



## Hindus observe 'sacred night'

Annual *Maha Shivaratri* event celebrated by millions of devotees worldwide with fasting, prayers and rituals to seek divine grace.

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## Urban renewal agenda not new, says prime minister

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim says no original property owners will be forcibly evicted under proposed Bill on redevelopment around Kuala Lumpur.

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## KLIA shooter sentenced to 14 years' jail, six strokes of rotan

Travel agency manager who injured wife's bodyguard in attempt on her life guilty of seven charges, including illegal possession of firearm.

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The primary purpose of a password is not for it to be easy for the owner to remember, but difficult for others to guess.  
- MASRY CHE ANI/THESUN

# 'Change password every month'

Apart from regular reset, cybersecurity experts recommend two-factor or multi-factor authentication when possible to reduce risk of hacking and data breach.

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## Act against *khatib* who refuse to read prepared sermons: Sultan Nazrin

**IPOH:** The Sultan of Perak Sultan Nazrin Shah considers the act of *khatib* (person who delivers sermons during prayer) who refuse to read the text of sermons prepared by the State Islamic Religious Department and approved by the mufti's office as "a transgression that has gone too far and must be addressed".

"Turning a blind eye to such behaviour is akin to allowing a malignant disease to spread, risking further division within the *ummah*."

"Those granted credentials to preach and teach in mosques and *surau* do so by royal decree conferred by the Ruler, based on recommendations from the office of the *mufti*, following a thorough evaluation."

The Sultan said the State Islamic Religious and Malay Customs Council, the State Islamic Religious Department and the office of the *mufti*, together with the *Orang Besar Jajahan* (territorial chiefs), mosque committees and parishes must remain vigilant in identifying individuals who exploit religion to propagate misguided ideologies.

"Mosques and *surau* must be cleansed of individuals who propagate deviant teachings," said His Royal Highness when opening the Muzakarah Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah, themed "Empowering the Integration between *Fiqh* and Sufism" yesterday.

The event was also attended by the Raja Muda

of Perak Raja Jaafar Raja Muda Musa and the Raja DiHilir Perak Raja Iskandar Dzurkarnain Idris Shah.

Sultan Nazrin said there has been an alarming trend among individuals who consider themselves as religious scholars or clerics.

"More and more voices are propagating misleading narratives. Religious talks, sermons and discussions have increasingly become platforms for slander and false statements, often influenced by political bias."

"Mosques and prayer halls, originally intended to unite the *ummah*, are increasingly being exploited as arenas for spreading divisive ideologies and falsehoods."

The Sultan said the relevant authorities should conduct fair and just investigations, thoroughly examining the facts and validity of reports on incidents that violate work ethics.

"The findings and any decision made by the authorities regarding any party involved, upon the completion of the appeal process, must be formally presented along with the recommendations for the consideration of the Ruler as deemed appropriate."

At the event, Sultan Nazrin unveiled two books, *Pengaruh Ahli Sunah Waljamaah Dalam Pembangunan Ummah dan Hubungan Antara Pemerintah Dan Rakyat Dalam Kerangka Ahli Sunah Waljamaah* authored by Perak Mufti Datuk Seri Wan Zahidi Wan Teh. – Bernama



Sultan Nazrin with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Saarani Mohamad (right) at the book launch in Ipoh yesterday. – **BERNAMAPIC**

## Urban renewal agenda not new, says PM

► 'Initial discussions to draft specific legislation to launch development around Kuala Lumpur held in 2013 before drafting of Act announced in 2015'

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The urban renewal agenda is not something new under the Madani government as it was initiated in 2012 with the formulation of the Urban Renewal Guidelines, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said initial discussions to draft a specific Urban Renewal Act to launch the development process around Kuala Lumpur were held in 2013 before the process of drafting the Act was announced in 2015.

Anwar said in 2020 former federal territories minister Tan Sri Annuar Musa had spearheaded the Urban Renewal Programme under Kuala Lumpur City Hall involving flats that were over 40 years old.

"In 2021, (then) housing and local government minister Datuk Zuraida Kamaruddin initiated the drafting of the Urban Renewal Bill while on March 22, 2022 (then) housing and local government minister Datuk Seri Reezal Merican Naina Merican continued, and focused on the same principles."

"Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim, who was then federal territories minister, in September 2022 even determined that Kuala Lumpur City Hall had identified 30 areas for renewal."

"Since 2012, 74 engagement sessions have been held and we have taken into

account the problems faced by the people," he said in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

He was responding to a question from Tan Kar Hing (PH-Gopeng) on the government's commitment that the proposed Urban Renewal Bill would ensure that no owner, regardless of race, would be forcibly evicted from his land or premises as clearly stated in Article 13 of the Federal Constitution.

Anwar gave an assurance the Bill would not allow the transfer of the original ownership of a property or change the ethnic composition and status of land, whether Malay reserve, government-owned or permanent.

"Regarding ethnic ownership, for example the Sri Perlis Flats, if it currently has 70% Malay (ownership), it will remain because under this law there is no right for us to transfer the original ownership."

Anwar said there is, therefore, no issue at all of the original owner of a property, regardless of race, being forcibly evicted from his land or premises.

Regarding the requirement for a threshold of between 51% and 80% of property owners to agree to the proposed Bill, Anwar said this is necessary to facilitate the renewal process.

"The threshold is necessary. For

example, if there is a project where one person does not agree, this matter is delayed."

"So is there a process? It can be taken to court. How many years? Five years? Then the value given by the court will be the current value and he will get more."

"If we really want to defend the people, use this Bill so that we can improve. A house that is currently RM70,000 can be RM200,000, (but) if we do the valuation it will remain RM70,000."

Meanwhile, he said the government could save RM1.7 billion by expediting the implementation of the Sungai Golok Integrated River Basin project.

He said this could be made possible following the government's decision to consolidate all three phases of the flood mitigation project, including the phase overseen by the National Security Council, Bernama reported.

"The Sungai Golok project and the dredging and cleaning of the Sungai Golok estuary, involve both the Malaysian and the Thai governments."

"If we expedite and consolidate the project's three phases, we will stand to save RM1.7 billion. That is why I say the principles of governance and transparency in the project must be upheld."

Anwar was replying to Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman (Muar) who wanted to know the proactive measures taken by the government to deal with floods during each monsoon season as well as the unforeseen factors in areas that are frequently hit by floods and have the potential to be hit by floods in the future.

## Federal agencies told to reduce dependence on govt grants

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Federal agencies are advised to strengthen revenue generation efforts to ensure operational continuity, thereby reducing dependence on government grants.

According to the Auditor-General's Report 1/2025, which was tabled in the Dewan Rakyat on Monday, the recommendation is to improve the financial management of the agencies.

"The use of government grants needs to be optimised to improve the efficiency of federal agency services."

The report also suggested that the agencies should review the direction and business plans of subsidiary companies that suffered losses for three consecutive years and did not provide appropriate returns.

It added that they should consider closing subsidiary companies with dormant or inactive status of more than five years.

The report said as of Dec 31, 2023, advances and grants given by 39 federal agencies to 94 subsidiary companies amounted to RM16.849 billion.

The amount consists of advances to 81 subsidiary companies amounting to RM14.105 billion and grants to 13 subsidiary companies amounting to RM2.744 billion.

According to the report the highest advances and grants by five federal agencies to subsidiary companies in 2023 were by the EPF, Lembaga Tabung Haji, FELDA, PRIMA and the Malaysian Timber Industry Board.

The report added that as many as 97 out of 142 federal agencies recorded a current surplus after tax and *zakat* amounting to RM73.886 billion while as many as 45 federal agencies recorded a current deficit amounting to RM2.011 billion.

"The audit analysis shows an increase in the total current surplus after tax and *zakat* in 2023, from RM55.842 billion in 2022 to RM73.886 billion in 2023, involving 97 agencies compared with 89 agencies in 2022."

"The five federal agencies that recorded the highest current surplus in 2023 were the EPF (RM41.335 billion), Retirement Fund Inc (RM9.651 billion), Bank Negara Malaysia (RM7.162 billion), the Public Sector Housing Financing Board (RM3.084 billion), Lembaga Tabung Haji (RM2.330 billion) and others consisting of 92 agencies (RM10.324 billion)."

Audit analysis shows a decrease in the current deficit from RM3.635 billion in 2022 to RM2.011 billion in 2023, involving 45 agencies in 2023 compared with 53 agencies in 2022. – Bernama

## Early warning systems for landslides installed at 40 locations

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Early warning systems for landslides have been installed at 40 locations in the country as of December last year, said Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad.

He said the systems would be installed in six locations this year - two in Kuching and

one each in Bau, Kapit, Limbang and Miri.

"They will be equipped with motion sensors, rain gauges, closed-circuit cameras and sirens," he said in the Dewan Rakyat on Monday.

Nik Nazmi said work on installing debris flow monitoring systems and fault movement benchmarks in high geohazard-

prone areas in Mount Kinabalu, Sabah, is expected to begin by the end of this year.

Meanwhile, the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry aims to present the Science, Technology and Innovation Bill to the Parliamentary Special Select Committee before it is tabled in the Dewan Rakyat for this term. – Bernama



# Experts urge regular password changes to boost security

Specialists recommend using complex characters, multi-factor authentication to prevent hacking and data breaches

BY QIRANA NABILLA MOHD RASHIDI  
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

**PETALING JAYA:** Cybersecurity experts have advised the public to change their passwords for digital applications and bank accounts at least once a month to minimise the risk of hacking and data breaches.

Malaysia Cyber Consumer Association president Sirajuddin Jilil said users can no longer rely on outdated password-setting methods as doing so leaves them vulnerable to cyber threats.

"Ideally, a password should have no connection to you at all. Many people mistakenly believe passwords should be easy to recall, but their primary purpose is to be difficult for others to guess, not easy for you to remember," he said.

He was commenting on a report by password management service NordPass, which revealed that 14,396 Malaysians use "123456" as their password. The data was sourced from publicly accessible platforms

and the dark web, covering users from 44 countries.

Sirajuddin said cybercriminals are constantly evolving their tactics, making it essential to stay ahead with robust security measures. A common mistake among users is reusing the same password across multiple platforms.

He warned against using passwords containing personal information and saving them in browsers.

"The safest method is to write passwords on paper because digital storage leaves behind footprints that hackers can trace. Cybercriminals also use spyware to remotely access devices, making digital storage of sensitive information risky," he said.

Sirajuddin urged companies and online platforms to enforce stricter password policies to prevent users from choosing weak passwords.

While six-character passwords were once common, today, longer combinations of unique symbols, numbers and letters - possibly up to 20 characters - are more secure.

Although creating complex passwords can be inconvenient, he stressed that it is a one-time hassle compared with the consequences of being hacked.

"Cybercriminals are the driving force behind today's digital black market. They create the supply and demand for stolen data, including personal information saved on devices, such as photographs and important files.

"High-profile individuals, such as politicians and government leaders, are especially targeted. This is why passwords are crucial, as

they are the keys to protecting everything in our digital lives," he said.

Cybersecurity expert Murugason R. Thangaratnam said one of the most effective ways to enhance online security is using two-factor or multi-factor authentication whenever possible.

"This adds an extra layer of protection to accounts, making it harder for cybercriminals to gain unauthorised access. Spyware is one of the most common and serious threats to internet users and can infiltrate a device without the user's knowledge.

"It can be embedded in app install packages, file attachments or malicious websites, with the primary goal of stealing credit card numbers, banking information and passwords," he said.

Murugason noted that changing passwords properly is just as important as doing it regularly.

Many users simply alter a character or two, which makes it easier to remember but also easier for cybercriminals to predict.

He explained that credential stuffing, a tactic used by hackers, allows them to exploit reused or slightly modified passwords, impersonate account owners, access sensitive data, empty accounts and make fraudulent purchases.

"Our research shows that cracking a complex password could take decades and require supercomputing power. Ensuring that all variations of a compromised password are changed and never reused would help secure accounts from cybercriminals," he said.

## Govt targets 70% reduction in Johor Causeway congestion

**JOHOR BAHRU:** The government aims to reduce peak-hour congestion at the Johor Causeway by up to 70% in preparation for Visit Malaysia 2026, ensuring a smoother experience for international visitors.

Home Ministry deputy secretary-general (Policy and Control) Datuk Makhzan Mahyuddin said 50 initiatives have been planned across four phases since 2019, with 58% already completed.

"Previously, the peak-hour congestion was between 3.45am and 4.30am, but it has now shifted to 6.30am. In the past, individuals had to spend up to three hours going through procedures at the Customs, Immigration and Quarantine Complex (CIQ). Today, that time has been reduced to less than an hour.

"We are confident that as more short-, medium- and long-term initiatives are completed, processing times will be further reduced," he said during a press conference following a media tour at CIQ Bangunan Sultan Iskandar (BSI) yesterday.

One of the key measures introduced by the Home Ministry to ease congestion is the addition of counters equipped with a quick response (QR) code system for all modes of transport, including motorcycles, buses and cars.

"Currently, eight counters for motorcycle entry and eight for motorcycle exit have been equipped with QR code systems, along with two counters for buses. Our goal is to expand the system to all counters," he said.

He added that the initiative will be further refined at the special committee meeting to address congestion at the Johor Causeway, chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof in Kuala Lumpur on March 3.

Among the 29 completed initiatives are the replacement of Royal Malaysian Customs scanning machines, the implementation of a contra-flow route at the entryway, improvements to the BSI electrical system and the integration of toll payment with the vehicle entry permit system at a single location.

Spanning 232,237 sq m, BSI is the largest CIQ complex in Malaysia.

On Dec 20 last year, it recorded its highest-ever daily visitor movement, with 375,828 people passing through. - Bernama

## Perak Umno determined to retain Ayer Kuning seat

**IPOH:** Perak Umno will not underestimate any opponent but is committed to keeping the Ayer Kuning state seat under Barisan Nasional (BN).

Perak Umno chairman Datuk Seri Saarani Mohamad said efforts will focus on securing support from new voters in the constituency.

"On paper, the seat should be a comfortable win for the unity government candidate. In the last election, BN secured over 9,000 votes, while Pakatan Harapan received around 6,000.

"If combined, that gives us 15,000 votes from both coalitions. However, we cannot take this for granted as voter sentiment is dynamic. Efforts must continue to engage with voters, especially new ones," he said after attending the Perak government's 2025 client engagement day at Stadium Indera Mulia.

Earlier, Saarani said Perak Umno had submitted a notice to Perak State Assembly Speaker Datuk Mohammad Zahir Abdul Khalid regarding the vacancy for the Ayer Kuning seat, following the passing of its incumbent, Isham Shahrudin, last Saturday.

Isham, 59, died of a heart attack after participating in a four-cornered football tournament at City Stadium in Georgetown, Penang. - Bernama



A team comprising officers from the Pahang Fisheries Department and the Fisheries Research Institute inspecting the carcass. - BERNAMAPIC

## Whale carcass washes up on Pekan beach

**KUANTAN:** A carcass of a 10m-long whale was found in a decomposed state on Pantau Sungai Miang in Pekan.

The marine mammal was discovered partially buried in sand by fishermen, who initially thought it was a log, at about 4pm on Sunday.

It is estimated to have been dead for several days based on the condition of the carcass.

The Department of Fisheries (DOF) said in a statement that the Pahang Fisheries Department had received information from the public regarding the discovery of a whale

carcass stranded on the beach.

"Acting on the information, a team of officers from the Pahang Fisheries Department and the Fisheries Research Institute at Rantau Abang in Terengganu was deployed to the location to inspect the condition of the carcass," the statement read.

"From an initial inspection, the whale carcass has been decomposing for a long time, making species identification difficult. Therefore, the team will take samples to conduct eDNA analysis to determine the species more accurately."

Based on the condition of the carcass, the DOF estimated that the species might be a Bryde or Fin (finback) whale.

"Under the Fisheries Act 1985, whale species are protected under provisions related to endangered marine species. Therefore, any disturbance or exploitation of whales is prohibited and can be subject to legal action. The department will continue to monitor this situation and take further action if necessary," said the statement.

Last year, an 80kg whale was found stranded at Kampung Tanjung Batu in Pekan. - Bernama



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# Hindus observe 'sacred night' to attain blessings

➤ Annual event *Maha Shivaratri* celebrated by fasting, performing prayers and rituals to enhance devotion, seek enlightenment and achieve self-purification

BY KIRTINEE RAMESH  
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

**PETALING JAYA:** Hindus today celebrate *Maha Shivaratri*, also known as "the Great Night of Shiva", one of the most sacred nights dedicated to Lord Shiva, the god of destruction, with special prayers, *bhajans*, *poojas* and chants of *Om Namah Shivaya*, which draw millions of devotees around the world, including Malaysia.

Malaysia Hindu Sangam honorary general secretary Vinayagamurthi Subramaniam said: "Among others, Hindus will fast from sunrise until the following morning, visit temples for *Shiva abhishekam*, which is the pouring of milk, water and other sacred substances on a statue of the deity while chanting sacred mantras."

Celebrated annually on the 14th night of the waning moon in the month of *Phalguna*, which is the 12th month in the Hindu calendar around February to March, the auspicious occasion is a night of devotion and self-discipline, on which divine grace is sought.

Vinayagamurthi said *Maha Shivaratri* represents the victory of light over darkness, self-control over desires and inner transformation.

"It is a time when devotees immerse themselves in prayer, fasting and meditation as they aim for spiritual elevation and inner transformation.

"Observing *Maha Shivaratri* rituals is believed to help overcome ignorance, absolve past sins and bring spiritual enlightenment. Through devotion and discipline, one can attain divine blessings and move closer to *moksha*, or freedom from the eternal cycle of life, death and rebirth."

He said devotees offer *bilva* leaves, flowers, and fruits to Lord Shiva, perform *jagaran* (the act of staying awake all night), and listen to the *Shiva purana* (mythology) and other sacred texts. The practice enhances spiritual



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— AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THESUN

consciousness and strengthens one's connection with the divine.

Fasting on *Maha Shivaratri* is considered a sacred act of devotion and self-purification, with different types of fasting observed.

*Nirjala Vratam* is a strict fast with no food or water, *Phalahar Vratam* allows only fruits, milk and water, while *Upvaas Vratam* permits one meal a day, avoiding grains and salt. Each type of fast represents a different level of commitment, demonstrating one's dedication to Lord Shiva.

Vinayagamurthi said *jagaran* also holds deep spiritual meaning. It symbolises overcoming ignorance and darkness through devotion and meditation. It is believed that those who remain awake, pray and meditate on Lord Shiva throughout the night receive divine blessings, good fortune and spiritual progress.

He said many also recite the *Shiva Tandava* hymn to connect with Shiva's cosmic energy, while sacred prayers and mantras are recited on *Maha Shivaratri*, with each carrying a profound significance.

"The mythology behind *Maha Shivaratri* is rich with meaning and devotion. One of the most well-known legends is the *Samudra Manthan*, in which during a churning of the

oceans, a deadly poison (*Halahala*) emerged. "To save the universe, Lord Shiva consumed the poison and held it in his throat, turning it blue and earning the name *Neelkanth*. *Maha Shivaratri* is observed in gratitude for his sacrifice."

"Another legend states that *Maha Shivaratri* marks the divine marriage of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, symbolising the union of *Shiva* (consciousness) and *Shakti* (energy)," Vinayagamurthi added.

There is also the story of a hunter who unknowingly dropped *bilva* leaves onto a *Shiva Lingam* while resting in a tree.

Without realising it, he observed the fast and night vigil, ultimately attaining *moksha*, highlighting the power of sincere devotion.

He said *Maha Shivaratri* is not just about rituals. It is a time for self-reflection, discipline and inner transformation.

"It teaches that through devotion, meditation and spiritual practice, one can transcend limitations and connect with the divine.

"Whether deeply religious or simply seeking inner peace, *Maha Shivaratri* presents an opportunity to embrace positive change and align oneself with higher consciousness," he said.

## Teenage girls twice as likely to experience depression: Minister

**JOHOR BAHRU:** Malaysian teenage girls are twice as likely to experience mental health issues, including depression, compared with their male peers, according to Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Dr Noraini Ahmad.

She said findings from the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2022 confirm this pattern, with 26.9% of teenagers showing the indications of depression.

The prevalence is higher among females, at 36.1%, compared with 17.7% among males.

"This data highlights the greater vulnerability of teenage girls to depression, reflecting the unique challenges faced by women today," she said at the 2025 International Women's Day (Southern Zone) celebrations on Monday.

She added that the Jiwa Kuant, Wanita Sihat programme, launched in conjunction with the event, aims to promote emotional resilience and well-being among women, empowering them to remain competitive and continue contributing to their families, communities and the nation.

The Women, Family and Community Development Ministry, through the Women's Development Department, remains committed to implementing initiatives that support women's health, stress management and work-life balance.

"Psychosocial support programmes, counselling services and mental health initiatives have also been expanded to ensure that all women, regardless of background, receive the necessary assistance. This aligns with the Madani government's commitment to safeguarding women's rights and well-being," she said.

Meanwhile, Noraini confirmed that none of the charity homes previously operated by GISB Holdings Sdn Bhd, which housed the children of its followers, are in operation.

She added that 13 children of former GISBH members under the age of 18 remain under the care of the Social Welfare Department, including those whose guardians have returned them to the department. — Bernama

## Applications for agri initiative extended

**PUTRAJAYA:** Applications for the Malaysian Indian Transformative Agri Programme (Mitap) 2024/2025 have been extended until March 10 following high demand from agricultural entrepreneurs and youths.

Malaysian India Transformation Unit (Mitra) said in a statement that agricultural entrepreneurs and the Malaysian Indian community aged 18 and above and from the B40 and M40 groups who have yet to submit an application could do so before the closing date.

The programme, which is expected to start in April, will be run in collaboration with Mardi Corporation Sdn Bhd (MardiCorp), using the existing agricultural module.

It is divided into two programmes, namely the Agricultural Development Grant Assistance Programme and Young Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme.

Applications can be made via Google Form at <https://forms.gle/AnVaa5Vc2aPjQicGA> for the Agricultural Development Grant Assistance Programme, and <https://forms.gle/Hbina9VwsSLQ2hAb9> for the Young Agricultural Entrepreneur Programme.

For details, contact Mitra at 03-8886 6013 or MardiCorp at 019-349 7005/03-8948 4699 from 8.30am to 5.30pm or email to [sek@mitra.gov.my](mailto:sek@mitra.gov.my). — Bernama

## Labuan-KK ferry resumption issue to be resolved

**LABUAN:** Issues linked to the resumption of the Labuan-Kota Kinabalu express ferry service is expected to be settled soon.

The federal government, through the Federal Territories Department, and the Sabah state government have reaffirmed commitment to resolving the issues in a discussion on Monday.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territories) Dr Zaliha Mustafa said the meeting demonstrated the strengthened collaboration between the federal and state governments.

"One of the key topics discussed was the express ferry service between Labuan and Kota Kinabalu.

"This service is not only crucial as another primary transport link but also plays a vital role

in boosting the economy of both regions.

"Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Mohd Noor welcomed the proposal, and both parties are committed to resolving the matter swiftly to ensure the service resumes for the benefit of the public," she told Bernama yesterday.

Among those present at the meeting were Federal Territories Department director-general Datuk Noridah Abdul Rahim, Labuan Corporation (LC) chairman Senator Tan Sri Anifah Aman and LC chief executive officer Mohd Sukuran Taib.

Zaliha had previously announced that the ferry service, halted for three years, was set to resume on Dec 15 last year. However, unforeseen technical issues led to further delays.

The ferry, once a popular travel option,

ceased operations due to low passenger volume during the Covid-19 pandemic.

She also emphasised that restoring the service is crucial to address Labuan's long-standing accessibility challenges while simultaneously revitalising its tourism sector.

"This service is essential not only for the local community but also to attract visitors and boost economic activity in both Labuan and Sabah."

She added that the improved connectivity is expected to foster tourism growth, with potential package deals offering travellers the combined experience of both destinations.

"As the Labuan International Ferry Terminal is prepared to handle the anticipated increase in passengers, we are working swiftly to resolve any remaining issues and expedite the resumption of this service," she said.



# KLIA shooter sentenced to 14 years in jail and caning

➤ Illegal possession of gun, bullets among charges taken into account by court

**KOTA BHARU:** A manager of a travel agency was sentenced to 14 years and six months in jail and six strokes of the cane by the Sessions Court here yesterday after pleading guilty to seven charges, including possession of firearms.

Judge Zulkifli Abllah handed down the sentence on Hafizul Hawari, 38.

He said the court took into account the facts of the case and the seriousness of the offences committed.

The court sentenced Hafizul to six years in prison and six strokes of the cane for the first charge of possessing an Austrian Glock 19 handgun.

He was also sentenced to three years in prison for each of the second and third

charges, for possession of 33 bullets without a licence and a plastic package containing ball-shaped firecrackers without a permit.

The charges were framed under Section 8 of the Firearms (Increased Penalties) Act 1971 for possessing a pistol, Section 8(a) of the Arms Act 1960 for possessing bullets and Section 8 of the Explosives Act 1957 for possessing firecrackers without a permit.

On the fourth to sixth counts, for possession of three identification cards belonging to individuals aged 29, 34 and 35, Hafizul was sentenced to six months in prison for each count.

The charges were framed under the National Registration Regulations 1990.

Zulkifli also sentenced Hafizul to 12 months in prison for the seventh charge, framed under Section 108(3)(f) of the Road Transport Act 1987, for driving a car with a fake registration number.

All offences were committed in a car in the compound of a private hospital here at 2pm

on April 15 last year.

However, Hafizul will only serve six years in jail as Zulkifli ordered him to serve the jail sentences concurrently from the date of his arrest on April 15 last year.

During mitigation, Hafizul's lawyer Nik Mohd Faris Syazwan Zainuzzaman told the court that his client has apologised for the offences committed.

Hafizul is facing two more charges at the Sepang Sessions Court.

On April 25 last year, he was charged with attempting to murder his wife Farah Md Isa, 38, at the international arrival hall at Level 3, Terminal 1 of the KL International Airport (KLIA).

He is alleged to have committed the offence at 1.09am on April 14 last year, Bernama reported.

He is also being charged with voluntarily causing grievous harm to his wife's bodyguard Mohd Nur Hadith Zaini, 38, by firing a firearm at the same place, date and time.



Hafizul being escorted to the Sessions Court in Kota Bharu yesterday. — BERNAMAPIC

## Ex-MMA coach imprisoned for drug possession

**KUALA LUMPUR:** A former mixed martial arts (MMA) coach was sentenced to nine years in prison and 20 strokes of the cane by the High Court for possessing 1.85kg of ganja two years ago.

Judge Datuk Muhammad Jamil Hussin handed down the sentence on Monday after Iranian national Ahmad Dhegani, 27, pleaded guilty to two alternative charges.

The court imposed a nine-year jail term and 10 strokes of the cane for each charge, with the prison sentences to run concurrently from the date of his arrest on March 16, 2023.

Ahmad was charged with possessing ganja weighing 997g and 860g at Jalan Sri Permaisuri 8 in Cheras and Jalan Baba Pudu in Dang Wangi on March 16, 2023.

He was charged under Section 6 of the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 and Section 12(2), punishable under Section 39A(2), of the same

Act, which provides for life imprisonment or a minimum of five years' jail, and a minimum of 10 strokes of the cane.

DPP Khalijah Mohd Khalid requested a fair sentence and urged the court to order the prison terms to run consecutively.

Lawyer Abdul Rashid Ismail, representing Ahmad, appealed for a reduced prison sentence on the grounds that his client has already spent nearly two years at the Sungai Buloh Prison since his arrest and shown remorse for his actions.

He said despite being detained in prison, his client remained active in sports, regularly participating in boxing training with fellow detainees under the supervision and approval of prison authorities.

"My client understands that his arrest prevented him from completing his master of business administration course, for which he

was supposed to graduate in June 2023.

"Given his academic achievements and strong cocurricular background, he has a promising future and has even represented Malaysia in MMA tournaments," said Abdul Rashid, who undertook the case alongside Jacqueline Hannah.

In another development, police have arrested two men believed to be involved in a group brawl during an MMA competition at Dewan Besar Tanjung, Shah Alam City Council.

District police chief ACP Mohd Iqbal Ibrahim said the fight broke out following an argument between two participants who were disqualified due to the absence of their opponents on Monday.

He said the argument escalated into provocations, leading to a brawl involving around 15 supporters and resulting in injuries to a 45-year-old male participant. — Bernama

## Retiree loses RM4m in investment scam

**SHAH ALAM:** A retired private sector employee has lost RM4 million to a fraudulent investment scheme that was advertised on Facebook.

Selangor police chief Datuk Hussein Omar Khan said the 73-year-old woman joined the scheme in mid-November, after being added to a WhatsApp group.

