policy reforms set the direction, their true impact lies in implementation. Sarawak is now putting these policies into action, accelerating industrial decarbonisation and advancing green innovation for a sustainable future," he added. – Bernama

Benefits and drawbacks of dating apps

➤ Despite offering access to global pool of potential matches, platforms also leave users feeling isolated and disconnected: Lecturer

BY KIRTINEE RAMESH
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: Today marks the 15th and last day of the Chinese New Year celebrations called Chap Goh Meh, which has great historical significance and is considered the Chinese equivalent of Valentine's Day.

In the past, Chinese women were only allowed out on the last day of celebrations, when young girls sought love and young men flocked to see them.

It is believed that when young women throw oranges into the sea, it would bring them a good husband. Prospective grooms at the venue would try to catch the oranges and see their future brides.

In the 21st century, dating apps are the "in" thing for those seeking romance and a life partner, with a Statista survey stating that 32% of Malaysians were on them in 2024.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia anthropology and sociology senior lecturer Dr Velan Kunjuran said despite dating apps, arranged marriages are still relevant among those who hold to cultural and traditional values.

He said unlike previously when relatives,

friends and even matchmakers helped parents find suitable partners for their children, dating apps now offer instant connections and access to a global pool of potential matches, all from the comfort of a mobile phone or computer.

However, Velan said dating apps have their drawbacks and foster a "touch-and-go" mindset in which relationships are easier to end and less likely to develop into long-term commitments, adding that the excessive use of dating apps replaces physical interactions and leaves users feeling isolated and disconnected.

He also said failed interactions or unmet expectations may impact self-esteem, with the focus on instant gratification often outweighing the development of emotional ties.

Danger also lurks with dating apps as love scams have become a growing concern. In a recent case, a woman from Sibu, Sarawak fell victim after meeting a man on a dating app who claimed to be a Korean national.

He convinced the victim to transfer RM86,841 through 25 payments for alleged Customs fees related to items he claimed to have sent her.

Bukit Aman Commercial Crime

Investigation Department director Datuk Seri Ramli Mohamed Yoosuf said women are the primary victims of love scams, making up 79.3% of the 2,223 cases reported from 2022 to August 2024.

"Women are often seen as emotionally weaker, which makes them susceptible to affectionate gestures, especially when they are lonely and vulnerable."

Despite the risks, many individuals continue to turn to dating apps for love. For some, the apps have been successful in helping them find their life partners.

One user, who asked to be known as Faizal, 27, said he met his wife on a dating app.

"I was sceptical at first and wondered if any of the women I had shown interest in would contact me. But I decided to give it a try. Within 24 hours, I had three replies and one of them is now my wife."

"Initially, we exchanged messages and she gave me her WeChat ID but not her phone number. After a few weeks of late-night conversations, I asked her out to dinner. A few months later, I knew she was the one for me."

As the popularity of dating apps continues to grow, Velan stressed the importance of using them responsibly and suggested that users limit their time on the apps and prioritise in-person meetings once a mutual connection is established.

He also urged dating app companies to do more to protect users from scams and harmful content.

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S'pore to deport duo over national security

SINGAPORE: An Iranian woman and her Malaysian husband will be deported from Singapore as well as banned from re-entering the country after they were found to be engaging in activities that posed a threat to national security.

Parvane Heidaridehkordi, 38, had her long-term visit pass cancelled and her husband Soo Thean Ling, 65, had his permanent resident status revoked, the *Straits Times* reported, quoting a statement by the Home Affairs Ministry on Monday.

Parvane was involved in the operations of a Singapore-registered travel agency that had sponsored visa applications by terrorism-linked foreigners seeking to enter the country.

Investigations found that the travel agency was a front for an operation directed by a foreigner based overseas.

Soo had tried to register a company to undertake travel agency business in Singapore on two occasions after authorities started investigations into the first travel agency, the *Straits Times* reported.

He intended for Parvane to operate these businesses, which would "likely have facilitated Parvane's continued involvement in supporting the entry of terrorism-linked individuals" into Singapore, said the ministry.

Both applications were rejected. - Bernama

RM98 million lost to commercial crime

TAWAU: A total of 149 commercial crime cases were reported to the police here last year, with losses estimated at RM98.7 million, said Tawau district police chief ACP Jasmin Husin.

He said phone scams were the most prevalent type of commercial crime, with 45 cases recorded.

"I advise the public to conduct business dealings directly at the relevant offices, rather than relying on phone calls from purported government departments."

He urged victims to file police reports as this would help authorities track down the criminals and take action.

He said police have been collaborating with the local Education Department to raise public awareness on the dangers of phone scams.

"I urge everyone to share information through media channels to educate the public on commercial crime prevention."

He noted a decrease in overall crime cases, with 650 reported last year, down from 795 in the previous year, and 470 brought to the Tawau Court. - Bernama

Man gets four years for extortion

KOTA BHARU: A man has been sentenced to four years' imprisonment by the Sessions Court here after pleading guilty to extorting a 62-year-old woman.

Mohd Zakuan Jaafar, 38, was charged on Monday with causing fear of death to the victim and compelling her to hand over RM100 in cash at an eatery in Kampung Lubok Simpol, Kuala Krai at 11am on Jan 28.

The charge was brought under Section 386 of the Penal Code, which carries up to 14 years' jail, a fine or whipping.

DPP Ahmad Faiz Fitri Mohamad prosecuted the case while the accused, who was unrepresented, pleaded for a lighter sentence.

"I asked for money and threatened to kill her because she owed me," said Mohd Zakuan.

Judge Zulkifli Abillah advised the accused not to repeat the offence, stressing that his act of using a *parang* was serious and had traumatised the victim.

The court sentenced him to four years in prison and a fine of RM3,000, in default of one year's jail. - Bernama



It is believed that when young women throw oranges into the sea on Chap Goh Meh, it would bring them a good husband. - BERNAMAPIC

Two women scammed of RM565,000

KUANTAN: Two women in Pahang have lost a total of RM565,200 after falling victim to online scams.

State police chief Datuk Seri Yahaya Othman said the first case involves a 44-year-old doctor, who was attracted to a Bitcoin investment advertisement on Telegram in July.

He said she clicked on a link that was connected to an investment administrator's WhatsApp and was offered investment packages of between RM500 and RM5,000.

"She chose a basic package with a capital of RM500 that promised a return of RM15,000 within three hours. She made 22 transactions to 16 accounts totalling RM433,700."

"She realised she had been scammed when she did not receive any returns nor the money she invested, and lodged a police report."

Yahaya said in the second case, a 61-year-old businesswoman lost RM131,500 after receiving a call from an individual posing as a Tenaga Nasional Bhd staff, who claimed that she was involved in electricity theft at her

home in January.

He said the caller allegedly told the victim that she was also involved in illegal money activities and connected the call to the "Kuantan police headquarters".

"The individual then told her to transfer money to an account provided and she made 26 transactions, which she sourced from her savings and Employees Provident Fund."

"She realised she had been duped when she was contacted again to transfer more money." - Bernama



Sky gazing hobby thrills

► 'Plane spotters' eagerly spend time and money to capture perfect shot of aircraft in mid-flight at KLIA

KUALA LUMPUR: Despite the scorching sun at the Anjung Spotter Observation Deck in KL International Airport (KLIA), a group of photographers wait patiently to capture the perfect shot of aircraft.

They are always poised, ready to press the shutter release button to snap photos of airplanes landing or taking off, either for their personal collection or to share with aviation enthusiasts worldwide.

Wedding pixman Hairol Hanim Harun, 50, discovered his passion for photographing the "iron birds", commonly known as "plane spotting", three years ago after being introduced to it by a friend.

"At first, I simply followed other plane spotters because I have a digital single lens reflex camera. I would capture any aircraft in sight, select the best shots, edit

them and share them on social media.

"Over time, I grew closer to the community and they taught me about aircraft models, sizes, technology and flight operations. There's an unmatched satisfaction in capturing the perfect angle of an aircraft, especially a rare one."

Hairol, a father of three, said he spends at least two days a week at Anjung Spotter, adding that plane spotting is more thrilling than his job as a wedding lensman. Because of that, he said he does not mind spending hours at the observation deck, despite the 50km distance he has to travel from his home in Telok Penglima Garang.

"This hobby requires patience and skill, whereas wedding photography is more about human interaction. Not all aircraft arrive on time, some get delayed because of weather conditions. To get the perfect shot is tricky. At weddings, there is proper lighting but in plane spotting, we rely entirely on natural conditions."

He added that to track aircraft schedules and types, he uses the Flight Radar 24 app, Bernama reported.

Hairol, who is active on TikTok, takes his hobby seriously, investing over RM80,000 of his savings to upgrade his camera accessories, including the body and telephoto lenses, in order to snap

high-quality images.

"In wedding photography, we use short or prime lenses and we move around to follow the subject. But as a plane spotter, we need a zoom lens because the aircraft moves fast while we remain stationary," he said.

For firefighter Muhammad Abdul Hafiz Asmi, 39, plane spotting is a childhood dream, as he is able to see airplanes up close.

He said working at KLIA gives him an advantage, as he has access to areas that external plane spotters cannot enter.

"The views I get are much clearer than those from outside. I can capture angles that external spotters can't, but I must follow rules, such as wearing a safety vest when near a parked aircraft and avoiding restricted areas."

Another plane spotter, Abdul Hafiz from Terengganu, said he is fascinated by the uniqueness of each aircraft, and capturing shots of rare models or special liveries is a thrilling experience.

"Some of the rare aircraft I've photographed include the McDonnell Douglas MD-11, which is the last cargo plane of a renowned courier company that landed at KLIA in 2010, and the Boeing KC-135 Stratotanker in August last year," he said.

Lifeline for destitute family

KUALA NERUS: Jani Yusof, a person with disability, will soon have a more comfortable home for his wife and three children, with assistance from the Terengganu development office under the Prime Minister's Department Implementation Coordination Unit.

State Pakatan Harapan (PH) chairman Mohd Hasbie Muda said he has spoken to the unit state director Abdul Kahar Abdul Latif to expedite the construction of a new house on the site of Jani's current dilapidated wooden home.

"The unit assists in building new houses or repairing damaged ones, especially for those registered under e-Kasih. We have verified that this family is an e-Kasih recipient.

"However, we need to help Jani and

his wife, Maznah Abu Bakar, 43, resolve an issue with the land title, which is under Maznah's brother's name. It must be transferred to Maznah before construction can begin.

"We will assist in expediting the process," he said after visiting Jani's home in Kampung Darat, Batu Rakit on Sunday.

Mohd Hasbie said Terengganu PH will provide immediate assistance of RM10,000 in the form of essential items such as fans and a refrigerator, as well as urgent home repairs, including fixing walls and doors.

The aid will also cover the provision of water supply, as his family currently has to rely on a nearby mosque, neighbours and rainwater.

The plight of Jani, 62, who was born

with a disability in his right leg, was recently widely shared on social media after it was revealed that due to financial hardship, he had to feed his wife and three children, aged two to eight, with expired food thrown out by supermarkets.

Earning around RM200 a month by collecting and selling empty bottles, scrap metal and plastic, Jani and his family live in a makeshift plywood house.

State Angkatan Muda Keadilan chief Md Asyraf Zulfadhly Md Zainudin said the youth wing will adopt the family as part of its welfare programme to support the couple's two school-going sons, Muhammad Aqil Azhari, eight, and Muhammad Syahrin Izzudin, seven. - Bernama

EDUCATION

FOCUS 2025

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Virus disinformation drives anti-China sentiment

➤ HMPV not mystery illness, says expert

HONG KONG: A deluge of disinformation about a flu-like virus called HMPV is stoking anti-China sentiment across Asia and spurring unfounded concerns of renewed lockdowns, despite experts dismissing comparisons with the Covid-19 pandemic five years ago.

Fact-checkers have debunked a slew of social media posts about the usually non-fatal respiratory disease human metapneumovirus after cases rose in China. Many of these posts claimed that people were dying and that a national emergency had been declared.

Garnering tens of thousands of views, some posts recycled old footage from China's lockdowns during the pandemic, as well as of crowded hospitals and medics in hazmat suits.

The falsehoods and fearmongering, which researchers warn could jeopardise the public response to a future pandemic, surged even as the World Health Organisation said China's HMPV outbreak was "within the expected range" for this season.

"The authors of some of these posts were trying to scare people," said Philip Mai, co-director of the Social Media Lab at Toronto Metropolitan University.

Mai said there was "an uptick in anti-Chinese rhetoric," with many on online platforms unfairly trying to blame HMPV cases "on an entire community or culture."

One video, shared by hundreds of users, showed a confrontation between Chinese citizens and police in medical suits, claiming that the country had begun to isolate the population to tackle HMPV.

Fact-checkers found that the sequence portrayed an unrelated altercation that occurred in 2022 in Shanghai.

Other posts claimed that HMPV and Covid-19 had "cross-mutated" into a more severe disease. But virologists said the viruses are from different families and impossible to merge.

Adding to the wave of disinformation were sensational, "clickbait" headlines in some mainstream media outlets that described HMPV as a "mystery illness" overpowering the Chinese healthcare system.

In reality, it is a known pathogen that has circulated for decades and generally causes

only a mild infection of the upper respiratory tract.

"It's an example of monetising panic in an already bewildered public right on the heels of the Covid-19 pandemic," said University of Illinois Chicago epidemiologist Katrine Wallace.

"The truth is that the HMPV is not a mystery illness."

Such posts have led to a surge in anti-China commentary across Southeast Asia, with one Facebook user going as far as saying that Chinese people "shouldn't be allowed to enter the Philippines anymore."

One TikTok video shared an Indian TV news report on the virus but with an overlaid message: "China has done it again."

"Because of the psychological trauma inflicted by Covid-19 and by draconian lockdown policies, citizens react anxiously to the possibility of another pandemic emerging from China," said Strategy Risks chief executive Isaac Stone Fish.

"The right response is to distrust what Beijing says about public health, but not assume that means the (Chinese Communist) party is covering up another pandemic, and certainly not to insult Chinese people." – AFP

Military officers in civilian posts spark concerns

JAKARTA: Indonesia's appointment of an army general to run the national food procurement company has raised concerns about the expansion of military roles under President Prabowo Subianto, with a rights activist saying it also violated military laws.

Major-General Novi Helmy Prasetya was named chief executive of Bulog, a powerful state logistics company in charge of government-controlled imports of rice and other important food staples, on the weekend, becoming the first active duty general in the role since the authoritarian regime of General Suharto.

Under military laws, soldiers are allowed to fill civilian posts only at state institutions in sectors such as defence, security, intelligence and disaster response. They are also not allowed to be involved in politics and business.

"This is a threat to democracy and a violation of the law," said Ardi Manto Adiputra, director of Indonesian rights group Imparsial, late on Monday.

The armed forces are subject to the military justice system, which is separate from the civilian criminal code, raising issues of oversight and transparency at any government institution run by active duty officers, Adiputra said.

State-Owned Enterprises Minister Erick Thohir said the appointment was a strategic move towards achieving a goal of food self-sufficiency, according to Antara news agency.

The SOE Ministry and the presidential communication office did not respond to requests for comment.

The military law does not stipulate penalties for such a breach. However, the appointment can be appealed through a petition to the administrative court.

It follows other military appointments in civic works since Prabowo took office in October, a trend that has caused unease among some people as it raises comparisons to Suharto's military-backed regime.

Prabowo was a military commander under Suharto, who was overthrown in 1998.

Australian National University research fellow Sana Jaffrey said Prabowo had appointed other active duty officers, such as his Cabinet secretary and senior officials at the ministries of agriculture and transport, which she said showed he trusted the military to help him meet his goals.

"But he's not willing to consider the long-term political consequences of placing active military officers in civilian roles," she said. – Reuters



Progressive Block senatorial candidate Danilo Ramos campaigning yesterday in Malolos city, Bulacan province. – AFP/PPIC

Duterte's future in balance as Philippines election season kicks off

MANILA: Campaigning began yesterday in the Philippines for mid-term elections that could set the table for the next presidential race and determine the political future of impeached Vice-President Sara Duterte.

Talk show hosts, movie stars and a preacher jailed on sex-trafficking charges are among the candidates vying for a dozen vacant Senate seats.

While the May 12 vote will fill more than 18,000 posts nationwide, it is the would-be senators who are facing a duty few bargained for; serving as jurists in the impeachment trial of former president Rodrigo Duterte's eldest daughter.

The vice-president, whose alliance with

President Ferdinand Marcos has imploded spectacularly, was impeached by the House of Representatives last week on charges of "violation of the constitution, betrayal of public trust, graft and corruption, and other high crimes."

Sixteen votes in the 24-seat Senate are now needed to deliver a conviction that would bar Duterte from public office, including a presidential run she says she is "seriously considering".

"The composition of the next Senate will be crucial" to the trial's outcome, said Dennis Coronacion, head of the political science department of Manila's University of Santo Tomas.

The Duterte camp last week put out a statement urging voters to "choose wisely who they will vote for, especially in the Senate, where the fate of VP Sara will be decided".

Yesterday's campaign kick-off is limited to Senate hopefuls and candidates for party-list seats reserved for interest groups ranging from taxi drivers to midwives.

Electioneering will kick into higher gear next month when candidates for the remaining 254 House seats and thousands of local positions launch their bids for office.

A survey by pollster Social Weather Stations last month listed job creation, food security, the health system, education and workers' rights as Filipinos' top concerns. – AFP

Singapore detains radicalised teenager

SINGAPORE: An 18-year-old student radicalised by far-right extremism and who idolised the gunman behind deadly attacks on two places of worship in New Zealand has been detained under the Internal Security Act.

Nick Lee Xing Qiu envisioned starting a "race war" in Singapore, the Internal Security Department (ISD) said in statement issued on Monday.

"Lee's attack ideations were aspirational and he had no timeline to carry them out," the ISD said, adding investigations into his contacts had not revealed any imminent threat to Singapore.

Lee has been detained since December under the ISA, which allows suspects to be held for up to two years without trial.

The ISD said Lee found far-right extremist content on social media in 2023, and then began actively searching for such content.

It said Lee idolised the gunman who killed 51 people in two places of worship in Christchurch in 2019, role-playing as the gunman in an online simulation.

"Lee aspired to carry out attacks in Singapore with like-minded far-right individuals that he conversed with online," the ISD said. – Reuters

World leaders seek elusive AI common ground

➤ US stance on summit statement remains uncertain

PARIS: World leaders held formal talks yesterday on artificial intelligence (AI), seeking elusive common ground on a technology subject to a global race for promised economic benefits.

Attempts to reach agreement may frustrate major powers such as the United States and China, which have their own geopolitical tech priorities.

Media reports suggest that neither Britain nor the US – two leading countries for AI development – will sign a planned joint declaration as it stands.

“Good AI governance” requires “clear rules that foster the acceptance of AI technologies,” German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told counterparts.

Outside observers criticised an alleged leaked draft of the joint statement for failing to mention AI’s suspected threat to humanity’s future as a species.

The supposed draft “fails to even mention these risks” said Future of Life Institute head Max Tegmark, who has warned of AI’s “existential risk”.

French President Emmanuel Macron vowed on Monday to blast through red tape to build AI infrastructure in his bid to keep Europe competitive.

“We will adopt the Notre Dame de Paris strategy” of streamlined procedures that saw France rebuild the cathedral within five years of its devastation in a 2019 fire, he said.

Macron’s push to highlight French competitiveness saw him repeatedly trumpet the €109 billion (RM502 billion) to be invested in French AI in the coming years.

He also hailed France’s extensive fleet of nuclear plants as a key advantage providing clean, scalable energy supply for AI’s vast processing needs.

“I have a good friend in the other part of the ocean saying ‘drill, baby, drill,’” Macron said in a reference to Trump’s pro-fossil fuels policy.

“Here, it’s plug, baby, plug!” he said.

EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen is expected to make further announcements on the bloc’s competitiveness.

Away from the political pageantry, OpenAI’s Sam Altman was to address business leaders at the Station F tech campus in Paris, founded by French telecoms billionaire Xavier Niel.

Altman mused in a blog post on Monday that with ever more powerful AI systems on the horizon, “it does seem like the balance of power between capital and labour could easily get messed up”.

On Monday, high-profile summit attendees had warned against squandering the technology’s economic promise in the shorter term.

World Trade Organisation chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said “near universal adoption of AI ... could increase trade by up to 14 percentage points” from its current trend.

But global “fragmentation” of regulations on the technology and data flows could see both trade and output contract, she said.

In the workplace, AI is mostly replacing humans in clerical jobs disproportionately held by women, International Labour Organisation head Gilbert Houngbo said.

That risks widening the gender pay gap even though more jobs are being created than destroyed by AI, he said. – AFP

France eyes Indian rocket launcher

BENGALURU: France is in advanced talks with India to buy a multi-barrel rocket launcher system, a top Indian official said on Monday, a potential deal that would be the first time India’s second-largest arms supplier buys weapons from New Delhi.

India is the world’s biggest arms importer, but has been trying to boost local production to meet its defence requirements and has been steadily raising its defence exports.

The domestically made Pinaka rocket system with a range of up to 90km was demonstrated to a French delegation in India three months ago and was found to be satisfactory, a second official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“France is in active talks for Pinaka,” said Ummalanesi Raja Babu, the director general of missiles and strategic systems at India’s Defence Research and Development Organisation, on the sidelines of the Aero India aerospace exhibition in Bengaluru.

“A deal has not been reached yet, but the talks are continuing.”

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in France to co-chair an artificial intelligence summit in Paris with French President Emmanuel Macron and both leaders are scheduled to hold bilateral talks.

It was not immediately clear if the rocket system will feature in the talks, and India’s Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

France’s embassy in India did not immediately respond to a request for comment outside of business hours.

France was India’s second-largest arms supplier after Russia between 2019 and 2023, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

The Pinaka rocket launcher system, used by the Indian Army and deployed in the 1999 war between India and Pakistan, is also being enhanced with longer ranges, Babu said. – Reuters

Business jets collide, one dead

COLORADO: At least one person was killed on Monday after a midsize business jet skidded off the runway while landing at the Scottsdale, Arizona, municipal airport and collided with another jet that was parked.

“A Learjet 35A veered off the runway after landing and crashed into a Gulfstream 200 business jet on the ramp,” the US Federal Aviation Association said in a statement.

Scottsdale Fire Department spokesperson Dave Folio said at a news conference that at least four other people were injured in the crash.

Folio said three other people were taken to hospital.

He provided no other details and it was not clear what caused the jet to skid.

The Federal Aviation Administration said in a statement that it was investigating the crash, which it said involved a Learjet 35A that skidded off the runway, which then collided with a Gulfstream 200 jet.

The incident comes at a time of heightened scrutiny of US air safety.

