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An expert said Budget 2026 should not be seen as an election budget, as GE16 is still far off and at least one or two more budgets would likely be tabled before then. - AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THE SUN

# Not driven by politics

**Budget 2026 carefully crafted to avoid appearing slanted towards polls and popularity quest, while focusing on immediate needs of B40 group and fulfilling MA63 obligations: Analysts**

page 2

## INSIDE

page 3

**RM15.5 billion savings from targeted subsidies initiative expected to bolster fiscal position.**

page 4

**Autism society calls on govt to consolidate efforts and policies addressing neurodiversity.**

page 5

**'Harmless' gossip and 'casual' banter may manifest as cyberbullying: Specialist**



BY **QIRANA NABILLA**  
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# 'Budget 2026 not aimed at wooing voters'



**PETALING JAYA:** Far from being an election budget, Budget 2026 may be the least populist in recent memory – a calculated plan that analysts say reflects the government's confidence in policy over politics.

Nusantara Academy for Strategic Research geostrategist and senior fellow Prof Dr Azmi Hassan said the Budget was carefully crafted to avoid appearing politically driven, although it was tabled ahead of the upcoming Sabah election.

"When Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim specifically mentioned that Sabah and Sarawak received more than the states in Peninsular Malaysia, it was not to please voters but to fulfil the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63) obligations," he told *theSun*.

Azmi said GE16 is still far off, and at least one or two more budgets would likely be tabled before then.

He added that while the Budget includes short-term goals, they are necessary due to the yearly fiscal cycle and the start of the 13th Malaysia Plan.

"The focus on immediate

Higher allocations for Sabah, Sarawak not politically motivated and reflect govt commitment to MA63, says analyst

needs, especially among the B40 group, is critical. Initiatives such as the Sumbangan Asas Rahmah (Sara) cash aid and free education through PTPN for low-income households show the government's intent to support those who need it most."

Azmi said subsidies play a significant role in Budget 2026 as the government has clearly explained how savings from subsidy rationalisation are being channelled back to the people, highlighting that the continuation of the RM100 Sara aid in February is among the most notable populist measures.

He said although some of the initiatives are continuations of previous policies, they demonstrate that the redistributed funds are being used to support essential groups rather than to curry political favour.

"The substantial allocation for Sabah and Sarawak each year reflects the government's recognition that both states require additional funding for infrastructure and development programmes."

Economist Dr Geoffrey Williams said the increased allocations for Sabah and Sarawak are part of a long-term MA63 settlement,

acknowledged as fair by both sides and reflective of the Unity government's continued reliance on East Malaysian support.

He said the Budget's timing was set in advance and was not linked to a general election, but noted that the Sabah election might have been scheduled earlier to take advantage of the additional funds allocated to the state.

"There is nothing at all in Budget 2026 that could be described as attractive to voters.

"There are no meaningful handouts – for example STR and Sara payments will be the same as last year.

"With inflation, the purchasing power is less. Budget 2026 is focused on housekeeping and fiscal management rather than anything else."

Williams also said there is no election narrative in Budget 2026 as the government did not introduce measures that would meaningfully raise incomes or reduce inequality.

He added that while subsidy savings are significant, it remains unclear how these funds are being utilised beyond helping the government avoid introducing new taxes.

"The cash transfers are unchanged, and the free education initiative covers only about 5,800 students out of 1.5 million. There are no key giveaways that would influence voters."

Under Budget 2026, Sabah and Sarawak will receive the highest federal development allocations, with Sabah's rising to RM6.9 billion from RM4.4 billion in 2022 and Sarawak's increasing to RM6 billion from RM2.9 billion.

## Economists laud govt spending plan

BY **T.C. KHOR**  
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**PETALING JAYA:** Economists have praised Budget 2026 for its fiscal restraint and lower spending, but cautioned that the government still plays too dominant a role in the economy despite signs of reform.

Centre for Market Education CEO Dr Carmelo Ferlito and economist Dr Geoffrey Williams said the Budget marks a welcome shift towards discipline and transparency but remains interventionist, offering limited relief to ordinary Malaysians.

Ferlito said the Budget is a step in the right direction but still "trapped in the logic of intervention and fiscal activism".

"Budget 2026 deserves recognition for progress towards discipline and transparency. Yet,

the state continues to act as planner, investor and allocator – roles incompatible with the spontaneous order that underpins prosperity."

He said the government's plan to narrow the fiscal deficit from 4.1% to 3.5%, and eventually to 3%, signals a responsible shift from past deficit expansionism.

He added that targeted subsidy reforms such as the Budig95 fuel scheme and diesel rationalisation were "less distortionary than universal subsidies, which historically fuel overconsumption and rent-seeking".

He said strengthening the Fiscal Responsibility Act and tightening audits were also positive as "institutional discipline, not moral exhortation, is what sustains fiscal integrity".

Ferlito said with RM470 billion

in total spending, including RM338 billion for operations, the state's presence remains large and risks constraining market efficiency.

"Even modest deficits exert upward pressure on debt and implicit monetisation. When spending outpaces genuine savings, it weakens purchasing power and distorts relative prices, particularly in capital-intensive sectors."

He added that genuine liberalisation would mean reducing the government's footprint, setting clear rules for a balanced budget, and gradually withdrawing subsidies and co-investment funds in favour of tax neutrality and open competition.

He said plans to mobilise RM10 billion through public-private partnerships could empower markets, provided the

government avoids "picking winners" and lets private capital drive investment policy.

Williams shared a similar view, describing Budget 2026 as "technocratic and sound from a fiscal management perspective" but "not people-centred".

He said the total federal expenditure, which is lower than the previous year's budget, reflects discipline and savings from subsidy rationalisation.

Williams called the 3.5% deficit target achievable and the 4% to 4.5% growth forecast "more sensible and closer to the economy's underlying potential".

He noted there were no new taxes apart from the carbon tax, which he described as "unnecessary" since last year's SST increase would already raise RM10 billion next year.

"The RM15.5 billion in

projected savings, slightly below the earlier RM17 billion estimate, would ease fiscal pressure without new revenue measures."

He warned that large-scale public investment in semiconductors, clean energy and digital infrastructure could either "crowd in or crowd out" private capital depending on execution.

"The free education for students from households earning below RM2,700 is welcome but limited. There was scope to provide free education to everyone."

He said allocations for health and social protection are still inadequate.

"Health spending increased but far behind health price inflation, so the Health Ministry would need to continue on tight budgets."



Anwar arriving for the meeting with Universiti Teknologi Petronas students in Seri Iskandar yesterday. – BERNAMAPIC

## Fight against graft netted RM15.5 billion: PM

**SERI ISKANDAR:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim reaffirmed his government's resolve to root out corruption, malpractice and cartel activities, citing RM15.5 billion recovered through strict enforcement over the past two years.

Anwar, who is also finance minister, said the achievement reflects the administration's determination to ensure that no one, regardless of status, escapes action for undermining the country's interests.

"We've seized RM15.5 billion in stolen and smuggled funds in just two years. I told enforcement agencies: no compromise, no corruption, no smuggling, no

syndicates or cartels – they're stealing from the people," he said at a meeting with Universiti Teknologi Petronas students yesterday.

He added that he intends to "clean up this mess" during his term.

"They may have titles – Datuk, Tan Sri or Tun – I don't care. If you steal, you'll be caught, tried and jailed. That must be our principle," he said to applause.

Anwar urged students to support the fight for justice, integrity and equality, and to reject racial oppression while upholding ethical values and pursuing knowledge and skills.

Delivering a lecture titled

"Universities as Strategic Assets: Planning Malaysia's Future through Talent, Technology and Transformation", he said education must build both intellect and character, aligning with the Madani Malaysia vision of justice, morality and shared wellbeing.

Earlier, Anwar toured the university's Integrated Engineering Department.

On Friday, while tabling Budget 2026, he said targeted subsidies would save the government RM15.5 billion annually, allowing more funds to be redirected to welfare, living costs and infrastructure. – Bernama

# Fiscal boost in RM15.5b savings

Targeted subsidy initiatives directly support projected deficit of 3.5% of GDP next year while easing dependence on debt issuance, says economist

BY QIRANA NABILLA MOHD RASHIDI  
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**PETALING JAYA:** Malaysia's projected RM15.5 billion in annual savings from targeted subsidies under Budget 2026 are expected to bolster the nation's fiscal position by narrowing the deficit and reducing reliance on new borrowings.

Economist Dr Mohamad Idham Md Razak said the move directly supports a projected fiscal deficit of 3.5% of gross domestic product (GDP) next year while easing dependence on debt issuance.

"These savings do not come from austerity or tax hikes but from improved governance, anti-corruption enforcement, and smarter allocation, making them fiscally sustainable and politically credible," he told *theSun*.

Mohamad Idham added that RM15.5 billion in savings is substantial enough to create tangible impact when strategically deployed, funding key initiatives such as RM1 billion for Ikhtiar Madani Untuk Rakyat, RM15 billion for Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah and Sumbangan Asas Rahmah, alongside rural infrastructure and digital public service improvements in 2026.

"When coupled with GLIC investments of RM30 billion and private-sector leverage, these

savings amplify public impact without increasing debt, proving that fiscal discipline and social progress can go hand in hand," he said.

He emphasised that the savings are designed for long-term stabilisation rather than short-term relief.

By redirecting funds from blanket subsidies, which often benefit wealthier households and foreign entities, towards targeted welfare schemes as well as high-impact public investment in rural infrastructure, TVET and digitalisation, Mohamad Idham said the reforms embed structural efficiency into the Budget.

"This shift supports Malaysia's transition toward a more resilient, inclusive and productivity-driven economy aligned with the 13th Malaysia Plan and Madani principles."

He acknowledged concerns that the M40 group, particularly those just above eligibility thresholds, could feel squeezed by higher fuel or food costs without direct support.

"However, the government has mitigated this by maintaining price controls on essentials such as RON95 at RM1.99 via Budi95, expanding Sumbangan Asas Rahmah to nine million recipients – including some M40 households – and ensuring 85% of electricity users see no

tariff increase.

Continuous refinement of Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah databases and dynamic eligibility criteria can further reduce exclusion errors."

Mohamad Idham added that removing blanket subsidies is necessary amid global fiscal pressures, climate imperatives and the need for equitable resource allocation.

"Blanket subsidies are fiscally inefficient, environmentally unsustainable and socially regressive. These reforms demonstrate mature economic stewardship, balancing affordability for the vulnerable with market realism.

"Floating prices for chicken, eggs and diesel improve market efficiency by letting supply and demand signals function naturally, discouraging overconsumption, reducing smuggling and black-market arbitrage, and incentivising domestic production and logistics innovation.

"For instance, RM1 billion in savings from chicken and egg subsidy rationalisation has been reinvested in strengthening local supply chains, enhancing food security rather than distorting it."

He added that short-term upward pressure on consumer prices and logistics costs is possible but the government has proactively cushioned the effects.

Diesel subsidies remain for public transport, fishermen and small farmers, while infrastructure upgrades benefit logistics operators. Agri-tech grants and stockpiling also bolster food supply chains, helping to reduce long-term costs.

## Use RM46.5b health budget wisely to realise long-overdue reforms: Expert

BY KIRTINEE RAMESH  
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**PETALING JAYA:** Malaysia's record RM46.5 billion health budget for 2026 has been hailed as a step towards long-overdue reform – but experts warn that its true test lies not in the numbers, but in how the money is spent.

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak public health specialist Prof Dr Helmy Hazmi said the government's focus on reform, equity and affordability reflects an encouraging shift in priorities after years of systemic strain.

"It is a shift in the right direction, and it reflects what the Health White Paper had called for," he said.

While the increase in allocation was widely expected, Helmy said the rise remains modest – a single-digit increment compared to previous years. What matters most, he stressed, is how

effectively the funds are channelled to where they are needed most.

"Each ringgit and sen must be utilised wisely – moving upstream into prevention, community-based initiatives and strengthening the primary care network, especially in Sarawak and Sabah," he said.

Helmy welcomed the government's move to offer permanent posts and higher allowances for medical and specialist officers, saying it addresses long-standing staffing shortages. However, he described the measures as "quite generic", likely constrained by fiscal limits across sectors.

He said the emphasis on diagnosis-related group implementation, public-private partnerships and basic insurance schemes could improve efficiency if carefully managed.

"We must ensure that these

partnerships add capacity to the Health Ministry, not drain its resources," he said.

"More importantly, reforms must not create a two-tier system in which access depends on one's ability to pay."

Among the more forward-looking measures, Helmy highlighted the National Ageing Framework 2025–2045, calling it both timely and necessary.

"Malaysia cannot keep treating hospitals as long-term care homes. Dedicated funding for community-based and home care will make the system more sustainable as we move towards an ageing society."

Helmy also backed the increase in excise duties on cigarettes, alcohol and tobacco, calling it both expected and essential.

"It's good that the government intends to channel the additional revenue back into the Health

### SOCIAL WELFARE AND SUPPORT

**Sumbangan Asas Rahmah**

**RM50**

Single individuals will receive RM600 a year (RM50 monthly).

**RM100**

Malaysians aged 18 and above will receive the aid again in mid-February 2026.

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**For the disabled community**

**RM1.4 BILLION**

Support allowances for chronically homeless and unemployed disabled individuals.

**Additional monthly RM150 allowance for disabled students.**

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### EDUCATION

**TABUNG Pendidikan**

**RM120 MILLION**

The National Higher Education Fund Corporation will provide free tertiary education in public universities to 5,800 students from low-income families.

**RM7.9 BILLION**

Allocation for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to meet demand for skilled local talent.

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**RM150 each**

RM800 million allocated to 5.2 million students to help families prepare for new school term.

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### NEW DEVELOPMENT

**TOBACCO AND ALCOHOL TAXES**

**2 sen** per cigarette

**10%** increase on alcoholic drinks

**RM210 MILLION**

MCMC to develop disaster early warning systems.