He said the victim was attracted to make investments after being promised daily lucrative returns of between 8% and 10%.

"For investment purposes, the victim was asked to make 62 payment transactions, involving 10 bank accounts.

"She realised she had been deceived when she was asked to make additional payments if she wanted to withdraw her supposed profits."

He said the victim lodged a police report after failing to get the promised profits and the case is being investigated under Section 420 of the Penal Code. — Bernama

## Raids on factories net 420 immigrants

**SEGAMAT:** The Immigration Department arrested 420 illegal immigrants suspected of committing various offences during simultaneous raids at 12 factories processing illegal electrical and electronic waste (e-waste) in Johor and Selangor on Monday.

Ten factories were located in Johor while two were in Telok Panglima Garang, Selangor.

Immigration deputy director-general (operations) Jafri Embok Taha said the offences included the absence of valid travel documents, overstaying and misuse of travel documents.

"Those arrested are aged between 20 and 30. They are mostly Bangladeshis, and also included Myanmar nationals and Nepalese," he said after the operation at a factory in Jalan Buloh Kasap here.

He added that those arrested in Jalan Buloh Kasap have been taken to the Machap Umboo Immigration Depot in Malacca and the Pekan Nanas Immigration Depot in Johor for further investigation.

He also said five locals in their 30s were detained and are believed to be representatives for the employers hired to manage the foreign workers.

It was reported on Thursday that a nationwide crackdown on illegal e-waste operations, carried out by police in collaboration with the Department of Environment, has led to RM3.8 billion in seizures between Jan 1, 2024 and Feb 17 this year. — Bernama

## Two workers die in transformer room fire

**MALACCA:** A Bangladeshi and a local were killed while two others suffered burns in a fire at a transformer room of a factory in the Tangga Batu Industrial Area here.

Tangga Batu Fire and Rescue station operations commander Roslan Manas said two teams from the Tangga Batu and Cheng stations were deployed after an emergency call was received at 10.08am on Monday.

"Upon arrival, it was confirmed that a fire had broken out in the transformer room on the upper floor of a two-storey building, measuring 20x50sq ft, with 40% of the room affected.

"According to initial reports, the incident involved four victims, whose identities have yet to be confirmed. Two of them were trapped and pronounced dead. The other two, both in their 30s, sustained burns but were rescued."

Malacca Fire and Rescue Department operations commander Mohd Khairul Nizam Mohamad said it took the teams about five hours to retrieve the charred remains of the victims due to the confined space and the risk of electrical currents. — Bernama



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# Second-hand success story

➤ From freezer to fortune, entrepreneur started business with only RM700 capital

BY T.C. KHOR  
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

**SEBERANG PERAI:** A man found his luck taking a turn for the better when he posted a picture of a second-hand freezer for sale seven years ago. In 2018, Radhi Razali, 51, was looking for buyers to offload his freezer and that was when he discovered a new business opportunity. He found that with the right items many people were willing to accept used goods.

"I posted a picture of a freezer on a website that hosts second-hand items," he said, adding that he started his business with a small capital of RM700.

He said the response was encouraging, so he decided to try selling used furniture.

"I began to trade in furniture, electrical appliances, bicycles and essentially, goods that have a sales value."

Radhi said he started sourcing for more used items and selling them for a small profit online. Initially, he sourced and kept his stock in his own

home and business premises.

However, he soon found it challenging to secure funds and deliver the goods to his customers.

To overcome financial constraints, he saved his profits, diversified his offerings and rented a shoplot in Taman Tun Hussin. However, it was not until the Movement Control Order in 2020 that his business started growing.

"Many businesses were closing down, and by then my friends knew I was selling second-hand items. So, I helped some friends to dispose of their belongings to raise some cash. The business took off from there."

In 2021, he opened a larger outlet in Seberang Jaya and called it RR Sinar Gemilang.

He said the industry has a high demand and his experience in the business gave him the confidence to continue, along with support from his wife who is his inspiration.

Radhi also said he sourced products that were in good condition and sells them at half the price of new products.



Radhi (right) at his shop in Seberang Jaya, where he sells second-hand goods such as furniture, beds, closets and electrical appliances.  
— MASRY CHE ANI/THE SUN

"I will clean the items carefully and ensure that they comply with Islamic standards as most of my customers are Muslims.

"If someone wanted to rent out his apartment or a room in his home, he would look for me to purchase second-hand goods such as beds, closets, fans, washing machines and others to

furnish the room. That will save him a lot of money.

"Or, if someone needs tables or chairs, or plates and utensils to start a business, I have that too."

Radhi said before he ventured into selling used goods he owned a cafe and car wash outlet but had to close them down due to worker shortage. He now plans to further

expand his business and is looking for a warehouse to stock his items.

He added that he promotes his business through Facebook and WhatsApp, offering low prices to attract customers.

RR Sinar Gemilang opens daily from 8am to 9pm and Radhi can be contacted at 018-260-4152.

## Laksa MakEte finds its way to UK

**KOTA TINGGI:** *Johor Laksa MakEte* from Segamat has made its way to the United Kingdom via the Halal Street UK e-commerce platform.

Warisan Indi Network director Siti Sainiza Saidin, 49, said her two products, the instant *Johor Laksa* gravy and instant *Johor Laksa*, made with wolf herring, have been developed since 2021 and marketed through the platform since last October.

"Our effort to market the product is supported by the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation.

"Since launching on Halal Street UK, demands have increased," she said at the 31st Asean Economic Ministers' (AEM) Retreat at the Desaru Coast Convention Centre on Sunday.

Siti Sainiza expressed gratitude for the opportunity to export her products, allowing locals and Malaysians abroad to experience the authentic taste of *laksa* Johor.

Operating under the Perbadanan Usahawan Johor Sdn Bhd and Johor Islamic Religious Council, Siti Sainiza said she developed the family recipe without preservatives

using retort technology (food preservation method) for a longer shelf life.

"Customer feedback has been positive, with many praising the gravy and the instant *Johor Laksa* suits their taste. The instant concept makes it convenient as the products only need to be heated before serving."

Siti Sainiza said demand is currently highest in Johor, with her products available at Halal Valet in Angsana Johor Bahru Mall and 15 vendors in Segamat, Kulai, Batu Pahat and Johor Bahru.

Additionally, she said the product is marketed on e-commerce platforms such as Shopee, TikTok Shop and Facebook.

She also plans to expand into Kuala Lumpur and other states while aiming to reach *laksa* Johor enthusiasts abroad.

She hopes that her participation in AEM would create opportunities to export her products to other Asean countries.

"*Johor Laksa* has universal appeal with its unique spaghetti-based preparation. I hope the product

can penetrate the regional market," she added.

The AEM Retreat on Feb 28 will be chaired by the Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Zafrul Abdul Aziz, followed by related meetings which started on Saturday until tomorrow, and held in conjunction with Malaysia's Asean chairmanship.

Themed "Inclusivity and Sustainability," the retreat reflects Malaysia's aspiration to strengthen a more inclusive and sustainable Asean community. — Bernama

# EDUCATION

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# Three Pertamina executives held over graft allegations

➤ Corruption charges relate to oil imports

**JAKARTA:** The Attorney General's Office here has arrested three executives at units of state-owned energy firm Pertamina on charges of alleged corruption related to oil imports that cost the state US\$12 billion (RM53 billion), a senior official said.

Late on Monday, prosecutors

arrested Riva Siahaan, CEO of Pertamina Patra Niaga, Yoki Firmandi, CEO of Pertamina International Shipping, and Sani Dinar Saifuddin, a director at Kilang Pertamina Internasional, said Abdul Qohar, director of special crimes at the Attorney General's office.

Pertamina said in a statement yesterday that it respected the legal process by Attorney General's Office.

"Pertamina is ready to cooperate with the authorities and hopes the legal process runs well and prioritises the presumption of innocence," it said.

Abdul Qohar said that between 2018 and 2023 the three were alleged to have violated a government regulation for Pertamina to source crude oil from domestic suppliers, and had colluded to justify imports.

He said the executives had said the crude oil from contractors operating in Indonesia did not meet their standards.

"But the fact was the specification matched," Abdul Qohar said.

Crude oil produced by contractors was exported, while Kilang Pertamina Internasional and Pertamina Patra Niaga imported

crude oil and fuel with "significantly higher prices", the prosecutor said, with losses to the state put at US\$12 billion.

Pertamina Patra Niaga is a unit in charge of retail sales and fuel imports at the state energy firm. Kilang Pertamina International processes crude oil and condensate into refined products.

The Attorney General's office said Pertamina International Shipping had marked up shipping fees.

Three other people from private companies were also arrested in the case, the office said. - Reuters

## Jakarta, Moscow seek to boost defence ties

**JAKARTA:** Top Russian security official Sergei Shoigu held talks here with President Prabowo Subianto and his defence minister yesterday, as Moscow and Jakarta seek to boost defence ties.

Southeast Asia's biggest economy maintains a neutral foreign policy, refusing to take sides in the Ukraine conflict or in the great power competition between the United States and China.

Shoigu, Russia's former defence minister and now secretary of its Security Council, is seen as influential in the decision to send Russian troops into Ukraine in 2022 and is a staunch ally of President Vladimir Putin.

He met Defence Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoedin for a courtesy call in Jakarta yesterday, Indonesia's Defence Ministry said in a statement.

Prabowo then received Shoigu at the presidential palace in the afternoon, the presidential palace said in a statement.

"This visit marks an important moment in strengthening bilateral relations between Indonesia and Russia, particularly in the fields of security and defence," the statement said.



Defence Vice-Minister Donny Ermawan Taufanty (right) and Shoigu reviewing a guard of honour at the Defence Ministry in Jakarta yesterday. - AFP/IC

"They discussed strategic issues and regional security."

The palace said the visit opened up "broader opportunities for future cooperation" with both sides committed to "strengthening their strategic partnership".

Prabowo has pledged to be bolder on the world stage and visited Moscow in July for talks with Putin.

In November, Indonesia and Russia held their first joint naval drills. Russia sent three corvette-class warships, a medium tanker ship, a

military helicopter, and a tug boat for the drills held near Java.

Jakarta has billion-dollar trade ties with Moscow, yet major arms imports have stalled after Russia seized Crimea in 2014 and launched its offensive on Ukraine. - AFP

## Thai girl in critical condition after vaping for two years

**BANGKOK:** A 12-year-old girl in Thailand has been hospitalised with extensive lung damage after reportedly vaping and consuming kratom drinks for nearly two years.

The girl's family, from the Buri Ram province, was unaware of her habit until her school informed them of her condition.

Her grandmother said the girl began displaying behavioural changes after entering the fourth grade, *The Nation* reported. She was a diligent student but became less involved in household chores and frequently left home on the pretext of studying with friends, the grandmother said.

Her health deteriorated and she was admitted to Satuek Hospital after experiencing severe breathing

difficulties, vomiting and weakness.

There, doctors informed the family that almost all of her lung capacity had been compromised due to vaping and she required a ventilator.

The case was initially brought to public attention by Paphawarin Simlakorn, an emergency responder who shared images of students being transported to hospital after suffering from similar symptoms.

Three other students from the school, in grades five, six and eight, were also admitted with breathing difficulties and chest tightness linked to the prolonged e-cigarette use and consumption of kratom, an herbal substance that induces an opioid-like effect.

According to Surasak Koonpak, a

clerk working for Don Mon municipality, while the grade five and grade six students were sent to Satuk Hospital last Tuesday, the eighth grader was admitted on Thursday. One of them was later transferred to Buri Ram Hospital for further treatment, reported the *Bangkok Post*.

Authorities have launched an investigation into the sale of these substances and arrested two individuals operating a shop near the school. They seized e-cigarettes, kratom drinks, cough syrup suspected to be mixed with kratom, and an illegal firearm.

The Thai government issued a renewed warning about the spread of illicit vaping devices.

Authorities highlighted the

increasing availability of pod toys, vaping devices disguised as miniature toys such as Japanese anime characters.

Some of these devices, widely known as "Doraemon e-cigarettes", are sold for as little as 99 baht (RM13), making them accessible to minors.

Deputy government spokesperson Anukul Prueksanusak cautioned that some e-cigarettes had been laced with powerful sedatives, such as Etomidate, which could cause extreme drowsiness, low blood pressure and respiratory distress.

Authorities urged parents to closely monitor their children's activities and educate them about the dangers of vaping and drug-laced products. - The Independent

BRIEFS

### US\$78.5M BLACK MONEY RING BUSTED

**HANOI:** Vietnam police said on Monday they had arrested 21 people allegedly involved in a money-laundering ring that moved US\$78.5 million (RM346 million) of cash to Cambodia. The detainees were nabbed mid-February, police in Dong Nai province said. The ringleader had "transferred money totalling US\$78.5 million for gambling and online fraud for a cross-border organisation headquartered in Cambodia" since July 2024, police said. They had set up 30 companies and made 150 business bank accounts to transfer and legalise money that had been obtained through fraud or gambling. - AFP

### CAMBODIA POLICE RAID SCAM CENTRES

**PHNOM PENH:** Cambodian police said on Monday they raided two locations in a city on the Thai border in a crackdown on online scam centres and detained more than 200 foreigners. The raids, conducted over the weekend in the city of Poipet, found 230 foreigners, including 123 Thais, after a three-month investigation, the Cambodian National Police said in a statement. "These foreigners were operating illegal online (activities) with Chinese nationals as ringleaders," the statement said, adding they accepted the "illegal work" voluntarily. It said Cambodian police were working with their Thai counterparts regarding the Thai nationals to identify ringleaders. - AFP

## US army commander meets Hun Manet

**PHNOM PENH:** A senior US army commander met Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet on Monday to "expand bilateral defence ties", the Cambodian army said, with Washington having previously raised concerns over the kingdom's Chinese-renovated naval base.

The United States has said the Ream naval base, located off Cambodia's southern coast, could give Beijing a key strategic position in the Gulf of Thailand near the disputed South China Sea, which China claims almost in its entirety.

Under former leader Hun Sen, Hun Manet's father, China had poured billions of dollars into infrastructure investment, while Washington's relationship with Phnom Penh had deteriorated.

On Monday, General Ronald Clark, the commanding general of the US Army Pacific, held talks with the prime minister as he began a two-day visit to Phnom Penh, and also met senior military commanders and officials.

Clark had "discussions" with Cambodian Army Commander Mao Sophan on cooperative initiatives, including the resumption of the joint military "Angkor Sentinel Exercise", the army said in a statement.

Clark also told his Cambodian counterpart that his visit was "to reinforce and expand bilateral defence ties", the statement said.

Hun Manet also met Chinese Communist Party Politburo member Yin Li, who praised the progress on "cooperation in all fields" between Cambodia and China. - AFP



# Tesla updates autopilot software

## Move falls short, say Chinese owners

**SHANGHAI:** Tesla on Monday made a long-awaited update to its autopilot software in China to add a city navigation feature, but the move disappointed Chinese owners who said it fell short of promises.

The electric vehicle maker, in a notification on its app, said capabilities will include automatic lane-changing depending on speed and route as well as detecting traffic lights at intersections and deciding whether to turn. An in-car camera will also monitor driver attention, it said.

The features are similar to those available with Tesla's "Full Self-

Driving" (FSD) but less advanced than what is available in the United States due to insufficient data training on Chinese roads and traffic rules, a person with direct knowledge of the matter said.

FSD is a suite of driving-assistance technologies developed with generative artificial intelligence to cope with more complicated traffic conditions whereas Autopilot handles more routine conditions.

Elon Musk wanted to bring full Autopilot and FSD systems to China but has said that the effort was proving to be tricky due to technology restrictions imposed by the US and Chinese governments. The company has postponed an initial goal of end-2024 to this year.

Several Chinese social media users said the update was a disappointment as it did not achieve

the capabilities Tesla has advertised for years and said rival Chinese carmakers were offering similar features at a lower price or for free.

Lu Panpan, a Tesla owner in Zhejiang province, said he paid US\$7,720 (RM34,149) for FSD software when he bought his Long Range Model 3 in 2019 but has been frustrated by lack of updates.

"We can tell Tesla has no choice but to deliver a knowingly restricted system. It is hard for Tesla to catch up with the smart-driving capabilities in Chinese cars, which even makes less sense given its high pricing," said Lu.

The delays to rolling out a full FSD system in China have left Tesla on the back foot versus rivals such as Huawei, Xiaomi and BYD, which have launched dozens of EVs with advanced smart-driving software capable of navigating city traffic.

Tesla charges its customers an additional fee of nearly US\$9,000 to access a limited version of its FSD software in its EVs priced from US\$32,000.

By comparison, Xiaomi, whose SU7 electric sedan priced from US\$29,700 has outsold Tesla's Model 3 in China on monthly basis, offers an enhanced smart-driving system including city navigation for free. Earlier this month, BYD also started offering advanced autonomous-driving features on most of its models for free.

Tesla's autopilot update is on par with BYD's mid-tier version of its God's Eye system, which uses advanced computing and lidars to generate 3D images of a car's surroundings to assist navigation around obstacles.

Musk has said that Tesla is seeking

regulatory approval from Beijing to fully roll out FSD in the country, but China only requires carmakers to register any level-two update with the Industry Ministry.

Under industry standards, both Autopilot and FSD are categorised as level-two autonomous driving technologies, so under Chinese law they require human supervision and intervention when necessary.

Carmakers only need to seek regulatory approval for more advanced level-three and above autonomous driving features.

Musk, however, wanted to be able to transfer data Tesla vehicles glean in China abroad, which is heavily regulated under China's data laws. Such data, used to train self-driving systems, would boost Tesla's long-term efforts to produce fully autonomous vehicles. - Reuters



Rescuers searching for missing workers at the construction site in Anseong yesterday. - AFP/FPIC

## Four dead in South Korea highway project collapse

**ANSEONG:** At least four people died and six were injured yesterday after a collapse at a highway construction site in an area south of Seoul.

The accident took place at 9.49am (8.49am in Malaysia) in Anseong, about 70km from Seoul, when five 50m concrete structures supporting the highway bridge collapsed one after another after being hoisted into place by a crane.

Ko Kyung-man, an Anseong fire official, said that four people had died, including two Chinese nationals, and six were injured,

including five who were in a critical condition. The five also included one Chinese citizen.

"They were working to install a deck on the bridge. All of the 10 were up on the deck... and fell from both sides when it collapsed," Ko told a televised briefing.

Broadcaster YTN aired dramatic footage showing a deck of a towering bridge collapsing at the site.

Rescuers at the site were seen examining twisted metal struts and fractured concrete slabs below the columns of the bridge.

Acting President Choi Sang-mok called to

mobilise all available personnel and resources to rescue any missing people and to ensure safety measures to prevent further damage, his office said.

The National Fire Agency said that it has mobilised three helicopters and nearly 150 officials for the search and rescue operation, and the Transport Ministry said it has dispatched a team to the scene.

Deadly accidents continue to regularly occur at industrial sites in South Korea, which introduced a law in 2022 to address safety lapses. - Reuters

## Yoon defends martial law as warning

**SEOUL:** South Korean parliamentary lawyers seeking President Yoon Suk Yeol's removal over his short-lived imposition of martial law compared him to a dictator in final arguments during his impeachment trial yesterday.

Yoon was expected to make a closing statement later in the hearing before the Constitutional Court reviewing his impeachment, as public hearings wrap up and his political fate is in the hands of eight judges.

Yoon faces being removed from office less than three years into his five-year presidency if the court upholds parliament's impeachment, which accused him of declaring martial law on Dec 3 with no justifiable constitutional grounds.

Lee Kwang-beom, one of the lawyers for parliament, compared Yoon to previous autocratic South Korean leaders including Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan.

Yoon wanted to create a world where his every word would be written into the constitution, and sought to privatise the country and reign over the constitution, Lee argued.

"We call this dictatorship. The moment he declared martial law, he effectively gave up on his position as the president of our democratic republic," he said.

Another lawyer said Yoon's allegations of election fraud were conspiracy theories that have had a "fatal" impact on the credibility of the election system.

The president has said in his trial he had a right to declare martial law but never meant to impose full military rule, instead arguing he intended to warn of the opposition Democratic Party's abuse of its parliamentary majority.

The justices are expected to take days to rule on whether to remove him from office or reinstate him.

Yoon has said that martial law, which lasted just six hours before he rescinded the decree, was not a failure but simply ended sooner than he intended.

The Constitutional Court has not said when it will deliver its ruling on Yoon but has up to six months from Dec 14, when it registered the case.

Yoon is being held in the Seoul Detention Centre after he was arrested over a separate criminal case, charging him with leading an insurrection. The former prosecutor is the first sitting president to face a criminal trial.

If Yoon is removed, a new presidential election must be held within 60 days. - Reuters

## DoorDash to pay New York delivery workers US\$17 million

**NEW YORK:** Delivery service DoorDash will give nearly US\$17 million (RM75 million) to drivers in New York state, who accused the company of swindling them out of tip money by applying it towards their base pay.

Some 63,000 delivery workers stand to benefit from the US\$16.8 million settlement, according to the office of New York Attorney-General Letitia James.

DoorDash formerly "used customer tips to offset the base pay it had already guaranteed to workers, instead of giving workers the full tips they rightfully earned", James's office said.

The settlement applies to deliverers who worked in New York state between May 2017 and September 2019, when the scheme was in place.

Before each trip, drivers known as "Dashers" would see the guaranteed base pay they would receive for a given delivery before accepting it.

If a customer gave the driver a tip, it would be applied towards the amount the driver had been guaranteed by the company, rather than on top of that sum.

If DoorDash guaranteed a driver would

receive US\$10 but the Dasher was given a US\$4 tip, the delivery person would receive US\$10 instead of US\$14, with the company only paying that person US\$6.

The system was used despite customers being told upon checkout that "Dashers will always receive 100% of the tip", James's office said, adding that disclosures about the payment system were either buried online or inaccessible.

"DoorDash misled customers who generously tipped and deceived Dashers who deserved to be paid in full", said James. - AFP



## Pope resting amid slight improvement

**VATICAN CITY:** A critically ill Pope Francis, battling pneumonia in both lungs, slept well, the Vatican said yesterday after earlier reporting a "slight improvement" in the health of the 88-year-old.

The Argentine pontiff was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital on Feb 14 with breathing difficulties and bronchitis but his condition has subsequently worsened and faithful around the world have been praying for his recovery.

"The pope rested well, all night long," said the Vatican in a morning update on the 12th day of the pope's hospital stay.

The Holy See issued a more hopeful statement on Monday evening, saying that the pope's "critical clinical conditions ... demonstrate a slight improvement".

It said Francis had suffered no respiratory attacks like one on Saturday that required "high-flow oxygen". It said some laboratory tests had improved.

But the pope remains "a fragile patient", as his doctor Luigi Carbone said on Friday, and his medical team have cautioned that it will take time for his drug treatments to show a positive effect.

"Considering the complexity of the clinical picture," his doctors have declined to "decide on the prognosis", the Vatican said Monday.

Francis, who has a special papal suite on the 10th floor of the hospital, has continued to do some work, has moved from his bed to an armchair, and received the Eucharist in the morning. — AFP



Israeli soldiers walking behind a tank in the Jenin camp for Palestinian refugees on Monday. — AFP/IC

# West Bank Palestinians fear Gaza-style clearance

## ► Israeli troops seen preparing for long stay

**JENIN:** Israeli bulldozers have demolished large areas of the now virtually empty Jenin refugee camp and appear to be carving wide roadways through its once-crowded warren of alleyways, echoing tactics used in Gaza as troops prepare for a long-term stay.

At least 40,000 Palestinians have left their homes in Jenin and the nearby city of Tulkarm in the northern West Bank since Israel began its operation a day after reaching a ceasefire agreement in Gaza after 15 months of war.

"Jenin is a repeat of what happened in Jabalia," said Basheer Matahen, spokesperson for the Jenin municipality, referring to the refugee camp in northern Gaza that was cleared out by the Israeli army after weeks of bitter fighting.

"The camp has become uninhabitable."

He said at least 12 bulldozers were at work demolishing houses and infrastructure in the camp, once a crowded township that housed descendants of Palestinians who fled their homes or were driven out in the 1948 war in what Palestinians call the 'Nakba' or catastrophe at the start of the state of Israel.

He said army engineering teams could be seen making preparations for a long-term stay, bringing water tanks and generators to a special area of almost one acre in size.

No comment was immediately available from the Israeli military but on Sunday,

Defence Minister Israel Katz ordered troops to prepare for "a prolonged stay", saying the camps had been cleared "for the coming year" and residents would not be allowed to return.

The month-long operation in the northern West Bank has been one of the biggest seen since the Second Intifada uprising by Palestinians more than 20 years ago, involving several brigades of Israeli troops backed by drones, helicopters, and, for the first time in decades, heavy battle tanks.

"There is a broad evacuation of population, mainly in the two refugee camps, Nur Shams, near Tulkarm and Jenin," said Michael Milshstein, a former military intelligence official who heads the Palestinian Studies Forum at the Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies.

"I don't know what the broad strategy is but there's no doubt at all that we didn't see such a step in the past."

Israel launched the operation, saying it intended to take on groups firmly implanted in the refugee camps for decades, despite repeated Israeli attempts to root them out.

But as the weeks have gone on, Palestinians have said the real intention appears to be a large scale, permanent displacement of the population by destroying homes and making it impossible for them to stay.

"Israel wants to erase the camps and the memory of the camps, morally and financially, they want to erase the name of refugees from the memory of the people," said 85-year-old Hassan al-Katib, who lived in the Jenin camp with 20 children and grandchildren before abandoning his house and all his possessions.

Already, Israel has campaigned to undermine UNWRA, the main Palestinian relief agency, banning it from its former headquarters in East Jerusalem and ordering it to stop operations in Jenin.

"We don't know what is the intention. We know there's a lot of displacement," said UNWRA spokesperson Juliette Touma, adding that refugees had the same status regardless of their location.

The camps, permanent symbols of the unresolved status of Palestinian refugees, have been a constant target for Israel which says the refugee issue has hindered any resolution of the decades-long conflict.

But it has always held back from clearing them permanently. On Monday, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar denied that the operation in the West Bank had any wider purpose than combating groups.

"It's military operations against terrorists, and no other objectives but that," he told reporters in Brussels where he met European Union officials in the EU-Israel Association Council.

But many Palestinians see an echo of President Donald Trump's call for Palestinians to be moved out of Gaza to make way for a property development project, a call that was endorsed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Cabinet.

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesperson for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, said the operation appeared to be repeating tactics used in the Gaza, where Israeli troops systematically displaced thousands of Palestinians. — Reuters

### BRIEFS

#### EUROPE NEEDED IN UKRAINE TALKS, SAYS PUTIN

**MOSCOW:** Europe's participation in Ukraine peace talks will be needed eventually but Moscow first wants to build trust with Washington, President Vladimir Putin said on Monday, while suggesting that a deal to end the conflict may still be far off. As Ukraine marked the third anniversary on Monday of Russia's invasion, US President Donald Trump suggested the war could end within weeks. But he did not elaborate. Putin told Russian state television that Trump was approaching the Russia-Ukraine conflict rationally and not emotionally, but gave the impression it might not end as soon as Trump would like. "To resolve complex and acute issues Russia and the United States must take the first step." — Reuters

#### KREMLIN DANGLES RARE EARTH DEALS

**MOSCOW:** The Kremlin said yesterday that Russia had lots of rare earth metal deposits and that it was open to doing deals to develop them after President Vladimir Putin held out the possibility of such collaboration with the United States. "The Americans need rare earth metals. We have a lot of them. We have our own plans to develop strategic resources, but there are quite broad prospects for cooperation here," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. Putin told state TV on Monday that Russia was open to joint projects with American partners. — Reuters

## Trump rescinds order on rights abuses with US-supplied weapons

**WASHINGTON:** The Trump administration has rescinded a Biden-era order that required it to report potential violations of international law involving US-supplied weapons by allies including Israel, two US officials and a source familiar with the decision said on Monday.

The *Washington Post* first reported the decision, citing current and former officials, to scrap National Security Memorandum-20, which was signed

by former president Joe Biden in February 2024 amid criticism over Israel's use of American bombs in its war in Gaza.

The memorandum required the US government to produce reports for Congress on the use of US arms by other countries. In May 2024, in a report required by the memorandum, Biden's administration said Israel may have breached international humanitarian law but that US officials

were unable to identify specific instances of breaches that harmed civilians due to the chaos of war.

The Trump administration would have been required in the coming months to report to Congress its own assessment of Israel's conduct.

The *Washington Post* cited an order issued by White House national security adviser Michael Waltz on Feb 21 repealing NSM-20.