National Transportation Safety Board investigators are investigating three deadly crashes in recent weeks – the midair collision of a passenger jet and a helicopter in Washington, DC, that killed 67 people, a medical jet crash in Philadelphia that killed seven people and a plane crash in Alaska that killed 10 people. – Reuters



TACTICAL SKILLS ... The Pakistan Navy special force conducting a counter-piracy demo during the sea phase of its 9th Multinational Maritime Exercise AMAN-25 under the slogan ‘Together for Peace’ in the Arabian Sea near Karachi on Monday. – REUTERS/ICP

Boston man cleared of Chinese agent charges

BOSTON: A jury found a Boston man not guilty on Monday of charges that he acted as an unlawful agent of China’s government by supplying officials information about individuals, dissidents and groups in the local Chinese community.

Liang Liang, 65, was acquitted in federal court of charges that he acted as an unregistered agent in a case brought in 2023 that US authorities had portrayed as part of their commitment to counter efforts by China to silence its critics abroad.

Liang, a China-born US citizen, had denied the charges and pleaded not guilty. His lawyer during the trial said the charges were “ridiculous” and called them an effort to chill the free speech of an activist who advocated the “reunification” of Taiwan with mainland China – a view in harmony with China’s leaders.

“Justice has finally arrived,” Liang said through a translator following the verdict.

US Attorney Leah Foley said that while prosecutors respect the jury’s decision, we are disappointed with the verdict.

Liang had worked at a hotel and for years had been an active member in his union as well as a community organiser and activist in the Chinese-American community in Boston, according to his lawyer, Derege Demissie.

Assistant US Attorney Timothy Kistner told jurors on Friday during closing arguments that China’s government sought out Liang because it “wanted someone already involved in the community and who knew the people”.

Prosecutors said Liang from 2018 to 2022 provided Chinese officials with information on individuals and shared details about dissidents and groups with pro-Taiwan leanings.

Prosecutors said that in 2018, after travelling to Beijing for meetings with an arm of the Chinese Communist Party, Liang founded the New England Alliance for the Peaceful

Unification of China, which focused on promoting China’s goals with Taiwan.

China views Taiwan as its territory but Taiwan rejects Beijing’s sovereignty claims, saying only the island’s people can decide their future.

Prosecutors said Liang, also at the direction of Chinese officials, in 2019 organised a counter-demonstration against pro-democracy protesters, and in 2022 provided an official with a Chinese agency tasked with investigating political dissent information on two potential local recruits.

Demissie in his closing argument to the jury countered that Liang made no secret of his activism and that his prosecution infringed Liang’s right to free speech under the US Constitution’s First Amendment.

He said: “This case would have meant nothing if it did not involve China. That’s what this is about. And it had the purpose of scaring people, and it achieved that purpose.” – Reuters

Palestinian Authority ends payments for families of prisoners

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Authority (PA) said it would end payments to the families of those killed by Israel or held in Israeli prisons, including for attacks on Israelis, responding to a long-standing request from Washington.

"President Mahmud Abbas has issued a decree to cancel articles in the laws and regulations related to the system of paying financial allocations to the families of prisoners, martyrs and the wounded," the WAFA news agency reported.

The families will remain eligible for financial benefits under the Palestinian social welfare system, according to criteria that apply to everyone, the report said.

The details of the implementation of the decree, which is likely to affect thousands of people, remain unclear.

WAFA said the programmes supporting prisoners' families would be transferred to an independent foundation, the Palestinian National Economic Development Institute.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad criticised the decision. "This behaviour flies in the face of patriotism," Hamas said in a statement, calling for the decree to be rescinded.

PA dominated by rivals of Hamas, is based in the occupied West Bank.

Israel has long denounced the payments to families of Palestinian attackers, and the Israeli government has cited the practice as a reason to freeze funds for the PA.

"This is a new deception scheme by the Palestinian Authority, which intends to continue paying terrorists and their families through alternative payment channels," Israel's Foreign Ministry spokesman Oren Marmorstein posted on X.

The PA's benefit system has also been criticised by other countries, including the United States and the Netherlands.

In 2018, during his first term as US president, Donald Trump signed into law rules suspending financial assistance to the PA as long as it continued to pay benefits to Palestinians linked to "terrorist" entities, according to the criteria of the Israeli authorities.

The Palestinian Authority has previously said the funds were a way of supporting families who have lost income, and who might suffer the seizure or demolition of their property by Israel.

To circumvent this international pressure, the PA has already amended the system several times, seeking covert ways of maintaining it. – AFP

BRIEFS

PROCEED WITH RELEASE OF HOSTAGES: UN CHIEF

GENEVA: The UN chief called on Hamas yesterday to proceed with planned releases of Israeli hostages, after the group threatened to postpone further hostage-prisoner exchanges agreed under a fragile Gaza ceasefire. "We must avoid at all costs resumption of hostilities in Gaza that would lead to immense tragedy," Antonio Guterres said on X, appealing "to Hamas to proceed with the planned liberation of hostages." "Both sides must fully abide by their commitments in the ceasefire agreement and resume serious negotiations." The ceasefire that went into effect on Jan 19 largely halted more than 15 months of fighting in the Gaza Strip. – AFP

RELOCATION PLAN BOUND TO FAIL: SYRIA PRESIDENT

DUBAI: Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa said in remarks broadcast on Monday he believes US President Donald Trump's plan to resettle Palestinians from Gaza and take over the Strip "is a serious crime that will ultimately fail". In an interview with a UK podcast, Sharaa said it would be neither "wise nor morally or politically right" for Trump to lead an effort to force Palestinians out of their land. "Over 80 years of this conflict, all attempts to displace them have failed; those who left have regretted their decision. The Palestinian lesson that every generation has learned is the importance of holding on to their land." – Reuters

Dozens of families flee West Bank attacks

NUR SHAMS: Dozens of Palestinian families fled on Monday from the Nur Shams refugee camp in the north of the occupied West Bank, as Israel pushed on with a sweeping military operation.

"We hear explosions and bombings as well as bulldozers. It's a tragedy. They are doing here what they did in Gaza," said resident Ahmed Ezza.

Ahmed Abu Zahra, another resident of the

camp which is on the outskirts of Tulkarem, said he was forced to leave his home.

"The (Israeli) army came and we were forced to leave after they started destroying our homes."

Three Palestinians, including two women and a young man, were killed on Sunday in Nur Shams, the Health Ministry said.

Israel said its military police had opened an investigation into the death of one of them, a

woman who was eight months pregnant.

It said on Saturday it had launched an operation in Nur Shams, part of a much larger campaign that began in January in Tulkarem and Jenin, which it said had "targeted several terrorists".

In the streets of Nur Shams, under a light rain, residents were fleeing.

A photographer saw dozens of families hastily leaving the camp, while bulldozers carried out large-scale demolitions amid gunfire and explosions.

According to Murad Alyan, from the camp's popular committee, "more than half of the 13,000 inhabitants have fled out of fear for their lives".

Since Jan 21, the Israeli military has been conducting a major operation in the "triangle" of Jenin, Tubas and Tulkarem, where half a million Palestinians live.

Israel says it is targeting "terrorist infrastructure".

"What we are living through is without precedent," said Tubas governor Ahmad al-Assaad.

The Israeli operations "today did not target fighters, but civilians, women and children, and they blew houses to pressure residents into leaving".

According to the Israeli rights group B'Tselem, Israel was pursuing an "all out war on the Palestinian people".

"Since the ceasefire began in Gaza, the West Bank has been on fire," it said in a post on X.

"The objective of these operations is not security-related, but political," said Tulkarem governor Abdallah Kamil.

"They destroy everything. They are trying to change the demographics of the region." – AFP



Israeli soldiers keep watch as Palestinians leave Nur Shams camp on Monday. – AFP/IC

Gaza truce under strain after Trump warning

Door remains open for prisoner exchange: Hamas

GAZA CITY: The ceasefire between Hamas and Israel appeared increasingly fragile yesterday after US President Donald Trump warned "all hell" would break loose unless Hamas releases every Israeli hostage by the weekend.

The truce, in place since Jan 19, largely halted more than 15 months of fighting in the Gaza Strip and saw five groups of Israeli hostages freed in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

But tensions spiked after Trump proposed taking over Gaza and removing its more than two million inhabitants.

On Monday, he ramped up pressure, saying he would call for an end to the ceasefire if all Israeli hostages were not freed by noon on Saturday.

"As far as I'm concerned, if all of the hostages aren't returned by Saturday 12 o'clock. I think it's an appropriate time. I would say cancel it and all bets are off and let hell break out," Trump told reporters at the White House.

The ceasefire agreement says staggered releases should take place over the 42-day first phase of the deal.

Trump's threat came hours after Hamas' armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, said the next hostage release due to take place on Saturday would be "postponed until further notice".

The group accused Israel of failing to meet its commitments under the agreement,

including on aid deliveries, and cited the deaths of three Gazans on Sunday.

Hamas later said it announced the delay five days in advance to give mediators time to push Israel to comply.

"The door remains open for the prisoner exchange batch to proceed as planned, once the occupation complies," it said.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said the Hamas announcement was a "complete violation" of the ceasefire agreement, signalling that fighting could resume.

"I have instructed the IDF (military) to prepare at the highest level of alert for any possible scenario in Gaza," he said.

The military later said it had raised "the level of readiness" around Gaza, and "decided to significantly reinforce the area".

Israeli far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a fierce opponent of the ceasefire, demanded yesterday the immediate release of all hostages, adopting the slogan: "Everyone Now."

Negotiators were set to meet in Qatar to discuss the truce's implementation, which remain unsettled.

Talks on a second phase were supposed to start on day 16 of the truce, but Israel had refused to send its negotiators to Doha.

The Hostage and Missing Families Forum campaign group said on Monday it had "requested assistance from the mediating countries to help restore and implement the existing deal effectively".

On Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu praised Trump's proposal to displace Gazans as "revolutionary", striking a triumphant tone after returning from Washington.

The proposal, which the United Nations

and experts have said would violate international law, has already drawn widespread criticism.

Trump said on Monday he could "conceivably" halt aid to US allies Jordan and Egypt if they refuse to take in Palestinians under his controversial Gaza plan.

Trump is due to meet Jordan's King Abdullah II in Washington this week.

The threat to withhold aid came after Cairo's Foreign Ministry said it rejected "any compromise" of Palestinian rights, including "remaining on the land".

Trump told Fox News Channel's Bret Baier on Monday that Palestinians would not have the right to return to Gaza.

"I'm talking about building a permanent place for them because if they have to return now, it'll be years before you could ever ... it's not habitable," said Trump of devastated Gaza.

Asked if the Palestinians would have the right to return, Trump said: "No, they wouldn't, because they're going to have much better housing."

For Palestinians, any attempt to force them out of Gaza would evoke dark memories of what the Arab world calls the "Nakba" or catastrophe – the mass displacement of Palestinians during Israel's creation in 1948.

Despite Trump's words, displaced Gazans streamed back to their homes after Israeli forces withdrew from the Netzarim Corridor that cut the territory in two.

US and Egyptian security personnel were on the ground inspecting vehicles crossing the corridor.

Gaza resident Ahmed al-Rai said "it takes 20 minutes to inspect each vehicle" and that he had to wait five hours for his turn. – AFP

COMMENT by Dr Rais Hussin

Rising above Trump tariffs

AS US tariff threats dominate headlines and markets reel, concerns mount from Washington to Kuala Lumpur. Malaysian analysts warn that US trade measures, especially against China, could disrupt local industries and raise costs.

However, a broader look shows that these threats are far from an economic apocalypse. In fact, Donald Trump's protectionism may backfire, isolating the already shrinking US market while giving countries like Malaysia a chance to reshape their trade ties.

The global impact of US tariffs is often overstated. With 347 million people, the US accounts for just 4.23% of the world's 8.2 billion.

Worse, income inequality skews purchasing power, with the top 20% controlling 50% of disposable income, shrinking its effective market share to just 0.846%.

In an already deeply divided economy, protectionism risks deepening social and economic fissures. Instead of fostering self-sufficiency, high tariffs may worsen disparities, inefficiencies and even fuel polarisation or unrest.

Countries targeted by tariffs are likely to retaliate. On Feb 5, China responded with limited tariffs and signalled possible sanctions against US firms like Google, showcasing a measured but strategic counteraction.

Emerging markets and BRICS+ encompass 4.6 billion consumers – a vast pool of potential innovation, production and investment that far surpass the US market. By imposing tariffs, Trump risks severing ties with these growing economies, endangering US exports and global supply chains.

However, recent events reveal Trump's patchwork approach. On Feb 3, Reuters reported that while tariffs on Chinese goods proceed, those on Canada and Mexico were paused for 30 days after border concessions.

This selective enforcement shows a willingness by the US to negotiate with close trade partners while keeping China in the crosshairs. Yet, the contradiction remains – imposing tariffs while depending on foreign commodities will fuel uncertainty and disrupt long-term planning.

The high-tariff strategy appears at odds with preserving the US dollar's global supremacy. Boosting American exports and reshoring manufacturing will ostensibly require a weaker dollar unless the underlying goal is to refashion the US into an "ordinary" economy.

Historically, a strong dollar has primarily benefited US corporate elites, enabling cheap borrowing and access to global capital, while ordinary Americans face higher prices and potential job losses.

Of course, high tariffs are likely to fuel global uncertainty, a trend historically tied to capital flight into safe-haven US assets, which can strengthen the dollar. Yet, in today's context, this dynamics is increasingly complicated by the accelerating push towards "dedollarisation".

Some analysts compare Trump's tactics to the 1980s "Plaza Accord", which pressured allies to appreciate



While short-term volatility is inevitable, the long-term impact of tariffs is likely to be muted as countries recalibrate their trade strategies and forge new alliances.

— AFPPIIC

their currencies and ease the US trade deficit. However, that strategy worked in a more insular era. Today, China, a global powerhouse with its own strategic priorities, is unlikely to comply, making such coercion ineffective in a multipolar world.

Beijing's integrated role in the global economy gives it ample room to manoeuvre around US pressures, and it is likely already exploring alternative channels to minimise any negative impact from protectionist measures.

As for Malaysia, although it is not directly targeted by US tariffs, it remains an integral part of the global supply chains connecting economies worldwide. Consequently, local policymakers' concerns are not unfounded but rather a realistic assessment of how deeply interconnected modern trade truly is.

However, instead of succumbing to fear, Malaysia should see this moment as a catalyst to diversify its trade partners, reduce reliance on any single market and strengthen regional frameworks like Asean and RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership).

By deepening ties with BRICS+ and pursuing new multilateral agreements, Malaysia can create a more balanced economic future while protecting key export industries like electronics and manufacturing from tariff disruptions. Thanks to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's visionary leadership and diplomacy, Malaysia is already part of BRICS+, and must continue to build on it to realise its full potential.

Furthermore, while short-term contingency measures, such as targeted subsidies, tax relief and export diversification programmes, are essential to help industries most affected by tariffs (including electronics and palm oil, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises) adapt to shifting trade dynamics, robust long-term structural reforms

are even more critical.

These reforms include investing in domestic production and innovation to reduce export dependency; upgrading infrastructure and accelerating digital transformation to strengthen economic resilience; improving the quality and value-added of exports to remain competitive despite tariffs; and nurturing high-growth sectors like technology, renewable energy and services. Such strategic shifts are crucial to ensuring sustainable economic stability in an increasingly volatile global trade environment.

This moment serves as a reminder that the global economy is not a zero-sum game. In this high-stakes environment, true strength lies not in unilateral sanctions or tariffs but in the ability to negotiate and adapt.

The US's longstanding reliance on global demand for its "paper" currency and military might is waning as both trust in US high-tech products and capacity for global intervention decline. The emerging trend leans towards diplomacy, mutual respect and equitable trade practices – a direction that will ultimately shape the future of international relations.

As Russia's leader and host of the latest BRICS summit succinctly put it: we are moving towards a world order that is not so much polycentric where centres inevitably compete, even to the point of conflict, for dominance, but rather polyphonic, one in which every voice must be heard. This vision underscores a shift from a unipolar or multipolar system inevitably defined by rivalry to a more inclusive framework that prioritises civilised dialogue and diversity in global governance.

As a crucial distinction, BRICS+ is not an organisation but a format – one that does not propose a new hierarchy of nations. Instead, it presents a fresh framework for relationships between nations. Its principles, articulated at the 2023 Valdai Forum, set forth a new

vision for global cooperation:

- An open world, free of artificial barriers between nations and peoples.
- Civilisational diversity, fostering harmony among cultures.
- Collective decision-making, ensuring every nation and community has a voice in matters that concern them.
- Universal security and lasting peace – a self-evident necessity.
- Justice for all, rejecting the creation of any new colonial empires.
- Equality, ensuring no nation dominates another.

Meanwhile, the US's attempts to reshape its economy through coercive measures will inadvertently catalyse this more balanced, polyphonic world – one in which economic resilience is built on cooperation and mutually beneficial growth rather than confrontation.

As innovation increasingly migrates to emerging markets in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the unilateral imposition of tariffs will only hasten the shift of global trade away from outdated paradigms.

The continued expansion of BRICS+ markets and the evolving nature of global supply chains will continue to offer opportunities for innovation and growth.

The current alarm over Trump's tariff threats overlooks a key point: global markets are resilient and adaptable. While short-term volatility is inevitable, the long-term impact of these tariffs is likely to be muted as countries recalibrate their trade strategies and forge new alliances.

For Malaysia, this is a clarion call to diversify trade partnerships, strengthen domestic industries and deepen regional cooperation.

Dr Rais Hussin is the founder of Emir Research, a think-tank focused on strategic policy recommendations based on rigorous research. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

"Instead of succumbing to fear, Malaysia should see this moment as a catalyst to diversify its trade partners, reduce reliance on any single market and strengthen regional frameworks like Asean and RCEP."

Courts as climate guardians

COMMENT By Liu Kumpeng and Dr Mohd Istajib Mokhtar

WHEN most people think about addressing climate change, they often envision high-level policy meetings, international summits and governmental negotiations.

However, what is frequently overlooked is the increasingly pivotal role courts worldwide play in enabling individuals and advocacy groups to hold governments and corporations accountable for their environmental impact.

Through strategic climate litigation, citizens are asserting their legal rights and demanding stronger climate policies. These legal actions directly contribute to Sustainable Development Goal 13 (SDG 13): taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

In 2023, a landmark ruling in Montana placed young people at the forefront of climate litigation. Sixteen youths sued the state, arguing that its continued support for the fossil fuel industry violated their constitutional right to a “clean and healthful environment”.

The court ruled in their favour, determining that the state’s failure to consider greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in environmental decisions breached these fundamental rights.

This marked the first time a US court explicitly recognised constitutional protections in the context of climate change, setting a significant legal precedent for future climate-related cases.

The Montana case is part of a broader global trend where young people are leveraging the legal system to push for climate action. Across different jurisdictions, youth-led lawsuits are emerging as powerful tools to challenge government policies that exacerbate climate change. These cases not only amplify the voices of younger generations, who will bear the brunt of climate change’s long-term effects, but also compel policymakers to integrate climate considerations into governance frameworks.

A pivotal case in the Netherlands further solidified the role of courts in climate governance. In 2019, the Dutch Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Urgenda Foundation, a climate advocacy group, ordering the government to cut emissions by 25% to meet its international climate commitments. This was the first time a national court held a government legally accountable for failing to meet climate targets, reinforcing the principle that climate action is not just a political choice but a legal obligation.

According to a researcher from the

“According to a researcher from the University of Sheffield, climate litigation is an increasingly effective tool in holding governments accountable for their environmental commitments.”

University of Sheffield, climate litigation is an increasingly effective tool in holding governments accountable for their environmental commitments. She argued that legal action is not only influencing national policies but also shaping global climate governance by setting precedents that other jurisdictions can follow. Since the Urgenda ruling, courts in Germany, Belgium and other countries have followed suit, mandating stricter emissions targets and stronger climate policies. These cases demonstrate how legal frameworks can be used to enforce climate commitments, ensuring that governments do not backtrack on their environmental responsibilities.

As highlighted in the *International Community Law Review*, these legal rulings are not only empowering citizens but also creating a critical avenue for climate action in a legal context, where formal political processes may lag behind. The review emphasises how the Urgenda case represents a watershed moment in the global movement to make climate policy more enforceable through the courts, creating pathways for future litigants in various countries to demand stronger environmental protections.

Climate litigation is not only targeting governments – major corporations are also being held accountable. In a groundbreaking decision, an oil giant company was ordered to reduce its carbon emissions by 45% by 2030, significantly extending the scope of climate responsibility to private companies. This ruling established a critical legal precedent: corporations, not just governments, have a duty to mitigate climate change. Building on this precedent, the environmental law charity ClientEarth filed a lawsuit against the company board of directors in 2023 accusing them of failing to align the company’s strategy with the goals of the Paris Agreement. This legal action signals a growing trend in which corporate executives are being held personally accountable for climate-related decisions, rather than allowing liability to rest solely on the companies they oversee.

Another significant development in climate litigation is the increasing number of lawsuits targeting greenwashing – the practice of misleading consumers about the environmental benefits of a product or corporate strategy. Many corporations advertise their products as “eco-friendly” or



Through strategic climate litigation, citizens are asserting their legal rights and demanding stronger climate policies. – REUTERS/SPIC

“sustainable”, yet their supply chains, production materials or management systems fail to meet the promised sustainability standards.

Legal actions against greenwashing aim to enhance transparency in corporate environmental claims. By exposing deceptive marketing tactics, these lawsuits ensure that businesses provide accurate and verifiable information about their environmental impact. This trend also empowers consumers to make informed choices, discouraging companies from engaging in misleading sustainability narratives.

An emerging legal trend is the integration of human rights arguments in climate litigation. One notable case involves Torres Strait Islanders, an indigenous community in Australia, who sued their government for failing to take adequate action on climate change. They argued that rising sea levels threatened their ancestral lands, violating their cultural and residential rights.

The United Nations Human Rights Council ruled in their favour, finding that Australia had breached its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by not protecting the islands from climate-related harm. This case has significant implications for other indigenous and vulnerable communities worldwide as it establishes climate inaction as a human rights violation.

Despite these legal victories, challenges remain. One high-profile case involved a young activist from Portugal who accused 33 countries of failing to implement adequate climate policies, arguing that their inaction jeopardised his future. However, the European Court of Human Rights dismissed the case, citing a lack

of jurisdiction.

This ruling highlights the complex legal hurdles in holding multiple nations collectively accountable for a global crisis. Unlike cases targeting a single government or corporation, cross-border litigation faces diplomatic and legal obstacles, making it difficult to assign responsibility for climate damages across multiple jurisdictions.

Looking ahead, strategic climate litigation is expected to expand further, focusing on corporate responsibility, financial risks and human rights. More lawsuits are being brought against corporate boards, demanding policies that align with international climate agreements. As legal pressure intensifies, businesses will need to ensure compliance with climate commitments and take proactive steps towards sustainability and resilience.