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Introduction of **LEMON LAW**

To provide protection against purchases of defective products.

THESUN GRAPHICS BY HARITH KAMAL

Ministry for lung health, diabetes and heart disease programmes," he said.

"That's how a sin tax should work – not just to collect money, but to correct a public health imbalance."

However, he urged the government to reserve such revenues for prevention and

health promotion, adding that in previous years, such funds often ended up in the general pool.

Helmy further commended the continuation of tax relief for vaccinations and duty exemptions for nicotine replacement therapies, calling them "small but meaningful nudges" to encourage healthier lifestyles.



BY FAIZ RUZMAN  
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**PETALING JAYA:** The government's RM1.4 billion allocation for persons with disabilities (PwD) under Budget 2026 has been welcomed as a positive step, but experts warn that without structural reforms and sustained, coordinated support, true inclusivity will remain out of reach.

National Autism Society of Malaysia vice-president Dr Nursuriati Jamil said while the government has made commendable progress in facilities, awareness and education, policies addressing neurodiversity still operate in silos rather than through a unified national strategy.

"The government has contributed significantly in terms of awareness, facilities, financial and educational support for PwD, especially those with neurodiversity issues.

"But we need a whole-of-society approach, not bits and pieces here and there. Higher institutions, multinational companies, SMEs and local industries must also take responsibility for long-term, effective solutions."

Nursuriati, who is also director of the National Autism Resource Centre, said early-intervention infrastructure has improved, but gaps remain for young adults with neurodiversity who are often left without

# RM1.4 billion allocation for PwD cautiously lauded

## Move shows good intent, but govt faced with challenge of turning commitment into meaningful, inclusive outcomes: Experts

direction once schooling ends. "After school finishes, what is their path in life? Local authorities, communities and industries must step in to ensure social and financial continuity, so these individuals can at least achieve partial independence."

She added that adults with neurodiversity are often overlooked in workplaces, leading to unnecessary conflicts and discrimination.

"The government should incentivise employers with dedicated HR units to manage neurodiversity issues. Awareness programmes must also be intensified to prepare employees to work in inclusive environments."

While welcoming the expansion of autism service centres to Labuan, Sabah and

Sarawak, she stressed that other regions also require attention.

"East coast states such as Kelantan and Terengganu, as well as Kedah and Perlis, need more centres. Infrastructure alone is not enough without skilled professionals, therapists, teachers and caretakers. Parents must also be trained to continue support at home, and the government must ensure these centres remain sustainable."

Nursuriati added that while tax reliefs provide some assistance, they do not fully address the burden faced by families.

"Parents caring for PwD children face financial strain as well as psychological pressures that can lead to depression, marital breakdowns and other challenges. The government

must expand community-based support networks."

Meanwhile, Universiti Teknologi Mara health-communication specialist Dr Mohd Yusof Zulkefli described the increase in tax relief for disability-related care to RM10,000 as constructive but insufficient for most families.

"In Malaysia, therapy and interventions for children with disabilities – speech therapy, occupational therapy, behavioural intervention – can cost between RM12,000 and RM20,000 annually in private settings.

"While the increase recognises inflation and real-world costs, families with multiple children with disabilities may still face financial difficulties. Tax relief also primarily benefits those with higher taxable incomes, limiting its impact on lower-income households. Combining relief with direct support or access to public therapy would be more effective."

He also said the RM3,000

childcare tax relief, now extended to day-care and transit centres for children up to age 12, was welcome but insufficient.

"Urban childcare costs range from RM500 to RM800 per month. The relief aids middle-income earners, while B40 families with little or no tax liability gain very little. A fairer approach would pair relief with subsidies or fee waivers."

Mohd Yusof added that while the RM1.4 billion allocation demonstrates intent, much of it may be absorbed by existing programmes, leaving little room for new initiatives.

"We need transparent fund distribution, proper oversight and measurable outcomes. Without structural reform, rural access gaps and caregiver shortages will persist, and support will remain temporary rather than transformative."

Both experts agreed that Budget 2026 signals serious intent, but the challenge now is to turn financial commitment into meaningful, inclusive outcomes.

## Gender, disability gaps persist despite inclusive measures

BY T.C. KHOR  
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**PETALING JAYA:** The Gender Budget Group (GBG) has warned that despite several inclusive measures, Budget 2026 still lacks a formal gender-responsive framework, a gap that risks excluding women, children and persons with disabilities (PwD) from equitable access to public funds.

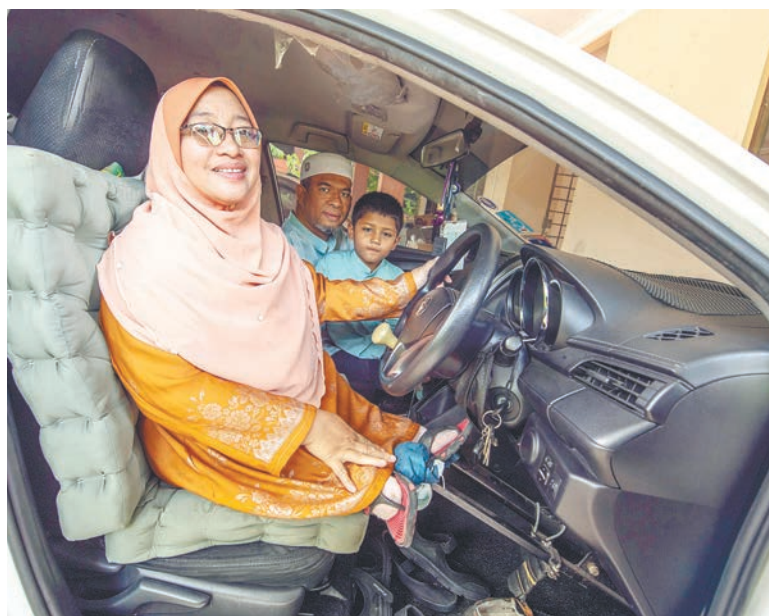
"Transforming large-scale allocations into equitable outcomes requires a formal inclusion mandate that integrates a gender perspective," the group said in a statement.

"Without a robust gender and disability lens, even well-intentioned programmes will fail the most vulnerable."

The coalition, comprising 24 civil society groups and 18 academics led by Engender Consultancy founder Omna Sreeni-Ong, said the Budget reflects commendable efforts such as the establishment of a behavioural science unit to address online sexual crimes, the absorption of contract doctors into permanent roles, targeted training for women leaders and new TVET courses for PwD.

However, it noted that structural inclusion remained missing.

GBG urged the government to make gender-responsive budgeting mandatory across all ministries, with each setting



The coalition said Budget 2026 still lacks a formal gender-responsive framework, a gap that risks excluding women, children and persons with disabilities from equitable access to public funds. – BERNAMAPIC

aside a specific percentage for programmes benefiting marginalised groups.

"GBG offers its assistance to train ministries in embedding this approach into their disbursement processes, transforming policy into meaningful, equitable outcomes," it added.

The group cited the Budig5 fuel subsidy as an example of policy oversight.

GBG representative Beatrice Leong said people who use wheelchairs or are of short stature

were unable to access the MyKad verification slot placed at an unreachable height.

"This forces them to hand over their identity card to a stranger, creating a security risk and a deeply disempowering experience. A gender and disability-responsive analysis during design would have prevented this exclusion," she said.

GBG also said extending the RM3,000 childcare tax relief offered little benefit to urban or

B40 families, calling instead for direct subsidies, vouchers or corporate incentives for workplace childcare.

The coalition welcomed allocations such as the RM1.26 billion for senior welfare and RM300 million for community homes under the National Ageing Framework 2025 to 2045, but stressed that Malaysia must move towards "ageing in place" through inclusive housing and universal design.

"This would allow seniors to live independently within their communities for longer and help build a more accessible society for all," it said.

GBG further raised concern over what it called a "glaring lack of dedicated funding" for gender-based violence response, adding that limited resources for shelters, hotlines and legal aid continue to undermine women's safety and economic participation.

While commending the Anti-Bullying Bill 2025, the group renewed calls for a comprehensive anti-discrimination Act to address the root causes of inequality.

It also supported allocations to strengthen parliamentary oversight, including RM5 million to enhance Dewan Rakyat functions and RM15 million for the Malaysian Parliamentary All-Party Group on Sustainable Development Goals, but urged the Finance Ministry to publish outcome-based reports to ensure measurable results.

## EC urged to boost female political representation

**PETALING JAYA:** The Gender Budget Group (GBG) has urged the Election Commission (EC) to take proactive steps to increase women's representation in politics, including introducing gender quotas, exploring electoral reforms and ensuring fairer access to campaign financing.

The coalition said Budget 2026 falls short in addressing structural barriers that limit women's participation in both the economy and politics, despite several new allocations for leadership and entrepreneurship.

"To address this, budgets could be allocated for the Election Commission to implement measures that actively boost women political participation and representation," it said in a statement.

GBG proposed that the EC introduce legislative gender quotas mandating a minimum percentage of women candidates across all political parties and election lists, or consider electoral system reforms such as proportional representation, which have been shown to improve women's chances of election.

Malaysia currently ranks 151st globally for female representation in Parliament, with only 13.5% of seats held by women – a figure GBG described as "unacceptably low for a maturing democracy". – by T.C. Khor

## Four teen students remanded over alleged gang rape

**MALACCA:** Four teenage students sitting for the SPM examination next month have been remanded for six days for police investigations after allegedly raping a female student in school last week.

State police chief Datuk Dzulkhairi Mukhtar said the remand order against all 17-year-old suspects was issued by senior assistant registrar of the Malacca Magistrate's Court S.R. Arthana.

"The remand of all the suspects will be until Oct 16 for the case to be investigated under Section 375B of the Penal Code for gang rape. The case involves a 15-year-old victim," he said in a statement yesterday.

Previous media reports said the gang rape occurred at 2.50pm on Oct 2 in a classroom at a school in Alor Gajah. The incident unfolded when the victim returned to the classroom to retrieve Science project materials that she had left behind.

The victim is believed to have been dragged into the classroom before being raped by two suspects in turns, while two of their other friends witnessed and recorded it using their mobile phones.

The incident came to light after the victim's mother received information from a school teacher about the video being circulated and subsequently lodged a police report.

The case has caused shock waves, sparking outraged reactions, including from former education minister Datuk Dr Radzi Jidin, who urged the Education Ministry to provide an explanation for the "extremely serious incident".

In Sungai Petani, Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek requested cooperation from relevant ministries to act immediately to stop the circulation of the purported rape video.

"We have asked the relevant ministry to take action so this issue does not continue to spread because it involves schoolchildren. The public needs to understand that this case involves minors who must be protected," she said after officiating at a handover ceremony in conjunction with an Ambangan Heights project at SMK Bandar Baharu Sungai Lalang yesterday.

Fadhlina said the Form 3 victim is receiving psychosocial support and hospital treatment. - Bernama

# Cyberbullying potential in 'casual' online banter

BY FAIZ RUZMAN  
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**PETALING JAYA:** What may seem like harmless gossip or casual banter in group chats is quietly emerging as one of the most overlooked forms of cyberbullying, experts warn, with potentially serious consequences for mental health.

Universiti Teknologi Mara media communication specialist Assoc Prof Dr Tengku Elena Tengku Mahamad said online environments have blurred the line between conversation and harmful behaviour, with private talk often spreading far beyond its intended audience.

She said once digital messages are shared, they can easily be taken out of context and reach

Social media environments have blurred line between seemingly normal conversation and harmful behaviour, says academic

unintended recipients.

"It starts within small circles, which then spreads far beyond what anyone intended. Once something is typed or forwarded, it can be shared or misinterpreted outside the original context.

"That is when it turns harmful, because private talk suddenly becomes public and permanent. The online environment rewards attention, not empathy. So, even private 'banter' can quickly become content that others consume, share and judge."

Tengku Elena said the absence of face-to-face interaction lowers social awareness and encourages group conformity.

"Online environments lower our social filters. When you cannot see someone's reaction, it is easier to forget there is a real person on the other side.

"People feel safer blending into a group, which we call diffusion of responsibility.

"The instant rewards of likes, emojis and approval make it feel like harmless entertainment.

"Over time, this normalises mockery and exclusion as part of belonging, and that is where harm begins."

She said digital platforms also make it difficult for users, especially young people, to understand the lasting impact of their behaviour.

"Once something is shared, it lives beyond intention and context."

Hospital Al-Sultan Abdullah psychiatrist Dr Nur Faizah Ali said gossip among youths often begin as casual chatting, or as she put it, *borak-borak biasa*.

But it turns into bullying when it becomes repetitive or personal.

"It crosses the line when it involves spreading rumours, making fun of someone's looks or sharing private stories without consent.

"For the person on the receiving end, it can be deeply painful. They may feel embarrassed, ashamed or betrayed by their peers."

Nur Faizah said online group involvement amplifies the harm, especially when others react or remain silent.

"Silence also sends a message. When nobody speaks up, it looks like everyone agrees.

"For young people, social rejection cuts very deep, and when gossip becomes a group activity, it turns into collective bullying.

"And because this type of bullying happens quietly, without adults noticing, many suffer alone, without support. That's why awareness and early conversations are so important."

According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 27,704 cyberbullying related content were removed between January and Oct 1, compared with 8,756 throughout 2024.



**TAKEN AWAY ...** One of several foreigners found begging at Masjid Jamek Kampung Baru in Kuala Lumpur yesterday being detained by an Immigration enforcement team. - BERNAMAPIC

## Influenza-positive boy died of encephalitis, says health minister

BY FAIZ RUZMAN  
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**PETALING JAYA:** A four-year-old boy who died in Samarahan, Sarawak, tested positive for Influenza A, but brain inflammation (encephalitis) - not the flu virus itself - was the main cause of death, said Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad.