Reuters was not able to

independently confirm the existence of the order, but two US officials and a source familiar with the move said they had been told the directive was revoked.

The State Department referred questions to the White House, which did not respond to a request for comment.

US Senator Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, a key proponent of congressional oversight of US arms

sales, said the decision to revoke the memo was "shameful".

He said: "It's a disservice to national security, to global human rights and to our standing."

"This move also undermines American taxpayers' right to ensure the use of their dollars aligns with our laws and national interest. It's another example of Trump's indifference to American values. This is not America first — it's America in retreat." — Reuters



COMMENT by Lai Cheng Wong

# Battle for truth in AI era

**A**RTIFICIAL Intelligence (AI) is a dynamic force shaping our everyday lives, transforming how we learn, communicate and engage with online information.

In an era where AI shapes what we read, watch and believe, critical thinking is no longer optional - it is essential.

A recent report by cloud-native data specialist Domo reveals the staggering scale of AI activity, indicating that every minute, ChatGPT is prompted 6,944 times and at least one deepfake is created. This data underscores the profound and pervasive influence of AI, from simple to complex tasks.

Across the world, the rapid spread of deepfakes has sparked outrage, highlighting the pressing need for stricter regulations against non-consensual synthetic media.

AI-generated explicit images falsely depicting public figures, including Pope Francis, Taylor Swift and more recently in Malaysia, professional cosplayer Elyana Sparks, have spread across social media, raising concerns over digital exploitation and privacy violations.

Malaysia's deputy communications minister revealed that the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission removed 1,225 AI-generated explicit content posts last year. While alarming, this trend is not new, highlighting the ongoing challenge of regulating AI-driven digital abuse.

Anyone can be targeted through deepfakes. Scammers have also exploited the image of local entrepreneur and influencer Khairul Aming, using a deepfake video to falsely advertise a cooking wok.

Similarly, local prominent figures like Datuk Seri Siti Nurhaliza and Datuk Lee Chong Wei have been exploited in deepfake investment scams, highlighting the growing threat of AI-driven deception.

These cases underscore the rising threat of AI-driven deception and the urgent need for stronger public education, stricter regulations and greater accountability from platform service providers.

The education system must build the public's ability to critically analyse AI outputs, understand algorithmic bias and equip them with skills to understand and critically analyse AI systems.

Recent research by Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University researchers, Prof Nicola Henry and Alice Witt, reveals that there are gaps in public understanding of deepfakes and how to detect them.

As AI-generated media becomes more sophisticated, the need for media and information literacy (MIL) and AI literacy education is critical, particularly in distinguishing between consensual and non-consensual digital content and addressing the harms of deepfake abuse.

There is no magic bullet to counter this. The rise of deepfake abuse, underscores the urgent need for enhanced public education, and policymakers should be concerned in developing it well from the outset.

Regulators, the public education system and tech service providers must work together to sustain and strengthen educational initiatives that empower the public with the skills to identify, question and mitigate the risks posed by AI-driven manipulation.

Equipping citizens with MIL is not about telling people what to think but empowering them by equipping them with the tools and skills to think critically and evaluate the sources, content and impact of information in the age of AI.

It means asking questions like "Where did this piece of content come from?" and "Why was this piece of content created?"

Developing critical thinking competency means being able to ask tough questions about AI-generated content, algorithmic decisions and the motives behind AI-powered systems.

In 2024, Unesco underscored the necessity of equipping individuals with MIL competencies when dealing with AI-generated content because it brings forth the importance of teaching and training people to use synthetic media



AI-generated explicit images falsely depicting public figures, including Taylor Swift, have spread across social media, raising concerns over digital exploitation and privacy violations. -- REUTERSPIC

*"The rise of deepfake abuse underscores the urgent need for enhanced public education."*

and interact with non-human agents in their everyday life activities.

MIL competencies foster responsible usage by helping users distinguish between authentic and AI-generated media, identify misinformation and assess the ethical implications of synthetic media.

Unesco's policy brief on integrating MIL into AI literacy frameworks outlines essential competencies across four key categories:

➤ **Knowledge:** Understanding AI's potentials and risks, recognising the geopolitical landscape of AI and assessing its societal and environmental impacts.

➤ **Skills:** Developing the ability to use AI tools responsibly, to critically evaluate information sources and interact effectively with AI systems.

➤ **Attitudes:** Fostering critical and creative thinking regarding AI applications, acknowledging personal biases and promoting ethical

considerations in AI use.

➤ **Values:** Advocating digital rights, privacy and inclusivity while opposing mass surveillance and supporting the well-being of all individuals in AI interactions.

AI's advancement should lead to human progress, not displacement or harm. As AI advances, so must our skills, knowledge and societal structures to ensure meaningful coexistence.

The future of AI is not solely in the hands of developers but in collective human agency, through ethical oversight, collaboration and empowerment.

Equipping citizens with MIL is crucial as this will enable them to engage critically and responsibly in societal affairs while shaping AI's trajectory for the common good.

**Lai Cheng Wong** is an educator and MIL advocate for Asean Network. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

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# Invest in nurses for healthier tomorrow

## COMMENT

By Prof Dr Soh Kim Lam

**T**HE healthcare sector is facing a growing challenge as the global nursing shortage intensifies. Ageing populations, increasing healthcare demands and a wave of nurse retirements are contributing to staffing shortages, jeopardising patient care.

The World Health Organisation has identified a significant global shortage of nurses, prompting numerous countries to recruit foreign nurses. Malaysian nurses are particularly in demand in the Middle East, Singapore and Australia.

A study the writer conducted on the factors influencing migration and job satisfaction among Malaysian nurses working abroad revealed that 77.5% of nurses are satisfied with their work overseas, mainly due to higher salaries and better benefits. Work-related challenges in Malaysia are a key driver for many nurses seeking opportunities abroad.

The ageing population is a key factor exacerbating this shortage. Older adults require frequent medical attention, chronic disease management and specialised care, increasing the demand for healthcare services.

Simultaneously, many experienced nurses are retiring, creating a significant gap in the workforce. The growing patient load and loss of veteran nurses highlight the urgent need for effective retention strategies.

Another contributing factor is the enduring perception of nursing as a predominantly female profession. This perception deters men from pursuing careers in this field despite efforts to promote gender diversity.

Furthermore, the substantial number of female nurses has resulted in workforce shortages as many are taking career breaks due to family commitments. This diminishes the number of new entrants into the profession and restricts the potential workforce.

Offering competitive compensation is



The global nursing shortage is a complex challenge that demands sustainable solutions. Ultimately, investing in nurses is an investment in the future of healthcare. – AFPIC

crucial for retaining nurses. Financial stability and professional recognition are fundamental to job satisfaction and commitment to the workforce.

Increasing salaries and providing comprehensive benefits can attract and retain skilled nurses. Economic incentives such as performance bonuses, tuition reimbursement and retention bonuses can significantly lower turnover rates.

Nurses who feel adequately rewarded for their efforts are likelier to remain in the profession. Compensation goes beyond salaries to include essential benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans and paid time off. These contribute to financial security, allowing nurses to focus on their work without additional stress while fostering a loyal and dedicated workforce.

Work-life balance is another crucial factor affecting nurse retention. Long shifts, unpredictable schedules and high-stress environments can lead to burnout, negatively impacting job performance and well-being.

Healthcare institutions must implement policies that support a healthier work-life balance. Flexible scheduling options, such as self-scheduling and shift-swapping, will help nurses manage their time effectively.

Part-time positions and job-sharing arrangements can help support those with family responsibilities or those pursuing further education.

Additionally, reducing mandatory overtime and ensuring adequate rest between shifts can prevent fatigue and improve job satisfaction.

Investing in staff wellness programmes is

equally essential. Hospitals should provide initiatives such as mental health counselling, stress management workshops and mindfulness training. These programmes can assist nurses in navigating workplace demands while preserving their well-being in a supportive environment.

Career development opportunities are essential for sustaining nurses' engagement and motivation. Continuous learning and professional advancement will enhance their skills and nurture long-term commitment.

Support for advanced degrees, certification programmes and specialised training can help nurses transition into leadership or advanced practice roles.

Healthcare institutions that prioritise career development will experience lower turnover rates and higher staff engagement. Nurses who see clear growth opportunities are more likely to remain with organisations that invest in their professional advancement.

Encouraging greater gender inclusivity through targeted recruitment campaigns, educational initiatives, workplace policies, flexible work arrangements and career re-entry programmes can also help expand and retain the nursing workforce.

Addressing the global nursing shortage requires collaboration among policymakers, healthcare administrators and nursing leaders. Strategies to attract new nurses and retain experienced professionals must be implemented.

Healthcare organisations can build a resilient nursing workforce by focusing on competitive compensation, better work-life balance and career development.

The global nursing shortage is a complex challenge that demands sustainable solutions. Ultimately, investing in nurses is an investment in the future of healthcare, ensuring high-quality patient care and a strong, sustainable healthcare system for generations to come.

The time for action is now.

**Prof Dr Soh Kim Lam** is from the Department of Nursing, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Putra Malaysia. Comments: letters@thesunday.com

## Appreciating simple, beautiful moments in everyday life

### COMMENT

By Nahrizul Adib Kadri

**I STILL** remember it quite clearly even though it has been more than a year since I had an office at Universiti Malaya's Bangunan Canseleri, where I served as the director of the Corporate Communications Centre.

It was a regular Monday morning as I found myself rushing into the elevator. As the doors were about to close, I spotted someone hurrying towards the elevator.

Instinctively, I held the doors open. The lady smiled warmly and thanked me. It was a simple exchange, perhaps one I would have overlooked had I not been paying attention. Yet, that small moment lingered with me throughout the day. Why? Because it felt good. It felt human.

In a world that often feels hurried and transactional, that fleeting interaction reminded me of the power of small, beautiful moments.

If you have not noticed, we live in a society that glorifies grand achievements and milestone moments. Social media feeds us a constant stream of so-called "big" news – promotions, weddings, glorious food and travels to exotic destinations.

It is easy to feel as though happiness is always out of reach, hiding somewhere in the "big moments" that we are striving to achieve. But, if we are always waiting for those

monumental milestones, what happens to the days in between? Do we let them slip by unnoticed, and more worryingly, un-lived?

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's timeless 1943 classic, *The Little Prince*, holds an earnest truth for our fast-paced lives.

In the book, the fox tells the little prince: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." This simple yet powerful line reminds us to look beyond the surface – beyond the obvious, the material and certainly the "big" things – to find what truly matters.

The "essential" is not always flashy or visible. Sometimes, it is the warmth of sunlight streaming through your window on a quiet Sunday morning. It is the first sip of your morning coffee as you settle into your workday. It is the laughter that erupts during a casual conversation with a close friend.

Recently, I experienced one, albeit, in a slightly different manner. It was the Friday of the final week of the semester – the week that typically is a whirlwind of deadlines and stress for a lecturer, what with grading tests, essays, group projects and individual assignments, all while handling endless emails and last-minute student queries. Amid the noise of a hundred to-do

lists, my phone buzzed with a WhatsApp message.

It was from the quietest student in my class, someone who had hardly spoken a word all semester. He thanked me – not just for

teaching the subject but for showing him that a career in biomedical engineering is not as bleak as he once feared. "Thank you, Sir. You gave me hope," he wrote.

In my 20-plus years as a lecturer, I have been fortunate to receive such messages from time to time but this one felt different. Perhaps it was because it came during a week when exhaustion threatened to overshadow everything else or maybe it was because this particular student had never drawn attention to himself. Yet, here he was, reminding me, with the quiet sincerity of his words, why I do what I do.

These small moments may seem insignificant but they hold a special power. They ground us in the present and remind us to slow down. They connect us to the world and to each other in ways that grand gestures often cannot.

Yet, noticing these moments requires effort. It is not always easy to shift our focus away from the "bigger picture" that society so often emphasises. We are conditioned to keep

striving and keep achieving. But perhaps, as the fox said to the little prince, we need to use our hearts more than our eyes. To really see – to notice – requires us to pause and pay attention.

This brings me to a challenge I would like to propose: every day, take a moment to notice something small and beautiful, and write it down. It does not have to be elaborate or profound.

Maybe, it is the way the evening light casts golden hues over your neighbourhood. Maybe, it is the taste of a meal that brought you comfort or maybe, it is a simple thank you from a stranger. The act of noticing and naming these moments will help us cultivate gratitude (*syukur*) and train us to find joy in the everyday.

Life is not made up solely of the grand milestones we are conditioned to chase. It is in the little moments that fill the spaces in between. When we begin to pay attention to these moments, we realise that they are not little at all. They are essential.

They are life itself.

Next time you are rushing to catch the elevator or sipping your morning coffee, remember to pause. Notice the warmth of the cup in your hand, the kindness in a stranger's smile and, most importantly, let yourself feel the joy in that fleeting, beautiful moment.

Who knows? It may just make your day.

**Dr Nahrizul Adib Kadri** is a professor of biomedical engineering and the principal of Ibnu Sina Residential College, Universiti Malaya. Comments: letters@thesunday.com

*"Life is not made up solely of the grand milestones we are conditioned to chase. It is in the little moments that fill the spaces in between."*

# Role of taxation in ESG adoption

➤ Policymakers use 'carrot and stick' approach to influence behaviour

OVER centuries, taxation has proven to be an effective tool to influence behaviour. This can be witnessed in personal reliefs being an effective "carrot" to promote reading habits or saving in SSPN.

Over the years, Malaysian tax policymakers have also used taxation as a tool to encourage ESG adoption among industry players.

➤ **The carrots**

One of the examples of a carrot that encourages ESG-friendly practice in Malaysia is the double deduction for remuneration of disabled workers. This means that employers who employ disabled workers are given a tax deduction amount to double the remuneration paid.

Say the remuneration is RM4,000, the employer gets a tax deduction of RM8,000 and, at the tax rate of 24%, there's RM1,920 of tax savings. In other words, about half (48% to be exact) of the remuneration is 'subsidised' by the government by way of tax forgone.

Double deduction for disabled workers' remuneration was introduced in 1982 – well before ESG emerged as a buzzword. Nevertheless, even today we can witness the incentive being effective in influencing corporations to hire in a more inclusive fashion in line with the spirits of the 'S' in ESG, i.e. Social factors.

Over the years, the tax incentive to promote DEI agenda in hiring has also been expanded to include double deduction for remuneration of senior citizens, ex-convicts, parolees, supervised persons and ex-drug dependents. Likewise, there are tax incentives to encourage women returning to work after a career break.

As for the 'E' being the initial of ESG, there are many tax incentives and reliefs to promote environmentally friendly behaviour such as solar panel, EV vehicles, Carbon Capture, Utilisation & Storage (CCUS) and even food waste composting machines for household use.

As for the letter 'G' which represents Governance, there is tax deduction up to RM50,000 for costs related to tax corporate governance framework (TCGF). The limit for this deduction is shared with a few expenses, namely cost of ESG reporting, cost of e-Invoicing implementation and cost of preparing transfer pricing documentation.

The incentives and reliefs listed above may be dubbed as 'carrots' to promote ESG-friendly behaviour.

➤ **The sticks**

Incentives and reliefs are not the only tax instruments that can be used to influence behaviour. Tax policy may be deployed as a 'carrot' to encourage certain desired behaviour



Many jurisdictions have implemented a Plastic Packaging Tax due to the environmental damage caused by single-use plastics. – AFPPIIC

or a 'stick' to discourage certain undesired behaviour.

Even when used as a 'stick', taxation is not as harsh as non-fiscal measures. To put it simply, tariffs discourage free-trade but are less-harmful than a complete trade ban such as an embargo or sanction.

Another important example would be the case of plastic. Following the widespread awareness on the environmental damages of single-use plastics, many jurisdictions such in the EU and UK has implemented a Plastic Packaging Tax (PPT) in recent years. PPT helps to close the price arbitrage between recycled plastic and virgin plastic (the former is more expensive, and PPT does not apply on packaging that use >30% recycled plastic).

PPT is vital in influencing industry behaviour but is certainly less strict than a complete ban of the use virgin plastic in packaging – as proposed by EU for introduction by 2030.

One could argue that where a complete ban of something is contemplated, a tax measure must at least be a prelude (if not an alternative) for such an action. Taxation is, at the very least, an important stepping stone (in many cases, taxation itself could achieve the desired behavioural change).

For the case of Malaysia, we neither have a ban on plastic packaging nor a PPT because it is a well-established practice to first offer carrots before reaching out to the sticks. In this regard, Malaysia is presently offering tax incentives for AI-driven reverse-vending machine to promote the use of recycled plastics. It remains to be seen if carrots are sufficient to move the needle in this case.

For decades Malaysia has in place excise duty on motor vehicles (particularly those that use combustion engines). This policy is directly linked to the 'E' element, but the 'S' element is also present given the general sentiment to link the overall [un]employment levels within a country/region with the automotive assembly plants therein.

Excise duty on tobacco and alcohol products is aimed to discourage unhealthy consumption of these products – and is directly linked to the 'S' element. More recently, Sugar Sweetened Beverage (SSB) is added to the list of goods subjected to excise.

Next, carbon tax is planned to be implemented for iron, steel and energy sectors effective from the year 2026. The exact date is not clear, but it's anticipated to be consistent with EU's CBAM definitive regime which would be effective 1st Jan 2026.

➤ **Getting the sequence right**

To achieve ESG goal within any nation or organisation, I would argue the sequence is paramount. First, awareness (along with cohesive framework). Second, offer carrots (e.g. incentives) to encourage adoption. Third, implement sticks (e.g. new taxes) to encourage the late adopters to buckle up. And finally, a complete ban where appropriate (should be limited cases where the damage is extreme).

In the sequence above, both 2nd and 3rd phase involve a fiscal measure such as tax incentives or new taxes.

➤ **My take on the overall approach**

It is vital for taxation policy to be not viewed as a pure fiscal measure but also an important tool

to prepare the industry and public towards ESG-adoption.

It is useful to earmark any tax revenue from ESG-driven taxes to promote causes that avoid the unsustainable outcome which triggers the taxation at the first place. Idealistically speaking, the ultimate goal of introducing ESG-driven tax should be to collect zero tax by achieving the ESG-aspirations.

For example, excise duty from SSB should be spent to spread awareness of dangers of excessive sugar intake. Hence, as the society attains the awareness and readiness, the tax loss would not be viewed as a loss of tax revenue, but a reduction in earmarked revenue which corresponds to lower spending needs on the same cause.

Such an approach potentially also involves legislative change as the present legal framework requirements all tax revenue to be in the Federal Consolidated Fund, and the spendings from thereon is based on discretion exercised during the budgetary process.

ESG-driven tax initiatives are not just fiscal policies, but important measures that encourage adoption of sustainable practices among industry players and public at large. A cohesive and transparent framework is essential to achieve the intended outcome.

**Thenesh Kannaa** is the executive director of TRATAX Sdn Bhd, APAC international tax lead of WTS Global, chair of CTIM's Technical Committee on Tax Policy, member of ACCA's ESG Task Force & expert panel on taxation, and member of International Fiscal Association's exco for Malaysia. Views expressed are his own.

## SME Bank approves RM3.6 billion funding in FY24

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Small Medium Enterprise Development Bank Malaysia Bhd (SME Bank) has facilitated about RM3.6 billion in approved financing for the 2024 (FY24) financial year, a 35.1% increase from a year ago.

In a statement, the bank said the funding was channelled to micro, small and medium enterprises categorised as unserved and underserved across key strategic sectors.

"It includes Bumiputera, technology and digital adoption, climate-related as well as halal and tourism, in line with Bank Negara Malaysia's

Performance Measure Framework which emphasises development financial institutions (DFI) to promote greater developmental impact," it said.

Acting group president/chief executive officer Datuk Mohammad Hardee Ibrahim said the bank is committed to providing financing and beyond-financing support to MSMEs as a DFI wholly owned by the Finance Ministry and supervised by the Entrepreneur and Co-operatives Development Ministry.

"We are proud to be the sole DFI providing

financial support with structured capability-building programmes that ensure long-term business resilience.

"This milestone reflects our commitment to mobilising the RM1.7 billion allocation from Budget 2024 targeting MSMEs," he said.

Mohammad Hardee further noted that the bank's subsidiary, the Centre for Entrepreneur Development and Research, was appointed as the Asean Centre of Excellence for MSMEs in Green Transition, which has been shortlisted as one of the priority economic deliverables for

Malaysia's Asean chairmanship in 2025.

Meanwhile, SME Bank said it will extend its financing and beyond-financing support with an emphasis on financial inclusion for MSMEs across key strategic sectors, including Bumiputera enterprises and all segments related to environmental, social and governance.

It reckoned these strategic priorities are intended to support the country's economic growth, amplifying the positive momentum achieved by the bank in 2024. – Bernama





# Malaysia targets 5% rise in investments this year

Country secures record RM378.5 billion in 2024, reflecting strong investor confidence despite global economic uncertainties

BY HAYATUN RAZAK  
[sunbiz@thesundaily.com](mailto:sunbiz@thesundaily.com)

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia anticipates a 5% increase in investments for 2025, in line with gross domestic product growth, following record high RM378.5 billion in approved investments in 2024, said Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Aziz.

He said the government sets the target after discussions with the Malaysian Investment Development Authority (Mida).

"After discussions with Mida's management, we have agreed to set the investment target for 2025 to increase by 5% from 2024," he told media at the Mida Annual Media Conference 2025, an event that unveils the country's 2024 investment performance in the manufacturing, services and primary sectors yesterday.

Malaysia secured RM378.5 billion in approved investments in 2024, the highest on record, up from RM329.5 billion in 2023.

The investments span the manufacturing, services, and primary sectors, signalling strong investor confidence despite global economic uncertainties, the minister said, adding that this represents a 14.9% year-on-year increase, covering 6,700 projects.

Tengku Zafrul said these investments will create more than 207,000 new job opportunities for Malaysians.

Of the total investments, 55% (RM208.1 billion) came from domestic sources, continuing a two-year trend of Malaysian investors increasing their investments locally.

Foreign investments contributed 45% or RM170.4 billion of approved investments.

"Malaysia has a healthy blend of investors from both the East and the West, reinforcing Malaysia's position as a preferred investment destination," said Tengku Zafrul.

The United States led foreign investments



Tengku Zafrul displaying the Malaysia Investment Performance Report 2024 during Mida Annual Media Conference 2025. Second from left is Mida CEO Datuk Sikh Shamsul Ibrahim Sikh Abdul Majid and on the right is Miti deputy secretary general (management and investment) Datuk Bahria Mohd Tamil. - BERNAMAPIC

with RM32.8 billion, followed by Germany RM32.2 billion, China RM28.2 billion, Singapore RM27.3 billion and Hong Kong RM7.4 billion.

Selangor attracted the highest amount of approved investments at RM101.1 billion, followed by Kuala Lumpur RM91.5 billion, Johor RM48.5 billion, Kedah RM45.8 billion and Penang RM32 billion.

In terms of sectors, in 2024, services secured RM252.7 billion in approved investments, or 66.8% of the total.

"These investments are set to generate nearly 120,000 new jobs, reaffirming the sector's role as the backbone of our economy, driving solid growth and job creation," said Tengku Zafrul.

Within the services segment, the information and communication sub-sector attracted RM136 billion in investments.

"This made up 53.8% of total approved investments for the services sector, highlighting the growing adoption of digital technologies across sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, finance, tourism and the *halal* economy," the minister said.

Tengku Zafrul said this trend extends to other vital areas, such as real estate, which saw RM64.5 billion in investments, support services with RM12.9 billion, utilities at RM11.1 billion, and transport services getting RM8.5 billion.

Meanwhile, the Digital Investment Office, jointly run by Mida and Malaysia Digital

Economy Corporation, delivered RM133.3 billion in digital investments in 2024.

"This has effectively surpassed our RM130 billion national digital investment target set for 2025, with total approved investments reaching RM278 billion between 2021 and December 2024," Tengku Zafrul said.

"Notable projects include STT GDC's commitment to building a world-class sustainable digital infrastructure. Located in Johor, this project is poised to advance our vision for the Johor Singapore Special Economic Zone as a hub for innovation, technology, and investment."

In 2024, Malaysia's manufacturing sector secured RM120.5 billion in investments, or 31.8% of total approved investments. Involving 1,108 projects, these will create nearly 88,000 (87,695) new jobs. Notably, 82.2% (or more than 72,000 jobs) are reserved for Malaysians.

Tengku Zafrul said 41.6% of these positions are high-value roles, spanning management, technical and skilled labour categories.

The E&E industry secured RM55.8 billion in approved investments. Of this, 86.2% is in the semiconductor subsector. Other key contributors include transport equipment RM15.8 billion, chemicals and chemical products RM10.6 billion, machinery and equipment RM10.6 billion, and food manufacturing RM6.1 billion.

## Govt to strengthen collaboration with TNB, Energy Commission for RE integration

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

**PETALING JAYA:** The government will strengthen collaboration with Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB) and the Energy Commission (ST) to enhance grid connectivity, ensuring that renewable energy generated from the palm oil industry can be effectively integrated into the national power system.

Plantation and Commodities Minister Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani said this initiative is crucial for optimising Malaysia's renewable energy potential and aligns with TNB's long-term investment strategy in sustainable energy infrastructure.

"The government recognises that palm oil by-products, such as mesocarp fibre, empty fruit bunches and palm kernel shells, represent an untapped energy resource that can be converted into biomass energy, significantly contributing to the nation's renewable energy goals.

"Beyond supporting Malaysia's clean energy transition, renewable energy presents significant opportunities for foreign direct investment (FDI). It positions Malaysia as an attractive destination for investors seeking to participate in the shift towards sustainable and low-carbon energy solutions," he said in a press conference held in conjunction with the 36th Palm & Lauric Oils Price Outlook Conference & Exhibition 2025 yesterday.

Johari emphasised that the potential within the palm oil sector is substantial, given that Malaysia has 450 palm oil mills nationwide.

"Each 60-tonne-per-hour mill has the capacity to generate between 5 and 7 megawatts (MW) of electricity. If harnessed effectively, the total power output from the industry could exceed 2,000MW, a significant addition to the national energy supply.

Despite the opportunities, Johari said, one of the biggest challenges faced by the industry is the lack of grid connectivity, which prevents many mills from transmitting their excess energy.

"Currently, some palm oil mills generate surplus power but are unable to supply it to the national grid due to the absence of necessary infrastructure. To resolve this, the government will work closely with TNB and ST to identify palm oil mills that are ready for grid integration and facilitate the necessary investments to connect them.

"This step is vital for ensuring that renewable energy from the palm oil sector can be fully utilised rather than wasted, helping Malaysia reduce its dependency on fossil fuels while improving energy security."

Johari disclosed that private sector interest in waste-to-energy investments is growing, with companies willing to finance the development of energy infrastructure in the palm oil sector.

He also said replantation is a critical component in ensuring the long-term sustainability and productivity of Malaysia's palm oil industry. Increasing the replantation rate is essential, he added, given the country's commitment to zero deforestation and the need to boost yields without expanding land use.

To address these challenges, Johari said, the government is prioritising the use of high-quality planting materials, ensuring that smallholders receive the preferred Tenera Hybrid instead of low-quality variants that could compromise long-term yields.

## SMEs must adopt AI, e-invoicing to stay competitive: Gobind

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Small and medium enterprises must embrace artificial intelligence (AI) and e-invoicing to remain competitive in Malaysia's evolving digital economy, said Digital Minister Gobind Singh Deo.

Speaking at the SME Business Talk Series: Empowering AI in Finance and E-Invoicing here yesterday, he said digitalisation is no longer optional as businesses that fail to adapt risk falling behind.

"The future of business is digital. The question is not if businesses will adopt AI and e-invoicing, it's when," he said in his keynote address.

He further said that technology has become a necessity rather than a luxury, underscoring the need for businesses of all sizes to adopt

digitalisation to maintain competitiveness, compliance and sustainability.

"SMEs are the backbone of Malaysia's economy, contributing over 38% to Malaysia's gross domestic product (GDP) and employing millions of Malaysians, yet many still rely on outdated processes that slow down efficiency, limit growth, and create unnecessary financial risks.

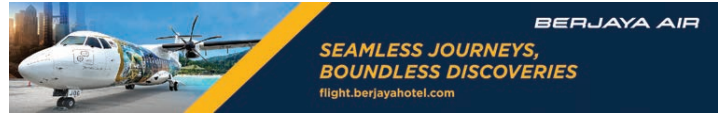
"To thrive in the modern economy, SMEs must take advantage of AI-driven solutions and digital financial tools to enhance business operations, reduce costs, and improve compliance efficiency," he said.

Regarding Malaysia's move toward full implementation of e-invoicing, he said the initiative goes beyond regulatory compliance,

serving as an opportunity to digitalise business operations and a crucial step in modernising the country's financial ecosystem.