At the same time, courts will continue to play a crucial role in driving measurable climate action, compelling governments to implement and enforce more effective policies. Climate justice is no longer confined to political discourse – it is actively being shaped by judicial rulings that redefine legal and ethical responsibilities.

As courts continue to align legal action with SDG 13, they are driving forward a more equitable, transparent and sustainable global climate response. Climate justice is not merely a topic for discussion – it is a legal reality that is shaping history, case by case.

Liu Kumpeng and Dr Mohd Istajib Mokhtar are from the Department of Science and Technology Studies, Faculty of Science, Universiti Malaya.

Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

Fumigation contractors must prevent mishaps at all costs

LETTERS
letters@thesundaily.com

IT was reported on Feb 1 that a contract worker hired to conduct fumigation at a factory in Perai died after carrying out the job from Jan 21 to 28. Another worker was in critical condition while six others were under observation.

Fumigation is a pest control process that uses hazardous gaseous chemicals in an enclosed area to exterminate pests.

The gas is contained in the secured space for a set period to ensure pests are eradicated, after which the space is safely ventilated and a fumigation certificate is issued.

The process must be undertaken by a

licensed and certified fumigator due to the serious health risks it poses to humans.

Several gases can be used in fumigation, and in this case, methyl bromide gas was used.

Methyl bromide is an odourless and colourless gas used to control a wide range of pests and vectors in warehouses and containers. It can eliminate fungi, kill weeds and exterminate insects, rodents and reptiles. A 2% chloropicrin is added to the gas as a sensory warning agent.

Methyl bromide is highly toxic. Studies in humans indicate that inhalation of the gas can severely injure the lung.

The most important advantage is that the gas can penetrate quickly and deeply into sorptive materials in normal conditions.

However, methyl bromide is an ozone-

depleting gas, and its use is regulated under the Montreal Protocol.

The Montreal Protocol, an international agreement signed in 1987, aims to protect the ozone layer by reducing the production and use of ozone-depleting substances (ODS).

Methyl bromide, an ODS, is banned across the European Union in accordance with the Montreal Protocol and due to its harmful effects on human health.

The ban includes its use as a pesticide and fumigant, with limited exceptions for quarantine and shipping purposes.

Methyl bromide is not completely banned in Malaysia for fumigation but its use is strictly regulated. It is primarily used for quarantine purposes, such as treating imported goods to prevent pest incursions into the country.

Its use for other applications is heavily restricted due to its ozone-depleting properties.

There is a Malaysian standard titled “Requirements for Methyl Bromide Fumigation” (MS 2546: 2013). This standard outlines the safety protocols for the handling and application of methyl bromide in fumigation.

Most Malaysian companies engage certified fumigators to carry out fumigation. The fumigator is responsible for complying with all relevant legislation and standards related to fumigation treatment and quarantine processes. They must ensure that the fumigation process is carried out without any incidents.

Wong Soo Kan

Awareness reshapes business landscape

➤ Companies that fail to adapt risk reputational damage: Grant Thornton

BY AIMIE SHAZRI sunbiz@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: As environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations gain momentum in Malaysia, businesses are increasingly recognising the importance of sustainability, ethical operations, and transparent governance.

Grant Thornton Malaysia country CEO Kishan Jasani (pic) said companies that fail to adapt to these changes risk reputational damage, regulatory scrutiny and operational inefficiencies.

He emphasised that human rights issues, particularly in labour-intensive industries, are becoming a significant concern.

"Businesses that neglect worker welfare not only face reputational risks but also struggle to attract and retain talent.

"With Malaysia already experiencing a labour shortage, we often advise companies to adopt fair labour practices, treating employees with dignity and respect to ensure long-term sustainability," he told *SunBiz*.

To improve ESG disclosures, Kishan recommended that Malaysian businesses engage with industry peers, such as the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers and the Malaysian Rubber Glove Manufacturers Association, to address ESG challenges collectively.

"Companies should also ensure compliance with regulatory guidelines like Bursa Malaysia's reporting framework and international standards, aligning with evolving ESG expectations.

"Starting with basic indicators like gender diversity and resource usage, businesses can scale up their ESG initiatives over time.

"Additionally, investing in employee training on ESG reporting and compliance can reduce dependence on external consultants and foster a culture of sustainability within the company," he remarked.

Addressing governance risks, he noted that

corruption and bribery remain key governance risks in Malaysia's corporate sector while highlighting the importance of whistleblowing policies.

"Auditors play a crucial role in identifying and reporting unethical practices to protect stakeholders and maintain corporate integrity," Kishan emphasised.

Furthermore, he noted that the growing adoption of ESG principles among Malaysian SMEs is driven by increased awareness, affordable technology, and evolving regulatory frameworks.

"Businesses are utilising Internet of Things (IoT) solutions and data analytics to improve energy efficiency, while sustainable practices such as solar energy adoption and rainwater harvesting are gaining momentum.

On Malaysia's ESG leadership in Asean, Kishan said, despite global uncertainties, Malaysia remains ahead of its regional peers in ESG adoption.

"With Asean's growing commitment to sustainability, Grant Thornton foresees more companies integrating ESG strategies to enhance competitiveness, attract investors, and future-proof their operations," he noted.

As Malaysian businesses navigate the evolving ESG landscape, Kishan said many are focusing on integrating sustainability into their core strategies.

"Companies are increasingly aligning their operations with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which help guide their efforts in areas such as responsible consumption, climate action, and decent work and economic growth.

"The rise of consumer demand for sustainable products and services is also compelling businesses to adopt eco-friendly practices.

"This shift towards sustainability not only enhances brand reputation but also positions companies to capitalise on emerging market opportunities within the green economy," he said.

In parallel, he noted that financial institutions are playing a crucial role in driving the ESG agenda forward in Malaysia.

"Banks and investors are increasingly considering ESG factors when making funding



decisions, promoting responsible business practices among firms seeking capital.

"The growing availability of green finance, such as sustainability-linked loans and green bonds, is further accelerating the transition to sustainable business models," he added.

Kishan said, as the regulatory and investment landscape evolves, Malaysian businesses are positioned to leverage these developments and enhance their competitiveness in both local and international markets, contributing to the country's overall economic growth and sustainability goals.

Looking ahead to the next five to 10 years, he said Malaysia is expected to see increased regulatory compliance, with governments encouraging businesses to gradually integrate ESG practices.

"Stronger diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives will promote equal opportunities and foster a more inclusive corporate environment.

"There will also be greater investment in renewable energy and efficiency, as companies recognise the cost-saving benefits of sustainable operations, leading to the accelerated adoption of green technologies," he added.

He also highlighted the role of digital innovation in shaping Malaysia's ESG future.

"Technology will be a key driver in sustainability, with businesses increasingly adopting artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain solutions for ESG reporting, supply chain transparency and carbon footprint tracking.

"Companies that proactively embrace these innovations will gain a competitive advantage in the evolving global market," he noted.

As businesses continue their ESG journey, Kishan encouraged corporate leaders to view sustainability as a long-term strategic investment rather than a compliance requirement.

"ESG is no longer optional, it is an essential part of the future-proofing business. Companies that embed sustainability into their core operations will not only strengthen stakeholder trust but also drive profitability and long-term resilience," he added.

Press Metal Aluminium, subsidiaries to reduce GHG emissions intensity

PETALING JAYA: Press Metal Aluminium Holdings Bhd and its subsidiaries aim to reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions intensity (Scope 1 and Scope 2) by 15% by 2025, measured against its 2020 baseline.

According to its corporate governance report, it aims to reduce its GHG emissions intensity (Scope 1 and Scope 2) by 30% by 2030, measured against its 2020 baseline. Press Metal aspires to reach net-zero emissions by year 2050.

Group CEO Tan Sri Paul Koon Poh Keong said the climate targets apply to manufacturing operations under its operational control by focusing on minimising the environmental impact through comprehensive mitigation and adaptation efforts within the boundary.

"The aspiration is in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement to keep the global temperature increase well below 2°C and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels."

He said Press Metal acknowledges the scientific evidence of global warming presented by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that highlights the urgent need for a global response to mitigate climate change risks.

"In our journey towards net-zero emissions, Press Metal is committed to reducing GHG emissions – Scope 1, 2, and 3 – within our manufacturing operations under our operational control," he said.

To pursue net-zero emissions, Press Metal said it is committed to:

- Optimising process performance to enhance operational efficiency and reduce energy consumption.
 - Deploying effective and low-carbon technologies within the production line.
 - Collaborating in research and development through strategic partnerships with external technology developers to develop and deploy advanced technologies that mitigate GHG emissions.
 - Promoting sustainable sourcing practices to source low-carbon raw materials.
 - Promoting and facilitating circular economy through closed-loop recycling to reduce consumption of raw materials and energy.
 - Transitioning to renewable energy for aluminium production.
 - Utilising GHG contractual instruments for renewable energy to support decarbonisation and increase our deployment of low-carbon energy.
 - Introducing low-carbon aluminium products to support our customers to reduce their carbon footprint.
 - Offsetting unavoidable GHG emissions through climate protection projects.
- Koon said Press Metal is committed to transparency in its sustainability practices and accountability across the group to drive systemic change and support our sustainability goals.

MARC Solutions establishes sustainability committee

KUALA LUMPUR: MARC Solutions Sdn Bhd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Malaysian Rating Corporation Bhd (MARC), has taken a significant step forward in reinforcing its commitment towards sustainability with the establishment of a sustainability committee (SC).

This newly formed panel will enrich MARC Solutions' credentials in addressing complex and evolving environmental, social, and governance (ESG) challenges while delivering exceptional sustainability services to its stakeholders.

As sustainability continues to reshape the global corporate and financial landscape, MARC Solutions recognises the need for specialised ESG and sustainability expertise. The SC will reinforce MARC Solutions' position as a trusted provider of sustainability-related solutions.

The SC will serve as a review panel for MARC Solutions' ESG and sustainability-related products, including MARC Solutions' second party opinions. Additionally, it will endorse the development of new sustainability-related



(From left) Arshad, Long and Theseira.

offerings, update and conduct periodic reviews of ESG/sustainability methodologies, and provide recommendations for all of MARC Group's broader sustainability initiatives.

The SC comprises:
➤ Dr Gary William Theseira, a climate governance expert and director and council member of Climate Governance Malaysia. Dr Theseira has a proven track record in advancing climate-related initiatives.

➤ Dr Alvin Long is a research fellow for the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network and a pioneer in low-carbon energy transitions in Malaysia. His work focuses on developing inclusive energy models. Long is also a Fellow of the Asean Academy of Engineering and Technology and the CEO of Atech Energy, a B Corp-certified energy services company. Additionally, he is a member of the CEO Action Network, a coalition committed to advancing sustainability and climate action within the corporate sector.

➤ Arshad Mohamed Ismail, Group CEO of MARC and executive director of MARC Solutions. Arshad brings extensive leadership experience in banking and finance to support MARC's strategic direction.

Commenting on the establishment of the SC, Arshad said, "As the demand for sustainable finance continues to grow, the creation of the Sustainability Committee underscores MARC Solutions' dedication to delivering rigorous and

forward-thinking ESG services. This committee will ensure that our offerings are in line with global best practices and that we remain at the forefront of sustainability innovation."

Theseira remarked: "The establishment of this committee is a testament to MARC Solutions' proactive approach to sustainability. It demonstrates a commitment not only to providing quality financial products and services but also to embedding robust ESG principles into decision-making processes that benefit the broader community."

Long added: "As a sustainability committee member, I am eager to contribute to MARC Solutions' efforts in fostering innovation in ESG and sustainability. By leveraging collective expertise, we aim to create a meaningful impact and help stakeholders transition to a sustainable future."

With its establishment, the SC reinforces MARC Solutions' position as a trusted partner in sustainability and ESG risk management.



Crypto exchange Hata **bullish** on growth in 2025

► Global policies, especially in the US, favour digital assets and are set to accelerate mainstream adoption, says CEO

BY HAYATUN RAZAK
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: Hata, Malaysia's second-largest cryptocurrency exchange, is expecting strong growth in 2025 as global policies favour digital assets and drive wider adoption.

Hata CEO David Low pointed out policy developments in the United States, particularly President Donald Trump's push to position the country as a hub for crypto innovation.

Low believes such moves will accelerate mainstream adoption worldwide.

"These favourable policies will encourage growth in the retail market and the institutional space. We look forward to seeing much higher

Low stresses that investors must grasp the fundamentals before putting money into cryptocurrencies.



adoption in the crypto sector as a whole," he told *SunBiz*.

Trump has openly advocated for fair digital asset regulations and has proposed a national or strategic Bitcoin reserve. This would involve the US buying large amounts of cryptocurrency over the coming years and holding it as a reserve, similar to the country's Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

Hata is a digital asset platform that offers an online exchange of cryptocurrencies and is regulated by the Securities Commission Malaysia and the Labuan Financial Services Authority.

With over three million Malaysians having opened crypto trading accounts, Low said, 2025 will be a positive year for the cryptocurrency industry in Malaysia because of the global momentum.

"When these policies are favourable towards the growth of the industry as a whole, generally, that will create more adoption.

"That enables us to build two platforms, one that serves Malaysians, enabling them to buy and sell digital assets with ringgit, and the other to serve users globally outside Malaysia, enabling them to buy and sell digital assets with US dollars," he said.

Low, a former general manager at digital exchange Luno and one of its earliest employees, played a key role in expanding operations of the com-

pany. "I helped set up their business, apply for licences, and scale across Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia and Australia," he said.

Addressing concerns about cryptocurrency's volatility, Low explained that blockchain technology was originally designed to facilitate value transfers and payments.

"However, due to asset limitations, many investors now treat it as both an investment class and a speculative asset, similar to digital gold or tech stocks," he said.

Crypto assets exhibit digital gold characteristics while offering speculative opportunities, much like technology stocks, Low said.

He advised Malaysians to understand the technology and use licensed exchanges to avoid scams if they choose to invest.

"More importantly, investors must grasp the fundamentals before putting money into cryptocurrencies. If investors adopt a long-term strategy by investing consistently through dollar-cost averaging, rather than making short-term trades, they can significantly reduce their risk of loss," Low explained.

Using Bitcoin as an example, he noted that in 2017 or 2018, it was worth only about a thousand US dollars. "Fast forward to today, more than five years later, and it's worth significantly more."

Low said success in the crypto industry comes from a responsible investment approach.

"Only investing what you can afford to lose, treating it as an alternative asset rather than a primary investment, and maintaining a long-term outlook instead of short-term speculation," he added.

MARC Ratings assigns preliminary ratings to Trusmadi Capital's Issue 2

KUALA LUMPUR: MARC Ratings Bhd has assigned preliminary ratings to Trusmadi Capital Sdn Bhd's Issue 2 of its RM3 billion medium-term notes programme (MTN programme).

The ratings are "AAA" for Class A MTN (up to RM220 million), "AA" for Class B MTN (up to RM40 million), and "A" for Class C MTN (up to RM40 million), with a stable outlook.

The proposed Trusmadi Issue 2, which can be up to RM345 million, is part of the existing RM3 billion Trusmadi Capital MTN programme.

The proceeds will be used to settle Murud Capital Sdn Bhd's outstanding issuances of RM342 million, including RM1 million in transaction costs due on March 28. Upon settlement, the charge on the collateral property Platinum Sentral to Murud Capital's issuances will be released and charged to Trusmadi Issue 2.

Trusmadi Capital is a special purpose entity (SPE) established by Sentral REIT, a real estate investment trust in Malaysia. The primary role of Trusmadi Capital is to facilitate financing activities for Sentral REIT.

In December 2021, Trusmadi Capital issued medium-term notes under its RM3 billion MTN programme. The proceeds from this issuance were used to refinance existing debts and support Sentral REIT's financial strategies.

Platinum Sentral is one of the key properties within Sentral REIT's portfolio. The income generated from Platinum Sentral contributes to Sentral REIT's financial performance, which in turn supports the obligations of entities like Trusmadi Capital.

While Trusmadi Capital does not directly own Platinum Sentral, its financial activities are indirectly linked to the property's performance through Sentral REIT.

MARC Ratings said the ratings assigned to Trusmadi Issue 2 reflect the loan-to-value (LTV) ratios of the MTN classes that are within the benchmarks the rating agency applies for the respective rating bands.

MARC Ratings determined the LTV ratios using its income capitalisation approach, valuing Platinum Sentral at RM513.0 million based on a stabilised net operating income of RM39.5 million. This valuation reflects a 23.9% discount from its market value of RM673 million as of Dec 31, 2024, as assessed by an independent valuer.

Platinum Sentral has a total net lettable area (NLA) of 480,062 sq ft, comprising office units (88.3%) and retail spaces (11.7%). It recorded a 95% occupancy rate at end-2024, with three tenants accounting for about 83.8% of total NLA.

MARC Ratings continues to view Platinum Sentral as being highly exposed to tenant concentration risk.

Of the three tenants, SME Corporation Malaysia accounted for 41.3%, Platinum KLS Centre (M) Sdn Bhd 33.2% and SBM Malaysia Sdn Bhd 9.3%.

The rating agency notes with concern that tenancies for a sizeable 24% of Platinum Sentral's tenanted NLA will be up for renewal in 2025, mainly comprising Platinum KLS. Meanwhile, the tenancies for SBM Malaysia and SME Corp will be up for renewal in December 2026 and June 2027.

The rating agency is confident in Sentral REIT Management Sdn Bhd's strong track record of securing quality tenants to manage renewal risks.

MARC Ratings said Platinum Sentral has maintained stable performance over the past five years, with occupancy rising from 80% in December 2021 to 95% in December 2024.

RM813m for MSMEs, co-ops in Sabah last year

KOTA KINABALU: The Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives Ministry (Kuskop) disbursed RM813.4 million to 53,395 micro, small and medium enterprises as well as cooperatives in Sabah last year, said Minister Datuk Ewon Benedick.

He said the allocations were provided to agencies under the ministry, such as Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia, Tekun Nasional, Bank Rakyat, SME Bank, SME Corp, Perbadanan Nasional Bhd and Malaysian Cooperative Societies Commission.

He said Institut Keusahawanan Negara also carried out 41 training and mentoring programmes for 1,585 entrepreneurs in Sabah.

"Kuskop has also introduced Ehsan@KUSKOP,

a special programme to help eradicate poverty in Sabah, and Yayasan Bank Rakyat has allocated RM3 million for this purpose.

"The programme will start this year in three districts identified as having high poverty rates - Kudat, Kota Marudu and Kota Belud," he said in a statement yesterday.

The Penampang MP also said the ministry has introduced the domestic Look East Policy, which focuses on Sabah and Sarawak, particularly in entrepreneur development.

He said the ministry's new initiatives for MSME entrepreneurs in Sabah include the Tamu Desa project, the Tamu Entrepreneur Financing Scheme (SPUT) and grants for Sabah and Sarawak Bumiputera entre-

preneurs under the Bumiputera Entrepreneur Programme Plus (BEEP Plus).

Ewon said that last year, 54 new Tamu Desa sites were built and upgraded with an allocation of RM10.29 million.

"BEEP Plus, with an allocation of RM8.39 million, benefitted 113 companies. Meanwhile, SPUT provided RM3.56 million in financing to 893 companies.

"Kuskop has strengthened its cooperation with Sabah through the establishment of Sabah Entrepreneurship Development Coordination Committee and District Entrepreneur, Cooperative, Hawker and Petty Trader Development Council," he added. - Bernama

Major energy hub in the making with launch of Sogip: Hajiji

KOTA KINABALU: Sabah is poised to position itself as a key energy hub in Southeast Asia with the launch of an RM8.88 billion oil and gas energy hub project at the Sipitang Oil and Gas Industrial Park (Sogip).

Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor said the project will create more opportunities for collaboration, innovation and development in the oil and gas sector, benefiting both industry

players and local communities.

"By facilitating a steady supply of natural gas and other lower-carbon fuels, SOGIP can help bridge the transition from fossil fuel dependency to greater adoption of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power in Malaysia's energy mix," he said.

Speaking at the launch of the Oil and Gas Energy Hub Project at the Sabah International

Convention Centre yesterday, Hajiji highlighted the project's potential to transform Sabah into a major player in the regional energy sector.

The development, a strategic collaboration between Sabah Oil and Gas Development Corporation, which manages Sogip, and Gibson Shipbrokers Ltd, will be executed in two phases, featuring a state-of-the-art port dedicated to energy transport and trade. - Bernama

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CAB Cakaran expects steady demand for chicken

PETALING JAYA: CAB Cakaran Corporation Bhd expects demand for chicken, being the cheapest meat protein, to grow at a sustainable rate in line with the domestic economy, which is expected to expand at around 5% and the increase in the minimum wage to RM1,700 from this month.

Executive chairman Chuah Ah Bee noted that the past two years had been challenging for the local poultry industry, having to overcome the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the oversupply of the chicken following the government's policy of allowing for more import of frozen chicken into the country.

"This policy has negatively impacted the selling price of broiler in the market which caused local producers to scale down on production.

"However, the price of feed has been on a downward trend, which helps to cushion the negative impact of the lower selling price of broilers," he said in the company's annual report filed with Bursa Malaysia.

He said the group, having become aware of the challenges outlined above, will take measures to upgrade production efficiency further and reduce waste throughout the value chain. This will ensure that the group's operations run at an optimum level and are sustainable over the long term.

"To improve and increase the distribution network for its products, the group will expand its supermarket outlets with a target of 12 new outlets in 2025.

"To better utilise its primary resource, the group is expanding further into processed meat products manufacturing. In this regard, a new factory in Nibong Tebal, with a production capacity of 1,500 tons per month, is expected to be commissioned in the second quarter of 2025," Cheah said.

He noted that the company expanded into Singapore by acquiring a controlling stake in a slaughterhouse.

"CAB Cakaran has continued to expand its business in areas such as manufacturing delicatessen products, trading, and supplying marinated and fully-cooked meat products in the island republic.

"In addition to trying to export more of our products overseas, it is very likely that the joint venture with the Salim Group would be an opportunity for the group to penetrate into the Indonesian market," Cheah said.

For FY24, CAB Cakaran recorded revenue of RM2.3 billion, which is a slight increase of 2.27% over RM2.25 billion posted in FY23. This was mostly owing to the increase in sales achieved by most of its

➤ Poultry farming and food processing company to upgrade production efficiency, reduce waste throughout value chain



CAB Cakaran is expanding further into processed meat products manufacturing. - CAB CAKARAN PIC

divisions, particularly the integrated poultry division.

The increased production of chicks and broilers and increased sales of feed, processed chicken, and further processed food products all contributed to the higher revenue.

However, the lower average selling price of chicks, broilers, and processed chicken has negated the revenue increase.

As a result, the group's gross profit fell by 11% in FY24 compared to FY23.