"While the lab tests indicate a positive Influenza A result, it's important to note that the main complication was encephalitis, which caused the seizures," he said.

"Encephalitis can also be

caused by other viruses, so we cannot solely attribute the cause to Influenza A.

"Let us wait for the final diagnosis before drawing conclusions," he said after attending the World Hospice and Palliative Care Day event yesterday.

Dzulkefly expressed condolences to the child's family and said a full investigation is underway to confirm the findings.

He assured the public that most influenza cases detected nationwide remain mild, and that the overall situation is under control despite a recent rise

in outbreaks.

According to the Health Ministry, the boy developed high fever on Oct 5 and sought treatment at a private clinic the following day.

On his way home, he suffered seizures and was rushed to hospital for emergency treatment.

"Due to his critical condition, he was admitted to the paediatric intensive care unit but was pronounced dead on Oct 8," the ministry said in a statement.

Laboratory tests confirmed Influenza A, but the ministry said the exact cause of death remains under investigation by the

Sarawak Health Department.

The ministry urged the public to remain vigilant against influenza infections and to seek immediate medical treatment for symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or body aches, especially among children and high-risk individuals.

It also advised the public to wear face masks, practise good hygiene and avoid crowded places if symptomatic.

The ministry said it continues to monitor the situation through its Influenza-Like Illness and Severe Acute Respiratory Infection surveillance systems, and is coordinating with the Education

Ministry to share updated information and preventive measures.

On Oct 9, the ministry reported 97 influenza A and B clusters detected nationwide during Epidemiological Week 40, up sharply from 14 the week before, with most cases recorded in schools.

Selangor had the highest number with 43 clusters, followed by Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya with 15 Penang with 10, Johor with nine and Kedah with five.

The ministry said the rise reflects seasonal influenza trends that remain under control.

# Echoes of past within ancient caves

From ancient skulls to rock art, Unesco World Heritage Site in Sarawak offers glimpses of early civilisations

**MIRI:** Amid the quiet wilderness of Sarawak's tropical rainforest, the Niah Caves rise majestically as the largest and oldest limestone cave complex in Malaysia.

A natural wonder steeped in history, the site serves as a gateway to uncovering the secrets of early human civilisation in Southeast Asia.

Renowned for archaeological discoveries dating back tens of thousands of years, the caves – once home to humans as early as 65,000 years ago – have emerged as a key site in tracing human origins and prehistoric life in the region.

Covering an area of 3,138ha, the caves are located in Batu Niah, about 90km from Miri.

They hold not only priceless archaeological treasures but also breathtaking natural panoramas that make them a must-visit World Heritage destination.

Tour guide Frankie C.K. Kho, 57, who has spent more than two decades leading visitors through the site, described the experience as a journey through both nature and time.

Recognised as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) World Heritage Site, Niah continues to captivate visitors with its vast caverns and deep historical resonance.

Visitors are often struck by the thousand-year-old limestone formations, the echoes of

swiftlets filling the cavern, and shafts of natural light piercing through rocky crevices, a setting that evokes the world of ancient civilisations.

Situated near the borders of Marudi to the east, Beluru and Subis to the south, and the South China Sea to the west, Niah offers a multi-layered experience that intertwines nature, culture and archaeology.

The adventure begins at the Niah National Park registration counter, followed by a short boat ride across the Niah River before a trek through dense rainforest to reach the cave network.

Among the main sites are the Traders' Cave (Gua Dagang), the Great Cave (Gua Besar), the Moon Cave (Gua Gan Kira) and the Painted Cave (Gua Lukisan).

Each site holds distinct significance, from awe-inspiring rock formations to artefacts left behind by prehistoric communities.

Visitors often start at the Niah Archaeological Museum, where exhibits include replicas of Southeast Asia's earliest modern human skull, found within the caves.

From there, a nearly three-kilometre walk along wooden walkways leads into the heart of the rainforest, where the scent of bat *guano* and the calls of swiftlets complete the sensory immersion.

The first stop, Gua Dagang,

was once a bustling trading hub for local communities.

Remnants of wooden structures still stand as silent witnesses to centuries-old commerce.

Further ahead lies the Great Cave, a vast chamber the size of a football field and nearly 75m high.

Here, natural light streams through the cave mouth, revealing spectacular limestone formations while swiftlets glide overhead.

If fortunate, visitors may witness Penan communities collecting swiftlet nests or harvesting *guano*, traditions that continue to sustain local livelihoods.

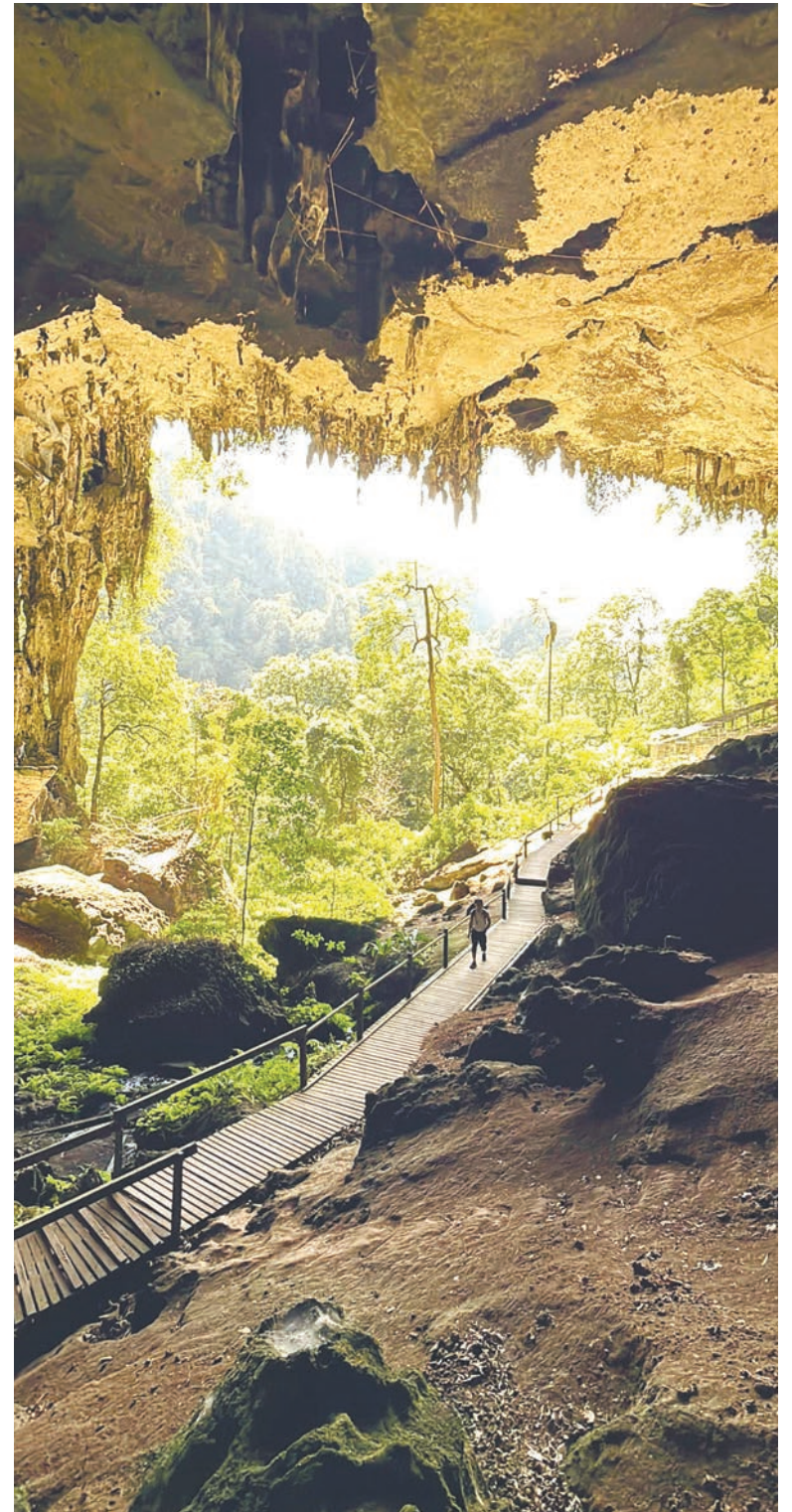
The trail's final stop is the Painted Cave, about 150m from the Great Cave.

On its walls, 1,200-year-old rock paintings depict boat-shaped coffins and spiritual beliefs about the soul's journey after death.

According to Kho, visitors are often amazed to learn that the earliest modern human skull in Southeast Asia was discovered here, not abroad.

He explained that the ancient paintings offer a glimpse into the artistic and spiritual expression of prehistoric communities, a priceless window into humanity's past.

With the Unesco recognition, the Niah Caves are now poised to play a greater role in sustainable tourism, offering new opportunities for local communities through eco-tourism and heritage-based travel while preserving one of the region's most remarkable archaeological legacies.



Niah offers a multi-layered experience that intertwines nature, culture and archaeology. – BERNAMAPIC

## EDUCATION

FOCUS 2025

Education matters remain an important component of Malaysian society. Today the landscape is fast paced with new exciting developments in technology such as AI, coding, virtual reality, and cybersecurity, leading the way for changes in curriculum development. To showcase the latest and most updated content, we invite you join us in 2025, and be part of our Education Focus!



## North Korea shows off new missile

**SEOUL:** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on Friday oversaw a large military parade displaying its new intercontinental ballistic missile in front of visiting dignitaries.

The parade marked the 80th anniversary of the founding of its ruling Workers' Party and followed celebrations on Thursday.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang, a delegation from Russia led by former President Dmitry Medvedev, as well as Vietnam's Communist Party chief To Lam were among the foreign dignitaries in Pyongyang.

North Korea displayed its Hwasong-20 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), described by KCNA news agency as the country's "strongest nuclear strategic weapon system".

The Hwasong series of ICBMs has given North Korea the capacity to target any site on the US mainland, but questions remain over its guidance system and the ability of its warhead to withstand re-entry.

"The Hwasong-20 represents the apotheosis of North Korea's ambitions for long-range nuclear delivery capabilities. We should expect to see the system tested soon," said Ankit Panda of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Kim said North Korean military heroism would not only be seen in the defence of North Korea but also in "outposts of socialist construction".

Kim held talks with Medvedev, who said the sacrifice of North Korean soldiers in Ukraine proved the trust in bilateral relations. - Reuters

## Seoul summons Cambodian envoy

**SEOUL:** South Korea's foreign minister summoned Cambodia's ambassador on Friday following a surge in reported kidnappings of South Korean nationals linked to job scams in the Southeast Asian country.

The number of reported kidnappings of South Koreans in Cambodia, previously averaging 10 to 20 cases a year, surged to 220 last year and 330 as of August, according to lawmaker Na Kyung-won's office.

The recent death of a Korean student in Cambodia - reportedly kidnapped and tortured by a crime ring - has shocked South Korea.

Many of the South Korean kidnapping victims are said to have been lured by fraudulent job offers promising high pay.

"I summoned Ambassador Khun Phon Rattanak to express grave concern over the cases of job fraud and confinement involving Korean nationals in Cambodia," Foreign Minister Cho Hyun said.

He urged "swift and concrete action to eliminate online scams", Cho said, adding that Seoul had issued a special travel advisory for Phnom Penh.

"I called for stronger measures to prevent another tragic loss of life and for closer police cooperation."

Amnesty International reports abuses in Cambodia's scam centres are happening on a "mass scale", and there are at least 53 scam compounds in the country. - AFP

# Strengthen ties with South, Asean urged

## Protect supply chains, group told

**PHNOM PENH:** Scholars are urging stronger cooperation between Asean and the South to address escalating challenges, emphasising that safeguarding supply chains is key to economic resilience.

Experts said Asean must continue to strengthen the South-South cooperation, supported by multilateral frameworks such as BRICS+ and the Belt and Road Initiative, to enhance its strategic autonomy.

"We need to strengthen and protect Asean supply chains, which are the backbone of the regional economy. Asean

should embrace regionalism and globalism in a way that aligns our concerted efforts that put the interests of people and the planet at the centre," Asian Cultural Council Chairman Suos Yara said at the Fourth Phnom Penh Forum recently.

The clarion calls arise amid increasing rivalry between major economies like the United States and China, which are at odds over tariff issues, Bernama reported.

On Friday, US President Donald Trump announced a 100% trade import tariff on goods from China effective Nov 1, a move that could jolt the global economy and potentially trigger a recession.

Prof Anna Rosario Malindog-Uy from Peking

University said the 21st century is witnessing a historic shift, with the economic and political weight of the South rising.

The BRICS+ economies account for nearly 36% of global GDP and more than 45% of the world's population, and the platform is growing into a political and diplomatic forum.

BRICS+ includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Iran.

"Asean must navigate the currents of competition with wisdom, prudence and unity.

"The essence of South-South cooperation lies not in rivalry with the North, but in redefining the global system

toward greater equity and inclusiveness," Malindog-Uy said at the forum.

She said if Asean could combine economic pragmatism with strategic foresight, then the region could lead the Global South.

"The challenges we face are complex and interconnected. No single country can confront them alone. The deepening partnership between Asean and China stands as a compelling example, yielding mutual gains in trade, infrastructure and sustainable development.

"This contrast presents Asean with a challenge and an opportunity," said International Relations Institute of Cambodia Director-General Dr Kin Phea.



Firefighters and residents fix a damaged roof in Baganga town, Mindanao. - AFP/IC/BUREAU OF FIRE PROTECTION REGION 11

## Philippines begins clean-up after quakes

**MANAY:** Dazed survivors of a pair of major earthquakes in the southern Philippines woke up yesterday to scenes of devastation.

Many residents of Mindanao island had slept outdoors, fearful of being crushed to death by aftershocks of the 7.4 and 6.7 magnitude quakes that struck off the coast within hours of each other on Friday.