"E-Invoicing offers several benefits, including faster payments, lower administrative costs, and improved tax compliance through a seamless, fraud-resistant system. Transitioning to e-invoicing now will put you ahead of the curve and give you a competitive advantage in Malaysia's digital economy," he said.

He added that the Malaysian government is committed to supporting businesses in their digital transformation journey, highlighting the establishment of the National AI Office last year as a central authority to drive the country's AI agenda. - Bernama



## Selangor International Business Summit 2025 eyes potential transactions worth RM10 billion

BY AIMIE SHAZRIE  
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

**SHAH ALAM:** The Selangor International Business Summit 2025 (SIBS 2025), an official event of the Asean Summit, is poised to elevate Selangor's position as a regional business hub.

Selangor state executive councillor for investment, trade, and mobility Ng Sze Han disclosed that the event will be held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre from Oct 8 to 11.

"The summit is expected to grab potential transactions amounting to RM10 billion, attract 50,000 visitors and feature 700 booths, further reinforcing its status as Southeast Asia's premier trade and business platform.

"With a refined and strategic format, SIBS 2025 will feature six key components aligned with Asean's economic priorities and Malaysia's regional leadership," he told reporters at a press conference held in conjunction with the upcoming SIBS 2025 yesterday.

He said these include flagship events in food and beverage, industrial parks, smart cities, the digital economy, and aerospace, as well as the introduction of two new summits focused on the care economy and aerospace advancements.

Following record-breaking achievements in 2024, Ng noted that SIBS 2025 aims to expand regional trade and investment opportunities.

"The Selangor Investment & Industrial Park Expo, which exceeded RM12.2 billion in transactions last year, will again serve as a key platform for investors, manufacturers, and developers.

"Meanwhile, the Selangor International F&B Expo will showcase industry innovations and drive business deals, building on RM300.4 million in transactions generated in 2024," he said.

He said the Selangor Asean Business Con-



From left: Selangor State Executive Councillor for Women Development and Social Welfare Anfaal Saari, Ng and Invest Selangor Bhd CEO Datuk Hasan Azhari Idris during the press conference held in conjunction with the upcoming Selangor International Business Summit 2025

ference will bring together policymakers, investors and corporate leaders to discuss emerging economic trends and investment strategies.

Similarly, the Selangor Smart City & Digital Economy Convention will highlight cutting-edge AI, semiconductor advancements, and digital transformation strategies to drive smart city developments.

Ng disclosed that SIBS 2025 will introduce the Selangor International Care Summit for the first time in 2025, reinforcing Selangor's ambitions as a regional leader in the care economy.

"With expert panels and an exhibition of 80 booths, this new segment will focus on strategic investments and sustainable growth in health-care and social enterprises," he added.

Additionally, the Selangor Aerospace Summit will debut as a rebranded and expanded version of the Selangor Aviation Show, offering an

indoor expo and conference format.

Discussions will cover maintenance, repair, and overhaul, drone technology, sustainable aviation fuel and talent development.

With its integration into the Asean Summit, Ng emphasised that SIBS 2025 serves as a strategic platform to strengthen trade relations, foster high-value investments, and drive economic collaboration.

"The Selangor state government is actively promoting the event under its Visit Selangor Year 2025 campaign, aiming to attract global investors, industry leaders, and trade delegations.

"As the Gateway to Asean, Selangor is committed to fostering deeper business engagement, investment opportunities, and cross-border trade collaborations.

"We invite global investors and industry leaders to capitalise on the opportunities offered by SIBS 2025," he added.

## Sarawak must strengthen AirBorneo to serve Borneo and beyond: Loke

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Sarawak must strengthen its capabilities to expand AirBorneo, formerly known as MasWings, and take full responsibility for its growth in serving Borneo and international destinations.

Transport Minister Anthony Loke Siew Fook said to achieve regional airline status, it requires significant capital investment, particularly in leasing additional aircraft to enhance operations and meet growing demand.

"We regard MasWings (AirBorneo) as we would any other Malaysian airline. They have the freedom to operate anywhere, as they are governed by the country's air service agreement.

"Sarawak can fully leverage air connectivity, as Malaysia's air service agreements with other countries grant them the freedom to operate internationally. Under Asean's open skies policy, flights operate on a point-to-point basis, allowing direct routes from Kuching to cities such as Hanoi, Bangkok, Manila, and Jakarta without restrictions.

"There is no distinction in access, and we fully support their expansion efforts," he told reporters on the sidelines of an event to mark Menzies Aviation's partnership with MMAG Holdings Bhd on Monday.

On the impact of this acquisition on Malaysia's overall aviation strategy, Loke said the key consideration is balancing regional connectivity while maintaining healthy competition within the domestic market.

The focus remains on the ownership side of the operation, he added.

MASWings was a wholly owned subsidiary of Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG).

Under the Rural Air Services programme, the airline initially provided essential air connectivity to remote and rural communities in East Malaysia.

Early this month, the Sarawak state government formally acquired MasWings after signing a sale and purchase agreement with MAG.

Loke believes the Sarawak government is actively working to expand AirBorneo's connectivity from Kuching to more destinations, strengthening links within Sarawak and the broader Borneo region.

"We fully support this initiative. Unlike commercial airlines, which operate based on market-driven decisions, AirBorneo is owned by the Sarawak government and follows a specific agenda to enhance regional connectivity. While this effort has strong governmental backing, operating an airline requires significant capital and financial resilience.

"Given this support, we hope the initiative will achieve long-term commercial success," he said.

Meanwhile, Loke said the partnership between Menzies Aviation and MMAG Sky Services Sdn Bhd, a wholly owned subsidiary of MMAG Holdings Bhd, will bring international expertise into Malaysia's aviation sector, aiming to expand their business and enhance service quality.

Menzies Aviation has secured a ground handling licence from the Malaysian Aviation Commission, effective Nov 1, 2024. This allows the company to commence operations in Malaysia.

Menzies Aviation executive vice-president for Oceania and Southeast Asia Darren Masters expressed confidence about the opportunities in Malaysia's aviation sector. "From our experience here so far, the aviation industry is already at a high standard and has a strong foundation. We want to build on that and make further improvements." - by JOHN GILBERT

# M'sia to make Asean global leader in sustainable finance

BY JOHN GILBERT  
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia will advocate deeper collaboration in green financing, regional energy connectivity and the expansion of sustainable investment frameworks through its chairmanship of Asean.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusoff said Malaysia is also committed to positioning Asean as a global leader in sustainable finance.

"While the Asean taxonomy for sustainable finance is a commendable step forward, we must strive to go further. Sustainable finance regulations should be harmonised across Asean to reduce investor uncertainty and facilitate cross-border capital flows.

"We must standardise green bond frameworks, align ESG disclosure requirements, and enhance carbon credit mechanisms to make cross-border investments in clean energy seamless and efficient," he told delegates at the 2025 Asean Banking and Finance Summit yesterday.

Fadillah, who is also the Energy Transition and Water Transformation Minister, said the Asean financial sector must lead the transformation, from funding large-scale renewable projects to supporting SMEs in adopting green technologies.

"The decisions we make today will shape the future of our economies, industries, and communities. We have the policies, the mecha-

➤ Regulations should be harmonised across the region to reduce investor uncertainty and facilitate cross-border capital flows: Fadillah

nisms, and the financial tools to accelerate this transition.

"What we need is collective will. Let us commit - as policymakers, financiers, and industry leaders - to make sustainable financing the bedrock of Asean's energy future," he said.

Fadillah pointed out that public financing, while essential, will not suffice.

He said governments can set policies, offer incentives, and provide initial funding, but the scale of investment required demands strong private sector engagement.

"We must strengthen public-private partnerships to share investment risks and accelerate clean energy projects. Collaboration between governments, development finance institutions, and private investors can derisk large-scale renewable projects, making them more attractive to capital markets.

"Secondly, blended finance models should be utilised, combining concessional funding with private investment to enhance the bankability of green projects," he said.

Fadillah noted that the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank have already

committed substantial resources to support Asean's energy transition. He said these instruments help reduce investment risks and improve access to affordable capital, thereby driving renewable energy growth.

"Thirdly, we must expand carbon markets and transition bonds to unlock new sources of capital while incentivising companies to decarbonise. The global voluntary carbon market is projected to exceed US\$50 billion (RM220 billion) by 2030.

"Asean must position itself strategically within this landscape. Companies that fail to adapt will face increased financing costs and restricted market access as sustainability-linked financial instruments become the global norm," Fadillah said.

Malaysia aims to lead in mobilising sustainable finance through initiatives such as Green Sukuk, Sustainability Bonds and the Corporate Renewable Energy Supply Scheme, he said.

"These are not just policy instruments; they are practical financial tools businesses and investors can leverage to accelerate renewable energy deployment."



## Hibiscus Petroleum achieves record high average daily output in Q2'25

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Hibiscus Petroleum Bhd yesterday declared a second interim single-tier dividend for FY25 of 3 sen when releasing a corporate and business update outlining the group's operational and financial highlights in conjunction with the release of its unaudited quarterly financial results for the second financial quarter of FY25 (Q2'25).

This represented a 1 sen increase over the first financial quarter of FY25 (Q1'25). The group targets to declare a minimum total dividend of 8 sen to 10 sen per share, if oil prices range between US\$70/bbl and US\$80/bbl.

The group sold a total of 2.6 MMboe of oil, condensate and gas and achieved a record high average production of 28,138 boe/day in Q2'25. The group is on track to sell approximately 9.1 MMboe of oil, condensate and gas FY25, 17% more than was achieved in FY24.

For Q2'25, the group reported an Ebitda of RM339.9 million and a PAT of RM83.3 million (127% and 10% higher respectively than Q1'25), supported by revenue of RM653.2 million and an average realised oil and condensate price of US\$77.4/bbl.

The newly acquired subsidiary Hibiscus Brunei contributed to the group's financial results for the first time in Q2'25, delivering an Ebitda of RM57.2 million and PAT of RM15.1 million for the period between Oct 15, 2024 and Dec 31, 2024.

As of Feb 24, 2025, a total of 51.2 million shares were purchased as part of the group's share buy-back programme, at an average price of RM2.10 per share. Of these, 36.6 million shares were cancelled in November 2024, while the remainder are retained as treasury shares.

# Petronas: 'Right-sizing' will affect entire workforce

■ BY HAYATUN RAZAK  
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Petronas Nasional Bhd (Petronas)'s upcoming "right-sizing" exercise will impact the entire workforce starting with management, said CEO Tengku Tan Sri Muhammad Taufik.

He dismissed claims that the restructuring would shield senior management while affecting lower-level employees.

"I have to say, some people are saying this is a protectionist exercise where senior management is going to be shielded while everybody else who has no say is going to be affected. On the record, if we decide to restructure the entire workforce, bottom to top is affected, the first ones who will be affected will be from management onwards," he said when announcing the Petronas Group second half & full year 2024 financial results yesterday.

He said that the process will be structured and equitable as Petronas adapts to a shifting industry landscape.

"We're going to be doing this in a structured way. And the people who are affected by this, we will deal with them respectfully and equitably."

Tengku Muhammad Taufik stressed that this is not a retrenchment exercise but a business-driven right-sizing initiative.

"That means we define how we

CEO dismisses claims that it affects lower level employees and shields senior management, says it starts with those at the top

want to operate and determine the most efficient portfolio of assets. Based on that, we assess the kind of workforce that matches our operational needs," he explained.

He further said if the workforce exceeds what is required for efficient operations, it will right-size it so that the business unit remains profitable and viable.

"Notice I did not say we cut so we get the profit. When you go to retrenchment and you hear retrenchment being repeated over and over again, it is a point of desperation. People retrench when they cannot sustain the costs."

There have been comments suggesting that Petronas could simply absorb the costs and maintain the workforce, but Tengku Muhammad Taufik argued that this would not serve the company's long-term interests.

"The layers and the population need to be revisited with a view to increasing efficiency, making faster decisions, and empowering people in a time when the environment demands these very changes."

He also addressed concerns about reports stating that 15,000 to 16,000 employees, referred to as

"enablers" in support functions such as finance, HR, and HQ support, would be let go.

"Are you telling me that the reports which say I am going to wipe out 16,000 employees are correct? Can Petronas operate without a corporate center - without accounts, finance, or HR? It is impossible."

He stressed that Petronas must assess its workforce needs judiciously.

"The time frame for deciding the eventual right size of Petronas will be concluded by mid-year as the task force completes its assessment. In the second half of the year, we will begin rolling out the new organisational structure in phases."

He also pointed to external factors influencing Petronas' transformation, including the changing industry landscape, macroeconomic conditions, geopolitical tensions, and regulatory shifts.

"With increasing technical challenges, lower carbon expectations, and the need for more market-oriented and customer-focused solutions, we have to determine the right workforce for these needs. We will do this

respectfully and ensure we engage with our staff first."

For the financial year ended Dec 31, 2024, Petronas recorded lower revenue due to lower average realised prices.

For the full year, revenue stood at RM320 billion, a decrease of 7% from the previous year, due to lower average realised prices, negated by higher sales volume.

In addition, the 2024 revenue only included five months of Engen Group's financial results until its divestment in May 2024.

Profit after tax (PAT) decreased by 32% to RM55.1 billion in line with the lower average realised prices and favourable tax adjustments in 2023. The unfavourable realisation of foreign currency translation reserve, upon divestment of the Engen Group, also impacted PAT.

The group recorded a lower Ebitda of RM114.1 billion, in line with lower profits. Cash Flows from Operating Activities stood at RM102.5 billion, primarily driven by Ebitda. Capital investments stood at RM54.2 billion, mainly attributable to activities in Malaysia. Total assets stood at RM766.7 billion. Shareholders' equity increased to RM451.2 billion, mainly attributable to profit recorded during the year.

As we look ahead to 2025, Tengku Muhammad Taufik said Petronas is strategically positioned to meet rising energy demands while ensuring supply security.

## Senheng's all-channel approach boosts online sales

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Senheng New Retail Bhd reported significant growth in its online sales for the financial year ended Dec 31, 2024 (FY24) and outlined a comprehensive strategy to navigate the retail landscape and drive sustainable growth in 2025.

A key highlight of FY24 was the online sales performance, reaching RM128.3 million, up 54% from RM83.5 million in the previous year.

Senheng's strategic initiatives enabled the group to partially offset the impact on revenue and profitability from weaker consumer sentiment, as group revenue moderated to RM1.2 billion in FY24 from RM1.3 billion last year. Net profit for FY24 stood at RM12 million compared to RM25.1 million previously in line with the topline performance, and impacted by one-off tax expenses and write-off of fixed assets. Adjusted for the one-off items, the group's net profit for FY24 would have been RM16.3 million.

For the fourth quarter ended Dec 31, 2024 (Q4'24), Senheng registered revenue of RM308.5 million versus RM358.6 million in the previous quarter due to weaker consumer sentiment. The softer sales, coupled with one-off tax expenses and write-off of fixed assets, resulted in net loss of RM1.5 million compared to net profit of RM7.6 million previously. Excluding the one-off items, the group would have recorded a net profit of RM2.8 million for Q4'24.

Executive chairman Lim Kim Heng said: "While the retail sector continues to face challenges, we are innovating our retail model and investing in growth areas. In 2025, we aim to deepen customer loyalty by enhancing our personalised rewards and broadening our product offerings."

Beyond electronics, he added they see potential in providing a wide range of solutions that deliver long-term value to consumers such as solar energy and EV charging solutions, in addition to expanding the range of household products under their brand distribution segment.

"Our efforts include enriching our online platforms, as well as digital marketing campaigns and boosting content across media platforms to engage with consumers. These initiatives have translated into improved online contribution, and work synergistically with premium in-store experiences nationwide," said Lim.

He added they are already seeing positive indicators, with improving customer footfall and sales since early 2025, underscoring the effectiveness of their strategies and reinforcing their positive outlook.

Looking ahead to 2025, Senheng outlined its strategic direction themed Flywheel 1.0, focusing on six key dimensions: profitability, revenue growth, customer loyalty, operational efficiency, customer experience, and



In addition to electronics, Senheng strives to offer a variety of solutions that offer lasting value to consumers, including solar energy and EV charging options.

competitive advantage.

At the heart of this strategy is a commitment to deepening customer relationships. Senheng is strengthening its PlusOne loyalty programme with new Customer Relationship Management projects to personalise

rewards and create a truly rewarding customer journey. The group is also enhancing its S-Coin cashback rewards programme, offering a wider range of redemption options and personalised incentives to provide even greater value and flexibility.

Senheng is refining its brand positioning with the new tagline "My Rewards, My Choice", offering greater flexibility and value to customers through cashback, warranties, a seamless shopping experience, and multiple payment options.

# Tiong Nam well-placed to capture larger market share

➤ Company reports steady growth in logistics and warehousing services

**JOHOR BHARU:** Tiong Nam Logistics Holdings Bhd is aiming for increased market share in the logistics and warehousing services segment in 2025, driven by significant revenue growth and expansion of its warehousing network.

The group's logistics and warehousing segment, which contributes 95.7% of group revenue, reported a 14.7% increase in revenue to RM607.8 million for the nine months ended Dec 31, 2024 (9M25) compared to RM529.8 million in the previous period.

The growth was driven by an expanding clientele base and increased business from existing customers.

Tiong Nam's strategic initiatives include adding 2.3 million sq ft of warehousing space across nine new warehouses throughout

Malaysia and Singapore, scheduled for completion between FY2025 and FY2028.

The new facilities will enable the group to meet rising demand for integrated logistics solutions and capture a larger share of the market.

Managing director Ong Yoong Nyock said: "We are seeing steady growth in our logistics and warehousing services segment, supported by sustained demand across key sectors including FMCG, F&B, IT, and automotive.

"Our expansion strategy from FY2025 until FY2028, coupled with ongoing operational enhancements, is driving improved efficiencies and strengthening our market position.

"With new warehousing capacity coming online, we are well-positioned to meet the rising demand for integrated logistics solutions.

"This enables us to provide exceptional service to our customers and capture new growth opportunities."

By FY2028, Tiong Nam's total warehousing capacity will increase to 11.6 million sq ft, significantly expanding its operational footprint from 9.9 million sq ft as at 31 December 2024.

For the nine months ended Dec 31, 2024 (9M25), group revenue rose 12.3% to RM634.9 million from RM565.2 million previously.

While revenue grew, the group recorded a net loss of RM1.4 million compared to a net profit of RM46.7 million in the previous corresponding period, largely due to higher finance, operating, and overhead expenses.

Additionally, the prior period benefited from a fair value gain on warehousing assets, which was absent in the current period.

For the third quarter ended Dec 31, 2024 (3Q25), group revenue improved 14.9% to RM217.1 million from RM188.9 million in the previous year, driven by higher demand for integrated logistics and warehousing services.

However, net profit declined to RM0.1 million compared to RM44.7 million previously, attributed to increased overhead expenses related to warehouse expansion, and the absence of the one-off fair value gain.

Excluding the impact of the one-off item, the underlying performance of the logistics segment remained strong, with positive growth compared to preceding quarters.

## FM Global Logistics achieves Q2 pre-tax profit growth of 14%

**PORT KLANG:** FM Global Logistics Holdings Bhd, a company in the provision of international multimodal freight and integrated logistics services, recorded a 13.7% year-on-year (YoY) growth in pre-tax profit to RM13.5 million, whilst net profit increased by 10.0% YoY to RM8.8 million for the second quarter (2Q) of its current financial year ending June 30, 2025 (FYJune2025).

The growth in profits came on the back of a 21.5% rise in revenue to RM243.1 million, underpinned by the general increase in industry freight rates and growth in FM Group's total volume handled during the quarter.

For the cumulative six-month period to Dec 31, 2024, Group pre-tax profit increased by 11.1% YoY to RM25.3 million, while revenue grew by 27.6% YoY to RM496.8 million. Net profit for the period was 5.6% higher YoY at RM16.1 million, translating into a net earnings per share of 2.88 sen.

FM Group managing director Chew Chong Keat said: "I am very pleased with FM Group's 2Q FYJune2025 results, which demonstrates our resilience and capability to continue seeking growth amidst a difficult and highly competitive environment.

"All our business segments were profitable, and notably, our mainstay Sea Freight division recorded robust growth, supported by a healthy increase in volume.

"Our international businesses also performed well, particularly our larger overseas operations in Australia and Indonesia."

He added FM's core strength is its diversified portfolio of logistics services across multiple markets and industries.

Whilst some business segments have shown signs of moderation, other segments have reported strong growth, thus contributing to overall growth for the group, he said.

"In view of our strong financial position and cashflow generating capability, FM's board of directors has declared a first interim single-tier dividend of 1.5 sen per share, which will be paid in April 2025," said Chew.

He added that they expect a continued positive performance in the second half of their financial year 2025.

## Manufacturing industry capacity utilisation at 81.8%

**PUTRAJAYA:** The manufacturing industry capacity utilisation operated at 81.8% rate in the year of 2024, increased by 2.4 percentage points as against negative 1.0 percentage points in the last year, according to Department of Statistics.

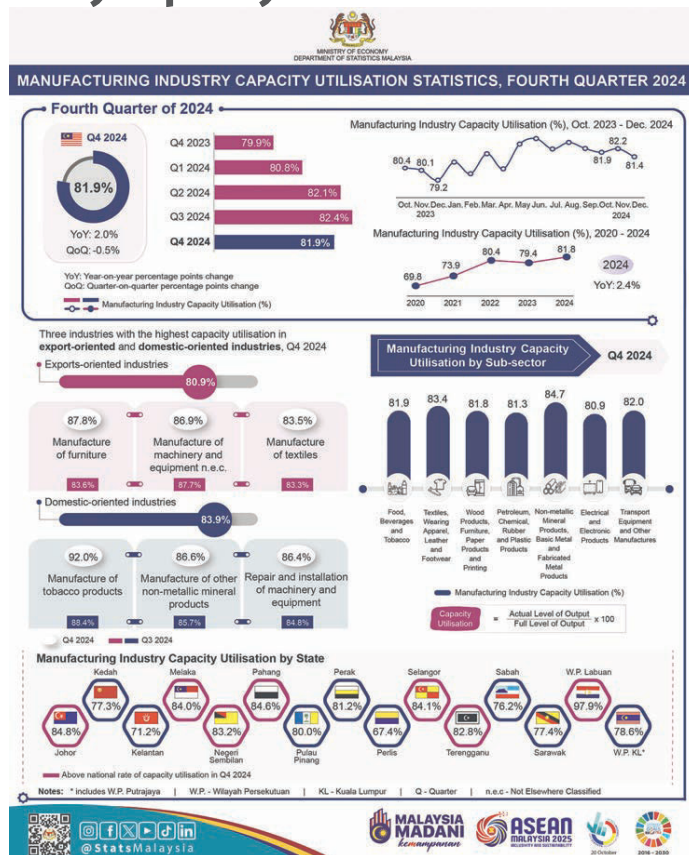
Chief Statistician Malaysia Datuk Sri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin said: "The capacity utilisation of the manufacturing industry was 81.9% in the fourth quarter of 2024, increased by 2.0 percentage points compared to the same quarter of the preceding year (Q4 2023: 79.9%). In this quarter, all sub-sectors posted capacity utilisation above 80%, with the highest rate recorded by the non-metallic mineral products, basic metal & fabricated metal products sub-sector at 84.7%; followed by textiles, wearing apparel, leather & footwear (83.4%); and transport equipment & other manufactures (82.0%). Nevertheless, in comparison with the previous quarter, the capacity utilisation of the manufacturing industry registering a mild decline of 0.5 percentage points (Q3 2024: 82.4%)."

The year-on-year increase in monthly capacity utilisation performance was recorded throughout the fourth quarter of 2024, which was October 2024 (81.9%; +1.5 percentage points); November 2024 (82.2%; +2.1 percentage points); and December 2024 (81.4%; +2.2 percentage points). Furthermore, factors such as low demand; insufficient supply of materials; and the repair & maintenance of machinery & equipment remained as the main cause of the under-utilisation of capacity in the manufacturing industry.

Mohd Uzir said: "The capacity utilisation in the export-oriented industries increased by 2.4 percentage points to 80.9% (Q4 2023: 78.5%). The manufacture of furniture registered the highest rate at 87.8%, followed by the manufacture of machinery & equipment n.e.c. (86.9%). Nonetheless, two industries recorded the capacity utilisation below 80% namely manufacture of vegetable & animal oils & fats (77.3%); and manufacture of wood & products of wood & cork, except furniture, manufacture of articles of straw & plaiting materials (76.9%)."

As compared to the third quarter of 2024, the capacity utilisation rate of the export-oriented industries declined marginally by 0.9 percentage points from 81.8% in the preceding quarter.

He said the capacity utilisation in the



domestic-oriented industries remained positive albeit at a slower rate of 1.0 percentage points to 83.9% in fourth quarter of 2024.

Two industries in this segment posted the

highest capacity utilisation rate namely the manufacture of tobacco products (92.0%); and the manufacture of other non-metallic mineral products (86.6%).

## Reservior Link announces quantum leap in earnings

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Reservior Link Energy Bhd, an energy related services provider, recorded substantial growth in profit before tax and profit after tax to RM86.1 million and RM84.7 million respectively for its financial results for the first half ended Dec 31, 2024.

The group recorded a profit before tax of RM6.2 million and profit after tax of RM3.9 million in the preceding year's corresponding period.

The improved earnings were primarily the result of a fair value adjustment of its then subsidiary Founder Group Limited (FGL) in conjunction with its successful listing on the Nasdaq Capital Market.

The listing of FGL led to a decline in the group's revenue to RM77.6 million as FGL's revenue was only consolidated until Oct 23, 2024.

Executive deputy chairman Thien Chiet Chai said the group is actively pursuing clean energy opportunities, including participation in the Corporate Green Power Programme and the LSS PETRA bidding process, potentially expanding its solar capacity and revenue streams.

"The successful NASDAQ listing of Founder Group Limited has enabled us to strengthen our renewable energy profile, providing access to capital and a broader investor reach.

"We are poised for sustained growth and strong financial performance this year."



**BEIJING:** Chinese companies are ramping up orders for Nvidia's H20 artificial intelligence chip due to booming demand for DeepSeek's low-cost AI models, six people familiar with the matter said.

The surge in orders, which is being reported for the first time by Reuters, underlines Nvidia's dominance of the market and could help alleviate concerns that DeepSeek might cause a slide in AI chip demand.

Tencent, Alibaba and ByteDance have "significantly increased" orders of the H20 - a chip specific to China due to US export controls - since the Chinese AI startup burst into the global public consciousness last month, two of the people said.

In addition to their internal needs for advanced AI chips, the three tech giants provide cloud computing services through which other firms can access and use AI tools.

Smaller companies in sectors like healthcare and education are also purchasing AI servers equipped with DeepSeek models and Nvidia H20 chips, said a source at one of China's largest server makers.

Previously only deep-pocketed financial and telecoms firms bought servers with AI computing systems, the source added.

US President Donald Trump's administration is looking at imposing restrictions on the sale of the H20 chip to China, Reuters has reported.

While the threat of further controls could be a factor in the jump in orders, the sources cited DeepSeek as the reason.

The sources did not provide details on the size of the orders.

They were not authorised to speak to media and declined to be identified.

Nvidia did not respond to queries on how much demand for the H20 it was seeing from China but said its products won "on merit in a competitive field".

# Nvidia's H20 chip orders jump

► Chinese companies ramping up purchases due to booming demand for DeepSeek's AI models

The company is set to report quarterly earnings today.

Tencent, ByteDance and Alibaba did not respond to requests for comment.

DeepSeek's large language models rival Western systems in performance at a fraction of the cost as they focus on "inference" or producing conclusions.

That optimises computational efficiency rather than relying solely on raw processing power.

"When DeepSeek launched, many misjudged that computing power demand might stagnate or decrease. In reality, more advanced AI models drive deeper integration into daily life, exponentially increasing inference-level compute need," said Nori Chiou, investment director at Singapore-based White Oak Capital Partners.

A DeepSeek-induced global rout in AI stocks that began Jan 24 saw Nvidia shares lose as much as a fifth of their value at one point but they have since regained most of that ground and are down just 3% for the year to date.

Though wider deployment of DeepSeek AI models is expected to help Chinese chipmakers

such as Huawei better compete in the domestic market thanks to the models' focus on inference, Nvidia's H20 chip remains the industry standard in China.

Analysts estimate Nvidia shipped approximately one million H20 units in 2024, generating over US\$12 billion (RM53 billion) in revenue for the company.

The H20 is the primary chip Nvidia is legally permitted to sell in China and was launched after the latest round of US export restrictions took effect in October 2023.