"The importation of frozen chicken from other countries, thereby increasing the supply in Malaysia, has resulted in a significant drop in broiler and processed chicken selling prices and a decrease in demand for day-old chicks. This has adversely affected the company's profit margin, even though feed costs have decreased," Cheah said.

The reduction in government subsidies for chicken, which fell from RM55.99 million in FY23 to RM39.80 million in FY24, has led to a decline in the group's other income.

As a result, other income dropped from RM75.24 million in FY23 to RM60.85 million in FY24.

The increase in marketing and selling expenses by 9.7% and administrative expenses by 15.5% contributed to a 27.8% decline in the group's operating profit, which fell to RM150 million in FY24. The other gains and losses decreased from a gain of RM2.1 million in FY23 to a loss of RM0.38 million in FY24.

Although the group recorded a RM7.89 million gain from the fair value adjustment of biological assets in FY24, up from RM0.35 million in the previous year, this was offset by an impairment loss of RM1.88 million on receivables, RM1.06 million on intangible assets, and RM2.81 million in bad debts written off.

"CAB Cakaran will continue to deploy resources towards our upstream and downstream business, such as to upgrade as well as modernising existing open house farms to closed house farms and expanding our processed food business," Cheah said.

FY25 likely to be another formidable year for Kelington: RHB Research

KUALA LUMPUR: RHB Research sees a strong start to the year for Kelington Group Bhd, with a tender book above RM2 billion, continuing strong off-takes at its liquid carbon dioxide (LCO2) plant, and robust growth of its ultra-high purity (UHP) segment.

The bank-backed research firm said the company's FY24 order wins should surpass those of FY23, and FY25 is likely to be another formidable year for Kelington.

"We see a seasonally stronger Q4 2024 with FY24 PATAMI likely up 20-30% YoY to a record high. Kelington's focus on profitability alongside the shift in product mix (higher margin UHP jobs and the ramp-up in the industrial gas business) should see net profit margin improving to 8-9% in FY24 vs 6.5% in FY23.

"With a healthy orderbook estimated at above RM1 billion in December 2024 and above RM2 billion in tender book, 2025 is shaping to be another stellar year.

"We project FY24 dividend-per-share (DPS) at 6 sen, with about 30% in dividend payout ratio (DPR) with 1H DPR at 52%," the research firm said in a note.

Further, RHB Research noted that 2024 order wins should surpass the RM1.3 billion posted in FY23, with the additional UHP jobs inked in Q4 2024 from Singapore.

The research firm said notable projects in the island state include the US\$7.8 billion (RM34.8 billion) 12-inch fab by Vanguard (an affiliate of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing (TSMC) and a high-bandwidth memory (HBM) facility by a major US-based memory producer that broke ground in January.

"We believe Kelington stands a good chance of securing its maiden UHP job in Europe, with tender outcomes likely to be known by mid-year.

"Projects vied for include a new fab in Dresden, Germany (JV between TSMC and NXP Semiconductors) potentially valued at RM900 million and fabs to be constructed by Infineon and Siltronic.

"As of Q3 2024, Singapore UHP projects made up the second-largest portion of Kelington's tender book after Germany at RM517 million (approximately 20% of the tender book)," RHB Research said.

The research firm also said Kelington stands to benefit from China's ongoing technology rivalry with the US.

It said as the Sino-US trade dispute intensifies, China is ramping up efforts to achieve self-sufficiency in semiconductors through significant domestic investments.

However, potential risks include weaker-than-expected order book replenishment, margin pressures, and shifts in the broader technology landscape that could impact future demand.

RHB Research reiterates a "buy" call on Kelington, with a target price of RM4.12, a 20% upside, and a 2% FY25 yield.

Haos Ek? brand owner eyes export market, listing on Bursa in 2028

KUALA LUMPUR: Haos Bhd, a company that produces the local beverage brand Haos Ek?, is expanding into the export market and taking steps towards listing on the Bursa Malaysia in 2028.

Chief executive officer and founder Anis Permin (*pic*) expressed confidence in the company's growth plans, citing the government's continuous support for Bumiputera entrepreneurs across micro, small, and medium enterprises as well as large-scale businesses.

"Our team deeply appreciates the various government agencies at both federal and Johor

state levels for their unwavering support and assistance through a holistic approach," she said.

Among the agencies that have contributed to Haos Bhd's growth are Perbadanan Nasional Bhd (Pernas), National Entrepreneurial Group Economic Fund, SME Corporation Malaysia, Small Medium Enterprise Development Bank Malaysia Bhd, Bank Kerjasama Rakyat Malaysia Bhd and Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia, under the Ministry of Entrepreneur and Cooperatives Development.

"Additionally, Johor state government

agencies such as Perbadanan Usahawan Johor Bhd and the Johor Department of Agriculture have also been instrumental in ensuring we qualify for various assistance programs tailored to the food and beverage industry," she added during the Brewing Success interview session at the 2025 National Corporation Bhd International Franchise Festival, held recently.

Anis highlighted that the assistance received by SMEs includes grants, financing, training, business development resources, and entrepreneurial mentoring opportunities, which in turn help enhance capabilities, expand markets and tackle challenges with greater confidence.

She emphasised the importance of taking

advantage of available government initiatives, noting that Haos has benefited significantly from various incentives throughout its four years of operation.

"As a committed SME focused on job creation, economic contribution, and innovation. We are proud to be part of this ecosystem supported by government agencies," Anis said.

She pledged the company's commitment to promoting these government initiatives to ensure more MSMEs can benefit from them.

Haos Ek? is a rising local beverage brand that focuses on producing and distributing Malaysian-themed beverage products. - Bernama



SCIB starts legal proceedings against Awana JV Suria Saga

KUCHING: Sarawak Consolidated Industries Bhd's (SCIB) wholly owned subsidiary SCIB Properties Sdn Bhd (SPSB) has filed a writ of summons against Awana JV Suria Saga Sdn Bhd, seeking legal redress over unauthorised loan drawdowns.

SCIB, an industrialised building systems specialist, is seeking several court declarations to safeguard its financial interests and legal standing.

As part of the lawsuit, SCIB is requesting a confirmation that the Settlement cum Appointment of Contractor Agreement (SA 2024) and the related contract have lapsed and are no longer enforceable.

Additionally, SCIB is seeking a court order to compel Awana to discharge SCIB as the corporate guarantor for the loan facility within 30 days from the date of judgment.

Furthermore, the company is also applying for an interlocutory injunction to prevent Awana from reusing the loan facility until the case is fully resolved.

These legal measures are intended to protect SCIB from further financial exposure and ensure that all contractual obligations are upheld in accordance with the law.

SCIB group managing director Ku Chong Hong said the company remains firm in upholding financial discipline and contractual integrity.

"The unauthorised loan drawdowns are a serious matter, and we are taking the necessary legal action to protect the company's financial interests.

"We trust that the judicial process will ensure accountability, and we will pursue all legal avenues to safeguard our shareholders' value," he said in a statement.

The legal proceedings will not impact SCIB's ongoing business operations.

The company will continue to monitor developments closely and provide updates as necessary.

Sime Darby-BYD alliance powers Malaysia's EV boom

■ BY AIMIE SHAZRIE
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: Sime Darby Bhd's automotive arm Sime Darby Motors Sdn Bhd's strong partnership with Chinese electric vehicle manufacturer BYD Co Ltd has propelled the BYD brand in Malaysia, securing an impressive 46% market share in the EV segment in 2024.

Sime Motors Southeast Asia managing director Jeffrey Gan said this partnership had positioned BYD as the top-selling EV brand in Malaysia since its introduction in December 2022.

He said that with popular models such as the Seal, Atto 3, Dolphin, Sealion 7, and M6, BYD successfully met the diverse needs of Malaysian consumers.

Despite BYD's dominance, Gan

➤ Partnership has made the Chinese automaker the top-selling electric car brand in the country since its debut in December 2022

said Sime Motors still sees room for collaboration.

The company is open to working with local manufacturers and charge point operators (CPOs) to help develop Malaysia's EV ecosystem.

"We currently have 123 charging stations across our network and continue to explore expansion opportunities to improve accessibility and convenience for EV owners," Gan told SunBiz.

Sime Motors' success with BYD highlights the effectiveness of its distribution strategy, yet it also

underscores a harsh reality — no Malaysian brand currently holds a comparable position in the EV race.

"With Chinese automakers securing an ever-growing market share, local manufacturers face an uphill battle in competing on price, technology, and brand recognition," Gan said.

He noted that Sime Motors has heavily invested in infrastructure, training, and after-sales support to strengthen BYD's market position.

While this benefits consumers, it also reinforces the perception that foreign brands are leading

Malaysia's EV revolution.

Gan said it takes strong local partnerships to understand and cater to domestic consumer needs.

He also noted that the Malaysian EV market is undergoing a major shift, driven by the rapid expansion of Chinese manufacturers, including BYD.

"While the strong demand for Chinese EVs signals a positive shift toward green mobility, concerns are growing over the long-term impact on local manufacturers.

"Some fear that Malaysia's reliance on foreign brands could stifle opportunities for homegrown automakers, making it difficult for them to establish a foothold in the EV market," Gan said, adding that Chinese EV marques, with their advanced technology, competitive pricing, and aggressive market penetration have propelled EV adoption.

While this is positive for the green mobility initiative, some industry observers warn that this growth may come at the expense of Malaysia's local automotive sector.

This is because Chinese EV makers have shaken up the industry by offering high-tech, affordable alternatives.

However, their rapid expansion raises concerns about Malaysia's growing dependency on foreign automakers.

Gan questioned whether these partnerships are enough to keep Malaysia's auto industry relevant or if the nation is destined to become merely a consumer in a market dominated by Chinese brands.

As competition in the EV sector intensifies, Malaysia stands at a crossroads.

The choices made now will determine whether the country can build a strong local EV industry or if it will continue to be shaped by foreign giants.



BYD managed to fulfill the wide-ranging needs of Malaysian consumers by bringing in popular models like the Seal, Atto 3, Dolphin, Sealion 7, and M6. —SIME DARBY MOTORS WEBSITE

Proton e.Mas arrives in Sabah, Sarawak, four showrooms launched

KOTA KINABALU: Proton Holdings Bhd's new energy vehicle subsidiary Pro-Net marked a milestone in the company's dealership expansion efforts by officially launching Proton e.Mas dealerships in Sabah and Sarawak, bringing electric mobility solutions to customers in East Malaysia.

On Feb 8, the Proton e.Mas showroom of Harapan Maju Sabah Sdn Bhd was officially opened in Kota Kinabalu by Datuk Phoong Jin Tze, Sabah's Minister of Industrial Development and Entrepreneurship, while in Sarawak, mayor of Kuching South Datuk Wee Hong Seng, launched the e.Mas dealership by Melinau EV Sdn Bhd on Feb 11.

The expansion continues with Ghee Hua Co Sdn Bhd opening its showroom in Sarawak on Feb 13, followed by Fook Loi Eurocar Sdn Bhd in Sabah on Feb 28.

Highlighting the positive impact of the company's expansion in East

Malaysia, Pro-Net CEO Zhang Qiang stated that the opening of the first dealerships in Sabah and Sarawak reflects the company's commitment to making electric mobility accessible to all Malaysians.

"With strong partners, we are confident that this milestone will accelerate the EV revolution in the region, bringing innovation, sustainability, and an exceptional EV ownership experience to our customers," he said.

These new dealerships reflect Pro-Net's ongoing commitment to expanding the EV ecosystem in East Malaysia.

The openings in Sabah and Sarawak are part of a larger vision to provide Malaysians with access to sustainable and innovative automotive solutions while contributing to the region's economic growth through job creation and the introduction of advanced technology.

The contemporary showrooms



were crafted to display Proton's electric vehicle technology and function as essential hubs for education and customer interaction.

Proton e.Mas dealerships aim to

offer customers a more seamless experience by integrating sales with after-sales services, ensuring long-term support for EV owners.

With 37 Proton e.Mas dealerships

The launch of new dealerships in Sabah and Sarawak demonstrates the company's commitment to ensuring electric mobility is accessible to all Malaysians.

nationwide, Pro-Net is on a steady path of expansion. As the brand continues to grow, it will set the stage for further innovation and customer-centric experiences.



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BP promises reset as Q4 profit hits **four-year low**

➤ Earnings of US\$1.17 billion lower than expected, dragged down by weaker realised refining margins

LONDON: BP reported quarterly profit of US\$1.17 billion (RM5.23 billion) yesterday, weaker than expected and the lowest in four years, while the company promised to reset its strategy, after news broke at the weekend that investor Elliott Management had built up a stake.

BP joins other oil majors that have experienced a decline in earnings throughout 2024, following record earnings in the previous two years, as energy prices stabilised and global oil demand weakened.

But BP has underperformed its peers and pressure has mounted on CEO Murray Auchincloss to deliver change.

Its share price was around flat shortly after the market opening, up 0.6% at 467.90 pence.

On Monday, it had rallied strongly on expectations Elliott's acquisition of an undisclosed stake would enforce change.

The 61% drop in the fourth-quarter compared with the previous year made the results the weakest since the fourth quarter of 2020, when pandemic lockdowns shrank demand for oil.

"We now plan to fundamentally reset our strategy and drive further improvements in performance, all in service of growing cash flow and returns," Auchincloss said in a statement.

Auchincloss has been working towards rebuilding investor confidence in the company, following the abrupt resignation of his predecessor Bernard Looney in September 2023 for failing to disclose relationships with employees.



Auchincloss speaking at a panel discussion during CERAWEEK with S&P Global in Houston on March 19, 2024. He has been working towards rebuilding investor confidence in BP. — REUTERS/SPIC

The company's quarterly earnings were dragged down by weaker realised refining margins. Its fourth-quarter average refining margin stood at US\$13.1 per barrel, down from last year's US\$18.5 per barrel.

For the current quarter, BP expects margins to remain low and a lower level of refinery turnaround activity compared with the fourth-quarter.

BP's underlying replacement cost profit, the company's definition of net income, dropped to US\$1.17 billion in the three months ended Dec 31, from last year's US\$2.99 billion.

That compared with forecasts of US\$1.26 billion in a company-provided survey of analysts and US\$1.2 billion, according to data compiled by LSEG.

Profit after tax tumbled to US\$381 million in

2024 from US\$15.2 billion in 2023, owing to weaker refining margins, asset write-downs and unfavourable accounting effects linked to gas prices, BP said.

Total revenue dropped 9% to US\$195 billion. Last year BP announced it would "significantly reduce" investment in renewable energy through the end of the decade. The company is looking to boost its share price, which lags behind that of other oil majors, including rivals Shell, ExxonMobil and Chevron.

BP announced last month it had cut around 4,700 staff jobs, or around 5% of its workforce, in a bid to slash costs.

Auchincloss is expected to reveal his new strategy at an investor day later in February. — Reuters, AFP

Shares of Chinese steelmakers slide as Trump's fresh tariffs add to export uncertainties

BEIJING: Shares at major listed steelmakers in top producer China slid yesterday as fresh tariffs by US President Donald Trump stoked concerns over possible impact on steel exports this year.

Trump substantially raised tariffs on steel and aluminium imports on Monday to a flat 25% "without exceptions or exemptions" in a move to aid struggling domestic industries, but which increases the risk of a multifront trade war.

Shares at Baoshan Iron and Steel, HBIS Co, Angang Steel, Hunan Valin Steel Co, Shandong Iron and Steel Co, and Jiangsu Shagang Co slipped between 0.14% and 2.63%.

Steel prices on the Shanghai Futures Exchange ended daytime trade with losses while the CSI steel index dipped 0.52%.

Fears mounted that new tariffs will add more uncertainty to China's steel exports this year, already threatened by mounting trade tensions, although the impact on direct Chinese steel exports to the US is limited given the small share of the trade flows.

Last year, China's direct steel exports to the US stood at 890,000 metric tons, just 0.8% of its total exports that hit a nine-year high at 110.72 million tons, customs data showed.

China's robust steel exports had helped to offset dwindling domestic demand, dragged by the protracted property crisis and the lower-than-expected consumption from the infrastructure sector last year.

"If the tariffs were to be implemented stringently, both direct exports and transit trade will feel some impact," analysts at consultancy Fubao said in a note.

Transit trade, or transshipment, refers to the process of countries buying products — in this case, cheap steel from China — and reselling those cargoes to other countries such as the US to avoid tariffs or other restrictions.

"In the medium to long term, it's bad news for the global steel market, as the reduction in US steel imports will eventually hit trading flow," said Pei Hao, a senior analyst at international brokerage Freight Investor Services.

"Some countries doing the transshipment will have to scale down buying from major steel producers."

A manager at an East China-based steelmaker, requesting anonymity as he is not authorised to speak to media, cautioned of "a butterfly effect on the market, which takes time to manifest."

"The bad news has not started yet, so we need to be prepared from now," the manager said, declining to disclose further details. — Reuters

China Vanke gets US\$383 million loan from state shareholder

HONG KONG: Cash-strapped China Vanke said its major shareholder, state-owned Shenzhen Metro, is giving it a 2.8 billion yuan (RM1.7 billion) loan, in a sign the government is stepping up efforts to stabilise the property developer.

Vanke, in return, will pledge 211.5 million shares, or 18.3%, of its listed property services unit, Onowo Inc., as collateral, the company said in a filing late on Monday.

The loan is the first liquidity support from Shenzhen Metro after a senior management

reshuffle in Vanke last month that increased state oversight and intervention to contain any non-repayment risks.

Vanke's bonds jumped yesterday after the loan announcement, with the offshore bond due May 2025 bid at 97.111 cents on the dollar in morning trade, up from 94.8 cents a day ago, while its yuan bond due March 2027 rallied 13.5%.

In a separate filing on Monday, Vanke published a repayment announcement for its 3 billion yuan notes maturing on February 16,

signalling that it will make the repayment on time.

Analysts said the Shenzhen Metro loan shows the authorities' efforts to avoid a bond default by Vanke. They added that it is a good deal for Vanke because of the higher-than-market loan to value ratio at 70% and a favourable interest rate of 2.34% as of Monday's calculation based on the loan prime rate.

They, however, said the amount is small compared to the more than 30 billion yuan of Vanke public bonds maturing in the remainder of 2025. — Reuters

Singapore's Paragon REIT gets buyout offer valuing it at S\$2.78b

SINGAPORE: Singapore's Paragon REIT said yesterday it received a buyout offer from its major shareholder, Cuscaden Peak, and parties valuing the real estate firm at S\$2.78 billion (RM9.14 billion).

The offeror, which holds an indirect stake of 61.5% in Paragon REIT, proposed to buy the remaining shares of the REIT at S\$0.98 per share.

The offer represents a 10.1% premium to the stock's closing price on Monday and a 4.4% premium to the REIT's fiscal 2024 net asset value (NAV) per unit of S\$0.9385.

Paragon REIT will also pay cash distribution of 2.33 Singapore cents per unit for the second half

ended December, according to the statement. When excluding this cash distribution, the offer still marks a 7.1% premium to NAV.

Paragon REIT is expected to be delisted by the end of May and will become a unit of Cuscaden Peak. An EGM will be called in April to seek shareholder approval.

Cuscaden Peak and parties holding 61.5% of Paragon REIT will abstain from voting, the statement said.

Additionally, the offeror plans to undertake an asset enhancement initiative, given Paragon REIT's portfolio heavily relies on Paragon, a 30-year-old shopping mall in the city's Orchard

Road shopping belt.

A potential total capital expenditure to refurbish Paragon Mall could amount to S\$300 million to S\$600 million, according to the statement.

The offeror said the mall's premier upscale status faces competition from malls undergoing major upgrades and upcoming redevelopments in the surrounding area.

"In the face of the uncertainties in the execution and extent of such an initiative, it would be more suitably carried out with Paragon REIT as a private entity," said Gerald Yong, chief executive officer of the sponsor and director of

the offeror.

Cuscaden Peak is a real estate firm jointly owned by Mapletree Investments and CLA Real Estate Holdings, which are ultimately controlled by Singapore state investor Temasek.

Citigroup is the financial adviser to the offeror, while Morgan Stanley is the financial adviser to Paragon REIT.

Separately, Paragon REIT reported a 4.5% year-on-year rise in net property income to S\$113.9 million for the second half ended December, and a 5.3% increase in gross revenue to S\$153.6 million driven by improved rental reversions. — Reuters

Trump tactics may reshape global trade

➤ US president has vowed 'reciprocal tariffs' to match levies that other governments charge on American goods

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump's use of tariffs as a blunt weapon to extract concessions on everything from commerce to immigration and drug trafficking could redraw global trading norms, analysts say.

Since his inauguration on Jan 20, Trump has unveiled and paused blanket tariffs on Canadian and Mexican goods over migration and illegal fentanyl, and hiked duties on Chinese imports in the same breath, triggering retaliation.

And on Monday he imposed sweeping steel and aluminium levies, drawing comparisons to his first term when he imposed duties across both sectors before allowing exemptions.

Trump sees tariffs as a way to raise

revenue, remedy trade imbalances and pressure countries to act on US concerns.

But "the degree of uncertainty about trade policy has basically exploded," said Maurice Obstfeld, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics.

Analysts can try to predict where tariffs might be imposed based on economic variables, he told AFP, but basing trade policy on non-economic objectives could throw things into a tailspin.

Trump's tactics could lead to a "retraction of global supply chains," he warned, or countries seeking to decouple from the US market if risk levels are deemed too high.

Already, the scale of Trump's tariff

threat is larger than before.

While he imposed sweeping duties on steel and aluminium imports previously, alongside levies on hundreds of billions of dollars in Chinese products, he has now threatened all US partners.

Trump has vowed "reciprocal tariffs" to match levies that other governments charge on US goods, and ordered a review of US trade deficits by April 1.

US officials are to recommend measures such as a global supplemental tariff to remedy deficits.

Across-the-board duties, if imposed, could affect more than US\$3 trillion (RM13.3 trillion) in imported goods.

But Trump's reasons for levies on Canada and Mexico - as well as a lower additional rate on China - go beyond trade.

"It's not a tariff per se, it is an action of domestic policy," Trump's commerce secretary nominee Howard Lutnick told lawmakers at his confirmation hearing last month.

"I don't think anyone should be surprised about these tariffs or tariff threats," said Christine McDaniel, a senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center.

Trump "has been very clear that he sees them as an important tool in his toolkit," added McDaniel, a former official in George W. Bush's administration. "He views this as as much of a negotiating tool, as he does in trying to balance trade."

Stephen Moore, a longtime external Trump adviser, sees tariffs as a way to "incentivise" countries to act in US interests, saying that partners such as Canada, Mexico and China risk bigger losses economically than the United States.

While he believes Trump's approach has been effective, he conceded it could be dangerous if it triggered escalating trade tensions with partners such as Canada.

Similarly, Washington would want a "strong and stable economy in Mexico," added Moore, a senior visiting fellow at The Heritage Foundation.