Philippine authorities said at least eight people were killed but they were still assessing the extent of the damage.

In Manay, a Mindanao municipality of 40,000, people were removing debris and sweeping up broken glass from buildings yesterday.

"Our small house and store were destroyed," said resident Ven Lupogan.

"We have nowhere to sleep. There's no electricity. We have nothing to eat."

The destruction came less than two weeks after a 6.9 magnitude quake struck the central Philippine island of Cebu, killing 75 people and wrecking about 72,000 houses.

Some people in Manay slept in tents, under improvised tarps and hammocks, inside vehicles, and on mats laid out in parks and pavements as aftershocks rippled across the region of 1.8 million people.

At the heavily damaged Manay government hospital,

patients lay on beds outside waiting for treatment.

Many had been wheeled out on Friday because government engineers said the building had been structurally compromised.

Nearby shopkeepers cleaned up broken glass and put merchandise back on shelves.

Vilma Lagnayo scrambled to save her family's clothes and belongings from their collapsed Manay home.

"Reconstructing (our home) is difficult now. Money is a problem," Lagnayo said.

The Philippine seismology office has recorded more than 800 aftershocks since the first quake struck Mindanao, which is

riddled by major faults.

In Mati, about two hours' drive southwest along the coast, Margarita Mulle and her relatives held a wake for her older sister who had earlier died from disease, as neighbours stayed away after tsunami warnings that have since been lifted.

"In case something happens, they (relatives) will carry the body using a 'tora-tora,' a tearful Mulle said, using a local term for a hand tractor-drawn cart.

Earthquakes are a near-daily occurrence in the Philippines, which is on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic activity stretching from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin. - AFP

# Call for immediate aid

Agencies ready to scale up response

**BERLIN:** Doctors Without Borders has called on Israeli authorities to allow "sufficient and unimpeded flow of humanitarian assistance" into the sealed-off Gaza Strip, following the start of the ceasefire on Friday.

Evacuations of patients in need of urgent specialist

medical care must be authorised, the aid organisation said in a statement.

"This ceasefire must be accompanied by an immediate massive and sustained scale-up of aid into and across the Strip, including the north," the group said.

Doctors Without Borders emphasised that the suffering of Gaza's population is not over.

"Palestinians in Gaza who survived the war are doing so amid the ruins of what was once

their homes and have immense medical, psychological and material needs," it said.

There is an urgent need for the most basic goods in the Gaza Strip – medical equipment, medicine, food, water, fuel and adequate shelter, it said.

The majority of people are facing the approaching winter without a roof over their heads, the aid organisation warned.

Israel controls access to the Gaza Strip and must authorise and guarantee the safety of

humanitarian convoys.

The ceasefire agreed between Israel and Hamas is intended to enable new aid deliveries. The next steps towards a lasting peace have not yet been finalised.

In Gaza, the bodies of 155 Palestinians killed in Israeli attacks were brought to hospitals across the Gaza Strip over the past 24 hours, including 135 whose bodies were recovered from under the rubble, medical sources reported.

The sources said 19 Palestinians were killed in Israeli airstrikes across the Gaza Strip, despite the announced ceasefire agreement, while one person succumbed to wounds sustained in a previous attack.

The sources said 16 people were killed when Israeli warplanes bombed a house in southern Gaza City.

Two Palestinians were also killed in an airstrike south of Khan Younis, Bernama reported.

Hospitals across the Strip received large numbers of victims, with 43 bodies taken to Al-Shifa Hospital, 60 to Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza City, four to Al-Awda Hospital in Nuseirat, 16 to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah and 32 to Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis.

Since October 2023, over 67,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, with about 170,000 wounded.

Massive destruction, including the targeting of homes and infrastructure, has also led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.

## 19 missing after explosives plant blast

**WASHINGTON:** Nineteen people were missing and an unspecified number were killed after a massive blast tore through a US military explosives plant on Friday, prompting emergency responders to scour the site for survivors.

Aerial footage broadcast by US media showed smouldering debris at the factory in Hickman County, Tennessee, with charred and mangled vehicles strewn across the facility.

"At this time, we have been able to confirm that we have 19 people whom we are looking for," Humphreys County Sheriff Chris Davis told reporters.

"There are fatalities. I don't want to put a number to that. I can tell you right now we are looking for 19 individuals."

The explosion occurred at a plant run by Accurate Energetic Systems in Hickman County's Bucksport area, prompting official warnings for the public to avoid the area amid fears of secondary explosions.

Davis said the blast engulfed an entire building at the facility, calling it "the most devastating scene that I've seen in my career".

The blast was so massive that it was heard across a great distance, with debris scattering across half a square mile, he said.

When asked to describe the state of the building where the explosion occurred, Davis said: "There's nothing to describe. It's gone."

It was not immediately clear what triggered the explosion. – AFP



Palestinians displaced to the southern part of Gaza returning to the north. – REUTERS/PIC

## US marines to lead anti-drug strikes

**WASHINGTON:** The Pentagon announced on Friday it is establishing a new counter-narcotics joint task force overseeing operations in Latin America, a move aimed to strengthen already intensifying military operations that have raised questions among legal experts.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said the task force aimed "to crush the cartels, stop the poison and keep

America safe".

"The message is clear: if you traffic drugs towards our shores, we will stop you cold," Hegseth said on X.

The missions have focused entirely on striking suspected drug boats in the waters of the Caribbean. The US military has blown up at least four, killing 21 people.

The US military Southern Command, which oversees US operations in Latin America, said

the new task force would be led by II Marine Expeditionary Force, which is based at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina.

The Southern Command said the II MEF, as it is known in military parlance, would "synchronise and augment counter-narcotics efforts across the Western Hemisphere".

"By forming a (task force) around II MEF headquarters, we enhance our ability to detect, disrupt and dismantle illicit

trafficking networks faster and at greater depth – together with our US and partner-nation counterparts," said Admiral Alvin Holsey, who leads Southern Command.

It was unclear if the creation of the task force granted the US troops in Latin America any additional authority as President Donald Trump mulls potentially striking suspected drug trafficking sites inside Venezuela.

In a statement, Marine Lt- Gen

Calvert Worth, who leads the II MEF and will head the task force, suggested the focus was still operations at sea.

"This is principally a maritime effort, and our team will leverage maritime patrols, aerial surveillance, precision interdictions and intelligence sharing to counter illicit traffic, uphold the rule of law and ultimately better protect vulnerable communities here at home," Worth said. – Reuters

## Qatar gets air force facility in Idaho

**WASHINGTON:** US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth announced on Friday that Qatar will be allowed to use an air force facility at Mountain Home Air Base in Idaho that will house F-15 fighter jets and pilots.

The announcement comes soon after President Donald Trump signed an executive order vowing to defend the Gulf Arab state against attacks, following

Israeli air strikes targeting Hamas leaders in the Qatari capital Doha.

"We're signing a letter of acceptance to build a Qatari Emiri Air Force facility at the Mountain Home Air Base in Idaho," Hegseth said at the Pentagon, with Qatari Defence Minister Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani at his side.

"The location will host a contingent of Qatari F-15s and

pilots to enhance our combined training" as well as "increase lethality, interoperability", he said.

"It's just another example of our partnership. And I hope you know, your excellency, that you can count on us."

The Idaho base also hosts a jet squadron from Singapore.

Hegseth also thanked Qatar for its "substantial role" as a mediator in the talks that led to a truce and

hostage-prisoner swap deal between Israel and Hamas, and its assistance in securing the release of a US citizen from Afghanistan.

The Qatari minister hailed the "strong, enduring partnership" and "deep defence relationship" shared by the two countries.

The Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar is Washington's largest military facility in the Middle East.

Trump's close relationship with

the leaders of Qatar has raised eyebrows, especially over its gift to the president of a Boeing 747 to be used as Air Force One.

The Idaho facility for Qatar had been in the works since Joe Biden's administration.

Hegseth said: "Qatar will not have its own base nor anything like a base. We control the existing base, like we do with all partners." – AFP

# theSunday

OCTOBER 12, 2025

## Special

### ALSO INSIDE

Lost in the middle

Dear men, stop  
wearing socks with  
sandals

Stopover  
programmes that  
help you travel for  
almost free

# Rewriting the script

for Malaysian cinema





# Rewriting the script for Malaysian cinema

BY HANNEF ESQUANDER

**M**ALAYSIAN filmmakers have long worked to bring local stories to the world stage. While Hollywood blockbusters and Korean dramas capture global attention, our own industry continues its journey toward the elusive recognition of a nomination for Best International Feature Film at the Oscars. The question is, how much longer will it take before a Malaysian production earns a place on that list?

## From the golden era to new beginnings

The history of Malaysian cinema began at Studio Jalan Ampas in Singapore, back when it was still part of the country. Out of this golden era emerged P. Ramlee, a multi-talented actor, director, writer and singer who created enduring classics such as *Bujang Lapok*, *Tiga Abdul* and *Ibu Mertua Ku*. His work not only charmed local audiences but also gained international recognition, including the Golden Harvest Award for Most Versatile Talent in Tokyo in 1963 for *Ibu Mertua Ku*.

That period, with its black-and-white productions and timeless appeal, marked the heyday of Malaysian cinema. But with P. Ramlee's passing in 1973, the industry's brightest spotlight dimmed, leaving behind an unfilled gap.



P. Ramlee wrote, directed, acted in and sang in classics such as *Bujang Lapok*, *Tiga Abdul* and *Ibu Mertua Ku*.



**I would love to see more original Malaysian films that not only succeed at home but also earn critical acclaim across the globe."**

Saw

## Finding new voices

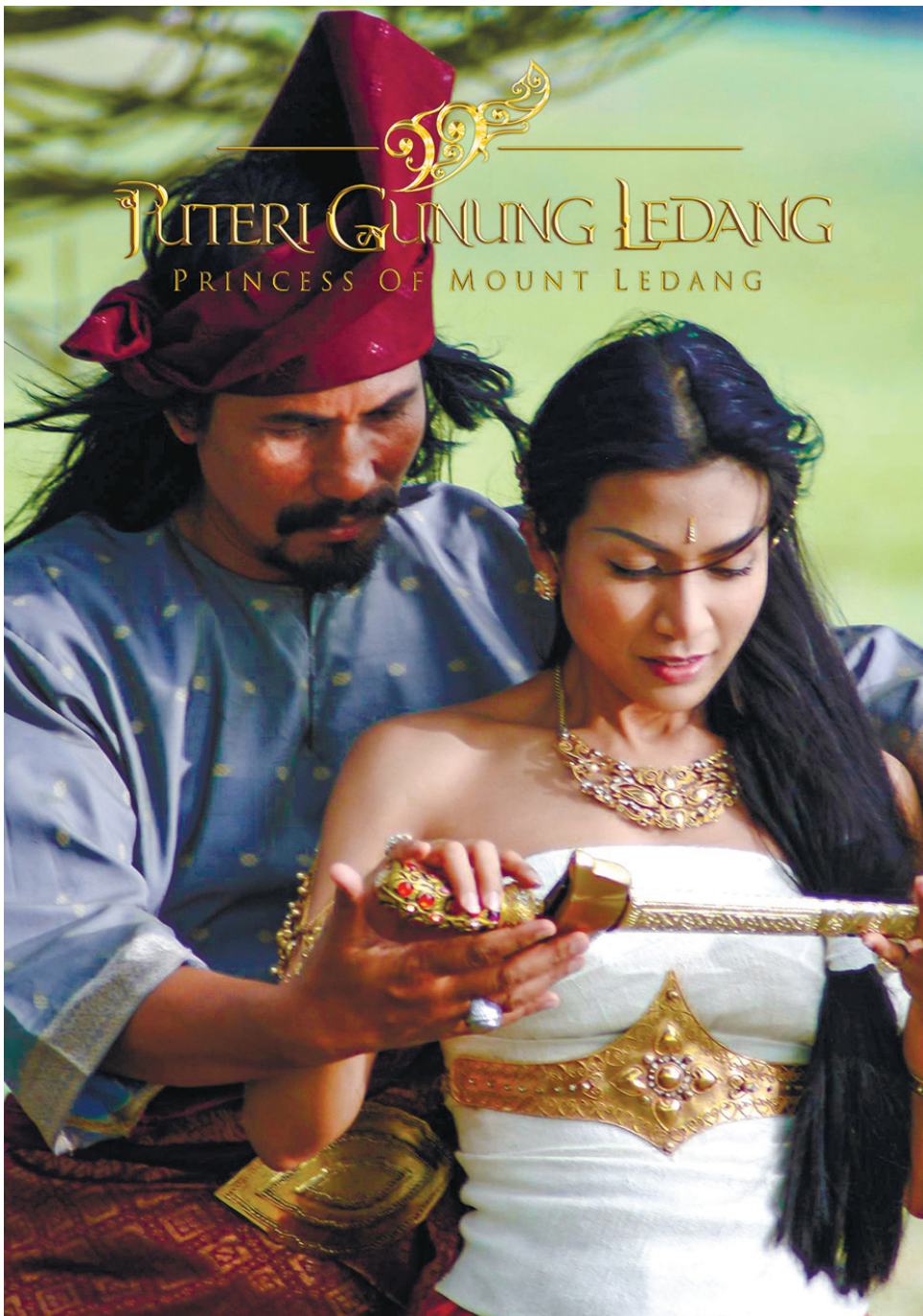
In the decades since, Malaysian cinema has produced critically acclaimed works and nurtured remarkable talents, although Oscars recognition remains out of reach. Yasmin Ahmad is one of the most celebrated names in this regard. Her debut feature *Sepet* (2004) explored race and religion with a sensitivity rarely seen on screen, winning Best Asian Film at the Tokyo International Film Festival in 2005. *Mukhsin* (2006), the final film in her Orked trilogy, went on to win the Grand Prix in the Generation Kplus competition at the 2007 Berlin International Film Festival.