Washington has banned exports of Nvidia's most advanced chips to China since 2022, concerned that advanced technologies could be used by China to build up its military capabilities.

Numerous Chinese companies have announced plans to use DeepSeek's models.

Among them are Tencent, which has said it will beta test integrating the models into its highly popular WeChat messaging app, and automaker Great Wall which has integrated DeepSeek's model into its connected vehicle system. - Reuters

## Thai exports expand for seventh straight month

**BANGKOK:** Thailand's exports beat expectations as they posted a seventh straight rise in January, and the Commerce Ministry yesterday maintained its forecast that shipments were expected to grow 2% to 3% this year amid uncertainty over US trade policy.

Exports, a key driver of Southeast Asia's second-largest economy, increased 13.6% in January from a year earlier, beating a forecast for a 7.15% rise in a Reuters poll, and compared with December's 8.7% increase.

Exports were seen posting double-digit growth in the first quarter, boosted by concerns about US President Donald Trump's tariffs, Poonpong Naiyanapakorn, head of the Trade Policy and Strategy Office, told a press conference.

"Exports were driven by pre-orders due to uncertainty from Trump's measures," he said, adding Thailand was trying to import more from the US to reduce its bilateral trade surplus, which was US\$35.4 billion last year.

"We have to see what can reduce the deficit with them. Can we import more corn and soybeans than we already import as well as crude oil?"

Imports rose 7.9% in January from a year earlier, above a forecast rise of 2.95%.

That led to a trade deficit of US\$1.88 billion in January, in line with a forecast deficit of US\$1.9 billion.

In 2024, Thailand's exports rose by 5.4% to a record US\$301 billion.

The ministry has forecast a more moderate rise of 2%-3% due to uncertain US trade policies, prolonged geopolitical tensions and fluctuations in exchange rates.

Commerce Minister Pichai Nariphaphan has said he hoped Thailand would not face US tariffs, amid concerns that the country's trade surplus with Washington could become an issue.

In January, exports to the United States, Thailand's biggest market, rose 22.4% from a year earlier. - Reuters

## South Korea's central bank cuts rate, growth outlook

**SEOUL:** South Korea's central bank yesterday slashed interest rates and its annual growth forecast as it looks to bolster the economy in the face of US tariffs and the fallout from President Yoon Suk Yeol's brief declaration of martial law last year.

Asia's fourth-largest economy expanded less than expected in the final three months of 2024 as Yoon's martial law move hit consumer confidence and domestic demand.

That compounded fears over US President Donald Trump's hardball trade policies that have seen him impose a broad range of levies on some of his country's biggest economic partners since taking office in January.

An official at the Bank of Korea told AFP it expected gross domestic product to expand 1.5% in 2025, down from its initial estimate of 1.9% in November.

The benchmark interest rate would also be lowered by a quarter of a percentage point, the official said.

In a statement released after the meeting, the bank said it projected a "slower recovery in domestic demand and export growth than initially expected".

It blamed "the effects of weakening economic sentiment and the US tariff policy" as well as political uncertainty stemming from the "martial law situation".

"There is a high level of uncertainty regarding the future growth path, including major countries' trade policies, (and) the direction of the US Federal Reserve's monetary policy," it added.

Trump warned last week that he would impose tariffs "in the neighbourhood of 25%" on auto imports and a similar amount or higher on semiconductors and pharmaceuticals.

South Korea is home to the world's key chipmakers, Samsung and SK hynix, and was the fourth-largest exporter of steel to the United States last year.

Governor Rhee Chang-yong said South Korea would continue to face challenges with tariffs unless it develops new industries.

"What our government should feel most painfully about the past 10 years is that no new industries have been introduced during this time," he told reporters.



Pedestrians crossing a road in front of the Bank of Korea headquarters in Seoul yesterday. - AFP/PPIC

"If we don't address this issue, these problems will keep recurring."

South Korea's Trade Ministry last week said it had asked Washington to exclude it from planned US tariffs on steel and aluminium.

The country's steel industry was already facing intense pressure in recent years as it grappled with oversupply - particularly from China - and a decrease in global demand.

The US tariffs are likely to intensify those challenges.

Analysts warn that should cheap Chinese steel which has been barred from the US market begin to flood regions such as Southeast Asia and Europe, South Korean steel producers will face deepening price competition.

The Bank of Korea also said yesterday that employment had continued to slow.

"The data for early 2025 have been weak amid signs the political crisis is weighing on the economy," Gareth Leather, senior Asia economist at Capital Economics, said.

But Leather added that even if the crisis is resolved soon, growth is likely to remain weak because of a "downturn in the property sector and tight fiscal policy weighing on demand".

Dave Chia, associate economist at Moody's Analytics, said he expected at least one more rate cut this year.

"The boom in artificial intelligence should sustain shipments of advanced memory chips," he wrote in a note.

But a "slowdown in other major categories" stands to limit South Korea's export growth, he added. - AFP

## Asia equities exhibit record bullish momentum: Goldman

**HONG KONG:** Hedge funds' willingness to boost bets on Asian stocks last week rose to its highest level on Goldman Sachs record since 2016, the bank said in a note.

Long positions exceeded short positions by a ratio of 1.5 to 1, with China and Hong Kong accounting for nearly half of the regional inflows from Feb 14 to 20, according to the note this week.

Japan contributed 23% of gross inflows, followed by Taiwan and Australia.

"Asia is now the most overweight region versus MSCI AC World weights," at the expense of hedge funds rotating out of North America, the bank said, based on the hedge fund exposure it tracks.

Hong Kong and China A-share markets have outperformed global peers in the past month, as the emergence of DeepSeek fuelled a tech rally and ignited animal spirits, driving Hang Seng Index to a three-year high at 23688.45.

Hot stocks such as Alibaba Group surged over 60% year-to-date.

The extreme bullishness has led to some concerns that there is too much optimism over China's recovery and US-China competition.

Both Hong Kong and China shares suffered sell-offs this week after the Trump administration issued the "America First Investment Policy," which aims to enhance restrictions on China.

Kevin Liu, a strategist at CICC Research, suggested investors take some profits around the 23,000-24,000 level for the Hang Seng index, as sentiment and technical indicators look overextended. - Reuters

# Trump says Canada, Mexico **tariffs** on schedule

➤ 25% duties may be imposed as soon as March 4 despite border and fentanyl efforts

**WASHINGTON:** President Donald Trump said on Monday that tariffs on Canadian and Mexican imports are "on time and on schedule" despite efforts by the countries to beef up border security and halt the flow of fentanyl into the US ahead of a March 4 deadline.

"The tariffs are going forward on time, on schedule," Trump told a joint news conference with French President Emmanuel Macron.

He had been asked whether Canada and Mexico had done enough to avoid the punishing 25% US duties.

Many had hoped the top two American trading partners could persuade Trump's administration to further delay tariffs that would apply to over US\$918 billion (RM4 trillion) worth of US imports from the two countries, from autos to energy.

This could wreak havoc on the integrated North American economy, with the automotive sector hit particularly hard.

Trump did not specifically mention the March 4 deadline.

He later referred to his desire for "reciprocal" tariffs to match the duty rates and offset the trade barriers of all countries, including France.

Trump and Macron did not publicly discuss another sticking point - digital services taxes imposed by France, Canada and other countries aimed at dominant US tech giants including Google, Facebook and Amazon.

On Friday, Trump ordered his administration to revive tariff investigations into countries that levy digital service taxes on US firms.

Canada and Mexico have taken steps to beef up border security, which bought them at least until clear evidence emerges that Trump's earlier Feb 1 deadline to impose the tariffs, based on a national emergency declaration.

Any further delay negotiated ahead of the deadline will keep the tariff threat in place at least until clear evidence emerges that Canadian and Mexican measures are working, said Dan Ujcz, a lawyer specialising in US-Canada trade matters.

"There's progress being made on the security front," said Ujcz, senior counsel with Thompson Hine in Columbus, Ohio.

"But it's overly optimistic to think that those tariffs would be fully rescinded."

The White House, US Trade Representative's office and Commerce Department did not respond to requests for comment on negotiations expected this week ahead of the March 4 deadline.

Since Trump's initial 25% tariff threat and imposition of a 10% duty on all Chinese imports, he has heaped on more tariff actions that could muddy the waters on border negotiations.

These include substantially raising tariffs on steel and aluminum to a flat 25%, rescinding longstanding exemptions for Canada and Mexico, the largest sources of US imports of the metals.

These steep increases, which also extend to hundreds of downstream steel products, are due to take effect a week after the border tariffs, on March 12.

Trump has also said he wants to impose 25% tariffs on imports of autos, pharmaceuticals and semiconductors, and to match duty rates and trade barriers of other countries.

The threatened tariffs could kick off an early launch of a renegotiation of the US-Mexico-Canada agreement on trade that is due by 2026, Ujcz added.

Trump signed the USMCA into law in 2020 after renegotiating the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, but has increasingly expressed dissatisfaction with imports of autos from Mexico and Canada. - Reuters



Trump and Macron reacting at the press conference at the White House. - REUTERS/SPIC

## Tata Play, Airtel Digital TV near merger, ET reports

**NEW DELHI:** India's Tata Group and Bharti Group are close to merging their satellite TV businesses, creating a nearly US\$1.6 billion (RM7.1 billion) entity with the aim of tidying over the sustained migration of subscribers to digital streaming, *Economic Times* reported yesterday.

The merged entity is expected to be run by Bharti Airtel, which will likely hold between 52% and 55% with the remaining held by Tata Play shareholders, including Walt Disney,

the report said, citing sources.

Bharti Airtel, Tata Play and Disney did not immediately respond to Reuters requests for comments.

Tata Play, a 70:30 venture between Tata Sons and Disney, and Airtel Digital TV had a combined 35 million paid subscribers as of last September, more than half the 60 million subscribers industry-wide at the time, according to a government report.

The two businesses are being approximately valued between 60 billion (RM3.1 billion) and 70 billion rupees each, with their revenue exceeding 70 billion rupees in fiscal 2024, ET reported.

The deal is the second major one in the sector since Dish TV merged with Videocon d2h in 2016 and follows the merger of Reliance Industries streaming media assets with Disney's Indian media assets last year. - Reuters

## Anthropic unveils its 'smartest' AI model yet

**SAN FRANCISCO:** OpenAI rival Anthropic on Monday released what it said is its smartest artificial intelligence model to date, particularly when it comes to computer coding.

Along with Claude 3.7 Sonnet, the San Francisco-based company is making available in a limited research preview a digital "agent" called Claude Code tailored to be a tool for software developers.

Amazon-backed Anthropic described Claude Code as able to search and read code, edit files, run tests and more.

The release comes as AI companies are pushing out new products at a fast pace and with innovations quickly reproduced by rivals, often at a lower cost, raising concerns about finding a return on the massive investments.

Anthropic's new model is "much stronger at coding, and particularly at taking over and doing really complicated coding tests," Anthropic co-founder and chief science officer Jared Kaplan told AFP.

Aside from overall improved intelligence, the latest iteration of Claude has a "hybrid" reasoning model that lets users get quick answers to questions or have it spend time mulling complex queries and share steps in the process, according to Kaplan.

The improvement enables Claude to better follow instructions and handle more sophisticated analyses, he added.

Since OpenAI released ChatGPT in late 2022, the race has been on to lead in a technology predicted to change the way people live and work.

The new AI model makes its debut as Anthropic works on finalising a US\$3.5 billion (RM15 billion) funding round that values the startup at US\$61.5 billion in a huge leap from its prior valuation, according to a *Wall Street Journal* report.

Anthropic declined to comment on the report.

AI models have moved beyond generating images, videos or written works to providing "agents" specialising in fields or tasks.

OpenAI released a version of ChatGPT about six months ago that shared its "thinking" process, but Anthropic followed that by enabling its Claude model to command computers as people do.

OpenAI responded with the recent release of its first AI agent called Operator with similar capabilities. - AFP

## Indonesia, Apple agree on terms to lift ban on iPhone 16: Bloomberg

**JAKARTA:** Indonesia and Apple have agreed on terms to lift the country's ban on iPhone 16 and could sign a deal as early as this week, Bloomberg News reported yesterday, citing people familiar with the matter.

Indonesia banned the iPhone 16 in October after Apple failed to meet requirements that smartphones sold domestically should comprise at least 35% locally-made parts.

Since then, Indonesia's investment minister has said Apple plans to invest US\$1 billion (RM4.4 billion) in a manufacturing plant that produces components for smartphones and other products.

Besides this investment, Apple will commit to training locals in research and development on its products and this will be done through programmes other than existing Apple academies, the report said.

However, Apple has no immediate plans to start making iPhones in the country, the report said. - Reuters



# MARKET ROUND-UP: FEBRUARY 25

## Bursa Trade Statistic

25 Feb 2025

Source: Bursa Malaysia, Inter-Pacific Research

Participation

| Category             | Net (in RM mil.) |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Retail (18.81%)      | +81.47           |
| Institution (38.66%) | +194.64          |
| Foreign (42.53%)     | -276.11          |

Bought (in RM mil.) / Sold (in RM mil.)

| Category    | Bought  | Sold    |
|-------------|---------|---------|
| Retail      | 539.01  | 457.54  |
| Institution | 1121.69 | 927.05  |
| Foreign     | 988.68  | 1264.79 |

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

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

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SUNBIZ presents a summary of the day's trading activity on Bursa Malaysia and other markets in an easy to digest format.

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

**DISCLAIMER:** The data and reports are provided as a service to investors. Sun Media Corporation Sdn Bhd shall not be liable or responsible for any consequences resulting from usage of the information.

## Bursa Indices

| INDEX               | CHANGE            |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| FBMEMAS             | 11,756.20 -160.00 |
| FBMKLCI             | 1,568.03 -16.22   |
| CONSUMER PRODUCTS   | 517.39 -6.37      |
| INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS | 158.70 -2.65      |
| CONSTRUCTION        | 275.21 -1.91      |
| FINANCIAL SERVICES  | 19,145.60 -160.00 |
| ENERGY              | 754.40 -14.40     |
| TELECOMMUNICATIONS  | 497.14 -7.02      |
| HEALTH CARE         | 1,982.15 -53.40   |
| TRANSPORTATION      | 1,045.15 +8.17    |
| PROPERTY            | 1,030.01 -18.40   |
| PLANTATION          | 7,482.60 -87.70   |
| FBMSHA              | 11,434.80 -172.00 |
| FBMACE              | 4,808.60 -97.00   |
| TECHNOLOGY          | 52.94 -1.71       |

TURNOVER: 3.140 bil VALUE: RM2,648 bil

## Bearish global leads weigh on Bursa, regional markets

BURSA Malaysia extended its losses for a second straight day yesterday, in tandem with the weak regional market performance following negative cues from global equities, said an analyst.

At 5pm, the FBM KLCI fell 16.22 points, or 1.02%, to 1,568.03 from Monday's close of 1,584.25.

The market bellwether opened 1.52 points easier at 1,582.73 and moved between 1,564.32 and 1,583.74 throughout the day.

On the broader market, decliners led gainers 905 to 217, while 390 counters were unchanged, 838 untraded, and seven suspended.

Turnover increased to 3.14 billion units worth RM2.64 billion from 2.69 billion units worth RM2.31 billion on Monday.

Rakuten Trade Sdn Bhd vice-president of equity research Thong Pak Leng said losses were primarily centered on chipmakers and technology stocks, with investor sentiment turning negative ahead of Nvidia's earnings report.

Heavyweights Maybank eased two sen to RM10.46, CIMB slipped 15 sen to RM8.23, Public Bank eased one sen to RM4.46, Tenaga Nasional dropped 24 sen to RM13.40, and IHH Healthcare gained six sen to RM7.31.

As for active stocks, TWL Holdings inched up half-a-sen to 2.5 sen, Ingenieur Gudang shed half-a-sen to 4.5 sen, My E.G. Services fell 3.5 sen to 97.5 sen, and SFP Tech declined five sen to 34.5 sen.

On the index board, the FBM Emas Index tumbled 160.72 points to 11,756.29, the FBMT 100 Index fell 153.40 points to 11,504.01, and the FBM Emas Shariah Index slid 172.13 points to 11,434.88. - Bernama

## Top 20 Actives

| STOCKS      | CLOSING (RM) | +/- (RM) | +/- (%) | VOLUME ('00) |
|-------------|--------------|----------|---------|--------------|
| HSI-PWDN    | 0.110        | +0.010   | +10.00  | 1,481,934    |
| HSI-CWCO    | 0.145        | -0.035   | -19.44  | 953,722      |
| TWL         | 0.025        | +0.005   | +25.00  | 919,936      |
| INGENIEU    | 0.045        | -0.005   | -10.00  | 795,149      |
| HSI-CWCA    | 0.185        | -0.050   | -21.28  | 634,960      |
| MYEG        | 0.975        | -0.035   | -3.47   | 589,988      |
| INGENIEU-WB | 0.005        | -        | -       | 430,554      |
| HSI-PWDS    | 0.045        | +0.005   | +12.50  | 420,196      |
| HSI-PWDW    | 0.120        | +0.015   | +14.29  | 388,863      |
| SFPTECH     | 0.345        | -0.050   | -12.66  | 354,568      |
| GAMUDA      | 4.460        | -0.030   | -0.67   | 284,053      |
| TAWIN       | 0.025        | +0.005   | +25.00  | 277,310      |
| VELESTO     | 0.180        | +0.005   | +2.86   | 266,818      |
| DSONIC-WB   | 0.100        | -0.005   | -4.76   | 259,606      |
| INARI       | 2.150        | -0.090   | -4.02   | 246,098      |
| PA          | 0.205        | -0.015   | -6.82   | 236,551      |
| CIMB        | 8.230        | -0.150   | -1.79   | 235,697      |
| HSI-PWD5    | 0.215        | +0.025   | +13.16  | 230,994      |
| TANCO       | 1.710        | +0.030   | +1.79   | 226,457      |
| ARMADA      | 0.560        | -0.005   | -0.89   | 224,909      |



## Top 20 Gainers (By RM)

| STOCKS     | CLOSING (RM) | +/- (RM) | VOLUME ('00) |
|------------|--------------|----------|--------------|
| HEIM       | 27.200       | +0.360   | 1,693        |
| UTDPLT     | 22.000       | +0.333   | 8,540        |
| HTPADU     | 3.000        | +0.140   | 13,122       |
| DLADY      | 30.140       | +0.120   | 88           |
| PBA        | 2.070        | +0.120   | 2,382        |
| HEXTECH    | 1.200        | +0.080   | 13,055       |
| PETDAG     | 20.980       | +0.080   | 3,875        |
| SUNCON     | 4.350        | +0.080   | 68,881       |
| IHH        | 7.310        | +0.060   | 65,372       |
| KAWAN      | 1.610        | +0.060   | 12,786       |
| MISC       | 7.370        | +0.060   | 21,078       |
| PETGAS     | 17.500       | +0.060   | 5,047        |
| PLENITU    | 1.450        | +0.060   | 1,354        |
| XIAOMI-C34 | 0.935        | +0.060   | 672          |
| BOXPAK     | 0.500        | +0.050   | 3            |
| INNO       | 1.780        | +0.050   | 12,789       |
| NDX-HK     | 0.380        | +0.050   | 875          |
| UMCCA      | 5.120        | +0.050   | 207          |
| XIAOMI-C33 | 1.130        | +0.050   | 64           |
| KNUSFOR    | 0.745        | +0.045   | 101          |

## Top 20 Gainers (By %)

| STOCKS      | CLOSING (RM) | +/- (%) | VOLUME ('00) |
|-------------|--------------|---------|--------------|
| 99SMART-CE  | 0.010        | +100.00 | 289          |
| GENM-HJ     | 0.030        | +100.00 | 408          |
| HONGSENG    | 0.010        | +100.00 | 3,182        |
| KGROU       | 0.010        | +100.00 | 117,146      |
| TIMCOM-C5   | 0.035        | +75.00  | 350          |
| FBMKLCI-HA2 | 0.015        | +50.00  | 500          |
| HARBOUR-CA  | 0.015        | +50.00  | 1,000        |
| HSI-PWDK    | 0.015        | +50.00  | 103,926      |
| HSI-PWDM    | 0.015        | +50.00  | 5            |
| HSTECH-HI3  | 0.030        | +50.00  | 6,123        |
| FBMKLCI-HA1 | 0.125        | +47.06  | 200          |
| HSI-PWDO    | 0.035        | +40.00  | 2,700        |
| NDX-HJ      | 0.035        | +40.00  | 2,500        |
| FAST-WB     | 0.020        | +33.33  | 1,200        |
| G3          | 0.020        | +33.33  | 10,162       |
| PBBANK-CIL  | 0.020        | +33.33  | 133,854      |
| REDTONE-CD  | 0.020        | +33.33  | 4,170        |
| SIMEPROP-HA | 0.060        | +33.33  | 2,850        |
| HSI-PWBT    | 0.045        | +28.57  | 10,858       |
| HSI-PWDG    | 0.045        | +28.57  | 500          |

## World Stocks/Commodities

| INDEX                             | CLOSING   | DAILY CHANGE | DAILY CHANGE (%) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|--------------|------------------|
| DJIA [US]                         | 43,461.21 | 33.19        | 0.08             |
| S&P 500 [US]                      | 5,983.25  | -29.88       | -0.5             |
| NASDAQ [US]                       | 19,286.93 | -237.08      | -1.21            |
| NYSE [US]                         | 19,859.20 | -22.34       | -0.11            |
| EURO STOXX 50 [EUR]               | 5,445.73  | -8.03        | -0.15            |
| FTSE 100 [UK]                     | 8,672.46  | 13.48        | 0.16             |
| DAX [GER]                         | 22,407.81 | -18.12       | -0.08            |
| NIKKEI 225 [JPN]                  | 38,237.79 | -539.15      | -1.39            |
| TOPIX INDEX [JPN]                 | 2,724.70  | -11.83       | -0.43            |
| HANG SENG INDEX [HK]              | 23,034.02 | -307.59      | -1.32            |
| CSI 300 [CHN]                     | 3,925.65  | -44.07       | -1.11            |
| MSCI ASIA PACIFIC                 | 189.69    | -0.91        | -0.48            |
| SHANGHAI SE COM [CHN]             | 3,346.04  | -26.99       | -0.8             |
| KOSPI INDEX [SK]                  | 2,630.29  | -14.98       | -0.57            |
| SENSEX INDEX [IND]                | 74,677.13 | 222.72       | 0.3              |
| ASX 200 [AUS]                     | 8,251.91  | -56.34       | -0.68            |
| ALL ORDINARIES INDX [AUS]         | 8,498.00  | -62.15       | -0.73            |
| FBM KLCI                          | 1,568.03  | -16.22       | -1.02            |
| STRAITS TIMES INDEX [S'PORE]      | 3,918.91  | -8.84        | -0.23            |
| WTI [US\$/BBL.]                   | 70.8      | 0.1          | 0.14             |
| BRENT [US\$/BBL.]                 | 74.82     | 0.04         | 0.05             |
| GOLD [COMEX] [US\$/T OZ]          | 2,953.00  | -10.2        | -0.34            |
| SILVER [COMEX] [US\$/T OZ]        | 32.83     | -0.1         | -0.32            |
| PLATINUM [US\$/T OZ]              | 970.85    | 0.89         | 0.09             |
| COPPER [COMEX] [US CENTS/LB.]     | 454.4     | -1.95        | -0.43            |
| COPPER 3MO [LME] [US\$/MT]        | 9,494.50  | -64.5        | -0.67            |
| CORN [US CENTS/BU.]               | 496       | -1           | -0.2             |
| WHEAT [US CENTS/BU.]              | 591.5     | -2           | -0.34            |
| SOYBEAN OIL [CBOT] [US CENTS/LB.] | 46.86     | 0.56         | 1.21             |
| COCOA [ICE] [US\$/MT]             | 8,482.00  | -658         | -7.2             |
| RUBBER [S'PORE] [US CENTS/KG]     | 202.7     | -3.9         | -1.89            |

As at 5pm, Feb 25

## Top 20 Losers (By RM)

| STOCKS     | CLOSING (RM) | +/- (RM) | VOLUME ('00) |
|------------|--------------|----------|--------------|
| NESTLE     | 90.000       | -1.500   | 408          |
| MPI        | 18.880       | -0.740   | 3,365        |
| F&N        | 25.860       | -0.620   | 390          |
| ALLIANZ-PA | 18.520       | -0.580   | 30           |
| ALLIANZ    | 18.000       | -0.480   | 1,162        |
| HLIND      | 13.080       | -0.340   | 787          |
| KLK        | 21.120       | -0.300   | 5,802        |
| PIE        | 4.500        | -0.300   | 1,228        |
| VITROX     | 3.310        | -0.290   | 29,164       |
| TENAGA     | 13.400       | -0.240   | 107,189      |
| HSI-CWCJ   | 1.400        | -0.230   | 16           |
| HSI-CWCV   | 1.010        | -0.220   | 3            |
| HSI-CWAW   | 0.915        | -0.215   | 174          |
| GCB-C14    | 0.270        | -0.210   | 79,800       |
| GCB        | 3.870        | -0.200   | 109,945      |
| TM         | 6.700        | -0.200   | 76,077       |
| HSI-CWCO   | 0.940        | -0.180   | 50           |
| SPS00-C50  | 0.415        | -0.175   | 35           |
| ABMB       | 5.160        | -0.170   | 9,479        |
| SDG        | 4.830        | -0.170   | 30,046       |

## Top 20 Losers (By %)

| STOCKS      | CLOSING (RM) | +/- (%) | VOLUME ('00) |
|-------------|--------------|---------|--------------|
| GREATEC-C12 | 0.005        | -85.71  | 500          |
| MRCB-C1M    | 0.005        | -80.00  | 4,000        |
| IJM-C92     | 0.005        | -75.00  | 200          |
| HSI-CWAY    | 0.020        | -73.33  | 400          |
| FFB-C8      | 0.010        | -71.43  | 500          |
| HIBISCS-C71 | 0.035        | -61.11  | 6,000        |
| MAXIS-C48   | 0.010        | -60.00  | 4,099        |
| MNRB-CG     | 0.010        | -60.00  | 4,424        |
| DUFU-CY     | 0.030        | -57.14  | 333          |
| CMSB-C59    | 0.065        | -56.67  | 7            |
| CIMB-C1Q    | 0.020        | -55.56  | 116          |
| MYEG-C8H    | 0.070        | -53.33  | 30,000       |
| AXIATA-C1I  | 0.005        | -50.00  | 200          |
| DRBHCOC3G   | 0.005        | -50.00  | 500          |
| EAH         | 0.005        | -50.00  | 7,200        |
| EKOVEST-C66 | 0.005        | -50.00  | 17,163       |
| FAST-WA     | 0.005        | -50.00  | 4,166        |
| FBMKLCI-CQT | 0.010        | -50.00  | 11,250       |
| GIIB-WA     | 0.005        | -50.00  | 5,010        |
| HSI-CWAF    | 0.005        | -50.00  | 400          |

# MARKETS/FROM THE BROKERS

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

Compiled by SunBiz Team

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## 99 Speed Mart's Q4'24 revenue rises to RM2.58b

**KUALA LUMPUR:** 99 Speed Mart Retail Holdings Bhd, Malaysia's largest home-grown mini market chain retailer posted a revenue of RM2.58 billion for the fourth quarter (Q4) ended Dec 31, 2024 (FY24), a 7.3% year-on-year (YoY) increase from RM2.4 billion posted in the same quarter last year.

Profit before tax (PBT) and profit after tax (PAT) rose by 15.4% and 16.8%, respectively, to RM165.5 million and RM124.4 million YoY for Q4'24.

Excluding one-off IPO listing expenses of approximately RM2 million incurred in Q4'24, the normalised PBT and normalised PAT would have been RM167.5 million and RM126.4 million, marking a YoY growth of 16.4% and 18.1% respectively.

Normalised PBT and normalised PAT margin were 6.5% and 4.9%, respectively, while the total sales transactions increased 10.7% to 120.7 million transactions.

The company also expanded its footprint with 81 new outlets in Q4'24, bringing the total outlet count to 2,778 outlets.

For the cumulative 12 months, the revenue was RM9.98 billion, representing an 8.3% increase from FY23.

The PBT and PAT rose by 22.4% and 22.5%, respectively, to RM658.6 million and RM490.3 million.

After excluding one-time expenses totalling RM26.5 million, comprising special bonuses and IPO listing costs, the company's adjusted PBT rose by 27.1% to RM685.1 million, and the adjusted PAT increased by 27.7% to RM512.4 million.

These adjustments result in normalised PBT and PAT margins of 6.9% and 5.1%, respectively.