Inu Manak, a fellow for trade policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, warned that Trump's tariffs could backfire.

Besides threatening tit-for-tat tariffs, Canadians also offered a "cultural response," with people booning the US national anthem at sporting events, she said.

"This is really damaging the United States' reputation, and I think that's something we need to be concerned about in the long term," she said.

To McDaniel, the risk of unilateral tariffs may upend global trade.

"What is the use of WTO membership when one of the biggest countries in the world can threaten tariffs for national security reasons in such an aggressive way?" she asked, referring to the World Trade Organisation.

"It's definitely upsetting the appletart in terms of how we've been thinking about the role of international trade institutions, international trade rules and trade agreements," she said. - AFP

Bangladesh seeks long-term LNG deals, to build import terminals

NEW DELHI: Bangladesh is looking for long-term liquefied natural gas (LNG) deals with exporting nations such as Brunei, an adviser to the South Asian nation's energy ministry said at the India Energy Week conference yesterday.

The government has almost finalised a list of countries to buy spot LNG from, said Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan, adding that it plans to set up two LNG import facilities.

One will be a land-based terminal with

1,000 million cubic feet per day capacity, and the other will be a floating, storage and regasification unit with 600 million cubic feet per day in capacity.

Khan also said that Bangladesh is reviewing all power deals from the last regime, and is looking to auction gas blocks and will come out with a tender soon, adding there are good amounts of gas reserves both on- and offshore.

Bangladesh's interim government has accused energy supplier Adani Power of

breaching a multi-billion-dollar agreement by withholding tax benefits that a power plant central to the deal received from New Delhi.

Dhaka still owes money to Adani Power despite the country increasing its payments.

Bangladesh has asked Adani Power to fully resume supplies from its 1,600-megawatt plant in India, a Bangladesh official said, after more than three months of reduced sales with supplies halved due to low winter demand and payment disputes. - Reuters

Thailand plans long-term equity fund to support flagging bourse

BANGKOK: Thailand's government plans to set up a long-term equity fund to support the Thai stock market, the finance minister said yesterday, as the bourse has been the worst performing market in Asia so far this year.

The fund could be set up in an existing environmental social governance fund, or ESG, and investors will receive similar tax breaks for five years, Pichai Chunhavajira told reporters.

The fund is expected to help slow down selling from long-term funds, which has added pressure to the market, he said, adding details were expected to be announced soon.

The main stock index rose 0.48% yesterday but has still dropped about 9% since the start of the year.

With the fund, "investors who want to sell will stop and think whether to sell or not because they are in the ESG fund, they will also receive tax benefits", Pichai said.

There are about 188 billion baht (RM24.7 billion) worth of long term fund units that can be redeemed, industry data showed.

Separately, Thailand's Cabinet yesterday approved support for non-bank debtors, a deputy finance minister said, as the government tries to tackle stubbornly high household debt that has been a drag on the economy.

The Cabinet also approved soft loans worth 50 billion baht for non-banks for three years to help debtors, Paopoom Rojanasakul said in a statement.

The support will include reducing instalment payments by 30% and a 10% reduction in interest rates for three years, he said.

The assistance will apply to debtors with car loans not exceeding 800,000 baht, motorcycle loans of up to 50,000 baht and personal loans with a total credit limit of up to 200,000 baht, Paopoom said.

Borrowers with bad loans of up to 5,000 baht will be allowed to repay only 10% to settle the debt, he added. The move follows earlier introduced support measures to tackle household debt, which was 16.34 trillion baht at the end of September, or 89.0% of gross domestic product, among the highest ratios in Asia.

Of the debt amount, 65.4% was provided by banks and the rest by non-banks. - Reuters

Back-to-back heavy central bank interventions lift Indian rupee

MUMBAI: The Indian rupee rose sharply yesterday, aided by the central bank's heavy-handed intervention, which also triggered stop losses for speculators betting against the currency.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had also intervened heavily on Monday to support the rupee, traders said.

The rupee rose to as high as 86.69 in early trading before trimming its gains to last quote at 86.89 as of 11:15am IST, up 0.7% from its previous close of 87.4750.

The RBI sold dollars before the open of the local spot market, via state-run banks, which persisted after the market opened, traders said.

The intervention "is surprising and has triggered a blood bath for longs (on USD/INR)," a trader at a private bank said.

The rupee's sharp rise likely prompted traders to exit long positions on the dollar-rupee pair, adding to the currency's tailwinds.

The RBI was also likely conducting dollar-rupee buy/sell swaps to mitigate the impact of its spot dollars sales on liquidity in the banking system, traders said.

India's central bank sold at least US\$4 billion (RM17.8 billion) on Monday and continues to intervene aggressively in the foreign exchange market to support the rupee, four traders said.

The RBI likely sold between US\$4 billion and US\$7 billion to shore up the currency on Monday as the currency slipped to record lows and was at risk of falling past the 88 handle, the traders said.

The traders did not want to be identified since they are not authorized to speak to the media. A mail seeking comment from the RBI went unanswered.

Meanwhile, the dollar index was little changed at 108.3 while other Asian currencies declined between 0.1% and 0.7% after US.



A currency exchange vendor counting notes in New Delhi on Monday. - REUTERS/SPIC

President Donald Trump imposed 25% tariffs on all steel and aluminium imports.

Concerns about a potential trade war, persistent foreign selling from domestic stocks and policy easing by the RBI have all weighed on the rupee this year, driving it lower by over 1% in 2025 so far.

"We note that the accentuated moves in USD/INR witnessed lately has brought the currency to near fair value. However, given the unrelenting global uncertainties in the near term we expect the pressure on INR to continue," Kotak Mahindra Bank said in a note. - Reuters



US consumer cases in limbo amid agency inaction

➤ CFPB lawsuits against major banks face uncertainty after leadership change

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration's idling of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) left in limbo significant cases the agency brought against companies and large financial firms in the waning days of President Joe Biden's time in office.

The CFPB in January sued Capital One, accusing the bank of illegally cheating consumers holding its flagship "high interest" savings account out of more than US\$2 billion (RM8.9 billion) by freezing their rate.

In December, the agency sued the likes of Walmart and big banks including JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America and Wells Fargo. The agency accused Walmart and a workforce payments company of forcing delivery drivers into using accounts that cost them more than US\$10 million in "junk fees."

The lawsuit against the banks, meanwhile, said they failed to safeguard consumers from widespread fraud on payments platform Zelle. The agency also sued the company operating Zelle.

But the fate of those lawsuits, which have been filed in recent months, has been put into significant doubt following the abrupt and dramatic upheaval at the watchdog.

Russell Vought, President Donald Trump's recently confirmed Office of Management and Budget director who is now the CFPB's acting head, told its nearly 2,000 employees to stay away from the office and do no work, according to an email seen by Reuters.

"The enforcement actions, all of them, are going to be shut down," said Chris Peterson, a University of Utah law professor specializing in consumer finance.

The agency could potentially withdraw the lawsuits, though federal judges overseeing them normally would have to approve any actions parties in the cases take.

Capital One did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The financial firm previously said it disagreed with the claims and would defend itself in court while expressing disappointment in what it described as a pattern of lawsuits coming from the agency before a change in US presidential administrations.

Walmart, JPMorgan and Wells Fargo declined to comment. Bank of America did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Walmart previously rejected the CFPB's allegations and accused the agency of failing to allow time for it to offer explanations and rushing to sue.

JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon has been critical of the CFPB and vowed to oppose measures he contends would not make banks safer. Bank of America said it opposed the CFPB lawsuit when it was filed, describing it as imposing huge new costs on banks and credit unions offering free Zelle service to clients. Early Warning Services, the company that operates Zelle, pointed to an earlier statement in which it called the case legally and factually flawed, and driven by political factors.

Billionaire Elon Musk, tapped by Trump to downsize the federal bureaucracy as part of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), has been openly critical of the CFPB.

He is also making a push to offer consumer direct payment options on his social-media platform X. Visa agreed to partner with X on

the XMoney Account (the platform intends to debut later this year), X's CEO said in a social-media post in January.

"There is a direct, deep conflict of interest of overseeing the dismantling of the consumer protection financial regulator and starting up a large complex consumer financial business," Peterson said.

DOGE and Musk did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

"The most recent communications from interim director Vought to the CFPB staff instruct them to halt work on all rulemaking, enforcement, investigation, settlement, guidance, and supervisory activities," Mallory Sorelle, a Duke University public policy professor, said. "That pretty much encompasses all of the agency's work to protect consumers."

The CFPB has drawn criticism from Republican lawmakers and the financial sector that it is too powerful and lacks accountability since its inception in 2010.

The complaints escalated under Rohit Chopra, the agency's most recent director during the Biden administration. Critics argued he tested the boundaries of legal activity at the agency with his aggressive policing of the financial sectors.

The agency's supporters contend it has been a critical safeguard for consumers, reaping billions in repaid funds to wronged parties.

Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, the top Democrat on the Senate Banking Committee who helped set up the agency, on Monday joined a crowd of protesters in front of the CFPB's building. The CFPB is the one that "caught the crooks and made them give back so far US\$21 billion," she said. - Reuters

Fed to delay next rate cut due to tariff-driven inflation risks: Poll

BENGALURU: Faced with the threat of rising inflation, the US Federal Reserve (Fed) will wait until next quarter before cutting rates again, according to a majority of economists in a Reuters poll who previously expected a March cut.

Economists have raised their inflation forecasts since US President Donald Trump was elected, based on concerns his policies, particularly on tariffs, could reignite price pressures in the economy.

After cutting rates by a cumulative 100 basis points between September and December, Fed officials, including Chair Jerome Powell, have recently said they are "not in a hurry" to lower rates further.

With a strong job market and still solid consumer spending, many economists see the world's largest economy in a sweet spot, with little need for lower rates.

So far, there have been new tariff announcements every week.

Trump said on Sunday he would impose new 25% tariffs on all steel and aluminium imports. The White House delayed its plan to increase trade barriers on Mexico and Canada until March 1 but has levied an additional 10% tariff on imports from China.

"The tariffs are inflationary and could be quite negative for economic growth as well. That uncertainty just means the Fed is sort of left waiting and wanting to see what actually does happen," said James Knightley, chief international economist at ING.

"There's lots and lots of moving parts to the policy thrust of Donald Trump, and some of them are somewhat contradictory. It's very, very challenging, and so confidence in any of our forecasts around the US economy, and by extension global economic activity, is pretty low right now."

While a near-60% majority of economists in a January poll had expected the central bank to reduce rates in March, they were divided in the Feb 4-10 poll on when the Fed will cut next.

A two-thirds majority of forecasters, 67 of 101, expected at least one rate cut by end-June with 22 saying March and 45 in the second quarter.

Only 17 of 99 economists with end-2025 forecasts said the next cut will come in the second half of the year, and 16 expected no cuts this year.

Interest rate futures are pricing in just over a 50% probability of one rate cut by mid-2025.

Although poll medians predict the Fed will lower rates twice this year, reaching 3.75-4% by end-2025, the range of forecasts is wide, from a low of 3-3.25% and a high of 4.5%-4.75%. There is no majority view.

But economists were more certain about inflation pressures.

Over 90% of common contributors between the October survey - conducted just before the US presidential election - and the latest poll raised their 2025 annual inflation forecast, by around 40 basis points on average.

Nearly 60% of respondents, 27 of 46, who answered an additional question said US inflation risks from tariffs have gone up recently. A further 17 said no change, with only two saying they had gone down.

"The uncertainty is likely enough to keep Fed officials on the sidelines over the coming months, and if high tariffs are ultimately imposed then the subsequent rise in inflation will prevent further easing over the remainder of 2025," noted Neil Shearing, group chief economist at Capital Economics.

After growing an annualised 2.3% last quarter, the US economy will expand 2.2% this year and 2% in 2026, faster than what Fed officials currently see as the non-inflationary growth rate of 1.8% over coming years, poll medians found.

The unemployment rate, which ticked down to 4% last month, was forecast at 4.2% this year and 4.1% next. - Reuters

Seeking AI boom, EU to reduce red tape on technology

PARIS: Europe will cut back on regulation to make it easier for artificial intelligence (AI) to flourish in the region, French President Emmanuel Macron told an AI summit in Paris on Monday, urging investment in the EU - and more specifically in France.

The European Union's digital chief Henna Virkkunen also promised that the bloc will simplify its rules and implement them in a business-friendly way. As US President Donald Trump has torn up his predecessor's AI guardrails to boost US competitiveness, pressure has built on the EU to pursue a lighter-touch approach to AI regulation to help keep European companies in the tech race.

"We will simplify," Macron said. "It's very clear we have to resynchronise with the rest of the world."

Using the example of the gothic Notre-Dame cathedral, which was rebuilt in record time after a devastating fire, thanks to special, simplified regulation, Macron said: "The Notre-Dame approach will be adopted for data centres, for authorisation to go to the market, for AI and attractiveness." After his speech, the Grand Palais venue hosting the summit switched to a nightclub atmosphere with a DJ playing music and the words "let's innovate" and "free yourself" booming from the sound system, while spotlights swirled from a balcony.

Trump's early moves on AI have underscored how far the strategies to regulate AI in the US, China and EU have diverged.

And many at the two-day summit that started on Monday pushed the EU to soften its own rulebook.

"Europe's productivity is dependent on using



EU digital chief Henna Virkkunen promised that the bloc will simplify its AI regulation and implement them in a business-friendly way. - PEXELS PIX

this emerging technology," Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai said.

Pichai called for ecosystems of AI innovation and adoption like one he said was growing in France. "How do we create more of these pockets in more places?"

In an interview with Reuters, Virkkunen, a European Commissioner, said she had gotten the message.

"I agree with industries on the fact that now, we also have to look at our rules, that we have too much overlapping regulation," she said.

"We will cut red tape and the administrative burden on our industries," she said.

European lawmakers last year approved the bloc's AI Act, the world's first comprehensive set of rules governing the technology.

Meanwhile, France hopes that world leaders at the summit will agree to a joint, non-binding text that says the AI revolution should be inclusive and sustainable.

But it was unclear whether the US would be

supportive. US vice-president JD Vance could spell out the US' views when he gives a speech at the summit on Tuesday. Macron announced private sector investments in AI in France totaling some €109 billion (RM504 billion). That will include French startup Mistral's announced opening of a data centre in the wider Paris region.

Clem Delangue, the CEO of Hugging Face, a US company with French co-founders that is a hub for open-source AI online, said the size of the announced investments in France "has reassured us... that there's going to be ambitious enough projects in France."

Separately, one early outcome from the summit was the launch of Current AI, a partnership of countries such as France and Germany and industry players including Google and Salesforce.

With an initial US\$400 million in investment, the partnership will spearhead public-interest projects such as making high-quality data for AI available and investing in open-source tools. It is aiming for up to US\$2.5 billion in capital over five years.

Not everyone in Paris agreed with taking a lighter-touch approach to AI regulation.

"What I worry about is that... there will be pressures from the US and elsewhere to weaken the EU's AI Act and weaken those existing protections," said Brian Chen, policy director at Data & Society, a US-based nonprofit.

Labour leaders expressed concerns on the impact of AI on workers, including what happens to workers whose jobs are taken over by AI and are pushed into new, less-protected jobs. - Reuters

Musk group offers US\$97.4b for OpenAI

► Tesla boss claims tech firm breached contract terms by prioritising profit over public good in AI push

SAN FRANCISCO: A consortium led by Elon Musk said on Monday it has offered US\$97.4 billion (RM434 billion) to buy the nonprofit that controls OpenAI, another salvo in the billionaire's fight to block the artificial intelligence startup from transitioning to a for-profit firm.

Musk's bid is likely to ratchet up longstanding tensions with OpenAI CEO Sam Altman over the future of the ChatGPT maker at the heart of a boom in generative AI technology. Altman on Monday promptly posted on X: "no thank you but we will buy twitter for US\$9.74 billion if you want."

Musk co-founded OpenAI with Altman in 2015 as a nonprofit, but left before the company took off. He founded the competing AI startup xAI in 2023.

Musk, the CEO of Tesla and owner of tech

and social media company X, is a close ally of President Donald Trump. He spent more than a quarter of a billion dollars to help elect Trump, and leads the Department of Government Efficiency, a new arm of the White House tasked with radically shrinking the federal bureaucracy. Musk recently criticized a US\$500 billion OpenAI-led project announced by Trump at the White House.

OpenAI is now trying to transition into a for-profit from a nonprofit entity, which it says is required to secure the capital needed for developing the best AI models.

Musk sued Altman and others in August last year, claiming they violated contract provisions by putting profit ahead of the public good in the push to advance AI. In November, he asked a US district judge for a preliminary injunction blocking OpenAI from converting to a for-profit structure.

Musk's lawsuit against OpenAI and Altman says the founders originally approached him to fund a nonprofit focused on developing AI to benefit humanity, but that it was now focused on making money.

"It's time for OpenAI to return to the open-source, safety-focused force for good it once was," Musk said in a statement on Monday. "We will make sure that happens."

Altman told staff in a message that the company's board of directors intends to make clear it has no interest in Musk's "supposed bid", according to a report by The Information on Monday.

Musk and OpenAI backer Microsoft did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The consortium led by Musk includes his AI startup xAI, Baron Capital Group, Emanuel Capital and others.

xAI could merge with OpenAI following a deal, according to the Wall Street Journal, which first reported Musk's offer earlier on Monday. xAI recently raised US\$6 billion from investors at a valuation of US\$40 billion, sources have told Reuters.

"This [bid] is definitely throwing a wrench in things," said Jonathan Macey, a Yale Law School professor specializing in corporate governance.

"The nonprofit is supposed to take money to do whatever good deeds, and if OpenAI prefers to sell it to somebody else for less money, it's a concern for protecting the interests of the beneficiaries of the not-for-profit."

OpenAI was valued at US\$157 billion in its last funding round, cementing its status as one of the most valuable private companies in the world. SoftBank Group is in talks to lead a

funding round of up to US\$40 billion in OpenAI at a valuation of US\$300 billion, including the new funds, Reuters reported in January.

Aside from any antitrust implications, a deal this size would need Musk and his consortium to raise enormous funds.

Musk's stock in Tesla is valued at roughly US\$165 billion, according to LSEG data, but his leverage with banks is likely to be thin after his US\$44 billion buyout of X, which was then called Twitter, in 2022.

To finance such a bid, Musk could sell part of his stake in Tesla or take a loan against his stake, or use his stake in rocket company SpaceX that is worth tens of billions of dollars as collateral, according to an uninvolved investment banker, who requested anonymity.

"Musk's offer to buy OpenAI's nonprofit should significantly complicate OpenAI's current fundraising and the process of converting into a for-profit corporation," said Gil Luria, analyst at D.A. Davidson.

"The offer seems to be backed by more credible investors... OpenAI may not be able to ignore it. It will be the fiduciary responsibility of OpenAI's board to decide whether this is a better offer, which could call into question the offer from SoftBank." - Reuters



Fast food giant posts surprise global sales in Q4, driven by demand for affordable meals in the Middle East, Japan, and China. - UNSPLASH PIX

McDonald's global sales jump offsets US slowdown

NEW YORK: McDonald's posted on Monday a surprise increase in its global comparable sales in the fourth quarter, aided by demand for its cheaper items and discounted offerings from diners in the Middle East, Japan and China.

Shares of the burger chain rose nearly 5% in early US trading, despite a bigger-than-expected drop in US comparable sales due to an E. coli outbreak in late October, and cautious spending.

Demand pressure on fast-food chains operating in the Middle East has begun to ease after widespread informal boycotts of Western chains over their perceived pro-Israeli stance in the Gaza conflict.

The surprising sales growth in the region for McDonald's offsets some weakness in its largest market, the US, where it reported the biggest drop, 1.4% since the pandemic.

KFC parent Yum Brands last week recorded positive sales growth in the Middle East. McDonald's and its rivals leaned on value meals in 2024 to spur spending among customers preferring to eat meals at home.

"Value is helping McDonald's recover traffic from lower-income consumers, but that

expansion of value will pressure store profits, which will make it difficult to drive stronger earnings longer-term," Northcoast Research analyst Jim Sanderson said.

McDonald's extended its US\$5 (RM22.30) meal deal launched in June into December. CEO Chris Kempczinski said the meal was prompting US diners to buy more, and that the average transaction size for the meal deal was more than US\$10 in the US.

Executives on a call with analysts did not give any timeline for ending the company's discount push and said the fast-food industry overall still faces challenges with low-income consumers. Chief financial officer Ian Borden said the company had limited pricing flexibility.

Budget-conscious diners were also targeted in October with a new Chicken Big Mac, along with other special releases. The company announced in December it would bring back its snack wrap, another chicken-based option aimed at budget-conscious diners.

US customer traffic increased slightly in the fourth quarter compared to a year ago, the company said, but that was offset by a smaller average amount spent by customers per visit.

Customer visits were also limited by an E. coli outbreak in October, which forced McDonald's to temporarily suspend sales of its Quarter Pounder hamburgers in a fifth of its 14,000 US restaurants for roughly two weeks. Kempczinski said the episode is still having an effect in the region where the outbreak occurred, but not elsewhere, and expects even that localized effect to subside by the end of April.

The company's global same-store sales rose 0.4% in the quarter ending Dec 31, compared with expectations of a 0.63% decline, according to data compiled by LSEG.

This was driven by a 4.1% rise in McDonald's business segment where restaurants are operated by local partners, led by Middle East and Japan. Company executives said in a post-earnings call that demand was stabilizing in China.

Executives said the chain was on track to have 50,000 units worldwide by the end of 2027.

Quarterly adjusted earnings per share of US\$2.83 were in line with market expectations. - Reuters

Moody's warns World Bank rating at risk if Trump pulls support

LONDON: The triple-A ratings of the World Bank and other top multilateral lenders would be at risk if US President Donald Trump slashed his country's support for them, credit rating agency Moody's has warned, adding such a move was unlikely.

Last week, Trump signed an Executive Order to review US government support to all international intergovernmental organisations of which it is a member and to withdraw from some United Nations organisations.

"The US is a key shareholder in a number of rated MDBs (multilateral development banks), hence it would be credit negative if it materially reduced its commitment to them," Moody's said in a report published on Monday.

The US is the single biggest shareholder in the World Bank Group's institutions, with a 16.4% share in its largest, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), and a 19% stake in International Development Association (IDA) which provides concessional loans and grants to the world's poorest countries.

The World Bank declined to comment on the Moody's note.

It has an even higher 30% share in the Inter-American Development Bank in Latin America, a 15.6% stake in the Asian Development Bank and 10% in the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development that was set up in the wake of the Cold War.

The Trump-ordered review of Washington's support for development banks is due to take roughly six months.

The set-ups of most of the institutions allow for an "orderly withdrawal" of a shareholder.

Moody's said it was "unlikely that the US would take drastic steps regarding its participation in key MDBs" for several reasons, including the loss of influence over those institutions' lending policies.