At home, her films sparked debate, but abroad, they were warmly received and celebrated for their honesty and courage. Yasmin's sudden passing in 2009 robbed the industry of a singular voice, one that had managed to connect Malaysia to

audiences far beyond its borders.

Other filmmakers have also carried the torch. Shuhaimi Baba's *Layar Lara* (1997) earned her the Special Jury Award at the Pyongyang International Film Festival and Best Director at the Brussels Independent Film Festival. Directors such as Amanda Nell Eu, Dain Said, Liew Seng Tat and Tunku Mona Riza have since brought Malaysian films to international festivals, winning awards and recognition along the way.

Saw Teong Hin holds a special place in the nation's cinematic history as the director of *Puteri Gunung Ledang* (2004), the first Malaysian film submitted for consideration in the Oscars' Best International Feature Film category. It was also the country's first epic and, at RM20 million, the most expensive local production of its time.



*Puteri Gunung Ledang* is the first Malaysian film to be submitted for the Academy Award's Best Foreign Language Film category.

"Like any out-of-body experience, it was completely unreal. Particularly attending the Palm Springs International Film Festival, the lead-up to the Academy Awards. To be in the same room with my film heroes was a complete thrill," Saw recalled.

*Puteri Gunung Ledang* paved the way for more submissions. Over the years, Malaysia has produced notable works, including *Bunohan* (2012), *Lelaki Harapan Dunia* (2015), *Redha* (2016), *M for Malaysia* (2019), *Roh* (2020), *Prebet Sapu* (2021), *Tiger Stripes* (2023) and *Abang Adik* (2024). None have yet made the final shortlist, but many notably *Tiger Stripes* and *Abang Adik* have achieved critical acclaim overseas, including awards at Cannes Critics' Week and the Far East Film Festival.

"Many festivals have celebrated Malaysian films. And that, of course, is a good thing. My stand-out festival moment was at the Venice International Film Festival.

The sight of our Malaysian flag flying above the pavilion brought tears to my eyes. There has been sporadic international recognition for Malaysian films. My wish is for us to achieve a sustained presence," Saw said.



Saw ... "Technology is making it easier for filmmakers to tell their stories the way they intended. But like most things, it is a double-edged sword."

“Streaming platforms have given Malaysian films a wider reach, allowing audiences to enjoy local stories alongside global blockbusters from the comfort of home.”

The Malaysian film industry today bears little resemblance to the one that launched *Puteri Gunung Ledang* two decades ago. Technology has reshaped both how movies are made and how audiences consume them.

Saw is particularly encouraged by the diversity of voices now coming forward.

"We now have more representations of our fellow Malaysians from East Malaysia. The local Tamil and Chinese cinema are blossoming too."

Audiences, meanwhile, no longer rely solely on theatres. Cinemas remain popular, but streaming platforms have transformed viewing habits. Malaysians can now access local films alongside global titles, often from the comfort of their own homes.

When *Puteri Gunung Ledang* entered streaming in 2020 via Netflix, it found a new wave of fans among younger viewers,

sparking online conversations and social media tributes to its enduring production quality and performances. Saw's last film, *You Mean the World to Me*, is not yet available on streaming platforms, although discussions are underway to bring it to a broader audience.

"Technology is making it easier for filmmakers to tell their stories the way that they intended to. But like most things, it is a double-edged sword. Options can be paralyzing.

Streaming platforms, for instance, offer access. Hopefully, that exposure will help us hone a stronger Malaysian voice. But access also makes it harder to break through the noise," he said.

#### Stories that matter

For Saw, filmmaking ultimately comes back to telling stories rooted in truth. He encourages young directors to experience life beyond the lens. Only through lived experience, he says, can filmmakers discover their authentic voice.

The examples of P. Ramlee and Yasmin Ahmad remain powerful reminders. Both drew deeply from Malaysian life and left behind works that continue to resonate with viewers. Today's filmmakers face the challenge of balancing cultural authenticity with broader appeal — a task that requires courage, creativity and, at times, patience.

"You almost need all the stars to align for that to happen. But still, the hope remains. I dream of seeing more original Malaysian films that not only succeed at home but also earn critical acclaim across the globe," Saw said with quiet optimism.

As Malaysia continues to submit films for Oscars consideration and build its presence at international festivals, the journey of local cinema continues to be shaped by history, fueled by new voices and propelled by the dream of one day seeing a truly Malaysian story take its place among the world's finest.



*Tiger Stripes* by Amanda Nell Eu won the Grand Prize at the Cannes Critics Week, making it the first Malaysian and Southeast Asian film to be honoured at Cannes.

**I**n the heart of every family, where names blur between sibling squabbles and shared meals, there lies a quiet question: Who truly sees the child in the middle? Not just in the photos or family trips, but emotionally, deeply and wholly?

Middle Child Syndrome has long been dismissed as a punchline and a funny meme shared online – yet another trope we use to simplify complex childhood dynamics.

But what if it is not a myth, but a mirror? A reflection of how easily emotional gaps form in even the most loving households.

To explore this idea, we turn to Alia Nizar, a life coach and founder of Mind Contemplation, one of the few voices in Malaysia daring to bridge personal introspection with communal healing.

Alia is not a middle child herself. She is the youngest, the only daughter, with three older brothers. Yet her perspective is far from distant.

"I'm married to a middle child," she shared.

"I've observed these dynamics closely through my husband, my brothers and my clients."

Today, her coaching work centres on helping women, especially those who feel stuck between expectations and identity, reconnect with their truth. And among them, middle children appear often.

#### Myth or mirror?

From a clinical perspective, Middle Child Syndrome is not an official psychological diagnosis. But the emotional patterns it points to are often very real.

These children are not forgotten deliberately. Instead, they are overshadowed by the logistical and emotional intensity of family life.

"In many households, especially in Asia, the eldest is the pride. The youngest is protected. The middle? They're expected to cope," said Alia.

"The emotional bandwidth simply isn't always there."

She explained that this isn't due to neglect, but rather emotional misattunement. Parents often rely on the blueprint



## Lost in the middle

*Middle Child Syndrome may not be in the diagnostic or statistical manual, but its emotional echoes are real*

BY AQILAH NAJWA JAMALUDDIN

used with the first child, assuming it will work again. But every child is, in Alia's words, "a different cartridge in the same Game Boy".

Without a conscious pause to ask, "Who is this child right now?", many parents inadvertently parent on autopilot. Discovery-based parenting, as Alia described it, requires intentionality.



Middle Child Syndrome is not an official psychological diagnosis, but the emotional patterns it points to are often very real.

**They don't explode. They withdraw. They say 'yes' while their gut screams 'no'.**

It asks parents not just to feed, clothe or discipline, but to become curious about what the child fears, loves and needs at each phase of life.

You see glimpses of this in stories we've long cherished. In the famous film adaptation of *Little Women*, Beth March, a gentle, kind and ever-accommodating character, lives mainly in the quiet spaces between her louder sisters.

Jo burns with passion, Amy craves attention and Meg is the model's older sibling. But Beth? She nurtures everyone but herself. Her softness is mistaken for simplicity, her quietness for stability. When her light begins to dim, it is not with protest or complaint, but with acceptance because no one thought to ask how heavy her silence had become.

Beth may not technically be the middle child, but she embodies the ache of being emotionally overlooked. The child who causes no trouble. Who adjusts. Who gives without asking. Who learns to speak only softly because she fears her needs might be too loud.

"Even in well-meaning homes, the middle child can become emotionally invisible," Alia added.

"Not because they were unloved, but because they were assumed to be fine."

#### How emotional neglect shapes personality

The coping mechanisms that middle children develop are rarely disruptive. In fact, they are often praised. Independence. Maturity. Calmness.

But beneath the surface, these traits can mask emotional suppression and internal conflict.

"They're the 'good kids'. The one who never causes trouble. But also the one no one checks in with emotionally," said Alia.

Through years of observation, both professionally and personally, Alia has identified several recurring patterns:

- Avoidant attachment: A tendency to self-soothe and withdraw emotionally, having learnt that their inner world is not likely to be met with interest.
- High-functioning people-pleasing: A need to maintain peace at all costs, often paired with crippling indecision and self-doubt.
- Silent rebellion: A quiet refusal to engage or conform, not through conflict, but through emotional disengagement.

"They don't explode. They withdraw," she explained.

"They say 'yes' while their gut screams 'no'."

These behavioural traits may not raise alarms in childhood. But in adulthood, they often manifest as anxiety, burnout, depression or difficulty with relationships. The emotional residue lingers in marriages, workplaces and parenting decisions.

"Middle children often become adults who succeed outwardly, but feel deeply unsure inwardly.

That dissonance between how they look and how they feel is what makes the psychological toll so heavy," said Alia.

A 2018 study from the University of Essex suggests that middle children are more adaptable and diplomatic.

But Alia urges us to look deeper.

"Adaptability isn't always resilience. Sometimes, it's self-erasure."



"Like Beth March in Little Women, the quietest sibling often carries the heaviest silence."

### Culture, consciousness and open conversations

The conversation around middle children cannot be separated from culture. In many Asian households, birth order is still strongly tied to identity. The eldest carries the legacy. The youngest receives affection. The middle often exists in a space of comparison.

But Alia pointed out that this pattern is not universal.

"In some Korean families, for instance, all the attention may go to the son, regardless of whether he's first or third. So even an eldest daughter may grow up feeling invisible."

This reinforces Alia's core argument: Emotional neglect is not about placement, but presence. The issue lies not in where a child is born, but in whether they are emotionally seen.

Thankfully, there is a slow but growing shift in modern parenting. With smaller families and the rise of conscious parenting, many parents today are more emotionally attuned to their children. They ask questions like 'What is my child feeling? What matters to them, not just what should matter?'

"Conscious parenting doesn't mean you're perfect. It just means you're willing to get curious. To see your child as a person, not just a role," Alia reminded.

She believes that all children, not just middle ones, need a space where their inner world is explored, not assumed to be understood. Where inclusion is not enough and understanding becomes the priority.

So, how do we ensure that middle children or any child does not grow up emotionally unseen?

Alia's advice to parents is to move beyond the checklist of inclusion. Yes, bring them into the room. But more importantly, make space for their voice within it.

"Don't assume. Observe. Ask. Listen to understand, not to respond."

A simple example she offered was this: Not every child defines "play" the same way. One may prefer board games, another prefers to run wildly and laugh without rules. When parents slow down enough to notice these nuances, they're not just attending to their children; they're meeting them where they are.

"What every child truly wants to know is: 'Do you really see me? Do you know what matters to me?'" she said.

Because when a child feels emotionally understood, they do not need to rebel, perform or please to be loved. They grow into adults who are not only successful but also grounded. Not just independent, but self-aware.

### The middle of nowhere

Middle Child Syndrome may not be recognised in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, but its emotional effects are real. And they are the loudest of the quietest kids.

The ones who never caused trouble. The ones who coped. Those who laughed when things felt heavy and stayed calm, so no one else would unravel.

They became the reliable ones. The mediators. They are emotionally self-sufficient. But beneath that resilience is often a child who learned to survive by staying small. A child who internalised that needing less made them easier to love.

"Some of my clients only realised in adulthood that they had been emotionally neglected," Alia reflected.

"Because they were the children no one had to worry about."

But they were. And they are. Still learning to locate themselves, somewhere between responsibility and rebellion, silence and selfhood. Trying to remember who they were before they shaped themselves to be easy, useful or invisible.

Maybe that's the quiet heartbreak of it all, how many brilliant, sensitive, intuitive children were never known deeply, simply because they made things easier for everyone else.

Perhaps it is time we saw them - not as the middle, not as the myth, but as whole people. Complex, emotional, worthy. Not waiting to be fixed or labelled, but simply to be met, exactly where they are.

**In many Asian families, the eldest is the pride, the youngest is protected and the middle is expected to cope."**

Alia



Success outside, uncertainty within – the middle child's paradox.



# Dear men, stop wearing socks with sandals

BY HANNEF ESQUANDER

**N**OT everyone has to be a fashion expert or keep up with the latest trends. What matters is knowing what looks good on you and what should be avoided to appear polished and well-groomed. There is no penalty for not pronouncing a designer label correctly or being unaware of seasonal styles.

Classic pieces work on everyone. Men's wear is simpler than women's wear and it is hard to go wrong unless you try too hard. Fashion often comes down to instinct. Icons such as Marlon Brando, James Dean and P. Ramlee were sharp dressers by nature. You do not have to copy them, but you should aim to look your best, appropriately dressed for the occasion in clothes that flatter you.

Yet many men remain clueless about fashion, repeating the same *faux pas*. This often stems from the environment or reluctance to step out of a comfort zone. Every man deserves to look his best and the first step is avoiding these common fashion missteps.

**Not getting the trousers hemmed**  
Trousers that are too long create an untidy pool of fabric around the ankles. A no-break hem offers the cleanest look and is suitable for shorter men. A quarter break gives a sharp appearance with only a slight fold. Medium breaks feature a single fold, offering a classic style. Complete breaks wrap around the leg but are harder to pull off and can appear sloppy, though they suit taller men better.

The simplest fix is a trip to the tailor. Hemming costs little but makes a big difference in how trousers fall. Well-fitted trousers give structure to your silhouette and instantly make you look more refined.

## Oversized logos on clothes

Large logos, especially on tops, overwhelm the outfit. Logo mania may return as a trend, but that doesn't mean you have to follow it. Avoid bold logos on polo shirts, T-shirts or jackets. Instead, opt for subtle branding or none at all. Quiet luxury may be overexposed, but it is still preferable to wearing a billboard on your chest.

Minimal branding lets the cut and fit of the clothing stand out. Clothes should highlight the person wearing them, not the label stitched on the front.



Well-fitted pants go a long way.



Being a sports fan is fine, but it should not define your entire wardrobe.