Total sales transactions rose 12.6% to 465.5 million, with digital platform 99 Bulksales adding RM23.1 million in revenue.

## Ringgit slips as Trump says Mexico, Canada tariffs are on

**THE** ringgit weakened against the US dollar at close yesterday, after reaching a nearly three-week high, highlighting the challenges of breaking below the RM4.40 level following US President Donald Trump's announcement that tariffs on Mexico and Canada would proceed as planned.

By 6pm, the ringgit depreciated to 4.4210/4255 from 4.4080/4110 at Monday's close.

Bank Muamalat Malaysia Bhd's chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid noted that the US Dollar Index (DXY) had gained traction, rising to 106.632 points.

He said the one-month deadline for delaying tariffs on Canada and Mexico is approaching, and President Trump appears poised to increase the tariffs if no concessions are made.

Additionally, the Trump administration is likely to intensify measures against China by restricting microchip exports and encouraging the US allies to do the same.

"It is a back-and-forth situation regarding tariff concerns, and intermittently, it exerts pressure on the currency markets," he told Bernama.

Meanwhile, the ringgit was traded weaker against major currencies.

It weakened against the Japanese yen to 2.9552/9584 from 2.9471/9495, declined against the British pound to 5.5806/5863 from 5.5704/5742, and fell against the euro to 4.6301/6348 from 4.6156/6188.

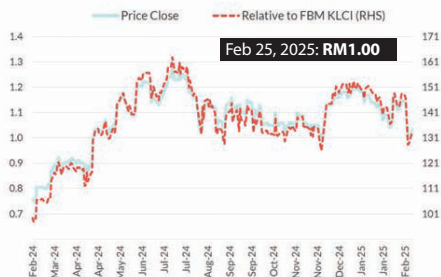
The local currency was mixed against Asean currencies. It depreciated against the Singapore dollar to 3.2997/3034 from 3.2950/2975 and fell against the Philippine peso to 7.63/7.64 from 7.62/7.63.

| Exchange Rates        |               |           |           |
|-----------------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|
| FOREIGN CURRENCY      | SELLING TT/OD | BUYING TT | BUYING OD |
| 1 US Dollar           | 4.4840        | 4.3480    | 4.3380    |
| 1 Australian Dollar   | 2.8600        | 2.7430    | 2.7270    |
| 1 Brunei Dollar       | 3.3460        | 3.2470    | 3.2390    |
| 1 Canadian Dollar     | 3.1380        | 3.0530    | 3.0410    |
| 1 Euro                | 4.6970        | 4.5430    | 4.5230    |
| 1 New Zealand Dollar  | 2.5770        | 2.4810    | 2.4650    |
| 1 Singapore Dollar    | 3.3460        | 3.2470    | 3.2390    |
| 1 Sterling Pound      | 5.6650        | 5.4820    | 5.4620    |
| 1 Swiss Franc         | 5.0290        | 4.8130    | 4.7980    |
| 100 UAE Dirham        | 123.4900      | 117.0600  | 116.8600  |
| 100 Bangladesh Taka   | 3.7670        | 3.5060    | 3.3060    |
| 100 Chinese Renminbi  | 62.2800       | 59.6200   | N/A       |
| 100 Danish Krone      | 64.5400       | 59.3600   | 59.1600   |
| 100 Hongkong Dollar   | 58.2800       | 55.3600   | 55.1600   |
| 100 Indian Rupee      | 5.2600        | 4.9300    | 4.7300    |
| 100 Indonesian Rupiah | 0.0285        | 0.0258    | 0.0208    |
| 100 Japanese Yen      | 2.9910        | 2.8940    | 2.8840    |
| 100 New Taiwan Dollar | N/A           | N/A       | N/A       |
| 100 Norwegian Krone   | 41.3700       | 38.0000   | 37.8000   |
| 100 Pakistan Rupee    | 1.6300        | 1.5300    | 1.3300    |
| 100 Philippine Peso   | 7.8600        | 7.4000    | 7.2000    |
| 100 Qatar Riyal       | 124.3500      | 118.0400  | 117.8400  |
| 100 Saudi Riyal       | 120.8600      | 114.7400  | 114.5400  |
| 100 South Africa Rand | 25.2700       | 22.8100   | 22.6100   |
| 100 Sri Lanka Rupee   | 1.5600        | 1.4300    | 1.2300    |
| 100 Swedish Krona     | 43.3300       | 39.4500   | 39.2500   |
| 100 Thai Baht         | 13.9800       | 12.3800   | 11.9800   |

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

## SKP Resources Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM1.31



Source: Bloomberg

**SKP Resources' 9M'25** results met our expectations driven by a solid topline recovery. Net profit of RM88 million (+23% YoY) accounted for 74% and 70% of our and consensus expectations respectively. Post-results, we make no changes to our earnings forecasts and TP of RM1.31 (inclusive of a 6% ESG discount) which is based on 15x 2025F P/E. The valuation is at +1.55D over the stock's 5-year mean and represents a discount over close peer VS Industry warranted by VS's larger market capitalisation and more diverse customer base.

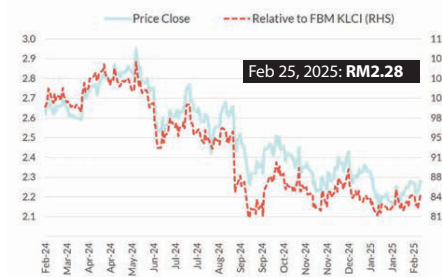
YoY, 9M'25 revenue rose 17% to RM1.6 billion as volume recovered from the low 9M'24 base that was affected by inventory adjustments of Customer X. Correspondingly, 9M'25 PBT jumped 24% with efficient cost management more than offsetting the GPM slippage (-0.9ppt YoY) as a result of initial start-up costs for new production lines. QoQ, Q3'25 revenue dipped 21% to RM504 million, mainly a function of Customer X's order timing. Consequently, Q3'25 net profit fell 25% to RM26 million.

After a slow Q3'25, sales volume should pick up again in Q4'25 owing to higher orders from Customer X. Meanwhile, we expect a more meaningful sales in the upcoming quarters from the new production lines that started commercially in mid-Dec 2024. Looking beyond the immediate term, we foresee its growth prospects to be underpinned by an improved order demand from Customer X and the full-year contribution of abovementioned new customers. On top of that, the group has continued to receive enquiries from potential customers looking to diversify production sources.

BUY with RM1.31 TP. - RHB Research, Feb 25

## Sime Darby Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM3.05



Source: Bloomberg

**Q2'25** core earnings rose 13% YoY (-15% QoQ) to RM305 million, bringing 1H'25 to RM664 million (+12% YoY), missing our and Street's expectations at 42-44% of full-year forecasts. While core operating profit was in line, the deviation was mainly due to higher-than-expected taxes and minority interests. SIME declared a RM0.03 interim DPS and RM0.01 special dividend from its recent healthcare operations sale, resulting in a RM0.04 DPS or 1H'25 core payout of 41%.

Motor segment's Q2'25 PBIT fell 39% YoY, bringing 1H'25 PBIT to RM285 million (-28% YoY). The YoY decline was largely from its Malaysia motor business (-27% YoY), in line with our expectation of a cyclical TIV decline. China motor business remained in the red, with its LBIT flattish YoY to RM16 million, as the price war continued.

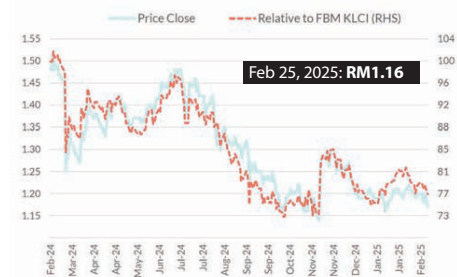
Industrial segment PBIT slipped 4% YoY in Q2'25, as Australasia operations' PBIT fell 14% YoY due to a downward price revision on equipment parts, resulting in lower margins and currency translation losses. The Malaysia industrial business saw an 88% jump in PBIT, thanks to higher contribution from data centres and higher parts sales with better margins.

While parts price reduction may continue to weigh on SIME's 2H'25 performance, we remain optimistic about its industrial division, which saw its orderbook jump 23% QoQ to RM4.8 billion at end-Dec 2024, supported by robust commodity demand. The automotive sector may stabilise in line with expected cyclical downturns, but UMW's strong performance with Perodua and Toyota should help offset this.

BUY with RM3.05 TP. - RHB Research, Feb 25

## CTOS Digital Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM1.49



Source: Bloomberg

**FY24** core PATAMI made up 96.7% and 97.8% of our and Street's full-year forecasts. Revenue grew 16.6% YoY to RM304.9 million, driven by growth and contributions from key accounts (+16.6%), commercial (+6.5%), and direct-to-consumer (DTC; +18.5%) units. However, lower margins from the international and DTC segments, coupled with higher D&A charges, SG&A, and interest expenses, affected PATAMI growth (+3.3% YoY). This was despite the healthy 17.9% growth at associates' level. The international business (under key accounts) acquired in Q3'23 generated a revenue of RM39.3 million and segmental profit of RM4.6 million.

Q4'24 core PATAMI grew 14% QoQ (+11.4% YoY) to RM32.1 million, mainly on lower administrative expenses and stronger associates' profits. Revenue was down 3.7% QoQ (+5% YoY), mainly stemming from the weakness seen in the key accounts segment, which was affected by delays in projects implementation due to various regulatory requirements for financial institutions and digital banks' roll-out delays. A fourth interim dividend of 0.99 sen/share (Q4'23: 1.706 sen) was declared (YTD dividend: 3.25sen).

Management guided lower on its internal target for FY25 earnings for the second time to RM118-123 million from RM125-130 million previously, citing the various market uncertainties, longer sales cycle for CTOS' new digital solutions and commercial segment, and additional expenses in additional headcount and regional marketing efforts. Nonetheless, the medium-term growth trajectory remains intact, with a huge total addressable market of RM2.7 billion (with a penetration rate of 20%).

BUY with RM1.49 TP. - RHB Research, Feb 25





# the Sun **LYFE**

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**Editorial**  
T: 03-7784 6688  
F: 03-7785 2625  
E: [lifestyle@thesundaily.com](mailto:lifestyle@thesundaily.com)

**Advertising**  
T: 03-7784 8888  
E: [advertise@thesundaily.com](mailto:advertise@thesundaily.com)



## WEEKLY FOCUS

**MONDAY**  
Technology and social media

**TUESDAY**  
Travel and leisure

**WEDNESDAY**  
Fashion and beauty

**THURSDAY**  
Home and living

**FRIDAY**  
Food and beverage

# The White Lotus premiere

Highlights from green carpet – P22

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**p25** Blackpink's Jisoo embarks on love odyssey

**p26** Local band to play European festivals

PIC FROM INSTAGRAM @LALALALISA\_M





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SCAN ME

LYFE'S LOOKBOOK



Vanessa Prescilla is an Indonesian actor-singer.



Tayme Thapthimthong plays Gaitok.



Kylie Verzosa and Maine Mendoza are Filipino actors.



Lalisa Manobal plays Mook. - ALL PICS BY MAX AND HBO

Stars grace green carpet for *The White Lotus* season three premiere in Bangkok

**T**HE fan-favourite, black comedy *The White Lotus* is back for season three and as fans gear up for another episode of biting social commentary, the stars of the show peacocked the latest premiere in Bangkok, Thailand. The green carpet was graced by the cast, HBO Original series executive producers. Guests were also treated to a Premiere Screening at Icon Cineconic and an after party at Four Seasons Bangkok.



Parker Posey plays Victoria Ratliff.



Natasha Rothwell plays Belinda Lindsey.



Nataphon Tameeruks (Taew) is a Thai singer.



Bright Vachirawit Chivaaree is a Thai actor-singer.



Patrick Schwarzenegger plays Saxon Ratliff.



BY THASHINE SELVAKUMARAN

**B**EAUTY is a form of self-care and personal expression. The products we choose play a vital role in our daily lives, be it a skincare product that nurtures our complexion or cosmetics that enhance our features. While international brands have long dominated the industry, homegrown Malaysian beauty brands are proving that high-quality and effective products can be found right in our backyard.

Supporting local brands not only helps the economy but also empowers entrepreneurs who create products tailored to the needs of Malaysians. With sustainable practices and a deep understanding of regional skincare concerns, these brands deserve a spotlight. Among them, these four brands have emerged in the local beauty industry, offering skincare that is effective and ethically crafted.

**Chuck's**  
Founded by social media influencer Jane Chuck in 2019, Chuck's is a movement that promotes self-love and confidence. Known for its aesthetically pleasing packaging and gentle yet effective formulations, Chuck's caters to those who believe in simple, feel-good skincare. One of the brand's best-selling products is the Self Love For All Honey Cream, a deeply hydrating moisturiser infused with 42% royal jelly extract.

Designed to soothe and repair the skin barrier, this lightweight yet nourishing cream has become a favourite among beauty lovers. Chuck's also gained popularity with its Let's Glow Honey Sheet Mask, which delivers an instant boost of hydration with ingredients that are safe and effective.

With its clean formulations and emphasis on self-care, Chuck's has built a loyal following that relates to its message, which is skincare should be fun, fuss-free and empowering.

**Ulu Soleil**  
Founded by husband-and-wife duo Dan McLean and Sophia Khan, Ulu Soleil was born from their shared love for the road less taken and a deep passion for nature-inspired beauty. Despite coming from backgrounds unrelated to skincare, their journey led them to create an island-loving body care brand that celebrates uniqueness and embraces



Chuck's three signature shades offer simple and feel-good beauty products. – PIC FROM INSTAGRAM @CHUCKS.CO

# Game-changing local cosmetics, skincare

## ➤ Homegrown beauty products

the natural beauty of human skin. At the heart of Ulu Soleil is all about simplicity and sustainability. Every product is crafted with the finest ingredients, focusing on creating body care that genuinely works while being kind to skin and the planet.

With a strong emphasis on inclusivity and diversity, the brand promotes a vision of beauty that defies



Ulu Soleil's body balm fades dark marks and smoothens skin texture. – PIC FROM INSTAGRAM @ULU.SOLEIL

traditional norms, encouraging everyone to embrace their individuality. Ulu Soleil is proudly planet-conscious, with a sustainable production process from start to finish, using eco-friendly packaging that reduces environmental impact.

The brand is also cruelty-free, ensuring kindness to all living beings. Made locally in Malaysia, Ulu Soleil champions the use of native ingredients, creating body care that not only nourishes the skin but also supports local communities.

### Handmade Heroes

When it comes to natural beauty, Handmade Heroes stands out as a game-changer in Malaysia's skincare scene. Founded in 2013 by Lim Cai Jin and Lynsey Lim, the brand takes pride in using all-natural, vegan and cruelty-free ingredients. Inspired by traditional remedies and botanical healing, Handmade Heroes creates skincare that is as kind to the skin as it is to the environment.

The brand is best known for its Coccolicious Luscious Lip Scrub, an exfoliating lip treatment made with coconut sugar and avocado oil that is designed to keep lips soft and supple. Another standout is the Australian Pink Clay Mask, which detoxifies the skin while boosting radiance.

Handmade Heroes's commitment to clean beauty has earned it a strong following, with customers appreciating its affordability and effectiveness. By combining natural ingredients with innovative formulations, Handmade Heroes emphasises that conscious beauty can be luxurious and accessible.

### Desi Rose Cosmetics

Founded by twin sisters Suvikha and Sucndra Anand Kumar, Desi Rose Cosmetics has been setting a remarkable example in championing diversity and inclusivity within Malaysia's beauty scene.

Born from a desire to see better representation for brown skin tones, Desi Rose is a cosmetics brand that caters to the wide range of skin tones often overlooked in mainstream beauty. At its core, Desi Rose is all about celebrating individuality and empowering everyone to feel seen and beautiful.

The brand offers brown girl-friendly products that enhance and complement deeper skin tones, ensuring makeup lovers no longer have to struggle to find shades that suit them perfectly. Beyond its focus on inclusivity, Desi Rose remains committed to ethical beauty, every product is cruelty-free and vegan, reflecting the founders' dedication to kindness and sustainability.

With its bold colours and empowering message, Desi Rose Cosmetics continues to break barriers, giving brown-skinned beauties the representation they deserve in the local beauty industry.



Desi Rose cosmetics made Malaysia's first ever glitter body oil. – PIC FROM INSTAGRAM @DESIROSECOSMETICS



Handmade Heroes is a body care brand that celebrates sustainability and happy skin. – HANDMADEHEROESPIC





# Emotional journey of discovery

BY YASMIN ZULRAEZ

**DIRECTED** by Jesse Eisenberg, *A Real Pain* is not your typical buddy road trip movie. It is a peculiar blend of comedy and drama that feels like a chaotic family reunion: awkward, emotional and occasionally laugh-out-loud funny.

The film follows two mismatched cousins, David (Eisenberg) and Benji (Kieran Culkin), as they embark on a journey to honour their late grandmother. What starts as a heartfelt pilgrimage quickly devolves into a series of uncomfortable confrontations, existential musings and moments of unexpected hilarity.

The film's strength lies in its ability to balance the absurd with the deeply human. Benji, played with manic brilliance by Culkin, is the kind of character who says the wrong thing at the wrong time but somehow manages to make you root for him.

David, on the other hand, is his straight-laced counterpart, constantly exasperated by Benji's antics but secretly envious of his cousin's unfiltered approach to life. Together, they form a duo that is as dysfunctional as it is endearing.

**Tough watch but worth it**

Let us be clear - *A Real Pain* is not an easy film to watch. It tackles heavy themes like grief, mental health and the lingering effects of trauma with a rawness that can feel uncomfortable at times.

The movie does not shy away from showing the messy, unresolved aspects of life and it demands that viewers approach it with an open mind. This is not a feel-good story where everything wraps up neatly by the end. Instead, it is a poignant reminder that some wounds do not heal, they just become easier to live with.

The film's setting, a tour through a country steeped in history, serves as a powerful backdrop for the cousins' struggles. The juxtaposition of their petty squabbles against the weight of the past creates a sense of unease that lingers long after the credits roll. Eisenberg's writing and direction enable the film to balance these heavy themes with moments of levity, making it a challenging and rewarding experience.

**Dynamic duo**

At the heart of *A Real Pain* is the electric chemistry between Eisenberg and Culkin. Eisenberg's David is the epitome of repressed emotions, his tightly wound demeanour a stark contrast to Culkin's Benji, who is all chaotic energy and unfiltered honesty. Their interactions are a masterclass in comedic timing and emotional depth, with each actor bringing a unique vulnerability to their role.

Culkin, in particular, shines as Benji, delivering a performance that is equal parts hilarious and heartbreaking. His ability to switch from manic humour to raw vulnerability in the blink of an eye is nothing short of mesmerising. Eisenberg, meanwhile,

➤ Eisenberg, Culkin deliver tragi-comic masterpiece



Eisenberg (right) and Culkin, who play David and Benji respectively, deliver standout performances.



Poland's haunting landscapes heighten the emotional depth and complexity of the story.

plays the perfect foil, his deadpan delivery and subtle expressions adding layers to a character who could have easily come across as one-dimensional. Together, they create a dynamic that feels authentic and deeply relatable, even when the situations they find themselves in are anything but.

**Cast:**  
Kieran Culkin, Jesse Eisenberg, Will Sharpe, Jennifer Grey, Kurt Egyiawan  
**Director:**  
Jesse Eisenberg

E-VALUE 7  
ACTING 8  
PLOT 6

**Relatable ensemble**

While Eisenberg and Culkin are the undeniable stars of the film, the supporting cast deserves equal praise. Will Sharpe, Jennifer Grey and Kurt Egyiawan deliver standout performances as members of the tour group, each bringing their quirks and complexities to the table. Their interactions with David and Benji add depth to the narrative, highlighting how people cope with trauma in different ways.

Sharpe's portrayal of James, the mild-mannered tour guide, is particularly noteworthy. His calm demeanour serves as a counterpoint to Benji's chaotic energy, creating some of the film's most memorable moments. Grey, meanwhile, brings a quiet strength to her role as Marcia, a recent divorcee who finds herself drawn to Benji's unfiltered honesty. Together, the ensemble cast creates a rich blend of characters that feels both authentic and compelling.



David (left) and Benji pour their hearts out in a candid and emotional exchange.

**Polarising experience**

Without giving anything away, the ending of *A Real Pain* is likely to polarise audiences. On one hand, it feels unsatisfying, as if the story is left hanging in the balance. On the other hand, it is deeply realistic, capturing the messy, unresolved nature of life. The film does not offer easy answers or tidy resolutions and that is precisely what makes it so powerful.

David and Benji's journey is transformative,

but it does not magically fix all their problems. Instead, it serves as a reminder healing is a process, not a destination. The film's final moments are bittersweet, leaving viewers with a sense of hope tempered by the knowledge some wounds never fully heal. It is a bold choice and one that ultimately makes *A Real Pain* a more impactful and memorable film.

**For open-minded viewers**

*A Real Pain* is not a movie for everyone. Its unusual tone, heavy subject matter and unresolved ending will undoubtedly leave some viewers frustrated. But for those willing to approach it with an open mind, it is a rewarding experience. The film's blend of humour and heartbreak, coupled with standout performances from Eisenberg and Culkin, makes it an exceptional entry in the buddy road trip genre.

At its core, *A Real Pain* is a film about the human condition, about the ways we cope with trauma, the bonds that tie us together and the messy, imperfect nature of life. It is a tough watch, but one that is ultimately worth it. Just do not expect to leave the theatre with all the answers. Sometimes, the most realistic endings are the ones that leave us with more questions than resolutions.



The eclectic mix of travellers is led by mild-mannered tour guide James (right), who is played by Sharpe.



Benji and David (right) share a complicated and fractious bond.



# Jisoo's *Amortage* hits right notes

BY THASHINE SELVAKUMARAN

**B**LACKPINK'S Kim Jisoo has steadily built an identity beyond the K-pop powerhouse group, making her mark as a soloist and actress. Debuting with Blackpink in 2016, she was often seen as the group's lead vocalist, but over the years, she has proven to be much more. In 2021, she made her acting debut in TV series *Snowdrop* and has since balanced music and acting.

Her solo music debut came in 2023 with *Me*, a two-track single album featuring *Flower* and *All Eyes on Me*. While *Flower* mesmerised with its minimalistic elegance, *All Eyes on Me* delivered a more dynamic, pop-driven sound. Now, two years later, Jisoo returns with her first mini album *Amortage*, a four-track project that delves deep into the many shades of love. The title itself is a combination of "amor" (love) and "montage", which perfectly encapsulates this theme. This album offers a rich musical experience, blending her delicate vocal colours with storytelling rooted in love and emotion.

Jisoo co-wrote all four tracks on *Amortage*, collaborating with renowned producers Blisoo and The Wavys. The lead single *Earthquake* comes with a visually stunning music video directed by Christian Breslauer, known for his work with The Weeknd and Doja Cat.

## Track review

### *Earthquake*

Serving as the album's lead single, *Earthquake* is an explosive mix of electronic beats, dramatic synths and pulsating rhythms, co-written by Jisoo, Blisoo and The Wavys. Jisoo's vocals remain airy yet powerful, blending into the instrumental's dynamic build-up.

➤ Blackpink star takes listeners on love-filled journey through music



*Amortage* is Jisoo's first mini album.

The lyrics metaphorically depict love as an unpredictable force, shaking the foundations of one's emotions. Compared to *Flower*, which was subtle and graceful, *Earthquake* is bold and intense, revealing a more daring side of Jisoo's artistry.

The music video, directed by Christian Breslauer, amplifies this theme. Jisoo is seen navigating surreal landscapes such as crumbling buildings, shifting floors and floating objects. This symbolises the emotional turbulence that comes with falling deeply in love. Visually striking and



The album highlights Jisoo's growth as a vocalist and songwriter.



Jisoo continues to balance music and acting.

conceptually rich, the video adds depth to the track's message.

### *Your Love*

The second track takes a gentler approach, leaning into a dreamy pop-ballad. Soft guitar strums and ethereal synths create a nostalgic, wistful mood. *Your Love* captures the innocence and purity of romance, with Jisoo's voice conveying warmth and longing. It feels reminiscent of classic love songs but with a modern twist, making it refreshing and comforting.

Lyrical, it explores the feeling of safety and joy in someone's embrace, making it one of the most tender songs on the album. The chorus stands out with layered harmonies that add depth without

overshadowing Jisoo's delicate delivery. Fans who enjoyed the soft, emotional touch of *Flower* will likely gravitate towards this track.

### *Tears*

Easily the most emotional song on the album, *Tears* is a heartfelt ballad that showcases Jisoo's vocal depth. The piano-led instrumental is simple yet effective, allowing her voice to take centre stage. The lyrics speak of unspoken pain and bittersweet memories, making it one of the most poignant songs in her discography.

Her emotive delivery, particularly in the bridge where her voice slightly cracks, adds a raw authenticity to the track. The stripped-down arrangement, mainly piano and subtle string

elements, creates an intimate atmosphere, highlighting her ability to convey deep emotions without relying on heavy production. If *Your Love* captures the beauty of romance, *Tears* reflects the sorrow that often accompanies it.

### *Hugs & Kisses*

Closing the album on a bright note, *Hugs & Kisses* is playful, upbeat and reminiscent of 2000s pop. It is flirty and fun, offering a stark contrast to the emotional depth of *Tears*. The production features bouncy beats and catchy hooks, making it an instant mood booster.

While the song does not necessarily break new ground musically, Jisoo's playful vocal delivery and the infectious chorus make it memorable. It adds light-hearted, carefree energy to the album.

*Amortage* is a well-rounded mini album that highlights Jisoo's growth as a vocalist and songwriter. The cohesive theme of love ties the project together, while the diverse production keeps it engaging from start to finish.

With *Amortage*, Jisoo takes a bold step forward in her solo career, offering a more complete and personal body of work compared to her debut single album *Me*. As she continues to juggle music and acting, one thing is clear, Jisoo is carving out her own path as a multi-faceted artist, and *Amortage* is proof of her ever-growing potential.

Jisoo takes a bold step forward in her solo career with *Amortage*. — ALL PICS FROM INSTAGRAM @SOOYAAA\_





# Local band to play European festivals

➤ Humiliation to share stage with major international acts

**S**OME bands are just studio hermits while some live for the road. Humiliation is one such band from the latter category. One of Malaysia's finest exponents of crunching death metal, Humiliation has always made it a priority to deliver its brutal sound on the live circuit.

Humiliation's commitment to playing live is not confined to local venues as it is headed to major European festivals. The band has toured the continent in the past and now will play two major dates in the middle of this year.

With the Pitfest and In Flammen festivals taking place during the same period - July 10-12 - the band has been booked to perform at these heavy-duty metal events. Humiliation will make a stop in the Netherlands first for Pitfest before skipping over to Germany for In Flammen.

The band will join heavy hitters such as Dirty Rotten Imbeciles, Tribulation and headliners Cradle of Filth at Pitfest. At In Flammen, the band will share the stage with the likes of Vader, Malevolent Creation and Marduk.

The Kuala Lumpur-based band has been an active outfit since its



Humiliation is set to play festivals in Germany and the Netherlands in July. - PIC FROM FACEBOOK @HUMILIATION

formation in 2009, releasing 14 full-length albums, numerous EPs and various split LPs and singles.

It is great to see Malaysian metal alive and well and being exported abroad.

If you are looking to support Humiliation on its European adventure, tickets and hospitality packages are available at the respective official concert websites. - BY R.BALA

## Mexican band DeerMx explores human-AI boundaries

**HONG KONG-BASED** Mexican band DeerMX has released its latest EP *Ai*, a futuristic sounding rock album that explores themes of identity and connection in a world increasingly defined by technology.

This EP is an evolution from the band's previous one in 2023, *Fables of Humanity and Mother Nature*, and builds upon DeerMX's

psychedelic rock foundations, adding a twist of electronic influence to reflect the EP's themes of the contrast between human nature and artificial intelligence in a modern age where technological advancements have blurred the boundaries between human and artificial intelligence.

In *Ai*, DeerMX brings a more refined sound, alongside more

profound lyrics, embracing a richer sonic palette that showcases the band's growth as artists. The approach of this EP is also more collaborative and organic, with all songs fully produced and arranged by DeerMX, alongside two friends joining them on drums and guitar, bringing in a fresh dynamic to the band.

"When listeners dive into *Ai*, we hope they can feel exposed to something 'out of the box' and find the beauty of the atypical reflected in both the sound and lyrics.

"This EP is about the questions that are linked to our human nature and we aim for it to be able to resonate deeply with all our listeners," said the band.