In the World Bank's case, the US has paid in capital of around US\$3.7 billion (RM16.5 billion) in the IBRD and has callable capital commitments of US\$49.2 billion, compared to disbursed and outstanding IBRD loans and guarantees of around US\$263 billion.

The average maturity of the IBRD's loan portfolio is 8.4 years although some loans are for up to 50 years meaning that, "the US would remain on the hook for IBRD's lending portfolio for many years to come," Moody's said. - Reuters

PETALING JAYA: A landmark moment for Spirit of Endeavour Sdn Bhd, a Malaysian consulting firm, came when it was selected by the Fiji government as the Integrated Project Manager for the “businessNOW Fiji” project.

Tasked with spearheading the development of Fiji’s national digital platform for government services, this project aimed to streamline processes for businesses and investors.

Under this initiative, two critical applications would be implemented: First, to digitise the process of starting a business and the other to automate building permit approvals through a digitisation process.

As one of Fiji’s largest ICT projects, businessNOW Fiji is a cornerstone of the country’s digital government transformation agenda, launched in 2018. Known as digitalFIJI, when fully completed, Fiji would have integrated 16 agencies and ministries with 25 e-services online.

“We’re happy to announce the launch of starting a business system which integrates eight agencies enabling companies to be registered, obtain their tax numbers, employee provident registration, occupational health, fire safety, training provisioning and food licensing (if applicable) all on one platform, one sign-on and with active monitoring. If a foreign company intends to invest in Fiji, the Reserve Bank’s certification is also on the same system, said Spirit of Endeavour managing director K V Soon (pix).

He said Endeavour conducted the process review and developed the high level integrated functional requirement, advised in the selection of the software (technical) vendor, set-up and manage the Integrated Project Management Office.

Soon shared with Sunbiz insights into the challenges, strategies, and triumphs of leading such a groundbreaking international venture.

Endeavour appointed project manager for businessNOW Fiji

➤ Malaysian consulting firm developing island’s national digital platform to enhance services for businesses and investors

“Being chosen for this project was both a proud moment and a significant responsibility,” said Soon.

“The Fiji government’s vision to enhance ease of doing business resonated deeply with our expertise in digitisation and transformation. We knew this project would push boundaries, not just technologically but also culturally and logistically.”

With the Fiji government’s goal to create a more business-friendly environment, businessNOW Fiji marked a bold step towards simplifying bureaucracy and catalysing economic development.

“Our role as the Integrated Project Manager required us to ensure the delivery of the systems are on time and of high quality. We are also responsible for the usefulness. We need to ensure that the system aligns with national strategies - in other words, it needs to, over time, achieve the intended impact. To achieve this, we had to first align various stakeholders, integrate diverse systems and processes, and deliver a platform that is both robust and user-



centric,” said Soon.

What were the primary logistical and infrastructural challenges in starting the project?

“The geography of Fiji was obviously a hurdle with hundreds of islands spread across a large space of oceans. I must acknowledge that the Fiji government was forward-thinking and is still in the process of improving connectivity - both in terms of reach and quality. An effective communication process was set up to ensure infrastructural and connectivity needs, as well as requirements are met for this project. The real challenge was connecting the multiple disparate agencies and ministries with varying degrees of software complexities. Of course, they are agencies that did not have systems who did their processes manually. The coordination and integration were immense. Moreover, for the existing multiple systems, we selected a technical vendor that could offer flexible solutions, including a generic front-

end solution for those organisations that relied on manual processes.

How did cultural and regional nuances influence the project delivery?

Understanding Fijian culture was pivotal. For instance, their emphasis on relationship building and community engagement meant we could not simply impose solutions. We had to co-create them with local stakeholders. Respecting traditions like the pace of decision-making was a learning curve. But once we aligned our processes with their way of working, the collaboration became smoother. Beyond acknowledging cultural differences, our team put together a comprehensive change management programme that seek to understand the challenges and to develop and execute specific activities to break through barriers for adoption.

How critical was stakeholder engagement in addressing these challenges?

Absolutely critical. This project integrates multiple agencies, over 15 of them onto a single platform. This alone is absolutely challenging, especially when all of them have their own processes. Some have systems, some don’t and their systems vary in sophistication and depth. One important aspect of running the project successfully is to ensure that the governance of the project is clear, and the right people are helming the respective

committees. We established a Joint Project Management Committee (JPMC) comprising Fiji government officials from key agencies reporting to a steering committee comprising members from the private sector, and our Endeavour team. Scheduled meeting and regular check-ins, open dialogue, and a shared vision were instrumental in resolving conflicts and aligning priorities.

What advice would you give Malaysian companies planning to venture overseas?

Firstly, adaptability is key. Each market has its own unique dynamics, and flexibility in approach is essential. Secondly, invest in meaningful relationships. In Fiji, success came from earning trust, understanding cultural nuances, and demonstrating long-term commitment. Finally, focus on building local capacity. By empowering local talent, we not only ensured the project’s sustainability but also built goodwill that will last long after the project ends.

Reflecting on the journey, Soon concludes, “Project businessNOW Fiji is a testament to what Malaysian companies can achieve on the global stage. It wasn’t just about technology; it was about partnership, perseverance, and creating something that truly made a difference. I believe our experience serves as a blueprint for other Malaysian firms aspiring to make their mark overseas, especially when working with governments.”

Shaping the future of MICE: Global trends and Putrajaya Marriott’s role

The MICE industry is transforming faster than ever, and Southeast Asia is right at the heart of this evolution.

As one of the region’s most exciting hubs for business events, Southeast Asia’s MICE market is set to soar, with an impressive 12.5% growth projected by 2028.

This blend of booming business and rich tourism potential is putting the spotlight on top venues like Putrajaya Marriott Hotel. Situated in the lush IOI Resort City, we’re leading the way with innovative event solutions that cater to the ever-changing needs of today’s organisers and attendees.

As the global MICE market heads towards a staggering US\$1.78 billion by 2030, the race is on to create experiences that stand out — and that’s where we come in.

The hybrid event evolution

With the rise of hybrid events — a trend growing by 23% globally — businesses are combining the best of both in-person and virtual meetings to increase flexibility and reach wider audiences. This shift is especially prominent in Southeast Asia, where cross-border collaboration and international business relations are key.

As a premier MICE destination in Southeast Asia, Putrajaya Marriott Hotel has invested in advanced AV technology and high-speed connectivity to seamlessly host hybrid events. Our flexible, well-equipped event spaces

allow organisers to deliver both in-person and virtual experiences that are equally engaging.

Focus on sustainability in MICE

Sustainability is now a driving force in MICE. According to the Global Destination Sustainability Index, over 70% of corporate planners prioritise venues with eco-friendly practices. This is a growing trend in Southeast Asia, where sustainable tourism and green-certified venues are in high demand.

At Putrajaya Marriott Hotel, we align with these priorities by offering green meeting packages that include energy-efficient spaces, paperless registration options, and sustainable food and beverage services. By partnering with us, event planners can meet their sustainability goals without compromising on the quality of their events.

Personalisation and experience-driven events

In today’s fast-evolving MICE landscape, one-size-fits-all is no longer enough. According to the American Express Meetings & Events report, a striking 89% of event planners now rank personalisation and immersive experiences as top priorities. In Southeast Asia, where cultural richness and diversity thrive, attendees are increasingly seeking events that reflect local authenticity and offer deeper,

more meaningful connections.

At Putrajaya Marriott Hotel, we don’t just tailor events — we craft bespoke experiences that leave lasting impressions. From weaving in the vibrant colours and customs of Malaysian traditions to creating culinary journeys that celebrate local flavours, every detail is meticulously designed to resonate with your guests. Whether it’s an intimate corporate retreat or a grand-scale conference, our mission is simple: to deliver an event that is as unique as your brand and as memorable as the region itself.

Wellness and well-being in MICE

As wellness continues to gain importance in the business world, 72% of global event professionals are incorporating wellness activities into their event agendas. In Southeast Asia, known for its thriving wellness tourism sector, the integration of well-being into business events is increasingly essential.

At Putrajaya Marriott Hotel, our guests can unwind with wellness-focused amenities, from serene outdoor spaces like the Palm Garden Golf Club and Central Park at IOI Resort City to relaxing treatments at our spa. We also provide healthy catering

options to keep attendees energised throughout their stay, combining productivity with balance.

The role of technology in MICE

With over 80% of MICE planners now integrating tech-driven solutions, technology plays a critical role in delivering engaging events, both hybrid and in-person. Southeast Asia, with its fast-growing digital infrastructure, is leading the charge in adopting tech innovations in MICE, from virtual reality to AI-driven event management.

Putrajaya Marriott Hotel leads the way with advanced technology, offering fast internet, digital collaboration tools, and smart event planning. This ensures smooth, tech-enhanced MICE events for both planners and attendees.

Southeast Asia: A leading MICE hub

Southeast Asia continues to rise as a dominant player in the global MICE industry with cities like Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Bangkok topping the International Congress and Convention Association rankings as premier MICE destinations. With strategic locations and robust infrastructure, venues in these cities offer unparalleled convenience and services.



At Putrajaya Marriott Hotel, we pride ourselves on being a part of this movement, offering world-class amenities, easy accessibility, and a lush, serene environment in the heart of IOI Resort City. Our team is dedicated to ensuring that each event is executed flawlessly, with personalised service and modern event spaces that inspire collaboration and creativity.

The future of MICE is here — is your venue ready?

As the MICE landscape evolves, venues that embrace hybrid flexibility, sustainable practices, personalised experiences, and wellness integration are setting the new standard. Putrajaya Marriott Hotel isn’t just adapting to these global trends — we are leading the charge in Southeast Asia, with innovative, tech-driven solutions tailored for tomorrow’s event needs. Whether it’s a large-scale conference or an exclusive board meeting, our team is equipped to bring your vision to life, delivering experiences that leave a lasting impact.

The future of MICE is here, and we are ready to be your partner every step of the way. Contact our events team today and let’s create a world-class event together at Putrajaya Marriott Hotel.

This article is contributed by Putrajaya Marriott Hotel general manager Nikie Mok (pix).



the Sun **LYFE**

WEDNESDAY | FEB 12, 2025

Editorial
T: 03-7784 6688
F: 03-7785 2625
E: lifestyle@thesundaily.com

Advertising
T: 03-7784 8888
E: advertise@thesundaily.com

Valentine's Day gifts

**Pressies that
say 'I love you'
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INSIDE **p24** Battle against
overconsumption

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with speed dating

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filming in Perlis



A health-focused gift may prompt a healthier lifestyle.



Customised wallet is a gift that will be used daily.



Quality headphone is ideal for the music lover.



Personalised star maps will help you remember the good times forever. - PICS FROM PINTEREST



Giving gifts is a good way to surprise your loved ones. - FREEPIKPIC

Valentine's Day gifts for men

➤ These thoughtful ideas will sweep him off his feet

BY THASHINE SELVAKUMARAN

VALENTINE'S Day is the right opportunity to show your boyfriend or husband how much he means to you. We all know chocolates and flowers are classic gestures, how about going an extra mile this year with a gift that truly reflects his personality and interests? Here is a curated list of seven thoughtful gifts that will make this Valentine's Day memorable.

Personalised leather wallet

A wallet is a practical yet sentimental gift that he will use every day. Opt for a high-quality leather wallet and personalise it with his initials or a meaningful date, such as your anniversary or the day you first met. Many brands offer customisation options, allowing you to add a personal touch that shows you have put thought into the gift. That way, every time he reaches for his wallet, he will be reminded of you.

Smartwatch or fitness tracker

If your partner is into fitness or loves staying on top of his health, a smartwatch or fitness tracker is a good gift. There are some well-known brands that offer sleek designs with features such as heart rate monitoring, step tracking and even, sleep analysis. It is a gift that combines functionality with style, helping him stay active and organised while thinking of you.

Customised star map

For the romantic at heart, a customised star map is a unique and sentimental gift. These maps depict the night sky on a specific date and location, such as the day you first met, your first kiss or your wedding day. Framed and ready to hang, it is a beautiful piece of art that captures a moment in time you both cherish. It is a gift that speaks volumes without saying a word.



Handwritten letter is a romantic way to express your deepest feelings.

Gourmet gift basket

If your significant other is a foodie, a gourmet gift basket is sure to delight. Fill it up with his favourite snacks, artisanal cheeses, premium chocolates and a bottle of wine or craft beer. You can even add a personal touch by including homemade treats or a handwritten note. It is a gift that caters to his taste buds, showing you paid attention to his preferences.

Experience-based gift

Sometimes, the best gifts are not things but experiences you can share together. Consider gifting him an experience he will never forget, such as tickets to a concert or a weekend getaway. If he is adventurous, plan a hot air balloon ride, cooking class or a hiking trip. These shared moments will create lasting

memories and strengthen your bond.

High-quality headphones or earbuds

For the music lover or tech enthusiast in your life, a pair of high-quality headphones or wireless earbuds is a game-changer. Brands such as Bose, Sony and Apple offer top-notch sound quality and noise-cancelling features that will elevate his listening experience. Whether he is working out, commuting or relaxing at home, he will definitely appreciate the upgrade.

Handwritten love letter

Everything is dominated by digital communication these days, a handwritten love letter is a classic and deeply personal gift. Take the time to express your feelings, recount your favourite memories together and share your hopes for the future. Pair it with a small token, such as a framed photo or a piece of jewellery, to make it even more special. This gift is a heartfelt reminder of your love and commitment.

Subscription box tailored to his interests

Keep the love going all year long with a subscription box tailored to his hobbies. There is a subscription box for almost every interest. Each month, he will receive a curated package that feels like a little reminder of your thoughtfulness. It is a gift that keeps on giving and shows you know exactly what makes him happy.

Valentine's Day is all about celebrating love, and the best gifts are those that come from the heart. The key is to tailor your gift to his interests and personality. Remember, it is not about the price tag but the thought you put into making him feel appreciated.

This Valentine's Day, go beyond and give him a gift that truly reflects your love. After all, the best gift is the joy of being together.

BY THASHINE SELVAKUMARAN

WE have already covered thoughtful Valentine's Day gifts for men, but now it is time to turn the spotlight to the incredible women in our lives. Valentine's Day is the perfect opportunity to show her how much she means to you. While flowers and chocolates are classics, why not surprise her with something extra special this year?

Personalised jewellery

Jewellery is a classic Valentine's Day gift, but adding a personal touch makes it special. Consider a necklace, bracelet or ring engraved with her initials, a special date or a meaningful phrase. Every time she wears it, she will be reminded of your love. For an extra touch, choose a piece that aligns with her style. It can be minimalist, bold or vintage-inspired.

Luxury skincare or spa set

Pamper her with a luxurious skincare set or a spa day experience. There are good brands that offer beautifully packaged sets that feel indulgent and thoughtful. Alternatively, book her a massage or facial at her favourite spa for a relaxing treat. If she enjoys self-care at home, consider a silk pillowcase, a jade roller or a set of scented candles to create a spa-like atmosphere.

Custom photo book or album

Capture your favourite memories together in a custom photo book or album. Include pictures from your trips, special occasions and everyday moments. Many online services allow you to design and personalise the layout, adding captions or quotes that



Giving a totally unexpected gift can have a powerful positive effect on a relationship.
— PICS FROM FREEPIK

Gifts for her

➤ Express your love this Valentine's Day with simple gestures

are meaningful to your relationship. It is a sentimental gift she will treasure for years to come.

Designer handbag or wallet

If she loves fashion, surprise her with a designer handbag or wallet from her favourite brand. Choose a colour she will adore and pair it with a sweet note expressing your love. If a full-sized bag is out of budget, consider a chic clutch or a compact crossbody she can use for evenings out.

Weekend getaway

Plan a romantic weekend escape to her favourite destination or a place she always wanted to visit. Whether the mountains, a beachside retreat or a chic city break, the experience will create lasting memories. Surprise her with the itinerary or plan it together

to build anticipation. Do not forget to include activities she loves such as wine tasting, hiking or exploring local cafes.

Gourmet chocolate or wine tasting set

If she has a sweet tooth or enjoys fine wine, surprise her with a gourmet chocolate assortment or a wine tasting set. Pair it with a cosy evening at home for a romantic touch. Many brands offer beautifully packaged sets with tasting notes, making it a fun and interactive experience. For an extra personal touch, include her favourite flavours or varietals in the selection to show plenty of thought went into choosing the gift.

Plan thoughtful gesture

While gifts are wonderful, do not underestimate the power of a thoughtful gesture. Cook her favourite meal, plan a movie night with her top picks or simply spend quality time together without distractions. The effort you put into making her feel special will mean



Jewellery is a thoughtful and romantic gesture that can make her feel special and loved.



Get the snacks out and enjoy a movie date with your partner.



Show off how well you know her with a book showcasing her favourite things and memories.

more than any material gift.

Valentine's Day is all about celebrating love, and the best gifts are those that come from the heart. Remember, it is not about the price tag but the thought and effort you put into making her feel appreciated.

This Valentine's Day, go beyond the ordinary and give her a gift that truly reflects your love. After all, the best gift of all is the joy of being together.



The Royce 2025 Valentine's Day Collection.

Heartfelt chocolate delights

LOVE is in the air and Royce's 2025 Valentine's Day Collection is crafted to make your celebrations special. Whether you are looking for a luxurious gift or something more budget-friendly, check out a range of chocolate gift boxes that offer something for every sweet tooth. From decadent assortments to charmingly packaged treats, each selection is designed to spread joy and romance.

➤ Royce Collection 'Bright Red' (RM305)

A generous indulgence with 81 pieces across 11 exquisite varieties of chocolates and cookies. This luxurious assortment features seasonal specials such as Flake Milk, Potechi Crunch and Petit Kurumaro Chocolat.

➤ Royce Chocolate Selection 'Sweet Season' (RM180)

Featuring 31 delectable delights across 11 exquisite varieties, indulge in limited edition creations such as

Popcorn Chocolate, Potechi Crunch Chocolate and Jagaimo Chocolate.

➤ Royce Sweet Assortment (RM105)

Packed with 17 indulgent pieces, with eight varieties of cookies and chocolates that will delight the senses. Among the highlights are limited seasonal treats, including the Graham Choco Cookie, Flake "Milk" and Petit Kurumaro Chocolat.

➤ Pure Chocolate 'Sweet and Milk' Gift (RM58)

Packaged in soft baby pink, adorned with a charming ribbon motif, this limited-edition gift has 50 individually wrapped chocolate rounds in vibrant pink and purple – a delightful mix of "sweet" (55% cacao) and "milk" (43% cacao) chocolates.

The 2025 Royce Valentine's Day Collection is available in Royce boutiques nationwide and online until Friday.



Skincare products are highly appreciated because they combine health and beauty. — PICS FROM PINTEREST



Waste not, want not

► S. Korean climate activist promotes second-hand clothing

RECOVERING South Korean shopaholic-turned-climate activist Lee So-yeon used to buy new clothes almost daily – until a US\$1.50 (RM6.70) winter coat triggered an awakening that stopped her shopping entirely.

While looking at the ultra-cheap padded jacket at a H&M shop in the US, in which she was working at the time, Lee asked herself how any item of clothing could be sold so cheaply.

The 30-year-old embarked on a deep dive into fast fashion production methods and was horrified at the human, social and environmental toll hyperconsumerism is having on the planet – and on the mental health of women who make and buy cheap clothes.

“I used to buy one new outfit each (working) day of the week,” said Lee, adding that each item from major high street retailers would typically cost less than a dollar.

But the reason the clothes are so cheap, Lee learned, is because the women who sew for companies are paid little, while the business model itself is causing significant environmental harm.

Lee stopped buying any new clothes – and has not purchased a single fast fashion garment since her epiphany around six years ago.

Her much more compact wardrobe consists of used items that she received from friends and family, including a vintage leather jacket that once belonged to her mother.

Unlike fast fashion items, which are often designed to be thrown away after just a few wears, each piece is irreplaceable because it carries a unique story and history, she said.

“Ultimately, the most eco-friendly clothes are the ones already in your wardrobe,” surmised Lee.

Break cycle

Lee now organises clothing swaps with her friends and family and has

written a book to promote the idea of valuing garments for “the story behind it” rather than chasing ephemeral trends.

She is part of a small but growing global movement seeking to promote second-hand clothing and help people – especially women – opt out of the cycle of over-consumption.

The app Lucky Sweater provides a platform for users to trade items from their closets with each other, focusing on sustainable brands, said founder Tanya Dastyar.

“We are programmed to believe the only way to express my fashion or show I’m beautiful or trendy... is new outfits. But you can still be fashionable and feel good and look great and not have to do that,” Dastyar said, adding that although trading clothes did not have the same quick dopamine hit as making a fast-fashion purchase, it was far more rewarding over time.

The app’s growing uptake indicates people are hungry to shift their relationship with clothing and consumerism, she said.

According to Dastyar, people are realising they do not have to follow trends and can just dress in a way that feels comfortable. While she does not believe it is a “mass market thing,” she claimed this recognition could turn into a movement.

For Lee, breaking the cycle of cheap clothing consumption helped her improve her mental health.

As a teenager, she would worry about what to wear on school trips – when uniforms were not required – at least a month in advance and would go shopping to ease her fears.

“I felt a lot of pressure about how others would see me,” she confessed.

But learning about Bangladesh’s 2013 Rana Plaza tragedy – one of the world’s worst industrial disasters that killed more than 1,130 garment factory workers, most of them young women – was a turning point.

The factory workers died making clothes for “women like me,” Lee said.

No second-hand?

The global fashion industry is one of the most polluting, accounting for up to 10% of greenhouse gas emissions, according to World Bank estimates.

Most modern clothes are made of



Climate activist Lee has not purchased a single fast fashion garment since her epiphany around six years ago. – AFP/PIC

synthetic materials like nylon and polyester, which are essentially plastic and do not biodegrade in landfills, industry data shows.

Keeping clothes out of landfills can help, but in South Korea, many still avoid used garments, said Kim Dong-hyun, who runs a used clothing export factory.

“People often do not look favourably on someone wearing used clothes because they are seen as unwanted items,” said Kim, noting he has found dirty diapers and food waste in the collection bins.

South Korea is the fifth largest exporter of used clothing in the world – and activists said many garments are essentially dumped in developing countries, which lack the capacity to process them.

At Kim’s second-hand clothing factory in Paju, outside Seoul, a mechanical claw categorised piles of used clothes to be exported overseas.

“Many people treat the clothing collection bin as just a trash can,” Kim said. – AFP



Fast fashion is often built on the back of cheap labour.

The global fashion industry accounts for up to 10% of greenhouse gas emissions.
– PICS FROM PEXELS

Speed dating

➤ Skip endless swiping, find love through real-life interactions this Valentine's Day

BY THASHINE SELVAKUMARAN

WITH Valentine's Day on Friday, those still searching for a date or even a life partner may be wondering where to start. While online dating apps are the go-to option, meeting someone in person can be a completely different experience. This is where speed dating comes in.