## Not buttoning the jacket properly

The rules are straightforward. With a two-button jacket, fasten only the top button. With a three-button jacket, the top is optional, but the middle must always be fastened. Never button the bottom one.

A poorly buttoned jacket makes even an expensive suit look sloppy. A properly fastened one signals polish and awareness of basic style rules.

## Wearing socks with sandals

This is one of the most common mistakes committed by both men and women – understandable in colder countries where socks are a necessity, but not in the tropics. Slipping into sandals over socks for a quick errand at home is forgivable. But wearing them to the mall or a restaurant is not. Sandals with shorts and a shirt work fine; socks are unnecessary.

The rule is simple: Sandals are meant for bare feet. Treat them as a casual, breathable option, not an extension of your bedroom slippers.

## Wearing sports jerseys everywhere you go

Being a sports fan is fine, but it should not define your entire wardrobe. Jerseys, with their bold colours and oversized numbers, can look messy off the field. A plain T-shirt with jeans or shorts creates a sharper, more versatile look.

Save the jersey for match day or when you are at the stadium. For everyday wear, invest in basics like neutral-coloured T-shirts or polos. They will carry you from a casual lunch to a night out without looking like you forgot to change after the game.

## Wearing clothes not suited to the climate

A leather jacket may give James Dean flair, but in this climate, it means only discomfort. Hoodies can be a risk under the blazing sun, leading to heat exhaustion. Dress for the weather: Opt for cotton or linen on hot days and consider light cardigans or jackets when the temperature cools.

Fabrics matter. Breathable options such as linen or seersucker keep you cool while still looking smart. Dressing for the weather shows practicality and respect for your surroundings.

## Not investing in good-quality footwear

Malaysian men's wear designer Bon Zainal, sharing his expertise, noted that footwear deserves equal attention. A good pair of leather shoes or simple sneakers can be dressed up or down to suit any occasion and poor-quality footwear, he warned, can ruin the entire look.

Shoes are often the first thing people notice. Cheap, flimsy shoes undermine an otherwise well-coordinated outfit. Invest in a few versatile pairs – such as leather oxfords, loafers or clean white sneakers and keep them polished. Good footwear is an investment in both style and confidence.

Looking good doesn't require a degree in fashion; only awareness and care are needed. Taking pride in how you dress shows respect for yourself and makes a lasting impression. The goal is not to impress everyone, but to present yourself with confidence and ease.



# Stopover programmes that help you travel for almost free

BY ASHRAF WAHAB

**C**OMING from Malaysia, international travel isn't always the cheapest. But stopover programmes are the hack you need.

Ever landed somewhere en route and thought, "Might as well make it worth it"? That's exactly what stopover programmes offer. Unlike short layovers, stopovers usually last more than 24 hours and let you leave the airport to explore a new city. All the while, your ticket to the final destination remains (mostly) unchanged.

Airlines and airports around the world offer various perks, including complimentary or discounted hotel stays, guided tours, vouchers and airport credits. That means a long flight connection can become a mini-holiday, giving you two destinations for the price of one. It also provides a nice break between long-haul travel.

A direct option might look easier. But flexibility counts. By adding a stopover, you often get the same ticket price while experiencing an extra city. If you're strategic – like flying through hubs with generous programmes – it's almost free. No additional ticket is needed. You simply choose a city and spend your layover exploring.

## Singapore Changi: Mini-city, mega experience

Changi Airport is legendary – many even consider it the best airport in the world. It boasts more than 500 awards, butterfly gardens, a slide and even a rooftop pool.

It's so feature-rich that it can feel like a mini-city.

If your connection is 5.5 to 24 hours, Changi and Singapore Airlines provide three 2.5-hour guided bus tours. This covers areas such as the Merlion, Marina Bay, Chinatown and Gardens by the Bay. It's a great way to dip your toes into Singaporean culture without renting a car or making prior arrangements. Oh and it's free.

For layovers longer than 24 hours, you can book a "Changi Stopovers" package. It bundles a one-night hotel stay, a complimentary SIM card and airport-hotel transfer from about US\$45 per person. If you fly Singapore Airlines, you can also get SIA's "Singapore Stopover Holiday" package, which includes a hotel, airport transfers, free bus rides and admission to 15 attractions. Sometimes you even get S\$20 in airport credits if you're flying premium.

## Why stopover beats booking direct

Aside from stretching your journey budget, Changi stopovers allow you to enjoy Jewel's indoor waterfall and lush Canopy Park. Check into Yotelair in-airport or Aerotel's pool-hotel in Terminal 1. Instead of rushing from one lounge to the next, you can sleep, splash and stroll effortlessly.

## Istanbul stopover: Touristanbul and hotel stay

Turkish Airlines' stopover programme in Istanbul comes with two options, depending on your layover length.

If your layover is between 6 and 24 hours, Touristanbul is your ticket. It's a free guided city tour that picks you up at Istanbul Airport and then takes you through top sights, including the Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Grand Bazaar, Galata Bridge, Golden Horn and more. The best part is that an English-speaking guide, transportation, all meals and entrance fees are all covered.

Available daily via online booking or at the airport desk, it's an easy, seamless way to sample Istanbul – no visa needed (check your passport). Passengers must have a Turkish Airlines ticket and a PNR-linked flight for both inbound/outbound travel.

For layovers lasting more than 20 hours, Turkish Airlines offers a complimentary hotel stay. Round-trip passengers with ticket numbers starting "235" can get up to two free nights in economy (three in business) at partner hotels. Additional nights are discounted. You must book ahead, present your voucher at check-in and complete the airport-hotel transfer promptly.

Travellers on review sites such as *Condé Nast Traveller* have described the programmes as a four-star stay, using Istanbul as a mini-vacation, with opportunities to fit in street food tours, mosques and afternoon breaks. *TripAdvisor* travellers confirm it works. The only catch is that you must fly Turkish both ways.

## Why stopover beats booking direct

Instead of sleeping on the plane, you get a proper rest in a city known for its vibrant culture and food scene. Touristanbul

offers curated insight; the hotel stay gives you the freedom to explore beyond the airport. For Malaysian business travellers heading to Europe or the Americas, this is a neat hack to see more without adding another flight.

## Etihad – "Stopover on us" in Abu Dhabi

Etihad's scheme offers one or two complimentary nights at a three-star hotel in Abu Dhabi for connecting flights. This applies to economy flights through to first class. It's straightforward: Pick your flight, add the stopover and select a hotel. At least 72 hours' notice is required and it's advisable to avoid third-party bookings. It's a solid way to visit the Louvre, the Sheikh Zayed Mosque or desert malls.

## Emirates – "Dubai Connect"

This programme gives travellers (economy to first class) with layovers of 6 to 26 hours a free night's hotel, meal, visa and transfers at no additional airfare. Eligible if on the shortest connecting flight. Typical hotels include Copthorne, JW Marriott or Le Meridien, located near DXB. It's ideal for those en route to Europe or the Americas.

## Malaysian traveller hacks: Plan smart

Choose the right hub: Flying via Singapore, Istanbul, Abu Dhabi or Dubai? Stopover programmes make those routes more fun.

Book stopover option: Use airline websites and add the stopover during booking. Don't assume it's automatic – click "add stopover".

Check passport and visa requirements: Some cities allow visa-free entry (Singapore transit) while others don't. Plan ahead.

Stick to the terms: Turkish Airlines requires both flights to be on the airline with a PNR (reservation code) starting with "235". Meanwhile, Etihad requires direct booking. Emirates, on the other hand, must be the shortest onward flight.

Mix business with leisure: Malaysian white-collar travellers can turn long-haul flights to London, New York or Europe into dual-city trips without extra flights.

Stopover programmes aren't a gimmick. They're practical, wallet-friendly options that let you squeeze more value out of experiences, relaxation and cultural insight into your journey. Next time you search flights, think: Why go direct when you can add another city, another story, another holiday without breaking your wallet? Weekend-warrior style travel, unlocked.

Turn your layover into a mini-holiday with stopover perks that add an extra city to your journey.



# Enjoying local favourites without **the guilt**

BY DR MOHD SHAH KAMARUDIN

“It’s not about being flawless; it’s about being consistent and balanced.”



**F**OR Malaysians, food is more than just nourishment. It is culture, comfort, celebration and identity. From the rich aroma of *nasi lemak* in the morning to the sizzling sound of *char kuey teow* at hawker stalls and the indulgence of *rendang* and *kuih* during festive seasons, food is deeply woven into the fabric of daily life. But along with this love of food, there is also a growing worry about health problems like diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure. This makes many people think that enjoying local favourites comes with a cost: Guilt.

You do not have to give up your favourite Malaysian foods to be healthy, though. Eating healthy does not mean following stringent rules or eating bland foods. It means making wise decisions, eating in moderation and finding a balance between pleasure and nutrition. You can eat well and live well if you make a few small changes.

People often think that they have to stop eating traditional meals like *nasi lemak*, *roti canai*, *rendang* or *kuih*. But no food is terrible in and of itself. How often you eat it, how much you eat and how it fits into your entire diet are more important. For example, a small plate of *nasi lemak* with a cooked egg, cucumber slices and sambal in moderation can still be a healthy meal. When you eat the dish with deep-fried chicken, a lot of sambal

cooked in oil and a sweet drink like *teh tarik*, that is when the problem starts. In these combinations, the amount of calories, saturated fat and sodium can easily exceed the recommended daily intake.

When eating out, which many working Malaysians do, it is extremely important to make healthy selections. Hawker food is readily available and tastes good, but it is generally high in fat, salt and sugar. That being said, you can still enjoy your meals by making modest but important alterations. You can ask for less oil and extra vegetables when you order *char kuey teow*, for example. Instead of the customary *nasi campur* with two or three rich dishes, consider grilled or steamed proteins as an alternative. Ask for the gravy to be served on the side and fill half your plate with vegetables. You may also make soupy noodle dishes healthier by using clear broths instead of creamy or greasy ones and adding tofu, eggs and leafy greens to the bowl.

Cooking at home gives you even more opportunities to eat healthily while preserving the flavours of classic foods. You can elevate many classic Malaysian recipes with just a few minor tweaks. You can reduce the saturated fat in curries by using less coconut milk or replacing it with low-fat milk. You may also make your meals healthier by steaming, boiling or grilling your meats instead of frying them.



Adding vegetables to meat recipes not only increases fibre but also makes the dish more filling.



Refreshing plain water with lemon and mint as a smart alternative to sweet drinks.

“Cooking at home gives you more chances to eat healthy while keeping the taste of classic foods.”

drinking more plain water and reducing the amount of energy-dense food you consume. Even simple modifications can result in long-term health benefits, such as switching from a sugary drink to water or eating a smaller portion of a rich dish.

You do not have to give up your gastronomic heritage or feel guilty about enjoying a traditional meal. It simply means knowing what your body requires, being conscious of what you eat and not exceeding your limits. So the next time you eat your beloved plate of *nasi lemak* or festive *kuih*, do so with gratitude and awareness. You can definitely eat well and live well if you do it the correct way. For more guidance on healthy local eating, consult a registered nutritionist.



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Adding vegetables to meat recipes not only increases fibre but also makes the dish more filling. For example, you can make *ayam masak merah* with less oil and more tomatoes, onions and carrots without changing the taste. You can even make festive foods like *rendang* with lean cuts of meat and less oil, using only traditional spices and herbs to provide flavour.

While ordinary meals can be adjusted to improve health, special-occasion delights such as *lemang*, *dodol*, *kek lapis* and *kuih raya* do not have to be avoided totally. These are “sometimes foods,” which means you should consume them in moderation and with caution. Instead

of eliminating them, pay attention to how much and how often you eat them. Rather than trying everything on the menu, pick a couple of your favourites. Eat small amounts, take your time and enjoy every bite. This conscious way of thinking helps you avoid overeating and lets you enjoy the experience without guilt.

People often overlook the amount of sugar in the drinks they consume. Sweetened beverages significantly contribute to daily sugar intake and are usually consumed without conscious thought. A single glass of *teh tarik* can contain as much as six teaspoons of sugar and canned drinks or boxed juices may have

considerably more. These extra sugars can add up quickly and make you more likely to gain weight and develop long-term health problems. Plain water is always the best choice, but you may add lemon slices, mint or cucumber to your water to make it taste better. It is best to choose tea or coffee that is unsweetened or has a lower sugar content. If you enjoy milk, opt for low-fat or unsweetened options.

Ultimately, eating well is not about being flawless; it is about being consistent and balanced. It is about making better decisions most of the time, but still having fun. Instead of worrying about what to cut out, start by eating more vegetables,

## Why meals taste better together

IN Malaysia, food is rarely just about what is on the plate. It is about who is sitting across the table. From late-night chats at the stall to strolling through a bustling night market, eating is one of the simplest yet most powerful ways Malaysians connect with one another.

Sharing a meal naturally slows down the pace of eating. When conversations stretch across the table, portions last longer and plates are savoured rather than rushed. This unhurried rhythm not only aids digestion but also encourages moderation, a hidden health benefit that comes with social dining.

The communal style of eating also creates variety. At family gatherings, a spread of dishes means everyone gets to sample small portions of many flavours instead of loading up on just one. It is a balance that mirrors the “little of everything” principal

nutritionists often recommend.

Beyond the physical, meals together nourish emotional well-being. Sitting with friends after work over a plate of fried rice or catching up with relatives during festive feasts offers comfort that goes beyond calories. Studies show that people who eat socially often report lower stress levels and a stronger sense of belonging.

Even in today’s fast-paced world of food delivery apps and takeaway culture, the tradition of eating together remains a cornerstone of Malaysian life. It is proof that health does not come only from counting nutrients but also from laughter shared, stories exchanged and bonds strengthened over the table.

So the next time you head out for a drink with friends or gather for a family dinner, remember that what makes the meal wholesome is not just the food – it is the company.