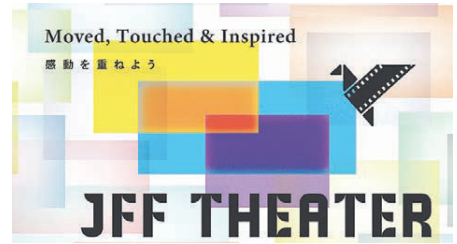
Throughout the record, listeners will be exposed to artificiality (the machine), the search (the subject) and utopia (massifying and homogenising to just one).

The title track *AI* reflects artificial intelligence beautifying reality, enhancing it, distorting it and constructing the visual utopia that has captivated humanity.

DeerMX is an alternative electro-rock band, whose members are Adriana Martinez and Miguel Bastida.



DeerMX members Bastida (left) and Falcon.



The JFF Theatre updates its line-up of films every few months.

## JFF Theatre releases new Japanese film line-up

**THE** Japan Foundation's JFF Theatre has unveiled its new line-up of films that have been split into four special features titled "Bridges Between Hearts", "Delicious Tales of Happiness", "When Passion Meets Comedy" and "Anime to Discover".

**The films in the line-up are:**

*My Broken Mariko*: A road movie about a woman who goes on a journey carrying her dead best friend Mariko's bones.

*I am what I am*: A film about "being your own cheerleader" as a woman, uninterested in romance, seeks to find a life of freedom without outside judgement.

*The God of Ramen*: A moving documentary about a man who started a legendary ramen shop in Tokyo.

*Bread of Happiness*: A cafe in the middle of the great outdoors serves delicious bread and coffee to people with pain in their hearts. A

humanistic drama that is sure to warm one's heart.

*School Meals Time Graduation*: A food comedy about a teacher and a student who love school lunches, and together, appreciate the importance of food.

*Project Dreams - How to Build Mazinger Z's Hangar*: Company employees are depicted earnestly grappling with meaningless things in this drama.

*Jungle Emperor Leo, aka Kimba the White Lion*: Osamu Tezuka's monumental masterpiece that became the cornerstone of Japanese anime.

The JFF Theatre was launched last year as a free global streaming platform offering a diverse selection of Japanese films with multilingual subtitles. Established to meet the growing interest in Japanese cinema by a global audience, the platform regularly updates its line-up of films every few months.



Band members with the 600 fans who showed up for the event.

## 82 Major concludes Malaysian debut with laughter, good times

**KOREAN** band 82 Major recently concluded its Malaysian fan meet, treating fans with exclusive performances and audience interactions.

Organised by iMe Malaysia, the event saw the attendance of over 600 fans at Segi University on Feb 16.

Members Seongil, Yechan, Seongmo, Seongbin, Seokjoon and Dogyun captivated fans with performances of their tracks, such as *First Class*, *Choke* and *Birthday*.

Band members also engaged with fans, greeting and expressing their love in the national language.

"This is our first time in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. We are so happy to meet everyone!" said the band before saying in Malay: "*Saya sangat gembira berada di Malaysia*". (I am so happy to be in Malaysia.)

Band leader Seongil then playfully chimed in: "*Sayang, aku cinta padamu!*" (Baby, I love you).

During the fan meet, band members shared fun facts about each other, participated in a message-reading session and took photos with fans on stage.

They concluded the event by announcing new music and their promise to return to Malaysia soon. "We are preparing for our third album. We will be back soon to meet you all. *Kita janji!* (We promise)," said the band.

Founded in 2023 under Great M Entertainment, the band dropped a pre-release track titled *Sure Thing*, which debuted with its single album *On*.

The group followed up with its first mini-album *Beat By 82* and has since released its second one *X-82*.





theSun  
Malaysian Paper

WEDNESDAY  
FEB 26, 2025

# Classified

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WEDNESDAY | FEB 26, 2025

SPORTS 27

## Raducanu 'offered extra security guards' for Indian Wells

EMMA RADUCANU has been promised extra security if she plays in the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells.

The 22-year-old was seen in a state of distress during her defeat to Karolina Muchova in Dubai last week, after spotting a man who exhibited "fixated behaviour" towards her in the crowd.

Prior to the incident, the same man reportedly approached Raducanu outside a cafe near the tournament hotel, handing her a letter containing his personal details.

The individual was detained by police in the United Arab Emirates and has since been given a restraining order.

After her match, Raducanu immediately flew back to the UK and released a statement thanking fans for their support.

The British player is yet to confirm if she'll take her place in the main draw of the Indian Wells tournament that gets underway next week.

According to *The Times*, Raducanu is likely to play the event and will be offered extra security guards, with the operation overseen by a former US Secret Service agent.

The WTA Tour's vice-president of security is Bob Campbell, who has been in the role since 2013.

Campbell worked as a secret service agent for 20 years between 1983 and 2003. He also worked for Bill Clinton during his presidency before taking a role with Major League Baseball.

Raducanu is reportedly set to be offered up to five extra guards when she is at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. The guards could also potentially accompany her off-site to her accommodation.

The 2021 US Open champion is currently managed by IMG, who could also opt to employ extra security for their client.

The saga in Dubai isn't the first time she's been targeted by a stalker since her incredible Grand Slam win in New York.

In 2022, a man was convicted and handed a five-year restraining order after stalking Raducanu outside her home. The Brit was still a teenager at the time. - Express Newspapers

### 302 Jobs

**theSun** Malaysian Paper

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- Manage employee benefits programs and ensure compliance with regulations.
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- Executive : 1+ years of experience in HR & Admin or a related field
- Senior : 3+ years of experience in HR & Admin or a related field
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- Fresh graduates are encourage to apply for Assistant Executive Post.
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Send in your CV with your photo via email to : [thesun.hr2@gmail.com](mailto:thesun.hr2@gmail.com) (Closing Date: 28th February 2025)

### 322 Notices

**DALAM MAHKAMAH MAJISTRET DI KAJANG DALAM NEGERI SELANGOR DARUL EHSAN, MALAYSIA**  
GUAMAN SWI. NO: BH-A72KVC-441-172024

ANTARA

COLUMBIA ASIA SDN. BHD. (N. Pendaftaran: 199601016009 (38359-P)) ...PLAINTIF

DAN

MOHD AZRI BIN ABU BAKAR (No. KP: B10915-14-5641) ...DEFENDAN

**PENTYAMPAIAN GANTI-BENTUK IKLAN**

Kepada :-

MOHD AZRI BIN ABU BAKAR (No. KP: B10915-14-5641) Kuarters Pendidikan Alam Damai, Persiaran Bistari, Blok F-0-4, Alam Damai, 50000 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.

Amil perhatian bahawa satu tindakan telah dimulakan terhadap kamu dalam Writ No. BH-A72KVC-441-172024 oleh COLUMBIA ASIA SDN. BHD. (No. Pendaftaran: 199601016009 (38359-P)) yang mempunyai alamat penyampaian di Tingkat 7, Wisma Complant 1, No. 2, Jalan SS16/4, 47500 Subang Jaya, Selangor dan mempunyai pengiraan tergelar Columbia Asia Hospital Cheras yang beralamat di Lot 33107, Jalan Selayang, 43200 Cheras, Selangor dalam mana tuntutan plaintif untuk jumlah wang sebanyak RM 9,480.47 dengan faedah 5% setahun ke atas jumlah pengiraan mulai tarikh penitahan Writ. Saman sehingga tarikh penyelesaian secepatnya.

Dan bahawa telah dipertimbangkan bahawa penyampaian writ itu dalam tindakan tersebut kepada kamu kena dilaksanakan melalui iklan ini.

Jika kamu berhasrat untuk membuat dalam tindakan tersebut kamu mestilah memosokkan kehadiran atau melalui penguatkuasaan kamu di Mahkamah Majistret Kuala Lumpur dalam masa tujuh (7) hari daripada Tarikh tamatnya iklan ini, termasuk hari penyampaian itu. Jika kamu ingkar berbuat demikian, satu pengiraan ingkar kehadiran boleh diberikan terhadap kamu.

AMIL PERHATIAN bahawa Tindakan ini telah ditatapkan untuk Pengurusan Kes pada 18.03.2025 jam 9.00 pagi secara e-review di hadapan Puan Nurul Hafzan kamu dikendalikan hadir pada tarikh tersebut.

Kamu boleh memohon kepada Mahkamah untuk memeriksa Kertas-Kertas kamu tersebut.

Bertarikh pada 18 Februari 2025

-T.T-

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Pegawai Mahkamah

Penyampaian Ganti (Bentuk Iklan) ini dilakukan oleh Kewin Wong Phang & Associates, Pegaungacara Plaintif beralamat di Blok J-3-24, Kompleks Pusat Bandar Puchong, 47160 Puchong, Selangor, Malaysia.  
Tel: 603-8600 2162  
Faks: 603-8600 2163  
Email: ghoon@gmail.com  
(Ruj. kamu: LT/WKPA/11824/ Columbia(CHERAS)/A29(h))

### 322 Notices

**IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF INTERFLOW TANK CONTAINER SYSTEM SDN. BHD. Registration No. 198701007987 (166704-W) (In Members' Voluntary Winding-up)**

**NOTICE OF FINAL MEETING**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT pursuant to Section 459 of the Companies Act, 2016, the Final Meeting of the Members of the above-named Company will be held at Unit 26-8, Level 26, Tower A, The Vertical Business Suites, Bangsar South City, No. 8, Jalan Kerinchi, 59200 Kuala Lumpur on Friday, March 28, 2025 at 11.00 a.m. for the following purposes:-

**AGENDA**

1. To receive the Liquidator's Final Accounts showing the manner in which the winding-up has been conducted and to receive any explanations thereon; and
2. To resolve under Section 518(3)(b) of the Companies Act, 2016, that the books, accounts, documents and records of the Company and of the Liquidator shall be destroyed after the expiration of three (3) months from the date of the Final Meeting.

LEE CHUN WENG  
Liquidator  
Dated: 26 February 2025

Note:

1. A member entitled to attend and vote at the above meeting may appoint a proxy to attend and vote on their behalf and such proxy need not be a member of the Company.
2. The instrument appointing a proxy must be lodged with the Liquidator at No. 13-1, Empire Galleria, Jalan Empayar, Off Persiaran Sultan Ibrahim /K01, 41150 Klang, Selangor Darul Ehsan on Wednesday 2 April 2025 at 2.30 p.m. for the following purposes:-

### 322 Notices

**IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF PEMBANGUNAN TRANS SDN. BHD. 197401000949 (17653-A) (In Members' Voluntary Liquidation)**

**NOTICE OF FINAL MEETING**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN pursuant to Section 459 of the Companies Act, 2016 that a Final Meeting of the Company will be held at Suite 729, 7th Floor, Menara Hai-O, Jalan Bukit Bintang, 55100 Kuala Lumpur on Friday, 28 March 2025 at 11.00 a.m. for the following purposes:-

- 1) To receive an account from the Liquidator showing the manner in which the winding-up has been conducted and the assets of the Company has been disposed of and to hear any explanation that may be given by the Liquidator.
- 2) To determine pursuant to Section 518(3)(b) of the Companies Act, 2016 the manner in which the books, accounts and documents of the Company and of the Liquidator thereon, shall be disposed of.

Dated this 28th day of February 2025.

FOONG CHEE SUI  
Liquidator

A member of the Company entitled to attend and vote at the above meeting may appoint a proxy to attend and vote on his behalf. A proxy need not be a member of the Company. The instrument appointing a proxy must be deposited at the Liquidator's office, Suite 729, 7th Floor, Menara Hai-O, Jalan Bukit Bintang, 55100 Kuala Lumpur, not less than 48 hours before the time for holding the meeting.

### 322 Notices

**IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF PIMA CONSTRUCTION SDN. BHD. Registration No.: 201301038498 (1068317-U) (In Members' Voluntary Liquidation)**

**NOTICE OF FINAL MEETING**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT pursuant to Section 459 of the Companies Act 2016, the Final Meeting of the Members of the Company will be held at Unit 26-8, Level 26, Tower A, The Vertical Business Suites, Bangsar South City, No. 8, Jalan Kerinchi, 59200 Kuala Lumpur on Friday, March 28, 2025 at 11.00 a.m. for the following purposes:-

**AGENDA**

- 1) To receive and consider the Liquidator's account of receipts, payments and statements of distribution to the contributory, showing the manner in which the winding-up has been conducted and to hear any explanations arising therefrom.
- 2) To resolve that under Section 518(3)(b) of the Companies Act 2016, the books, accounts and documents of the Company and Liquidator be destroyed after the expiration of three (3) months from the date of final meeting.
- 3) To approve and accept the resignation of the Liquidator under Section 513(3) of the Companies Act 2016.

Yeoh Sheong Lee  
Liquidator  
February 25, 2025

### 322 Notices

**IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF JUTA DIMENSI (M) SDN. BHD. Registration No. 199201001482 (222969-H) (In Members' Voluntary Winding-up)**

**NOTICE OF FINAL MEETING**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT pursuant to Section 459 of the Companies Act, 2016, the Final Meeting of the Members of the above-named Company will be held at No. 13 Persiaran Greentown 5, Pusat Perdagangan Greentown, 30450 Ipoh, Perak Darul Ridzuan on Wednesday 2 April 2025 at 11.00 a.m. for the following purposes:-

**AGENDA**

1. To receive the Liquidator's Final Accounts showing the manner in which the winding-up has been conducted and to receive any explanations thereon; and
2. To resolve under Section 518(3)(b) of the Companies Act, 2016, that the books, accounts, documents and records of the Company and of the Liquidator shall be destroyed after the expiration of three (3) months from the date of the Final Meeting.

LEE CHAN HING  
Liquidator  
Dated: 26 February 2025

Note:

1. A member entitled to attend and vote at the above meeting may appoint a proxy to attend and vote on their behalf and such proxy need not be a member of the Company.
2. The instrument appointing a proxy must be lodged with the Liquidator at No. 13 Persiaran Greentown 5, Pusat Perdagangan Greentown, 30450 Ipoh, Perak Darul Ridzuan not less than 48 hours before the time set for holding the meeting.

### 322 Notices

**IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF MOORES ROWLAND INSOLVENCY SERVICES P.L.T. (Reg. No. 199301019190 (264927-W)) (In Liquidation)**

**NOTICE OF MEETING**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT pursuant to Section 459 of the Companies Act, 2016, the Final Meeting of the Members of the above-named Company will be held at Unit 26-8, Level 26, Tower A, The Vertical Business Suites, Bangsar South City, No. 8, Jalan Kerinchi, 59200 Kuala Lumpur on Friday, March 28, 2025 at 10.00 a.m. for the following purposes:-

**AGENDA**

1. Briefing on the ownership info obtained from previous liquidator.
2. Briefing on the valuation report conducted by valuer on Kompleks Cayman Kullim
3. Propose resolution of Kompleks Cayman Kullim
4. Any other matters.

Khor Yong Yong  
Liquidator  
c/o MOORES ROWLAND INSOLVENCY SERVICES P.L.T.  
33B, Jalan Pahang, 10400 Georgetown, Pulau Pinang  
Tel: 604-227 4111

Dated this 26th day of February 2025.

Please contact us at [max.fang.chan@moorsrowland.com.my](mailto:max.fang.chan@moorsrowland.com.my) or 012-455 3727 to obtain the meeting platform and ID before the meeting.

Forms of general and special proxies are enclosed herewith. Proxies to be used at the meeting must be lodged not later than 12 o'clock noon on the 9th of March 2025.

### 322 Notices

**IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF PK LUMBER CO. SDN. BHD. Registration No. 198701002313 (160984-K) (In Members' Voluntary Winding-up)**

**NOTICE OF FINAL MEETING**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT pursuant to Section 459 of the Companies Act, 2016, the Final Meeting of the Members of the above-named Company will be held at No. 13 Persiaran Greentown 5, Pusat Perdagangan Greentown, 30450 Ipoh, Perak Darul Ridzuan on Thursday 3 April 2025 at 11.00 a.m. for the following purposes:-

**AGENDA**

1. To receive the Liquidator's Final Accounts showing the manner in which the winding-up has been conducted and to receive any explanations thereon; and
2. To resolve under Section 518(3)(b) of the Companies Act, 2016, that the books, accounts, documents and records of the Company and of the Liquidator shall be destroyed after the expiration of three (3) months from the date of the Final Meeting.

LEE CHAN HING  
Liquidator  
Dated: 26 February 2025

Note:

1. A member entitled to attend and vote at the above meeting may appoint a proxy to attend and vote on their behalf and such proxy need not be a member of the Company.
2. The instrument appointing a proxy must be lodged with the Liquidator at No. 13 Persiaran Greentown 5, Pusat Perdagangan Greentown, 30450 Ipoh, Perak Darul Ridzuan not less than 48 hours before the time set for holding the meeting.

### 322 Notices

**IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF WONDER EXPRESSIONS SDN. BHD. Registration No. 200701004059 (798531-A) (In Members' Voluntary Winding-up)**

**NOTICE OF FINAL MEETING**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT pursuant to Section 459 of the Companies Act, 2016, the Final Meeting of the Members of the above-named Company will be held at No. 13 Persiaran Greentown 5, Pusat Perdagangan Greentown, 30450 Ipoh, Perak Darul Ridzuan on Thursday 3 April 2025 at 11.00 a.m. for the following purposes:-

**AGENDA**

1. To receive the Liquidator's Final Accounts showing the manner in which the winding-up has been conducted and to receive any explanations thereon; and
2. To resolve under Section 518(3)(b) of the Companies Act, 2016, that the books, accounts, documents and records of the Company and of the Liquidator shall be destroyed after the expiration of three (3) months from the date of the Final Meeting.

LEE CHAN HING  
Liquidator  
Dated: 26 February 2025

Note:

1. A member entitled to attend and vote at the above meeting may appoint a proxy to attend and vote on their behalf and such proxy need not be a member of the Company.
2. The instrument appointing a proxy must be lodged with the Liquidator at No. 13 Persiaran Greentown 5, Pusat Perdagangan Greentown, 30450 Ipoh, Perak Darul Ridzuan not less than 48 hours before the time set for holding the meeting.

SHORTS

Match-winner Rachin relishes return

**NEW ZEALAND'S** Rachin Ravindra yesterday thanked his support staff and well-wishers for the care after a freak on-field accident as he returned to action with a match-winning century that booked his side's passage to the semifinals of the Champions Trophy.

The left-hander missed New Zealand's opening victory over Pakistan after being hit by the ball on his forehead when fielding in a recent tri-series match against the same opponents.

"Yeah, definitely a freak accident," Ravindra told reporters yesterday. "I think things like that don't really happen too often."

He said: "I'm very grateful to have a great support crew around me in terms of Black Caps set up, coaches and doc and physio that have been able to come out of it reasonably well and I'm extremely grateful for the love and support of everyone."

"Having the support around me has been great and being able to come here and contribute to a win for the Black Caps, an environment that I hold dear and I enjoy so much playing for... it was cool to come back and really enjoy my cricket again after that weird moment."

England lose Carse to injury

**ENGLAND** fast bowler Brydon Carse has been ruled out of the Champions Trophy with a toe injury and replaced in the squad by leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed, tournament organisers said yesterday.

The 29-year-old Carse missed England's training session yesterday, 48 hours before their second Group B match against Afghanistan in Lahore.

The ICC said it had approved Rehan as a replacement for Carse, who took 1-69 in seven overs as Australia chased down a 352-run target to win by five wickets on Saturday.

"The Event Technical Committee of the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 has approved Rehan Ahmed as a replacement for Brydon Carse in the England squad," the ICC said in a statement.

"Rehan, who has played six ODIs, was named as a replacement after Carse was ruled out due to an injury to the toe."

Rehan, who has taken 10 wickets in five ODI innings, was expected to join the England squad late yesterday.

England are winless and sit third in the Group B standings behind South Africa and Australia.

# Max boycott threat

Four-time world champion prepared to snub F1 events in London after being booed

BY KIERAN JACKSON

**MAX VERSTAPPEN** has threatened to boycott any future F1 launches which take place in England after being booed by sections of the British crowd at F1 75 Live last week.

Four-time F1 world champion Verstappen appeared on screen to a mixed reception, with initial boos being drowned out eventually by cheers, after being introduced by host Jack Whitehall in London last week.

Christian Horner, Verstappen's boss at Red Bull, also received jeers as he entered the stage in The O2 ahead of his team's car livery reveal for the 2025 season.

Verstappen and teammate Liam Lawson were also the only drivers not to be interviewed on stage during the event.

Jos Verstappen, Max's father and former F1 driver, told *RaceXpress* over the weekend that it was "unacceptable" that his son was booed by the 15,000-strong crowd.

"In itself, I thought it was a reasonable set-up (of the event), but I thought it was embarrassing what happened there with Red Bull Racing, that Horner was booed so much," Verstappen Snr said.

"Max was booed too. Then you are there for Formula 1 to promote the sport a little bit and all. Then you are booed by the public. I think that is unacceptable."

"Look, I understand it. Max is the only one who puts the English drivers under pressure and who tells it exactly how it is, but I think it is unacceptable and a real disappointment what happened there."

"No, Max doesn't feel like being booed in front of 25,000 people. He also says: 'If this is in England again next year, they certainly won't see me there', and I completely agree with him."

It is understood the subject will be raised at a World Motor Sport Council meeting this week.

Sources have told *The Independent* that a similar launch event next year is unlikely, due to the need for more pre-season testing time given new engine and chassis regulations, but no final decision has been made.

Verstappen Snr was embroiled in a bitter feud with Horner this time last year, insisting Red Bull could "explode" if the team principal remained in charge amid an investigation into "inappropriate behaviour."

Horner was cleared of any wrongdoing, twice.

Verstappen's words come after the FIA, F1's governing body who were also booed as their logo appeared on screen last week, released a statement criticising the "tribalist" reaction of British fans.

An FIA spokesperson said: "Great rivalries throughout the history of motorsport have contributed to making it such an exciting experience for fans. But what underpins sport at all levels is a culture of respect."

"As such, it was disappointing to hear the crowd's tribalist reaction to FIA Formula 1 world champion Max Verstappen and his Red Bull team principal and CEO, Christian Horner, at the F1 launch in London."

"Max and Christian have both contributed greatly to the sport we love. In the season ahead we should not lose sight of that."

"We urge the sporting community to consider the impact of their actions both online and offline."

Pre-season testing takes place in Bahrain this week, starting on Wednesday, with the first race in Australia on March 16. - *The Independent*



## Ravindra ton powers NZ into semi's

**RACHIN RAVINDRA** struck a superb 112 to lead New Zealand into the Champions Trophy semifinals with a five-wicket win over Bangladesh and in turn dump hosts Pakistan out of the semifinal race.

The result in Rawalpindi also ensured India's semifinal berth in the 50-over tournament as Bangladesh became the other team from Group A to be knocked out.

Both New Zealand and India have two wins from two matches and will now meet in Dubai on Sunday to decide team one and two from the group.

New Zealand have been the team to beat in this group after they humbled Pakistan by 60 runs in the tournament opener.

Coming in as firm favourites in their second match, New Zealand elected to field first and spinner Michael Bracewell

returned career-best ODI figures of 4-36 to restrict Bangladesh to 236-9.

Chasing 237 for victory, New Zealand slipped to 15-2 and 72-3 before Ravindra and fellow left-hander Tom Latham, who made 55, added 129 for the fourth wicket.

Both were dismissed before the end but New Zealand still achieved the target with 23 balls to spare.

New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner showered praise on player-of-the-match Bracewell for adjusting to flat tracks.

"He's a quality bowler now in the way he's been able to change his pace on these wickets where it tends to be a touch flatter," Santner said.

"He's been outstanding... the key in this tournament is to be able to take wickets in that middle phase (of matches). Today we were able to do that"

Santner also praised Ravindra, who returned to the team after recovering from a nasty blow to his forehead in a recent tri-series match against Pakistan.

"He's doing Rachin things. He loves ICC events and looked like he never left the game," Santner said of the left-hander, who only came into the side due to Daryl Mitchell's illness.

"He wasn't as fluent as he probably would have liked (to be) but when he's going he's tough to stop and that partnership with Tom really put us in a good spot."

Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto rued his team's limp batting display but looked ahead to tomorrow's dead rubber against hosts Pakistan.

"It's an important game. If we finish on a high note it'll give us a lot of confidence," Shanto said. - *AFP/Reuters*

Rachin Ravindra plays a shot during the ICC Champions Trophy match against Bangladesh. - *AFP/ICC*

## What went wrong for Pakistan in Champions Trophy?

**TITLE-HOLDERS** and hosts Pakistan crashed out in the group phase of the Champions Trophy after losing to New Zealand and arch-rivals India.

They still have a match to play, against Bangladesh tomorrow, but their tournament is over - a disappointing end to their first hosting of a major international cricket event in three decades.

Here's a look at where it all went wrong for Mohammad Rizwan's men in the 50-over tournament:

Uncertain build-up

Rizwan was appointed white-ball skipper in October last year and led Pakistan to an impressive 2-1 ODI win over world champions Australia - their first series victory in 22 years in the country.

They also won in Zimbabwe and inflicted on South Africa their first home whitewash, with a 3-0 scoreline.

But fast-rising opener Saim Ayub injured his ankle during a subsequent Test in South Africa.

To add to the home team's woes, fellow opener Fakhar Zaman was ruled out of the rest of the tournament after the first match with a muscle injury.

Pakistan's much-vaunted pace attack of Shaheen Afridi, Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf looked rusty and failed to control the death overs.

Poor squad selection

Pakistan selectors resisted calls from former players and pundits to include a second spinner in

the 15-man squad and instead chose only one in Abrar Ahmed.

They relied on part-time spinners Salman Agha and Khushdil Shah, who have managed just one wicket between them in two matches.

Pakistan also erred by not selecting a regular opener and took the risky step of promoting out-of-form Babar Azam to partner Fakhar.

When Fakhar was ruled out they brought in Imam-ul-Haq as a replacement. He made just 10 as Pakistan were crushed by title favourites India by six wickets.

Old-style cricket

Former Pakistan captain and popular all-rounder Shahid Afridi accused Pakistan of playing

outdated cricket.

"In 2025 Pakistan was playing the cricket style of the 1980s and 1990s while other teams had progressed well to adopt an aggressive and modern style," he said.

"The ailment of playing too many dot balls also hurt our game."

Pakistan played 152 dot balls against India in scoring 241 in 49.4 overs, including a record 28 balls with no scores in the first six overs.

Their total of 260 in 47.2 overs in the defeat to New Zealand had 162 dot balls.

"The mindset of Pakistan players does not match with modern-day cricket," said Afridi.

"We need a complete overhaul of the system so that we can produce players with an aggressive mindset." - *AFP*



## SIDENETTING

## 'No corruption' in Ligue 1

**MARSEILLE** president Pablo Longoria said yesterday he regretted his outburst in which he claimed his club were the victims of "corruption" following a 3-0 Ligue 1 loss to Auxerre. Spaniard Longoria launched into a tirade after Saturday's match at the Stade de l'Abbe-Deschamps, shouting "this is real corruption" in response to what he and other Marseille officials felt was unfair treatment by the referee towards their team. "It wasn't appropriate and that word, yes, I regret it," a contrite Longoria told *AFP* in an interview. "Everyone explained to me what it (corruption) meant in French, because in Spanish it has a broader meaning. Mind you, that doesn't justify anything. But I've never in my life thought of anything like money exchanges or financial transactions, never. I'd like to say that there's no corruption in French football. But that there are things that aren't clear and that need to be improved, for everyone, yes." Longoria has been summoned to appear before the French league's disciplinary committee today, *AFP* learned from multiple sources closer to the matter. "I have to take responsibility for what I've done," said Longoria.

## Cherries' Jebbison switches allegiance

**DANIEL JEBBISON** of Premier League side Bournemouth has decided to switch his international commitment to Canada from England and yesterday the forward was listed on Canada's preliminary squad for the 2025 Concacaf Nations League Finals. The Canadian-born Jebbison, who is eligible to represent England and Jamaica through his parents, spent years as an England youth international and went to the U-20 World Cup with the Three Lions in 2023. Canada Soccer told *Reuters* the 21-year-old Jebbison cannot officially play for Canada until his "Change of Association" has been approved by Fifa. According to a source familiar with the situation who spoke on the condition of anonymity, Canada Soccer expects Jebbison's one-time transfer to be completed before naming a final 23-man roster and potentially even this week. Jebbison has not scored in eight Premier League appearances off the bench for Bournemouth this season but does have two goals in two FA Cup appearances.