Unlike the endless swiping of dating apps, speed dating offers an immediate, face-to-face connection. Participants meet several potential matches in a single event, engaging in short but meaningful conversations. At the end of the event, if both individuals express mutual interest, they are matched. To explore how speed dating is evolving in Malaysia, *theSun* attended three different events, each with its unique approach.

Take the Leap

Take the Leap founder and CEO Carlos Eduardo Fernandez is a dating coach from Mexico who believes "there is always someone out there for you". Having hosted over 50 events, he understands people have different preferences and comfort levels when it comes to dating. To cater to this, Take the Leap organises themed events appealing to specific demographics, including Christians, bilingual English-Chinese speakers and even introverts.

"Some people hesitate to pay for a dating event because they fear it might look desperate. But, speed dating has become more normalised. There is no shame in being single or in taking the initiative to meet new people," Carlos explained.

The format is simple: women remain seated while men rotate tables every seven minutes. If both parties are interested, they scan a QR code and at the end of the event, they receive their matches. To ease nerves, Take the Leap incorporates icebreaker games, making the experience fun and engaging.

John, a participant, shared his experience: "It was a fun new



LinkUp tailors events by cultural background and age group.

experience. Everyone was friendly, and I would definitely do it again to find a partner."

Carlos shared a heartwarming success story.

"One participant met her husband at her very first event with us, it is moments such as these that remind me why I do this."

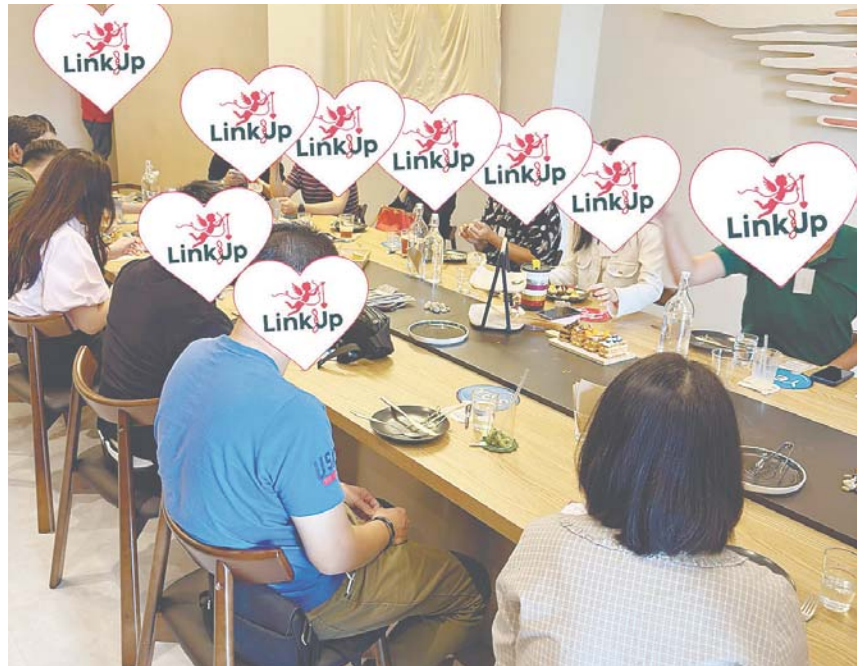
Looking ahead, Carlos believes the future of dating is becoming more intentional.

"People are bolder now. They know what they want and speed dating helps them take that leap."

Pertama Kali

For many, traditional matchmaking remains an important part in finding a life partner, and Pertama Kali seeks to offer a modern yet culturally respectful alternative.

Shameera Firdaus, Diyana Sabri and Shameela Firdaus co-founded Pertama Kali, a speed dating event catering primarily to the Muslim community. Shameera, who married before her cousins, noticed how difficult it was for them to find suitable partners.



Events are conducted in cosy cafes, which will be closed for the private gathering. - PICS BY LINKUP

"We saw a gap and decided to create a safe, halal environment for people to meet," she explained.

A common misconception about their event is it may be frowned upon in conservative circles.

"We believe we are not doing anything wrong. Our intentions are pure. We simply provide a space for meaningful connections to form," Diyana said.

The process is straightforward: men rotate every five minutes and if interested, participants note their preferences on a scorecard. Matches are revealed three days later. Their first event went viral after a single Instagram post, proving there is a growing demand for such spaces in Malaysia.

"Malaysians need to be more open and educated about safe, structured dating events such as ours," Diyana added.

Veronica, an attendee, found the event enjoyable but felt there was room for improvement.

"The venue was nice, but the timing was too short. Without icebreakers, the conversations felt a bit awkward. Still, it was fun meeting people from different backgrounds," she admitted.



Founders of Pertama Kali provide a halal environment for people to meet.

- PIC BY PERTAMA KALI

LinkUp

LinkUp founder Alice Tan never imagined she would move from IT development to hosting speed dating events.

"After years of using dating apps such as Tinder and Tantan, I got tired of endless texting that led nowhere. I met scammers, people with hidden agendas and those who were not serious about relationships. Meeting in person is the fastest way to know if there is real chemistry," she shared.

Tan attended multiple speed dating events before launching LinkUp, gathering feedback to refine her approach.

"One major issue I noticed was the lack of participant screening. Some attendees were just passing through Malaysia, looking for casual flings. That is not ideal for those genuinely seeking relationships."

To ensure compatibility, LinkUp tailors events by cultural background and age group. Tan also incorporates interactive games that subtly reveal participants' personalities and relationship goals.

"Psychologically, people naturally express themselves when prompted, so I design activities that encourage conversation without pressure."

The response to the event has

been mixed.

"Some Malaysians are hesitant, but many are becoming more curious about speed dating. Especially in cities such as KL, where people have little time to waste on endless swiping," she said.

Anne, who attended LinkUp, had a few critiques.

"The Q&A session took too much time and the participant rotations did not run as smoothly as expected. But, the games were fun and the icebreaker drinks helped get people talking."

Despite minor hiccups, Tan remains optimistic.

"Speed dating is not just about finding 'the one'. It is about making meaningful connections, whether romantic or platonic."

New era for dating in Malaysia

While online dating remains popular, speed dating offers something unique, that is the chance to meet someone without the filter of a carefully curated profile. It pushes people out of their comfort zones, encouraging them to have real conversations in real-time.

So this Valentine's Day, why not take the plunge? Either for love, friendship or simply a new experience, speed dating might just surprise you.



Carlos (centre) and his Take the Leap team. - PIC BY TAKE THE LEAP



Rom-com *Mojo* starts filming

➤ Cast members include local, Indonesian stars such as Mimi Lana, Adipati Dolken

PRODUCTION has begun on local independent rom-com film *Mojo*. It tells the story of an ambitious city boy (Adi) who finds love (with a girl named Ayu) and meaning in simple, rural life. Central to the tale is social media superstar Mojo, the cow who has a hand – or hoof – in changing the boy's life for the better. The movie went into production in Perlis last week, with the state providing support, and is slated for a release later this year.

Sympatico, the co-production label established by Malaysian production company Double Vision, and UK-based Argo Films said

leading film studio Astro Shaw has joined Sympatico and co-producer Mocha Chai Laboratories as a full production and equity partner.

Astro Shaw will act as co-producer for *Mojo*, while also being responsible for the Malaysian distribution and marketing of the film when it is released later this year, ahead of its international roll-out under UK-based distributor SC Films International.

The cast of *Mojo* features award-winning actors from Malaysia and Indonesia. The lead role of Adi is being played by the award-winning Indonesian actor Adipati Dolken, who is making his



The cast of *Mojo* features award-winning actors from Malaysia and Indonesia.

debut in a Malaysian film. His credits include *The Clerics*, *Posesif*, (for which he was nominated for Best Actor in a Leading Role at the Indonesian Film Festival) and last year's global hit Netflix film *Shadow Strays*.

Mimi Lana plays the female lead character Ayu. One of Malaysia's most popular actresses, having been nominated for Best Actress at *Anugerah Skrin* (the country's equivalent of the Oscars), Mimi's credits include the hit movie *The Experts* and the Astro Original series *Framed*.

Other high-profile cast members are the revered Wan Hanafi (whose film *Apprentice* was screened at Cannes), respected actor, director and screenwriter Namron (director of the multi-award-winning *One Two Tiga*), former award-winning child star, now actor and director Aziz M. Osman (*Fenomena*, *XX Ray*), Malaysian national treasure Datuk A. Tamimi Serigar (*Abang, Old Road Misery*) – recipient of the 2023 Best Actor award at the Asean International Film Festival, Tony Eusoff (*Pecah, Revenge of the Pontianak*), Gambit Saifullah (*Jasmine, Malbatt: Misi Bakara*) and Farah Ahmad (*Soul, Liar*).

Mojo is being directed by



Mimi Lana, one of Malaysia's most popular actresses, plays the female lead character Ayu.

Sympatico's Min Lim (producer of award-winning local versions of *Liar* and *The Bridge* and director of *Kopitiam*).

The head writer is local scriptwriter Honey Ahmad (*Motif, Saladin, Walinong Sari*) – who was the only Asian writer to be included in Film Independent's Episodic Labs Cohort for 2024 – with

award-winning director Zahir Omar (*Fly By Night, The Bridge*) and award-winning writer Chi-Ren Choong (*The Bridge, Liar*) on board as creative consultants. Michelle Chang (*Venus on Mars, Wonderland*) from Mocha Chai Laboratories will produce alongside Sympatico's Richard Johns (*Shadow of the Vampire, The Liability*).



The lead role of Adi is being played by Indonesian actor Adipati, who is making his debut in a Malaysian film.

Local rock group Neon returns with single *Biar*

ALTERNATIVE rock band Neon has released its latest single *Biar*, marking a new musical chapter as the group ventures into song production for the first time.

Combining elements of modern rock with spiritual themes, *Biar* is about spiritual repentance upon experiencing heartbreak.

"*Biar* is a rather heavy song, but very close to the character and style of Neon's music. We experimented a lot for this song and that is why the recording took more than two months.

"The efforts and difficulties we encountered made the success of this song more meaningful and we are more enthusiastic to continue working," said member Adam Svl.

He hopes *Biar* will introduce the local band to more listeners regionally and internationally.

"We hope Neon can attract more new music listeners through *Biar*, in



Biar combines elements of modern rock with spiritual themes.

addition to giving Malaysian music fans a fresher and more modern piece. We are also determined to elevate the local arts, introducing it to music lovers not only in Malaysia, but also in



The band is attached to local music label Alternate Records.

Singapore, Brunei and Indonesia," he said.

Founded in 2017, Neon comprises six members, namely Boy (vocalist), Naim Sapuan, Shafique Shariff, Adam Svl, Azuad Abdullah and Danial Firdaus.

The band rose to fame after releasing their debut song *Cinta Yang Telah Mati*. It gained massive traction and was frequently played on radio, even garnering over 1.1 million views on YouTube.

Since then, the band has built a

following for its unique approach to alternative rock, combining pop, ballad, jazz and experimental sounds.

It aims to continue producing rock music that blends modern and alternative elements to create a unique experience for listeners.

Hamilton won't last at Ferrari: Ecclestone

FORMER Formula One chief Bernie Ecclestone insists Lewis Hamilton will "not last" at Ferrari.

Hamilton has completed a move from Mercedes ahead of the 2025 season and is seeking a record eighth world championship.

Only three former drivers have won the Drivers' Championship above the age of 40. Hamilton would become the first man to do so since Jack Brabham 60 years ago.

Ecclestone wonders whether Ferrari may end up wishing they had not signed the veteran driver.

"He won't last that long," Ecclestone told the *Telegraph*. "Piero Ferrari, who has taken him there, still thinks they've

done the right thing. I hope they have. I hope they haven't just jumped in and end up wishing they hadn't."

The 94-year-old, who was CEO of Formula One Management and Formula One Administration for over four decades, suggested that there could be a conflict between Hamilton and Charles Leclerc.

Leclerc has been Ferrari's No. 1 driver for several years. Ecclestone also wonders whether Hamilton has the motivation to win another Drivers' Championship, having already won seven in his career.

"I have my theory about this. It's not the age with drivers, it's how long they have been doing the same thing,"

Ecclestone said.

"I have thought with Lewis, 'He's getting tired. He has lost motivation.' If he had never won a world championship, it might be different, because then there would be an incentive to win one. But he has won seven.

"The team is happy with Charles Leclerc, his teammate. Leclerc speaks their language, so they'll be looking after him.

"Even if Lewis does well, there'll still be a lot of enemies, because he has suddenly arrived."

Ecclestone and Hamilton have not always seen eye to eye. The driver criticised Ecclestone for revealing his

respect for Russian president Vladimir Putin soon after the 2021 invasion of Ukraine.

Hamilton said at the time: "We don't need any more of it, to hear from someone that believes in the war, and the displacement of people and killing of people, and supporting that person (Putin) is beyond me.

"I cannot believe I heard that. This is going to put us back decades, and we have yet to see the real brunt of the pain.

"Why? We do not need to be supporting that but looking into the future. If you don't have anything positive to contribute, don't give them any space." - Express Newspapers

Djokovic 'almost 100%' ready

Serb aiming for 100th title in Doha

NOVAK DJOKOVIC has almost fully recovered from the injury that ended his Australian Open campaign and has set his sights on lifting a 100th singles title at this month's Qatar Open.

The 24-times Grand Slam champion retired due to a hamstring injury in his semifinal against Alexander Zverev last month.

The world No. 7 was booed by the crowd at Melbourne Park and responded by posting a photo of an MRI scan taken of his left hamstring with the caption: "Thought I'd leave this here for all the sports injury 'experts' out there."

He also withdrew from Serbia's Davis Cup first-round qualifying tie, in which they lost to Denmark.

"There is no more rupture in the muscle, the injury is almost 100% healed," Djokovic, 37, told Montenegrin daily newspaper *Vijesti* in an interview published yesterday.

"I have the green light from the medical team to be able to train, to be able to prepare. The tournament in Doha is scheduled for a week now, so I am sticking to the schedule. Thank God, I managed to recover quickly.

"I have had a few more injuries lately than I did in the first 15 years of my career. That probably comes with age, but my body still listens to me, the flame and desire for achievement and new achievements still burns in me.

"Currently, as I would say, I am in the middle between my desire and the need to enjoy the achievements I have achieved and I approach matches and



Djokovic.
- REUTERS/PIC

tournaments a little more relaxed on the one hand. "And what I am used to on the other hand, which is the mentality of winning and thinking 'only the title is success, the rest is not'.

"I somehow got used to that myself, which is perhaps a good 'problem' to have at this stage of my life and career."

The recent Australian Open served as the perfect example.

"Let's say, I was a little surprised by how many people saw my placement in the semifinals of the Australian Open as a success," Djokovic continued.

"Maybe it sounds a bit stupid to say, but to me, when someone says semifinal, considering what I have achieved in my career, although it is certainly a success, it is not what I was looking for and what I would be satisfied with."

At the Feb 17-22 Qatar Open, Djokovic will be hoping to become only the third man to win 100 singles titles on the tour in the professional era after Jimmy Connors (109) and former rival Roger Federer (103).

The Serbian, whose 99th title came in August with his victory at the Paris Olympics, came closest to winning his 100th at the Shanghai Masters where he was beaten by world No. 1 Jannik Sinner in the final in October.

"I hope that the 100th trophy can come already in Doha, I've been chasing it for a long time, since October last year, but about that - it will come when it's supposed to come," said the 37-year-old, who won the title in Doha in 2016 and 2017.

"I know it will come, we'll see when and where." - Reuters/Express Newspapers

Rebel golfers receive pathway to Open Championship

PLAYERS from the LIV Golf League now have a qualification pathway into the Open Championship, the R&A announced yesterday.

The leading player in the top five of the LIV Golf standings at the end of June who is not already exempt will earn a spot in the 153rd Open Championship on July 17-20 at Royal Portrush in Northern Ireland.

"The Open is a global championship for the best men's golfers, and each year we review our exemptions to ensure that we offer pathways into the championship based on results achieved on the leading professional tours," Mark Darbon, CEO of The R&A, said in a statement.

"We acknowledge that players competing in LIV

Golf should also have the opportunity to secure places in The Open through its individual season standings as well as existing pathways."

The selection will happen after LIV Golf's tournament in Carrollton, Texas, from June 27-29.

"We thank Mark Darbon for his leadership and the R&A for taking this step for the benefit of moving golf forward," LIV Golf CEO Scott O'Neil said.

"The Open Championship is one of the most prestigious events in all of sports. The acknowledgement that competitors from the LIV Golf League and The International Series will have the opportunity to play in golf's original major is a true testament to the strength of fields and the R&A's commitment to golf fans around the world.

"LIV will continue our mission to bring the best players to the four corners of the world to grow the game. We are excited for the future of this great sport."

LIV Golf members who are already exempt for the Open Championship as past major winners include Jon Rahm, Bryson DeChambeau, Dustin Johnson, Phil Mickelson and Brooks Koepka.

The R&A's announcement follows a similar move announced last week for the US Open by the United States Golf Association.

As of May 19, the leading golfer in LIV's top three not otherwise exempt will gain a spot in the June 12-15 tournament at Oakmont Country Club in Pennsylvania. - Field Level Media

SHORTS

Tiger pulls out of Torrey Pines

GOLF superstar Tiger Woods said yesterday he was "just not ready" as he announced he will not play in this week's Genesis Invitational at Torrey Pines as planned following his mother's death.

Woods had committed to his first professional tournament in seven months in the Genesis, a US PGA Tour event he hosts.

His decision to play came just days after Woods announced his mother, Kultida, had died last week.

"I planned to tee it up this week, but I'm just not ready," the American said in a statement posted to his social media.

"I did my best to prepare, knowing it's what my Mom would have wanted, but I'm still processing her loss.

"Thanks to everyone who has reached out. I hope to be at Torrey later in the week and appreciate the continued kindness since my Mom's passing."

Woods, the 15-time major champion, had committed to make his first appearance in a non-major on the US tour since he played the Genesis last February, withdrawing after one round because of illness.

Woods went on to finish 60th at the Masters and missed the cut in the year's other three majors as he struggled to recover between rounds because of back trouble and leg injuries from a 2021 car crash that continue to hamper him.

Swiatek off to winning start in Qatar

IGA SWIATEK powered into the third round of the Qatar Open yesterday by brushing aside Maria Sakkari in straight sets to kick off her bid for a fourth straight title in Doha.

The five-time Grand Slam champion overcame a slow start to win 6-3, 6-2.

The Polish star, who was given a one-month doping ban late last year, is playing for the first time since losing in the Melbourne semifinals to eventual champion Madison Keys.

The 23-year-old has not dropped a set at the Qatar Open since her second-round win over Viktorija Golubic in 2022.

Swiatek's victory in the tournament last year was her first of four WTA 1000 titles in 2024, taking her total tally to 10, the equal most among current players with Victoria Azarenka.

Earlier, the 20-year-old Noskova notched an impressive 6-2, 6-4 win over 15th seed Donna Vekic in the first round, while Putintseva edged out Moyuka Uchijima in three sets.

Russian 10th seed Daria Kasatkina demolished Polina Kudermetova 6-0, 6-0 in just 42 minutes to set up a last-32 tie with Armenia's Elina Avanesyan.

Jelena Ostapenko also cruised into round two, beating Japanese qualifier Aoi Ito 6-2, 6-1.

SANTIAGO GIMENEZ is living his childhood dream of being AC Milan striker, following in the footsteps of some of his biggest heroes as he prepares to take on former team Feyenoord in the Champions League.

Mexico striker Gimenez returns to the De Kuip stadium in Rotterdam tomorrow, barely a week after moving to Italian giants Milan with his sights set on dumping Feyenoord out of the Champions League at the playoff stage.

The 23-year-old signed for Milan as a replacement for Alvaro Morata on deadline day of the winter transfer window and has already made an impression on supporters.

Having already set up fellow new arrival Joao Felix on their debuts in last week's Italian Cup triumph over Roma, Gimenez then showed what he can do in front of goal with a classy curling finish which sealed a 2-0 win in his Serie A bow at Empoli on Saturday.

After those two impressive substitute appearances Gimenez is set to line-up against a Feyenoord team in turmoil after the sacking of Arne Slot's replacement as coach Brian Priske, in

Living the dream

New Milan striker Gimenez on cloud nine ahead of Feyenoord return

what is set to be a red-hot atmosphere.

"There are a lot of conflicting emotions. Honestly I wanted it to be Milan against Feyenoord because had I stayed at Feyenoord I would have played against the team I always dreamed of playing for," said Gimenez in a recent interview with Milan's in-house TV station.

"But now I'm at Milan it will be great because I'll be able to see my Rotterdam family and a club I'm really connected to. It's a chance to say goodbye to a team with which I had some wonderful times."

Gimenez has been a fan of Italian football and a Milan supporter since childhood and was a target for the seven-time European champions in the summer before they signed Morata instead.

Spain captain Morata has since been shipped off on loan to Galatasaray while Milan have put €32 million (RM144m) worth of faith in Gimenez after he netted 65 times in 105 appearances for Feyenoord, where he won the Dutch title in 2023 and the Dutch Cup last season.

"It's all gone exactly how I wanted," said Gimenez. "I followed Milan as a boy, they were the team that I loved, as I watched the likes of Kaka, Beckham, Ronaldinho, Ronaldo, Pirlo, Gattuso. That whole generation of players made the world fall in love with them."

"It was always my dream as a boy and when they contacted me it was like: 'I can't miss this opportunity.'"

Gimenez has photos of himself as a child

wearing a Milan jersey as well as with his favourite player Kaka, who he describes as his "model".

Gimenez will have the chance to represent his country on home soil at the next World Cup, which will be held in 2026 across the United States, Canada and Mexico.

"There's no bigger honour than playing for your national team at home so playing a World Cup in your own country is a privilege," said Gimenez.

"There's no doubt that Argentina is a country where I feel at home, all my family are there... But if I had to choose I feel more Mexican simply because I spent nearly my whole life there, right from childhood." – AFP

Goodison Park set for emotional last Merseyside derby

GOODISON PARK, home of Everton since 1892, plays host to the Merseyside derby for the final time tomorrow (3.30am) as the Toffees aim to derail Liverpool's Premier League title charge.

Everton will move to a new state-of-the-art 53,000 capacity ground on Liverpool's Bramley Moore Dock next season when they finally leave behind England's first major football stadium.

The origins of Goodison gave birth to the rivalry between the city's two clubs.

Everton, formed in 1878, once called Anfield their home before a dispute over rent between their landlord John Houlding and the club's board.

Rather than meet Houlding's demands, Everton moved to new land just across Stanley Park little more than half a mile away.

Left with a stadium but no team, Houlding, a local businessman and politician, decided to form his own – Liverpool.