**S**EASONED brand strategist Alyani Fadzil describes herself with a distinctive professional title: “Empath designer.” What does that mean, exactly?

“It’s a title that I feel best reflects who I am and the work I do. It’s an amalgamation of my professional identity – a highly sensitive brand strategist and designer who leads with empathy,” she shared.

Alyani, a Portsmouth University graduate with a master’s in urban design and architecture, started out working at an architectural firm before transitioning into the creative industry. She transitioned from architecture-related assignments to graphic design and then to creative directing. She was at the height of her career when Covid-19 happened and like most people at that time, she was back to square one.

“Being bedridden during Covid-19 made me realise a lot of things. With all the time in the world, I learned as much as I could about business and something just clicked in me,” Alyani said.

In the aftermath of Covid-19 and an increasingly competitive digital economy, female entrepreneurs in Malaysia are rewriting the playbook. From kitchen-based startups to tech ventures, women are not just creating businesses – they are creating identities. But beyond catchy logos and Instagram aesthetics, many face one persistent challenge: how to build a brand that lasts.

Branding is the crucial foundation of your business and without it, your business will crumble before it even begins. It’s not just about colour palettes or product packaging – it’s about clarity, trust and long-term vision. For women-led businesses, especially those trying to establish themselves in the post-pandemic era, a solid brand strategy can mean the difference between staying afloat and truly standing out.



# Empowering female entrepreneurs through strategic branding

BY DAYANA SOBRI



Strong brands start with clarity, not just logos.



“For women entrepreneurs, branding is more than design – it is identity.”

Alyani

## The post-pandemic reality for female entrepreneurs

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted businesses across the board, but women-led ventures were disproportionately affected. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia, nearly 60% of micro and informal enterprises in sectors such as food, retail and personal services – many of which are run by women – reported severe financial strain during lockdown periods.

Based on the statistics, women tend to start businesses out of necessity – to supplement income, gain flexibility or support their families. However, when a crisis strikes, these businesses often

lack the necessary cushion or systems to weather the storm.

Many women pivoted to online sales during the pandemic, offering a range of products, from baked goods to wellness services. Yet, in the rush to keep businesses running, branding often took a backseat. The result? A sea of similar-looking offerings, with unclear messaging and no brand differentiation.

“In the digital space, competition is brutal,” Alyani pointed out.

“If your brand does not communicate who you are, what you offer and why it matters, clearly and consistently, you get drowned out.”

### Why brand strategy matters for all businesses

While branding is often mistaken for marketing or design, it is actually the foundation upon which these elements are built. Without a brand strategy, even the most visually appealing social media feed or catchy tagline can fail to reach its full potential.

"Brand strategy is your compass. It tells you who you are talking to, what your business stands for, how you are different and how to communicate that across every touchpoint," Alyani said.

A brand without a strategy risks becoming reactive – constantly chasing trends or mimicking competitors. With strategy, however, entrepreneurs can make intentional decisions that resonate with their target audience and align with long-term goals. Simply put, branding is a strategic asset, especially for small business owners.

"Strong branding builds trust and trust drives sales.

"Consumers are more likely to support businesses that feel familiar, authentic and aligned with their values. That is especially true for women-led brands, where customers often expect a more personal connection," she said.

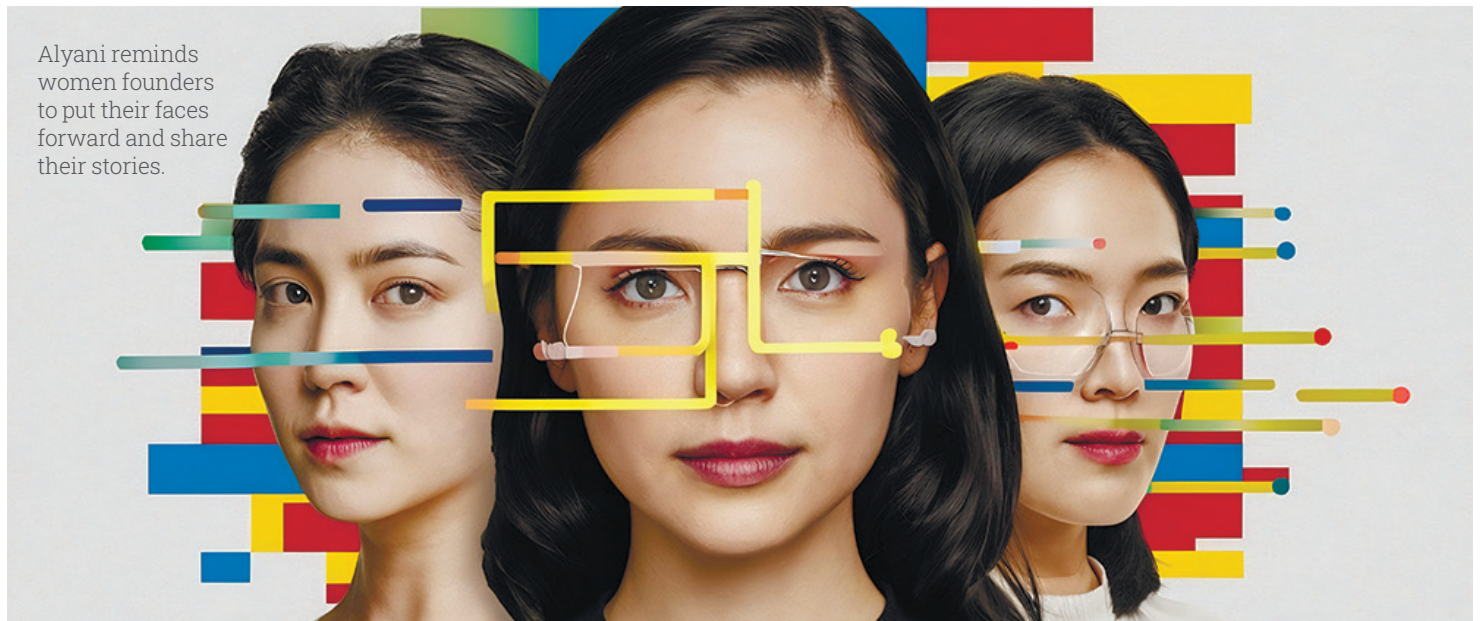
### Common challenges faced by female entrepreneurs

Branding, like many aspects of entrepreneurship, is not gender neutral. For Malaysian women, cultural expectations, time constraints and lack of access to mentorship often complicate the process.

"I see a lot of female founders hesitate to invest in branding," Alyani said. "They worry it is too expensive, or they are unsure how to start. Many juggle caregiving, household duties and business, which leaves little time to reflect on brand clarity."

Self-doubt also plays a role. A 2023 survey by SME Corp found that nearly 40% of female entrepreneurs felt uncomfortable promoting themselves or their services online, fearing they might come across as 'too aggressive' or 'too salesy'. This fear affects brand visibility. If you are not showing up with confidence, the business could suffer.

Alyani reminds women founders to put their faces forward and share their stories.



### Building a brand with purpose: Alyani's strategy tips

Through her years of experience and consulting, Alyani has helped many female entrepreneurs go from uncertain to unmistakable. Here are her key strategy tips for entrepreneurs ready to take their brand seriously:

#### 1. Know your "why" and stay rooted in it

Before you design a logo or build a website, ask yourself why you started this business. What problem are you solving? For whom? And why does it matter to you? This clarity helps form the brand's mission, voice and values – all of which influence how it is perceived.

#### 2. Define your audience – not just demographically, but emotionally

Do not just say "my target market is women aged 25 to 45". Who are they really? What keeps them up at night? What do they value? What are they searching for? Understanding your audience's mindset enables you to communicate with them in a way that feels personal and relevant.

#### 3. Avoid the copycat trap

With the rise of e-commerce and social media marketing, many new entrepreneurs fall into the habit of copying what is already popular. That might get you short-term attention, but it will not build brand loyalty. You can take inspiration, but your brand voice, style and story should be uniquely yours.

#### 4. Make your brand visible in the right places

Not every business needs to be on every platform. Instead, focus on where your target audience actually spends time. Show up where it makes sense – whether that is Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn or even offline channels. But be consistent. Use the same tone, visuals and message everywhere.

#### 5. Do not wait to be 'ready' to show your face

Many female founders hesitate to put themselves front and centre, especially in conservative or male-dominated industries. People connect with people. If you are the founder, show your face. Share your journey. You do not have to be perfect – just present.

#### Branding on a budget

One common misconception is that good branding requires a big budget. While professional designers and strategists can add polish, the most essential ingredients – clarity, voice and consistency – cost nothing.

"Start with what you have. Even a simple Google Doc can help you outline your brand pillars: mission, audience, tone, visual cues and content strategy," Alyani advised.

For those with limited funds, she recommended focusing on one platform at a time, investing in quality content and learning the basics of visual branding through free resources.

“Clarity builds confidence and confidence builds brands.”

She added that entrepreneurs should treat branding as a long-term investment.

"You might not see returns overnight, but a strong brand will help you raise prices, attract loyal customers and scale more easily later."

#### More support for women-led brands

While progress is being made, there is still a need for more structured support for female entrepreneurs in Malaysia, particularly in areas such as brand education, funding, and digital marketing literacy.

Programmes by agencies such as SME Bank and Teraju have included women-focused initiatives, but many remain inaccessible to rural or non-English-speaking entrepreneurs.

"Brand strategy should not be a luxury. It is a necessity. And we need to create more spaces where women can learn these skills without fear or judgment," Alyani emphasised.

Mentorship, peer learning and accessible workshops can help bridge the gap – empowering women to build brands that are not only beautiful but sustainable.

#### Beyond aesthetics

For female entrepreneurs in Malaysia, the journey toward building a strong brand is often layered with personal, social and structural challenges. But with the right strategy, even the smallest business can create a lasting impact.

Branding is not just what your business looks like – it is what it stands for, how it makes people feel and why it matters. And in a crowded marketplace, that difference is everything. By embracing clarity, confidence and connection, more female entrepreneurs can build brands that not only survive but thrive.

Branding is about trust, purpose and connection.



**D**O pets make us better or do they just show who we really are? They don't use words. They don't offer advice. But they might be quietly changing us or at least reminding us of the people we could be.

There's a saying you'll often hear from animal lovers: "I became a better person because of my pet." It's usually said softly, often with a little smile – as if surprised by how true it feels. Maybe you've said it too or at least thought it. That your temper has softened. That your empathy has deepened. That your sense of responsibility has matured.

But here's the question worth asking: do pets really make us better people or do they simply draw out what was already there, waiting beneath the surface?

#### Animals are not into politics

Unlike humans, pets don't play politics. They don't keep score. They don't pretend to like you out of social obligation. A dog doesn't flatter you when you're irritable. A cat won't sugar-coat your bad mood. They meet you exactly where you are without judgment, without pretence. In that quiet honesty, they often reflect who you've become.

If you're kind, they lean into it. If you're stressed, they shrink from it. If you're inconsistent, it shows in their behaviour. Especially with dogs, the connection runs deep. Their temperament often mimics yours. A calm owner tends to have a calm dog. An anxious one may raise a reactive pet. But this isn't about blame, it's about awareness.

In this way, pets become more than companions. They become mirrors. Once you start seeing yourself reflected in body language, energy, and daily habits that clearly – it becomes harder to look away.

What follows is usually quiet and gradual. Someone who seems brusque in public may be seen cooing softly to a rescue cat. A busy executive might carve out time daily for a patient walk with their dog. Loud personalities sometimes grow gentler in the presence of animals – not because they've become someone else, but because something older, softer has been reawakened.

Pets don't fix things. But they offer presence. Sometimes, presence is all the permission you need to begin healing.



## Love, loyalty and fur on everything

*You thought you were training the dog. Turns out, it was the other way around*

BY SIMON VELLA

#### Building the muscle of compassion

Caring for a pet asks something deeply human of us. Consistency without applause. Patience without reward. Vulnerability without explanation. You can't tell a dog you're trustworthy – you have to show up, every single day. You can't bribe a cat into

trusting you – you have to earn it, quietly and slowly.

This act of showing up on good days and bad, in rain or shine – starts to spill into other areas of life. It shifts how we approach our relationships. It changes how we respond to messes, to silence, to emotion.

In Malaysia, where emotional openness is still finding its place in public life, the rise of pet ownership is creating subtle cultural shifts. Traditional families may not always speak affection out loud, but you'll often see that affection spill out around pets – in the way they're held, spoken to or included in family routines. Visit a park in Desa Parkcity or a café in Hartamas and you'll see it. Families and couples doting on their pets with visible tenderness. In a society where feelings are often implied, pets become a socially accepted way to express care more openly.

There's a small, often overlooked moral practice in the routines of pet care – waking early, forgiving accidents, learning to read discomfort without words, being present through storms or illnesses. These aren't grand gestures. They are repetitive, small kindnesses. But as any therapist might tell you, it's those small, repeated acts that shape character. You do them long enough and they start to shape your default setting – not just with pets, but with people.

Of course, it's not always a fairytale. Pets don't automatically make someone

kind. There are pet owners who lose patience, who neglect, who abandon. Some love animals but treat other humans terribly, which is why it's essential to note that having a pet doesn't guarantee moral growth. It offers the opportunity for growth. What you do with it is still entirely up to you.

For those who do rise to it, though, the changes can be quietly transformative.

Then there's healing – the silent, often unnoticed comfort animals bring. Science backs this up. Numerous studies have shown that pets can lower blood pressure, ease anxiety and even help people recover from post-traumatic stress. However, while the research speaks in terms of measurable outcomes, the lived experience is often simpler.

A dog that greets you like you're the centre of the universe, even after the worst day. A cat that curls on your lap and stays. A rabbit that munches quietly while you cry.

They don't fix things. But they offer presence. Sometimes, presence is all the permission you need to begin healing.

So do pets make us better?