## Footballer dies in shopping mall fall

**UGANDAN** police said yesterday they were investigating the death of Nigerian footballer Abubakar Lawal who fell from a shopping mall balcony in Kampala. The 29-year-old striker played for local premiership club Vipers. He fell from the third floor of Voicemail Shopping Arcad on Monday, police said in a statement. He had been visiting a Tanzanian friend staying in one of the residential apartments that form part of the mall. The friend told police she had left him alone shortly before the fall. "Authorities are retrieving CCTV footage and conducting thorough interrogations to establish the exact circumstances surrounding the incident," police said. The Vipers Sports Club said in a statement: "We are deeply saddened to announce the sudden and untimely passing of our beloved player, Abubakar Lawal, who left us this morning. Our thoughts and prayers are with Lawal's family, club fans, friends and loved ones during this difficult time," it added.

## Brazilian club denounce decapitated mannequins of players

**BRAZILIAN** club Cruzeiro reported threats to police yesterday after decapitated mannequins, dressed in jerseys of three of their players and smeared with red stains resembling blood, were found hanging from a bridge in Belo Horizonte. The mannequins wearing the numbers three, 10 and 12 shirts of players Marlon, William and Matheus Pereira respectively, appeared two days after Cruzeiro's 4-2 loss on penalties to America MG in the Campeonato Mineiro semifinals. Marlon and William missed penalties in the shootout loss, while Pereira, who was sidelined on Saturday, has faced criticism from fans over his desire to play in Europe and a recent failed move to Russia's Zenit St Petersburg. "Cruzeiro vehemently repudiates and regrets the attacks on the lives of some of its players that took place last night," the club said in a statement. "The club has called in the security forces so that all measures can be taken in this regard. Episodes like these only highlight how much we need to evolve as a society." Cruzeiro also condemned death threats from fans against America goalkeeper Matheus Mendes, who saved a penalty in Saturday's penalty shootout.

## Ranieri all praise for resurgent Roma

**ROMA** beat last-placed Monza 4-0 to extend its unbeaten Serie A run to 10 games and deepen the Lombardy club's already serious relegation fears yesterday.

The win will delight Roma coach Claudio Ranieri, who has watched his charges put together the best run of form in the league in 2025.

Roma has taken 20 of a possible 24 points since the turn of the year, a run anchored by the best defence in the league over the same period.

"I asked the team to approach this match with immediate strength and dedication," Ranieri said.

"The boys understood that the moment was too important," he added.

"As I always tell everyone after a win, let's take care of our minds and think about the next match, which I repeat will be difficult.

"My secret? I don't know. I always try to find the right feeling with the team. If I find that I know that the team will give me more than what they have at that moment. It's a question of sensitivity and respect.

"The thing I'm happiest about is that these guys are winning back the fans, who come to the stadium with the awareness of seeing a team that fights."

The home side went ahead in the 10th

minute through Alexis Saelemaekers.

Three teammates lined up expecting a cross but the Belgian winger cut inside from the right and curled a fine shot into the far corner of the net.

Uzbek striker Eldor Shomurodov doubled its lead. Matias Soule Malvano twisted and turned inside the box and Shomurodov headed home unmarked.

Spanish fullback Angelino made it 3-0 18 minutes from time with a low drive and Cristante added a fourth three minutes from time with a glancing header from a corner.

The defeat left Monza three points adrift at the bottom of Serie A. - Agencies

## Mourinho in hot soup

Galatasaray accuse Fenerbahce boss of 'racist statements' after Istanbul derby



**GALATASARAY** have accused Jose Mourinho of making "racist statements" and said they will initiate criminal proceedings against the Fenerbahce manager over his comments following their 0-0 Super Lig draw yesterday.

While it was not clear which statements Galatasaray were referring to, Mourinho said the home side's bench had been "jumping like monkeys" and that the match would have been a disaster if a Turkish referee had been in charge.

Yesterday's game was refereed by Slovenian Slavko Vincic after both clubs requested a foreign official take charge.

Galatasaray said on X that Mourinho had "persistently issued derogatory statements directed towards the Turkish people" since taking up his role in the league.

"Today, his discourse has escalated beyond merely immoral comments into unequivocally inhumane rhetoric," the club said.

"We hereby formally declare our intention to initiate criminal proceedings concerning the racist statements made by Jose Mourinho, and shall accordingly submit official complaints to UEFA and FIFA."

Mourinho and Fenerbahce did not immediately respond to a request for comment from *Reuters* sent outside normal business hours in Turkey.

Former Chelsea, Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur manager Mourinho has previously been fined and suspended for his comments about Turkish match officials. And the Portuguese was again critical of Turkish referees in a press conference after the match.

"I went to the referees' dressing room

after the game. Of course, the fourth official was there, a Turkish referee," Mourinho told the press conference.

"I told him (Vincic), 'Thank you to come here because you come for a big match and you are responsible for a big match.

"And I turned to the fourth official and I (said) 'this match, if you are the referee, this match would be a disaster.'

"And when I say him, I say the general tendency."

Mourinho also praised Vincic for not giving a yellow card to defender Yusuf Akkicek early in the match despite the animated reaction of the Galatasaray bench to a challenge.

"I have also to thank the referee because with a Turkish referee after the big dive in the first minute, their bench jumping like monkeys on the top of the kid, with a Turkish referee you would have a yellow card after one minute and after five minutes I would have to change him," he added.

Yesterday's match was disrupted midway through when pyrotechnics were launched towards the Galatasaray crowd by the travelling fans.

A whopping 30,000 police officers were reportedly brought in to help manage crowd trouble ahead of the clash.

It was Mourinho's second taste of the derby vs Galatasaray, having been beaten by the record Turkish champions 3-1 earlier in the season.

The result leaves Galatasaray six points clear at the top of the Turkish Super Lig table, with Fenerbahce sat in second.

The match-up is considered one of the fiercest in world football and is dubbed the "The Intercontinental Derby" - a reference to the fact both clubs sit on either side of the European and Asian divide in Istanbul. - Reuters/Express Newspapers

## Ferguson raring to get started at Rangers

**FORMER** Rangers captain Barry Ferguson has reflected on "a whirlwind 24 hours" after being placed in charge of first-team affairs until the end of the season following Philippe Clement's sacking.

Saturday's 2-0 home defeat to St Mirren proved to be the final straw for Clement, with the club announcing the Belgian's departure on Sunday night after 16 months at the helm.

The surprise loss left second-placed Rangers 13 points behind Old Firm rivals Celtic in the Scottish Premiership and came after a damaging Scottish Cup reverse to minnows Queen's Park on Feb 9.

Ex-Scotland midfielder Ferguson won five league titles, five Scottish Cups and five League Cups across two spells at Ibrox.

"If I am being honest, it came out of the blue, so it has been a whirlwind 24 hours, but I am just happy to get it done, get my staff together, get to the training ground and get going," Ferguson told *Rangers TV*.

"I had to be respectful that my backroom staff were in jobs elsewhere, so we had to get all this sorted.

"Thankfully, the guys worked hard, and so did the chief executive and the chairman, and we got it done quicker than expected.

"When I was asked about this job, it was one I couldn't turn down. Albeit it is only for three months, but it is my job to go and get a kick out of this group of players."

Assessing Rangers this season, Ferguson added: "In terms of Europe, some of the

performances have been top class, but domestically, that is your bread and butter, that is where you have got to win most weeks.

"You are always going to have a bump in the road, but I think there have been too many bumps in the road, so it is my job as a manager and the staff's job to try and get a level of consistency in the squad.

"It is all about winning at Rangers. That is how I was brought up, and that is the way I want my players to be.

"You have to win every game with the demands and the expectation put on you here. When people come to watch, they expect you to win games, and I don't think we have won enough this year." - The Independent

BY RICHARD JOLLY

**W**HILE Sir Jim Ratcliffe announced a fresh round of redundancies yesterday, the facetious suggestion is that perhaps he should add the head coach, his assistants and Manchester United's players on the list.

United departed Goodison Park doubly relieved, by a comeback in a match when Everton were vastly superior, by the injury-time rethink by Andy Madley to overturn his own decision to give the hosts a penalty. United were dire nonetheless.

A couple of hours later, West Ham clinched victory at Arsenal to mean United only held on to 15th place on goal difference.

The number has a further significance: they have played 15 League games under Ruben Amorim, taking 15 points.

It isn't quite relegation form, much as the Evertonians enjoyed chanting "going down" when they boasted a 2-0 lead; but over Amorim's reign, only the three promoted clubs have collected fewer points.

The watching Sir Alex Ferguson is always used as proof that managers need time; some do, albeit with the caveat that Ferguson is the exception to every rule. A criticism of Amorim is that, with more time, his United have got worse.

They have taken eight points from their last 10

# Hammer to fall?

*Amorim has made United worse – is there a decision to make?*

matches. They were flattered by a draw against Everton, just as they were by victory at Fulham.

They were the inferior team for 75 minutes when they beat Southampton. It leaves a 2-2 at Anfield as a lone deserved and impressive result.

Bruno Fernandes rescued United at Everton. A reason why the superclubs never normally slip this low is that they have individuals capable of securing results, even when everything else is going wrong, and the victory over Southampton came courtesy of another, in Amad Diallo.

David Moyes had reasons to rue Fernandes' intervention but a man who now seems at peace with his past may also study the numbers.

The Scot won 50% of his League games in charge of United. Amorim's victory percentage is just 26.67%.

Different times, different teams and the Portuguese did not inherit a side who had been crowned champions, but revealing nonetheless.

Amorim did not buy this squad, with the recent exceptions of Patrick Dorgu and the teenager Ayden Heaven but, apart from the loanee Carlos Alcaraz, the only player at Everton bought by Moyes was Seamus Coleman, recruited in 2009.

Moyes has galvanised Everton since his return. It is not entirely Amorim's fault his United have looked drained of energy; not when they have so many slow players.

But they cannot press, or pass at pace. Whatever his pre-match instructions, they begin games badly. They have one goal before half-time in their last 11 League matches; even that was a penalty.

Amorim was supposed to be a progressive appointment but who has progressed under him? Apart from Amad, now sadly injured, perhaps no one.

Some have regressed, including a striker starved of service. Rasmus Hojlund has not scored

in his last 16 appearances in all competitions.

His sidekick Joshua Zirkzee is goalless in his last 12 in the Premier League. Meanwhile, a seemingly rejuvenated Marcus Rashford was pivotal in Aston Villa's comeback to beat Chelsea.

Amorim exiled Rashford. At Goodison, with more meagre resources and no pretence a philosophy comes first, Moyes has taken a limited group of players and looked for a way to win. There could be a lesson for Amorim there, were he willing to learn it.

At some point, United's powerbrokers may have to decide if they have put a square peg in a round hole.

Ratcliffe and Ineos thought they had found the future in Amorim, instead, they have made the present more unpleasant.

Perhaps short-term pain will lead to long-term gain. But so far, there is scant evidence it will. – The Independent

## SHORTS

### Devils to cut jobs, bonuses and free lunches

**MANCHESTER UNITED** will cut around 150-200 more jobs as part of an overhaul to return to profitability after five years of losses, the Premier League soccer club said yesterday.

The plan is in addition to 250 jobs removed last year, the club said.

The club has been restructuring and cutting costs since British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe took a 25% stake last year and took charge of football operations to try to revive its fortunes on the pitch.

In September, the 20-time English champions reported its fifth straight annual loss as it missed out on the lucrative European Champions League competition.

"We have lost money for the past five consecutive years. This cannot continue," CEO Omar Berrada said in a statement.

The restructuring plan includes an end to free lunches for staff in the Old Trafford canteen to save more than £1 million (RMS.5m) a year, a source close to the club told Reuters.

Some staff will move from Old Trafford to the new training facility at Carrington near Manchester and all the club's leadership will be based in Manchester, the source said.

Executive bonuses will be paid at a reduced rate this year and then transition to a revised scheme based more firmly on the club's football and financial performance, the source added.

### Make Anfield horrible: Van Dijk

**VIRGIL VAN DIJK** has called on Liverpool's players and supporters to make Anfield as horrible as possible for the opponents who block their path to their 20th league title.

Liverpool went 11 points clear at the top of the Premier League by securing a 2-0 victory over the champions Manchester City on Sunday.

Now they have seven of their remaining League games at home, including the next three: Newcastle, Southampton and Everton.

Anfield was nervy in the closing stages of last week's win over Wolves but Van Dijk believes that, if it is at its most intimidating, it can help Arne Slot's side in the run-in.

He said: "It's pretty normal, (with) humans, there could be some anxious feelings kicking in, and that could still be the case, but I think it only helps us and them as well to make Anfield horrible for the opponent."

"Most of the time we have been doing that, and obviously the way we play obviously helps with that as well."

"How many home games are left? Seven out of 11. So let's make sure those seven are going to be amazing, as loud as possible, and I don't think we have to speak about it, because normally that is the case."

## Gonzalez throws cold water on Rodri comparison

BY RICHARD JOLLY

**MANCHESTER CITY'S** new £49 million (RM270m) midfielder Nico Gonzalez has insisted he does not feel like the replacement for Rodri.

The 23-year-old was signed from Porto on the final day of the winter transfer window and believes his years at Barcelona will help him adapt to manager Pep Guardiola's style of play and tactical demands.

But while City had lacked a specialist defensive midfielder since the *Ballon d'Or* winner Rodri was injured in September, Gonzalez feels he is not charged with emulating his fellow Spaniard.

"I don't see it that way," he said. "It doesn't matter who

plays, we're a team that is very united with everyone now."

"It doesn't matter if I play, or Kova (Mateo Kovacic) plays, or whoever, I don't see myself as the replacement for Rodri, I see myself as another player."

Gonzalez made his City debut in the FA Cup win at Leyton Orient, excelled in the previous week's 4-0 win over Newcastle and opened his account for his new club in injury time

as they lost to Real Madrid.

He came through the youth system at the Nou Camp and feels that can aid him settle in at City.

He added: "I was raised in Barcelona and I've always more or less played the way we play here, I've got used to playing here very quickly."

"Obviously the team plays really well, there are also players close to me to have the ball and everyone wants the ball every time so it's easy to find players and find passes."

"The quality of the players is so good so for me it's easier to play here than the team I used to play."

Gonzalez admitted that, after being in the Portuguese league, he was not accustomed to coming up against footballers like Mohamed Salah, who got a goal and an assist in Liverpool's 2-0 win at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday.

"I've just arrived, I'm not used to playing against players of the quality like Salah, I think he already had 30 goals and it's tough to play against players like this," he said.

After winning four consecutive titles, City are now 20 points behind Liverpool and Gonzalez added: "I haven't won a Premier League and I've been here two weeks and it's disappointing to lose and disappointing to be fourth in the League." – The Independent



## Tanaka scores in Leeds' late-show against Sheffield United

**JAPAN'S** Ao Tanaka and Dutch forward Joel Piroe scored late goals as Leeds came from behind to win 3-1 at promotion rivals Sheffield United yesterday, leaving them five points clear at the top of English football's second tier.

Victory over second-placed Sheffield United in the all-Yorkshire clash at Bramall Lane strengthened fallen giants Leeds' bid to return to the lucrative Premier League, with only the top two at the end of the regular season guaranteed promotion to the top-flight.

This win lifted Leeds seven points clear of third-placed Burnley, with 12 league games remaining, but defeat for the Blades left them a mere two points ahead of the Claret.

An own-goal from Leeds goalkeeper Illan Meslier gave the Blades an early lead they kept until the 72nd minute.

But after Junior Firpo had headed Leeds level, Tanaka and Piroe struck in the final three minutes of the game.

"I'm proud of the boys – this is one of the toughest places you can go and it was the worst possible start," Leeds manager Daniel Farke told reporters.

"The reaction the boys showed was outstanding. We were able to find not just another gear but another two or three."

"It was a really good night for us and a priceless three points," added the German, who was serving a touchline ban after

receiving his third yellow card of the season for celebrating his side's stoppage-time winner against Sunderland the previous week.

Blades manager Chris Wilder, speaking to *Sky Sports*, admitted: "It was a tight game. Congratulations to Daniel (Farke) – they're a top side and put in a great performance."

"We started well. We wanted to make it difficult for them, which we did, and we lost a bit of control at the back-end of the first half."

"They're top for a reason and we said at half-time we might have to suffer a little bit."

"I think we'd have all shook hands on a draw at 89 minutes, so to concede the second from a set-piece was disappointing." – AFP/Agencies



## RESULTS &amp; STANDINGS

**CHAMPIONSHIP:** Sheffield United 1 Leeds 3.

| TOP 6      | P  | W  | D  | L  | F  | A  | Pts |
|------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
| Leeds      | 34 | 22 | 9  | 3  | 71 | 21 | 75  |
| Sheff Utd  | 34 | 22 | 6  | 6  | 48 | 26 | 70  |
| Burnley    | 34 | 18 | 14 | 2  | 43 | 9  | 68  |
| Sunderland | 34 | 17 | 11 | 6  | 50 | 31 | 62  |
| West Brom  | 34 | 12 | 15 | 7  | 44 | 31 | 51  |
| Blackburn  | 34 | 15 | 6  | 13 | 39 | 34 | 51  |

**LA LIGA:** Sevilla 1 (Salas 45+1) Mallorca 1 (Valjent 90+1).

| TOP 6        | P  | W  | D | L | F  | A  | Pts |
|--------------|----|----|---|---|----|----|-----|
| Barcelona    | 25 | 17 | 3 | 5 | 67 | 25 | 54  |
| Real Madrid  | 25 | 16 | 6 | 3 | 54 | 23 | 54  |
| A. Madrid    | 25 | 15 | 8 | 2 | 42 | 16 | 53  |
| Villarreal   | 25 | 13 | 9 | 3 | 44 | 22 | 48  |
| Atletico     | 25 | 12 | 8 | 5 | 48 | 35 | 44  |
| R. Vallecano | 25 | 9  | 8 | 8 | 27 | 26 | 35  |

**SERIE A:** Roma 4 (Saelemaekers 10, Shomurov 32, Angelino 73, Cristante 88) Monza 0.

| TOP 6       | P  | W  | D  | L | F  | A  | Pts |
|-------------|----|----|----|---|----|----|-----|
| Inter Milan | 26 | 17 | 6  | 3 | 59 | 24 | 57  |
| Napoli      | 26 | 17 | 5  | 4 | 42 | 21 | 56  |
| Atalanta    | 26 | 16 | 6  | 4 | 59 | 26 | 54  |
| Juventus    | 26 | 12 | 13 | 1 | 43 | 21 | 49  |
| Lazio       | 26 | 14 | 5  | 7 | 47 | 34 | 47  |
| Fiorentina  | 26 | 12 | 6  | 8 | 41 | 28 | 42  |



Kemarol Baharin.

# Thrilling first day

Kemarol, Zulaikah lead PGM Seri Selangor Championship

**T**HE PGM Seri Selangor Championship 2025 got off to a thrilling start yesterday, with Galven Green and Kemarol Baharin leading the way after the first round at the prestigious Kelab Golf Seri Selangor.

Both players posted impressive scores of 4-under, setting the stage for an exciting continuation of the championship.

The tournament, a major fixture on the Malaysian golfing calendar, has attracted a strong field of both local and international talent.

The Men's Championship features a total purse of RM180,000, with an additional RM30,000 set aside for the Ladies Championship.

Green's opening round was nothing short of spectacular, as he made a remarkable eagle on the 5th hole (par 5), followed by four birdies to give him the edge.

However, his round was not without its challenges, as he dropped two bogeys on holes 16 and 17, but still managed to finish strong at -4.

Kemarol displayed consistent skill throughout the round, recording six birdies and two bogeys. His steady play has placed him in a strong position

heading into round 2, where he will look to extend his lead.

Trailing just one stroke behind the leaders are five players who are tied for third place at 3-under. Shahrifuddin Ariffin, the best Malaysian professional at the recent Selangor Masters, currently sits in a tie for eighth place.

The tight competition at the top of the leaderboard guarantees an exciting battle as the tournament progresses.

In the Ladies Championship, Zulaikah Nasser is leading by a three-stroke margin, having posted an impressive 68 in the opening round. Liyana Durisic, who recently returned from competing at the WPS Perth-Melbourne International, is in second place with a score of 71.

The strong performances from both Zulaikah and Liyana promise a competitive showdown in the coming rounds.

Round two of the PGM Seri Selangor Championship 2025 will commence today at 7.45am, with players eager to capitalise on the momentum from the first round and make their move up the leaderboard.

## SHORTS

## NSI appoints new CEO

**DR. P. VELLAPANDIAN** has been appointed as the new chief executive officer (CEO) of the National Sports Institute (NSI) which took effect yesterday.

He replaces Ahmad Faedzal Md Ramli whose term of service ended yesterday, after assuming the position on Feb 25, 2019.

The announcement of the appointment was made by NSI Board chairman Datuk Marina Chin at NSI, Bukit Jalil.

Meanwhile, in a media conference here, Marina said his selection was through an open process with anyone able to submit an application to fill the vacant position.

"Dr. Vellapandian brings over two decades of experience in the fields of sports science, sports psychology, research and development of athlete performance.

"His expertise in the development of high-performance athletes, sports psychology, and management of elite sports programmes will contribute to driving NSI to a higher level in support of the excellence of national sports," she said.

Vellapandian, 56, previously served as CEO of the Institute for Youth Research Malaysia (Iyres) under the Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS), and has held various



2024 Moto3 world champion David Alonso (2nd left) poses for a photo after signing the agreement with MKA Group CEO, Bruce Lee Cong Quan (2nd right) yesterday. — BERNAMAPIC

important positions at NSI including director of the Sports Performance Division and head of the Podium Programme.

## Alonso eyes strong Moto2 debut

**REIGNING** Moto3 world champion David Alonso aims for a strong start in his debut Moto2 season at this weekend's Thailand Grand Prix (GP) at the Chang International Circuit.

The 18-year-old rider, who has been promoted to Moto2 this

season with the CFMOTO Aspar Team, however, said he cannot set very ambitious goals as he is now competing in a completely different class.

Speaking to the media yesterday after signing as a brand ambassador for RCB, Malaysia's leading aftermarket high-performance motorcycle parts and accessories provider, he said completing the Thai GP without crashing will be his main objective. The event is scheduled from Feb 28 to March 2.

"The first target for the first race

is to see the chequered flag (finish the race) and learn from the big boys there. When you jump to a new category, no matter whether you know the track or not, it's a new track.

"The first season will be challenging, but you can't lose your way. You need to stay calm in those moments to improve race by race.

"The preparations have been good; we did a lot of laps in two pre-season tests, probably about 200 laps," said the Colombian-Spanish rider.

# Adam Adli urges fraud victims to file police reports

**DEPUTY** Youth and Sports Minister Adam Adli Abd Halim has urged victims of fraud cases involving sports activities to file police reports so that strict action can be taken.

Adam Adli said his ministry is aware of two recent cases, namely a badminton training package and the organisation of a non-existent football tournament in Ipoh last Saturday.

"I urge that police reports be made and we will ensure investigations are carried out on our end as well (including action by the Sports Commissioner).

"If it involves any national, state, district sports association or parties affiliated with the ministry, we demand for strict action," he said.

He said this after officiating a Pineapple Management (Exposure and Training Course) and the Construction Personnel (Green Card) Course by the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) yesterday.

Earlier, a viral video alleged that many parents had fallen victim to a badminton training package for school children, costing tens of thousands of ringgit, using various academy names as a lure to deceive.

In addition, another sports fraud was a football carnival of U-14 11-a-side and U-16 ASM Cup & 2025 Big Pos Cup, which was supposed to take place at 7am last Saturday but did not materialise.

In other developments, Adam Adli mentioned the recent success of a national junior female cycling sensation Sawda Hasbullah, who broke the world record in the 1-kilometre women's time trial at the 2025 Asian Track Cycling Championships (ACC) at the National Velodrome in Nilai last Sunday.

This achievement shows that the country is not lacking in new talent for the sport, he said.

"We know that track cycling is limited (to a velodrome) and not the same as road cycling because not everyone can access the sport.

"But it does not mean there is no development of new talents; there is always a pool of talent and Sawda herself is a testament to the success of the cycling legion," he said. — Bernama

# Australia, Central Asian nations launch 2031 Asian Cup joint bid

**AUSTRALIA** have submitted an expression of interest (EOI) to host the 2031 men's Asian Cup, while Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have launched a joint bid for the continental showpiece.

Australia, which hosted and won the 2015 tournament and will stage the Women's Asian Cup next year, submitted its EOI to the Asian Football Confederation on Monday, Football Australia (FA) said.

"Football Australia is delighted to confirm that it has submitted an Expression of Interest to host the AFC Asian Cup 2031 Finals," an FA spokesperson said in an emailed statement to

Reuters yesterday.

"This important step reaffirms our commitment to advancing the beautiful game in Australia and on the international stage, while adhering fully to the bidding process as set out by the AFC."

Former Soviet republics Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have never hosted the Asian Cup before, however Uzbekistan will organise the women's event in 2029.

"The AFC Asian Cup is more than a football tournament, it is a celebration of unity, progress, and sporting excellence," Central Asian Football Association President Rustam Emomali said in a

post on Instagram.

"Central Asia has a deep-rooted football culture and a passionate fan base, and we are confident that together, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyz Republic can deliver an exceptional tournament that leaves a lasting legacy."

Australia and the central Asian nations are the latest to notify the Asian Football Confederation of their desire to organise the quadrennial event, following EOIs from the United Arab Emirates, South Korea and Indonesia.

The next edition of the men's Asian Cup will be played in Saudi Arabia in 2027. — Reuters





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SCAN ME



# 'Rigid' Gunners

Neville slams Arsenal over set-piece obsession and failing to sign striker in January

Arsenal's players react during the English Premier League match against West Ham United. - REUTERS/PIC

BY JAMIE BRAIDWOOD

**GARY NEVILLE** has claimed Arsenal's "obsession" with set-pieces has cost the club in their pursuit of the Premier League title.

Mikel Arteta's side fell to a 1-0 defeat to West Ham on Sunday and are now 11 points behind Liverpool after their victory over Manchester City.

Neville, who had the Gunners as his favourite to win the title at the start of the season, also said Arsenal had paid the price for not strengthening their squad in January.

Arsenal failed to recruit another attacking player despite injuries to Bukayo Saka and Gabriel Jesus, with Kai Havertz and Gabriel Martinelli joining them on the sidelines.

Arsenal were forced to start midfielder Mikel Merino in attack against West Ham but Arteta's side landed just two shots on target and struggled to threaten the visitors.

Neville believes Arsenal have become "rigid" and "turgid" on the ball - and have missed an opportunity this season with Manchester City out

of contention after leaving themselves "short" in attack.

"When City weren't going to be there, the team that had to be there was Arsenal," the former Manchester United and England right back said on the *Gary Neville Podcast*.

"It's not going to be them, it doesn't look like, and that's the big shock and surprise. That'll be the one that'll hit hardest in that Arsenal boardroom, and with Mikel Arteta and the players, because they're desperate to win a title.

"Liverpool have drawn two in the last three, they've drawn four in the last eight, Arsenal have had a chance to get back closer, they could have gone within five points (had they beaten West Ham).

"(The injuries to attacking players) is a defence, but they you've got to plan for it. I know they didn't want to do business in the January transfer window, they thought there wasn't value in the market, or they couldn't get the player that would come in and impact them."

Neville said he still expected Arsenal to beat West Ham at home, with Arteta left furious at his

team dropping their standards in the 1-0 defeat at the Emirates.

The Gunners scored 20 goals from set-pieces last season, the most in the Premier League, but have bristled at suggestions that they have become overly reliant on scoring set-piece goals under assistant coach Nicolas Jover.

"I felt there was an obsession with set-pieces, which almost overtakes the whole game, exacerbated by the fact that there's the presence of the set-piece coach on the touchline," Neville said. "I feel like the freedom's gone a little bit from them."

Following the 2-0 win over Manchester United earlier this season, Arteta had said: "We want to be very dangerous and very effective from every angle and every phase of play.

"Last year we scored the most goals in the history of this football club, not because of only set-pieces but because of a lot of things that we have. We want to create individual and magic moments, too."

Arteta said Arsenal "deserve" to feel the "pain" of their defeat to West Ham as the Gunners look to

pick themselves up ahead of their trip to Nottingham Forest tomorrow (3.30am)

"The moment we got into the areas, then you have to unlock something, and we didn't. That is down to me as well," Arteta said after the 1-0 defeat.

"That is my responsibility and I don't want to take that all to the players. Today we weren't at the level required to be convincingly better than the opponent. It is painful. We need to feel the pain today, we deserve it."

Arteta's sentiments were echoed by skipper Martin Odegaard, who said the Gunners "lacked efficiency" in the final third against Graham Potter's team.

"It's a big blow," he told *BBC Sport*. "The performance today wasn't good enough. We have to see the game back and analyse it, but it wasn't good enough."

Speaking on *Match of the Day*, former England players Alan Shearer and Danny Murphy both said the title race was already over, with Liverpool's lead at the top insurmountable. - The Independent/Agencies

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