Goodison was a ground-breaking development. It twice hosted the FA Cup final in 1894 and 1910 and allowed Everton to become the richest club in England at the time thanks to bumper crowds.

"Behold Goodison Park!" *The Out of Doors* publication reported in October 1892.

"No single picture could take in the entire scene the ground presents, it is so magnificently large."

A series of developments ensured it remained among England's leading stadia for over a century, playing host to more games than anywhere but Wembley during the Three Lions' World Cup triumph in 1966.



An aerial view shows Everton football club's new stadium under construction at Bramley Moore Dock in Liverpool. – AFP FILEPIC

Everton's golden era arrived in the 1980s, winning two league titles, the FA Cup and European Cup Winners' Cup between 1984 and 1987.

They still sit fifth for most English top-flight titles, behind only Manchester United, Liverpool, Arsenal and Manchester City.

But the last of those came 38 years ago and Everton have not won a trophy since the 1995 FA Cup. – AFP



Fiorentina's Marin Pongracic (centre) fights for the ball with Inter Milan's Nicolò Barella (right) during the Italian Serie A match yesterday. – AFPIC

Inter squeeze past Fiorentina to close gap on Napoli

INTER MILAN closed to within a point of Serie A leaders Napoli yesterday after beating Fiorentina 2-1 and gaining revenge for the previous week's thumping in Florence.

Marko Arnautovic replaced injured Marcus Thuram and nodded home his first league goal of the season shortly after half-time at the San Siro to pile pressure on Napoli who could only draw with Udinese on Monday.

Champions Inter travel to Turin for a grudge match with Juventus next weekend with coach Simone Inzaghi hoping for a quick return for Thuram, while Napoli face a tough task at fourth-placed Lazio as a tight title race hot up.

Atalanta are not out of the equation as they sit a further four points back in third following a 5-0 hammering of Verona on Saturday.

"We need to show what we're made of on the pitch," said Arnautovic to *DAZN*.

"Today we got three important points and we're close to Napoli but it's not done, we've

got a long season ahead of us and we can only think about winning games."

Fiorentina are sixth and three points behind Lazio after a match which threatened to boil over following Marin Pongracic's own goal which gave Inter the lead in the 28th minute.

Inzaghi and opposite number Raffaele Palladino were both booked as Fiorentina raged against the decision to give the corner from which Pongracic diverted into his own net.

The corner was given even though Alessandro Bastoni's cleared cross had clearly come from beyond the touchline, with the Viola first left flummoxed at that call and then a goal down.

"I'm really proud of my players, we held our own against a great team, a team which is going to fight for the title all the way," said Palladino.

"My only regret is that decision on the corner because that sort of thing needs to be handled better." – AFP

Rodgers finally rises to challenge

BRENDAN RODGERS returned to Celtic for a second stint as manager determined to restore the club's battered reputation on the European stage and make a personal impact on the Champions League for the first time.

Just over 18 months later, Bayern Munich visit Glasgow tomorrow (4am Malaysian time) in the Champions League playoff round, giving Rodgers and the Scottish champions a chance to shock the continent.

Celtic have been one of the big winners of the Champions League's revamp this season.

Despite an unprecedented era of domestic dominance, with 12 Scottish titles in the last 13 years, the Glasgow giants won just three Champions League games between the 2013/14 and 2023/24 seasons.

In the old format, European campaigns were routinely over for Celtic before Christmas after just six games against higher seeded opponents.

Rodgers' men may have benefitted from a kind draw against the likes of Slovan Bratislava, Young Boys, Dinamo Zagreb and Club Brugge in the first year of the eight-game league phase.

But they took full advantage, losing just twice at Borussia Dortmund and Aston Villa, to qualify for the knockout stage of the Champions League for the first time in 12 years.

That breakthrough was particularly sweet for Rodgers.

The Northern Irishman hovered up seven trophies in his first spell at Celtic before an acrimonious departure for Leicester in 2019.

But he had won just three of his first 24 Champions League games across four campaigns as Liverpool and Celtic boss.

"The one glaring thing from my first time here was doing better in Europe," said Rodgers.

"This is the highest level of club football, where there are top players in every team, but for us we've built through it and played some great football and showed different ways to win as well," Rodgers said.

"When we've had to dig in, we've been able to do that."

"Defensively we've been good at the level bar one game, so overall, there has been a lot of progress and I'm really pleased with that."

Now comes the acid test of how far the Hoops have developed when it comes to competing with Europe's best.

But with the daunting task comes a great opportunity for Rodgers to banish the ghosts of his past on the Champions League stage.

"That's my job," he replied when asked how he will make his players believe they can beat Bayern are beatable in the Champions League cauldron at Celtic Park. – AFP

BY DAVE CLARK

In it to win it

Glasner says Palace mean business in FA Cup

OLIVER GLASNER vowed Crystal Palace will "go for it" in the FA Cup after goals from Daniel Munoz and Justin Devenny saw them through to the fifth round with a 2-0 win at Doncaster.

The Eagles avoided an upset at the Eco-Power Stadium to set up a home tie against Millwall in the last 16.

Colombia wing-back Munoz eventually made the breakthrough from a well-worked free-kick before Northern Ireland international Devenny put the game beyond the hosts' reach early in the second half.

"As long as you are in the competition you can win it," Glasner said. "We will go for it. I don't know if it will work but we will go for it, definitely."

"I'm pleased with the performance. Over the first 60 minutes I think we controlled the game and didn't give them anything."

"We didn't create so much; credit to Doncaster, they had a good match plan and it was difficult to find space."

On facing south London rivals Millwall in the next round, Glasner added: "I could feel the excitement in the dressing room."

"It makes this game even bigger than it is - against any other team the target and the goal is the same, to win the game and get into the quarterfinal."

Glasner started Adam Wharton, who made a late cameo in the win at Manchester United after four months out injured, while Ben Chilwell

made his Eagles debut as he got 45 minutes under his belt on his first appearance since coming on as a substitute for Chelsea against Barrow in the Carabao Cup in September.

"We wanted to give Ben some minutes," Glasner added. "We could see he's comfortable in possession, in passing - a little bit more attacking than (Tyrick Mitchell)."

"Adam has worked hard to get back - it is the toughest time when you are injured."

Rovers were first to get an effort on goal as good work down the left by James Maxwell and Luke Molyneux led to Sharp laying the ball off for Ethan Ennis, whose tame shot from the edge of the area



Crystal Palace's Justin Devenny (left) in action with Doncaster Rovers' George Broadbent. - REUTERS/SPIC

SHORTS

Plymouth handed City clash

PLYMOUTH will travel to Manchester City in the FA Cup fifth round as the Championship strugglers landed a dream draw to follow their stunning win against Liverpool.

The Pilgrims shocked Premier League leaders Liverpool as Ryan Hardie's second half penalty sealed a memorable 1-0 win at Home Park on Sunday.

Miron Muslic's side are bottom of the second tier, with only one league win in three months.

But they have eliminated Liverpool and Brentford to earn a shot at Pep Guardiola's spluttering Premier League champions.

FA Cup holders Manchester United will face Fulham at Old Trafford after beating Leicester 2-1 on Friday thanks to Harry Maguire's controversial last-gasp winner.

League Cup finalists Newcastle meet Brighton, who knocked out Chelsea on Saturday, while Bournemouth take on Wolves in another all-Premier League tie.

Aston Villa, 2-1 winners against Tottenham on Sunday, will host Championship team Cardiff.

There will also be an all-Championship tie with Preston hosting Lancashire rivals Burnley.

There was no VAR in operation during the fourth round ties, but the technology will come into play from the next round onwards.

FA Cup fifth round: Preston vs Burnley, Aston Villa vs Cardiff, Crystal Palace vs Millwall, Man United vs Fulham,

was comfortably saved by Matt Turner.

Palace went ahead with their first chance of note in the 31st minute. Daichi Kamada's clever low freekick found Jean-Philippe Mateta, whose shot cannoned back off the post but left Munoz with a simple tap-in.

Rovers continued to hold their own and Sharp saw an effort saved while Molyneux fired narrowly wide before the break.

Mateta's effort was well blocked after 51 minutes, while at the other end Molyneux saw a fierce effort deflected away and Bailey fired wide.

However, just as the League Two promotion chasers looked to be building some momentum, Palace launched a 55th-minute break and Will Hughes played a clever ball over the top to allow Devenny to convert.

"I'm proud of the players, proud of the performance," said Rovers boss Grant McCann.

"We had some moments. The second goal we don't concede in League Two - that's just Premier League quality. The city can be proud of the players tonight." - The Independent

SPORTS TOTO RESULTS

DRAW NO: 5925/2025 DATE: 11/02/2025 (TUE)

STW LOTTERY SDN. BHD. (1999100099) (84200)

TOTO 4D PRIZE PAYMENTS GUARANTEED IN FULL

1st Prize	8071
2nd Prize	2750
3rd Prize	0334

Special	Consolation
3053 8344	8932 7878
6964 0597	6587 5439
4289 0013	2781 1112
9666 0775	4589 4090
0943 1106	9650 3572

4D JACKPOT

Jackpot 1 **RM 2,764,275.33**

8071 2750	2750 8071
8071 0334	0334 8071
2750 0334	0334 2750

Jackpot 2 **RM 138,959.15**

Winning combination of any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of Special prizes.

4D Zodiac

1st Prize	8071	+	
2nd Prize	2750	+	
3rd Prize	0334	+	HORSE
4th Prize	Special Prize	+	
5th Prize	Consolation Prize	+	
6th Prize	Any 4D drawn number	+	

TOTO 5D & 6D PRIZE PAYMENTS GUARANTEED IN FULL

5D	1ST	3 1 0 2 0	
	4TH	1 0 2 0	
2ND	0 4 2 1 0	5TH	0 0 2 0
3RD	5 5 4 8 1	6TH	0 0 2 0

6D

1ST	9 4 1 1 6 9
2ND	9 4 1 1 6 or 4 1 1 6 9
3RD	9 4 1 1 1 or 1 1 6 9
4TH	9 4 1 or 1 6 9
5TH	9 4 or 6 9

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SUPREME 7/30	1 15 34 51 55 56
Jackpot	RM 18,589,417.81

POWER 7/30	3 21 29 32 40 50
Jackpot	RM 8,415,358.23

STAR 7/30	8 19 31 32 39 44 + 5
Jackpot 1	RM 3,522,065.88

Jackpot 2	RM 435,612.81
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Toto 4D Jackpot 1 **RM 9,982,289**

Toto 4D Jackpot 2 **RM 840,951**

Toto 4D Jackpot 2 (i-System) **RM 84,300** won on 09/02/2025!

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WINNING NUMBERS

PAYMENT GUARANTEED IN FULL

Draw Date: 11/02/25 (Tue) Draw No: 5872/25 Venue: WISMA GENTING, KL

1-3D SUPER1+3D	
1st Prize	4435
2nd Prize	4299
3rd Prize	2472
Starters	Consolation
4249 7615	5268 3437
3722 3160	4086 1081
5176 4243	8212 0299
9200 1242	8110 8000
9279 8451	2773 7967

3-3D Bonus

Jackpot 1	RM16,744,116.50
4435 + 4299	4299 + 4435
4435 + 2472	2472 + 4435
4299 + 2472	2472 + 4299
Jackpot 2	RM444,382.90

Winning pair matches any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of 10 Starter Prizes.

3-3D Bonus

1st Prize	Bonus	1st Prize Bonus
504 435 +	TIGER	RM230,000.00
2nd Prize	Bonus	2nd Prize Bonus
754 299 +	DRAGON	RM1,225,904.60
3rd Prize	Bonus	3rd Prize Bonus
882 472 +	DRAGON	RM1,721,506.00

Starters	Consolation
044 249 987 615	315 268 483 437
453 722 473 160	394 086 931 081
775 176 314 243	118 212 270 299
969 200 001 242	128 110 438 000
559 279 548 451	882 773 007 967

3D		
1st Prize	2nd Prize	3rd Prize
435	299	472

3D Jackpot

Jackpot	RM742,775.60
435 + 299 + 472	299 + 472 + 435
435 + 472 + 299	472 + 435 + 299
299 + 435 + 472	472 + 299 + 435

Winning combination matches the Top 3 Prizes in any order.
HSSB 1+3D J1 RM952,192.60 and J2 RM136,214.30 won on 9/2/202

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RESULTS & STANDINGS

ENGLISH FA CUP (4th round): Doncaster 0 Crystal Palace 2 (Munoz 31, Devenny 55).

SERIE A: Inter Milan 2 (Pongracic 28-og, Arnautovic 52) **Fiorentina 1** (Mandrakora 44-pen).

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Napoli	24	17	4	3	39	17	55
Inter Milan	24	16	6	2	58	23	54
Atalanta	24	15	5	4	54	26	50
Lazio	24	14	3	7	45	32	45
Juventus	24	10	13	1	41	21	43
Fiorentina	24	12	6	6	41	25	42

No quick fix

Tweaking Aaron-Wooi Yik's playing style will take time, says coach Herry

NEW national men's doubles head coach Herry Iman Pierngadi has a plan to tweak Aaron Chia-Soh Wooi Yik's playing style to take their game up a notch ahead of the 2025 All England Badminton Championships in Birmingham from March 11-16.

However, the Indonesian coach admitted that it won't be a quick fix.

"They will definitely need time. We have to take it slowly and hope to see a change in their playing style at the All England," he told reporters after a training session yesterday.

The coach, better known as Herry IP, is trying to get Aaron and Wooi Yik to be more aggressive and adapt to a new trend in doubles action by focusing on the drive (a quick, flat and powerful counter-attacking shot that can be either a backhanded or forehanded shot).

He also described the national men's doubles pair had shown good progress since he officially took charge at the Akademi Badminton Malaysia (ABM) in Bukit Kiara on Feb 1.

"Looking at the way they used to play, they are used to lifting the shuttle high but that's not a method I subscribe to. So, I have to force them (not to do so) and in the past week, they have shown good progress," said Herry, who is nicknamed the "Fire Dragon".

The coach was also quick to admit that the is still a wide gap between 2024 World Junior Badminton Championships (WJC) boys'

Haikal sets sights on All England debut

THE saying "hope springs eternal" aptly describes national men's doubles shuttler Muhammad Haikal Nazri.

Still recovering from a torn right hip muscle, the 22-year-old is quietly confident that he and his partner, Choong Hon Jian, can kickstart their 2025 season at the March 11-16 All England Badminton Championships in Birmingham.

Muhammad Haikal, who has been sidelined for the past month due to the injury, was quick to admit that while he has no chance of competing in the German Open (Feb 25-March 2), it is still touch-and-go for the Orleans Masters in France (March 4-9).

He said this was because, based on the examination carried out by the National Sports Institute on Friday (Feb 7), his recovery level has reached 80%.

"I informed my coach yesterday that I won't be able to go for the German Open but I will wait and see if I can play in the Orleans Masters or the All England.

"Of course, I would love to play in the All England as I have never competed in the world's oldest badminton tournament. Hopefully, I can recover in time," he told reporters after a training session yesterday.

The injury sustained by Muhammad Haikal

resulted in him and Hon Jian having to shelve their hopes of competing in last month's Malaysia Open for the first time.

Muhammad Haikal, who resumed court training today, said he is working more on covering the front court and not making too many jumping smashes to avoid aggravating the injury.

The Kelantan-born shuttler also described training under new national men's doubles coach Herry Iman Pierngadi as an eye opener, with the Indonesian introducing a new method of getting them to hit with a heavier racquet to increase their wrist strength.

"For me, it (training with Herry) is okay and good... like making sure we don't lift (the shuttle) high all the time and, at the same time, making sure we use a heavier racquet. For me, that's good as I lack power," he said. - Bernama



doubles champions Kang Khai Xing-Aaron Tai and the senior pairs at the ABM.

However, Herry is optimistic that the youngsters can close the gap by constantly training with the seniors and he also hopes that Khai Xing-Aaron can qualify for the 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

"They are smart and have potential. So, we must protect them... don't let them get injured," he said.

Herry, who has been given a four-year contract by the Badminton Association of

Malaysia (BAM), is a high-profile coach renowned for his "Midastouch" in forging world-class Indonesian pairs.

He has been credited with producing top pairs who have gone on to become Olympic champions, like Candra Wijaya-Tony Gunawan (Sydney 2000) and Hendra Setiawan-Markis Kido (Beijing 2008).

This is the first time that the 62-year-old coach has taken his expertise abroad, having spent 31 years with the Indonesian badminton squad. - Bernama

Wai Ching secures MBPJ funding

PETALING Jaya City Council (MBPJ) has continued its collaboration with world-famed tower runner Soh Wai Ching to help his unique career as well as to promote the city PJ to the world community.

Through a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed today, MBPJ has provided a sponsorship of RM75,000 to Wai Ching in his mission to regain his world No. 1 ranking this year.

Petalung Jaya Mayor Mohamad Zahri Samingon hopes the sponsorship will help Wai Ching achieve victories and bring glory to Malaysia, especially to Petalung Jaya on the world stage.

"The purpose of the MoU is to promote Petalung Jaya as a smart, sustainable and resilient city.

"It also aims to make Petalung Jaya a tourist destination for visitors from all over the world, providing attractive tourist locations, a variety of food and other facilities to visi-

tors in conjunction with Visit Selangor Year 2025," he told a press conference at the MBPJ Headquarters on Monday.

Wai Ching said he was happy when MBPJ became the first local authority to support tower running in the country.

He said that apart from bringing accolades to Malaysia and elevating MBPJ in the eyes of the world, he also plans to continue the community outreach to find new talents in the sport, which is increasingly gaining attention.

"I will also hold sharing sessions in schools around Petalung Jaya and colleges to promote tower running.

"Tower running sessions and workshops will be held on every Saturday from 5.30pm to 7pm if there is no competition. We want more enthusiasts to join this because we want to create new talent and ensure Malaysia's world dominance in tower running," he said. - Bernama

Thailand among 15 countries confirmed for 2025 Asia Cup

FIFTEEN countries, including world champions Thailand, have confirmed their participation in the 2025 Asia Cup Sepaktakraw Championships at the Titiwangsa Stadium in May. Sepak Takraw Association of Malaysia (PSM) president Datuk Mohd Sumali Reduan said the other countries confirmed for the inaugural edition of the Asia Cup are Malaysia, India, Singapore, Brunei, Iraq, Myanmar, Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, China, Pakistan and the Philippines.

"Yesterday, we held a meeting on the 2025 Asia Cup with several Astaf (Asian Sepaktakraw Federation) executive council members to decide on certain matters, including team participation.

"We finalised the 15 teams and, as everyone knows, the Asia Cup will

have four events - regu (mandatory), doubles, quadrant and team. "We have nine teams competing in the quadrant event, seven in doubles and eight in the team event," he told a media conference yesterday.

Mohd Sumali said PSM had also proposed to Astaf and Istaf (International Sepaktakraw Federation) regarding the 'challenge' system in international tournaments, where each team is allowed two challenges per match.

The current system is such that teams will lose their challenge even if the referee's decision is proven incorrect, unlike in badminton, where challenges are retained in such cases.

"I'm proposing that a team will have two challenges remaining if a referee's decision is proven incorrect," he said. - Bernama

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7108	8064	9628	6005
9343	1010	3487	2286
1535	2433	0767	8141
8853	8884	9127	4296

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3636 + 1382	3636 + 8820
8820 + 1382	8820 + 3636

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 Jackpot 2 - Group 2 + Golden Number

GROUP 1	8 2 3 6 2 0
GROUP 2	8 2 3 6 2 OR 2 3 6 2 0
GROUP 3	8 2 3 6 OR 3 6 2 0
GROUP 4	8 2 3 OR 6 2 0
GROUP 5	8 2 OR 2 0
	OR 3 6
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SCAN ME

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ARNE SLOT declared his weakened FA Cup line-up at Plymouth was done "for a reason" as Liverpool faced up to a shock exit to Championship strugglers and criticism his team selection had devalued the competition.

Ryan Hardie's second half penalty secured a famous 1-0 win for Plymouth, rock bottom in the Championship, against the Premier League leaders in Monday's fourth-round tie at Home Park.

In what was Liverpool's 13th game since Boxing Day and ahead of tomorrow's (3.30pm Malaysian time) Merseyside derby at Everton, Slot made 10 changes from the side which had dismantled Tottenham three days earlier to reach the Carabao Cup final.

Only goalkeeper Caoimhin Kelleher remained with skipper Virgil van Dijk, Mohamed Salah, Alexis Mac Allister, Cody Gakpo and Ryan Gravenberch among Liverpool regulars to be given the day off.

Slot was accused on social media of disrespecting the FA Cup by leaving so many of his stars on Merseyside, although Liverpool still started with a front line of Diogo Jota, Federico Chiesa and Luis Diaz, while Darwin Nunez came off the bench after Plymouth scored.

The Dutch manager also suggested later that Plymouth's direct playing style meant there was no guarantee Liverpool would have progressed to the last 16, even if his first-teamers had featured in Devon.

"You never know what will happen if we would have played with our starters," Slot said.

"During this season we've seen a few times already that it's a game plan and playing style which is difficult for our starters, but also for the ones that played here.

"Constantly long balls and second balls, it's difficult for every team and we had this with (Manchester) United at home as well.

"Similar playing style going to a very low block, kick every ball long, and then we play with our starters.

"Most of the things we do, we do for a reason. We don't do all of a sudden something.

"We have many games to play and the last few weeks we've played every single week two times.

"It's not only good for them to have a week where they play only one game, but also for the ones here that need intensity and a game as well.

"You saw that some of these players really need games like this to be ready for the last

Reason in madness

Slot defends Liverpool team selection after Plymouth Argyle secure historic FA cup win

BY PHIL BLANCHE



three months of the season." Liverpool's misery was compounded by an injury to Joe Gomez, who wore the armband following a six-week layoff.

The England defender, who suffered a hamstring injury against West Ham on Dec 29, was forced off inside 11 minutes at Home Park.

Slot said: "I am not too sure if it was the same leg (as West Ham)... but it was clear that we all know which moment he felt a bit insecure about because he didn't sprint back fully.

"He said he was not 100% sure and he was afraid that if he made one extra sprint that things would go wrong.

"He didn't tear it, it's not torn I assume, but it didn't feel good for him and that is a bit of a blow."

Plymouth resume their battle to avoid relegation from the Championship at home to Millwall tomorrow.

The Pilgrims are currently four points from safety and boss Miron Muslic admits league survival, and not further FA Cup glory, remains his priority.

"The biggest moment is yet to come at the end of the season when we are staying up," said Bosnian Muslic, who replaced the sacked Wayne Rooney last month.

"This is the big, big goal for Argyle and then this will be the next biggest moment in my career.



"It's a hell of a task in front of us, no doubt, but I think we are ready to take this challenge." - The Independent



Djokovic 'almost 100%' ready

Living the dream

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In it to win it

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