Perhaps the answer is yes and no. Yes, they help us practise love. Yes, they bring out qualities we may have forgotten we possessed. But they don't implant compassion into us. They just create the space for it to bloom.

The potential was always there.

They simply helped uncover it – one step at a time, one meal at a time, one moment at a time.

So the next time someone says, "You've changed since you got that dog," maybe don't brush it off. Smile. Accept it. Quietly give credit to the creature who never once asked you to be better but somehow made you want to be.

### Five ways pets change you without trying

- 1. You become more patient:** Waiting for a stubborn cat to come out from under the bed teaches more patience than most management courses.
- 2. You soften:** Even when you think you won't. The grumpiest people talk to their pets in baby voices. Science can't explain it. But it's real.
- 3. You start showing up:** consistently. Rain or shine, tired or not, you walk the dog. Feed the cat. Refill the water bowl. That kind of consistency quietly rewires your habits.
- 4. You notice more:** Tiny changes in posture, appetite or mood – pets train you to observe. This awareness often spills into how you read people, too.
- 5. You forgive more easily:** They chew on a shoe. You forgive. They knock over a glass. You sigh and clean up. Over time, that kind of low-stakes forgiveness becomes second nature – even beyond your living room.





# the Sun Motoring

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powered by PISTON.MY

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This massive grille is known as the 'waterfall grille' for its vertical slats.



Underneath that panel sits a 2.0-litre, turbocharged engine.

## Value, redefined

Jaecoo J8 proof that you don't need a lot of money to have a premium car

BY KESHY DHILLON

**CHINESE** cars are many things, but if there is one thing they deserve credit for is bringing technology to the masses.

There used to be a time when certain features were reserved only for the upper segment cars.

You could never find suede trimming, massage seats or even captain seats in any car below RM200,000.

But the Chinese have completely changed that, specifically Jaecoo.

It has only been in Malaysia for a little over a year, but has already made an impact that other car makers have struggled to match despite their years of being in the market.

The first model launched in Malaysia was the J7, and it was an immediate success thanks to its design, interior trimming and advanced technologies. But more than anything else, it was a success because of its price.

Suddenly, Malaysians realised that they could have more for less – much to the horror of legacy car makers who were got too comfortable for too long.

But Jaecoo is not a company that rest on its laurels, it is on a roll and has introduced more models such as the J8.

### WHAT IS THE J8?

The Jaecoo J8 is a D-segment SUV and is available in two variants, the two-wheel-drive model which is priced at RM178,800, and the all-wheel-drive variant which is priced at RM198,800. The latter is what we will be focusing on for this article.

It is currently the flagship model for Jaecoo Malaysia and like the J7, it is also locally assembled in Shah Alam.

It shares a lot of its underpinnings with its cousin, the Omoda C9. But since Jaecoo

The electric door handles of the J8 pop back in when locked.



20-inch wheels blend in perfectly with the overall design of the car.



Column mounted air vent works a treat.

is the luxury division of the Chery umbrella, it has certain elements that make it more "upper class" than the Omoda.

### WHAT MAKES IT PREMIUM?

Let's first try to define what premium means to a car buyer. To a person driving a Perodua Axia, a Honda WRV will feel premium.

For the person driving a Honda WRV, a Civic will feel premium and to the person driving the Civic, a BMW 3-series is a premium car. It is all about perception.

But there is a noticeable trend here, every person who wants that premium feel must spend more money. And that is what makes the Jaecoo J8 different.

The J8 feels as premium as any sub-RM500k BMW, Mercedes-Benz or Volvo, and costs nearly half the amount. So with the Jaecoo J8 you don't have to spend more to get a premium vehicle.

I recently drove the all-wheel-drive



Third row seats fold flat to reveal a massive boot.

(AWD) variant and it is everything a car should be without breaking the bank.

The exterior is a safe blend of grace and style. But of course, beauty is always in the

eye of the beholder and design is subjective.

I like the way the Jaecoo J8 looks, more than the Omoda C9 though these two



The Jaecoo J8 interior has been heavily influenced by Mercedes-Benz.



Similarly designed steering wheel on J7.



A little radar that monitors the drivers attention level.

share a lot in common.

The vertical “waterfall” grille gives it an imposing presence on the road while the 20-inch wheels give it an elegant stance as it is in proportion with the overall size of the car.

### THE INTERIOR

The interior is an entirely different story though. The door handles gently whirl out to greet you when you walk up to the car, and the door opens with a solid feel.

When you take a seat, you sink gently into the plush nappa leather seats. Glance around and you will notice a lot of premium materials, and everything is wrapped in genuine leather. Opt for the two wheel drive variant and you get faux leather though.

The roof lining in the AWD variant is also finished in suede while the seats, door panels and parts of the dashboard are wrapped in plush leather.

The seats are heated and ventilated which may not be a big deal these days but the J8 comes with an advanced fragrance system like that of a Mercedes-Benz S-Class.

For this to work, you must install cartridges into a slot beneath the centre console.

After you have done that, you get to select the type of fragrance you want after which it gently releases your chosen fragrance into the cabin.

Personally, fragrances give me a headache, but it is undoubtedly a nice, unique touch.

What is even more unique are the rear seats. The two wheel drive variant gets a regular bench, but the AWD model gets individual captain chairs. These also have a massage function, are heated and ventilated, and they also come with a memory function as well, as do the front seats.

These captain chairs make the J8 a nice car to be driven in as well because you get plenty of legroom, and they are electronically adjustable as well. The latter being unheard of in a car of this price category just a few months ago.

The pillar mounted air-conditioning vents are a nice touch as well. And that is also a feature rarely seen in a car of this price tag.

If the photos have not given it away already, the Jaecoo J8 gets a lot of its influence from Mercedes-Benz. Particularly the W213.

The flowing dashboard offers wood trimming for the flagship AWD model and there is a 24.6-inch digital screen that is split into the infotainment system and the instrumentation cluster.

For entertainment, you get wireless Carplay, Android Auto, while music is



Rear seats get electronic adjustment and memory function.



Speakers embedded into the headrests of J8.



A 50W charge pad incase you forget your cables.



Turn the crystal knob to select one of seven drive modes .

channelled via a 14-speaker Sony sound system with two speakers embedded into the front headrests. Sound quality is decent.

If you like a car with neat tricks, you will like the 256 ambient light colour option, and you may also appreciate not having to spend money on a dashcam as the J8 offers a built in dashcam as well.

### HOW DOES IT FEEL LIKE TO DRIVE?

The J8 is powered by a 2.0-litre, turbo-charged, four-cylinder engine that puts out 249PS and 385Nm of torque.

Power is sent to all four wheels through a slick-shifting eight-speed dual-clutch transmission.

But despite its power, the J8 never feels like it is in a hurry to get anywhere. It sees off the sprint to 100kph in nine seconds flat and tops out at 200kph.

The J8 is not about power and speed though, it is about a premium feel and drive quality, and you get exactly that thanks to a clever suspension system called Continuous Damping Control, which is basically another word for adaptive suspension.

But this is not your regular adaptive suspension system that adapts to the selected drive mode. This is a suspension system that is capable of adjusting to road conditions in just 0.002 seconds.

It reacts so fast that you barely feel it inside the cabin. All you feel is a plush ride.

And when you do select Sport through the crystal drive mode selector (you have seven driving modes to choose from) the suspension is noticeably stiffer but not uncomfortable.

Refinement is brilliant as well, thanks to sound deadening materials and double glazed windows. You barely hear and feel anything of the world around the car.

In fact, I would go so far as to say that the ride quality of the Jaecoo J8 matches that of a BMW or Mercedes-Benz.

### SO, SHOULD YOU SPEND YOUR MONEY ON ONE?

The Jaecoo J8 AWD is proof that you do not need to spend a lot of money to experience a premium car.

It puts to shame cars in the RM300,000 – RM400,000 price category and more than anything else, it has forced car makers to improve their products or risk losing

sales. And that is good for all car buyers.

Many have sent me private messages asking if Chinese cars like the Jaecoo J8 are worth it. My reply is always yes. It is either that or buy a sub-standard car for nearly twice the money.

It even comes with a Level 2.5 rated ADAS safety suite with over two dozen systems working in unison to keep passengers safe.

Some cars that cost over RM300,000 don't even come with a Blind Spot Monitoring system, relying instead on the brand to sell cars.

For that alone, the Jaecoo J8 AWD is worth every cent, simply because of everything that it has to offer and the price tag it comes with.

### SPECIFICATIONS

**Engine:** 2.0-litre, four-cylinder, turbo-charged

**Power:** 249PS

**Torque:** 385Nm

**Transmission:** 8-speed dual-clutch

**Price (as tested): RM198,800**

**We like:** Refinement, premium quality.

**We don't like:** Steering needs more feel.

# Chery gets sweeter

Chinese carmaker expands hybrid line-up with Tiggo 7 Phev and Tiggo 8 Phev in Malaysia

**CHERY MALAYSIA** has officially launched two new plug-in hybrid models – the Tiggo 7 Phev and Tiggo 8 Phev – expanding its electrified SUV portfolio.

Both are built on Chery's advanced Super Hybrid platform, combining cutting-edge efficiency with strong performance and premium features.

While the Tiggo 7 Phev targets buyers seeking a stylish, practical, and accessible electrified SUV, the larger Tiggo 8 Phev offers added luxury and space for families.

Both models share the same hybrid powertrain and charging system but differ in design, equipment, and positioning.

## Tiggo 7 Phev

The Tiggo 7 Phev brings sharp styling and smart functionality to the plug-in hybrid market.

It features a diamond-patterned grille, LED headlights, a redesigned bumper, and sporty 18-inch alloy wheels, projecting a modern and athletic look.

Inside, the cabin showcases a 24.6-inch integrated dual-screen display, wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, ventilated sport leather seats, and 64-colour ambient lighting.

High-quality materials and thoughtful detailing lend it a premium feel despite its compact dimensions.

Power comes from a 1.5-litre Acteco TGD i hybrid engine paired with a dedicated hybrid transmission (DHT) and an 18.3kWh lithium iron phosphate battery.

The system delivers 275PS and 365Nm of torque, enabling up to 90km of electric range and a 1,200km combined range. With a mechanical efficiency of 98%, the SUV promises smooth acceleration and excellent fuel savings.

Charging from 30% to 80% takes just 19 minutes via DC fast charging, or around three hours with an AC wall charger. It also supports Vehicle-to-Load (V2L) at 3.3kW, allowing users to power small appliances – perfect for outdoor or emergency use.

Safety is assured through Chery's Guardian Battery Safety System, which includes high-voltage cut-off, IP68-rated waterproof protection, extreme heat resistance, and the ability to wade through 500mm of water.

A full Adas 2.0 suite adds adaptive cruise control, lane departure warning, blind-spot detection, and automatic emergency braking.

The Tiggo 7

Phev is available for RM129,800 in Phantom Grey, Khaki White, and Blood Stone Red (additional RM2,000).

It comes with a seven-year/150,000km vehicle warranty, plus eight years/160,000km coverage for the battery, motor, and hybrid control unit.

Buyers also receive a one-to-one battery replacement if health drops below 70% during warranty, alongside five years of free labour service.

## Tiggo 8 Phev

The Tiggo 8 Phev sits above its sibling as a more refined and spacious SUV designed for families. It shares the same hybrid powertrain and charging performance and V2L capability mirror the Tiggo 7 Phev.

What sets this SUV apart is its design and luxury.

The front fascia sports a bold grille with an illuminated logo, LED lighting, and 19-inch diamond-cut alloy wheels for a more premium appearance.

The interior elevates comfort and technology with a 15.6-inch infotainment display powered by a Qualcomm Snapdragon 8155 processor, ventilated sport leather seats, dual-zone climate control, ambient lighting, and a 10-speaker Sony audio system. Safety features mirror those of the 7 Phev.

Available for RM159,800 in Aurora Green, Khaki White, and Carbon Black, the Tiggo 8 also carries the same warranty coverage as the Tiggo 7.



## When authorities fail, children die

**ANOTHER** devastating accident has shocked the nation. This time involving a family, government workers and a driver of an unrelated car.

They were all victims of brake failure involving a speeding truck. Sadly, an infant lost his life in this accident.

While any loss of life is tragic, this one hits a PLACE in our hearts because of the age of the infant and the circumstances surrounding the accident.

As usual with tragic accidents in Malaysia, netizens are quick to point fingers, politicians are quick to issue statements, the authorities will announce the formation of a task force to "investigate" and then... nothing.

Days will turn into weeks, and then into months and another tragic accident will happen again, and the temperature will rise once more. The whole cycle will repeat itself over and over again like a badly scripted movie.

But sadly, this movie does not end. Nothing seems to happen. No action seems to be taken.

Why was a truck with brake failure on our roads? Sure no one can predict brake failure and perhaps the truck was perfectly fine during inspection but are we going to keep leaving all of this to chance and fate?

Vehicle inspections are no longer monopolised by Puspakom, but there are not many organisations that have stepped up to this service. One can't help but wonder why.

But the one thing that strikes me the most is, why wasn't that poor infant in a child seat?

Many have lambasted our transport minister for supposedly shifting the blame from the truck and its failed brakes to the parents and the fact that the child was not properly secured in a seat.

But was he shifting the blame? I believe those are the words of a man who has many times stressed the importance of a child seat and yet his words have fallen on deaf ears.

The accident is undoubtedly tragic. It should not have happened. My heart goes out to the parents.



WRITTEN BY  
KESHY DHILLON

Being a parent myself, I don't even want to imagine what they are going through, and my heartfelt condolences go out to the family.

I pray they find strength.

But we can all learn from this.

A child always needs to be secure, in a proper seat preferably.

What truly shocked me was the comments left by some netizens asking the purpose of a child seat? Some even criticised the minister saying that a child seat does not serve any purpose.

In all honesty, this left me horrified. Are we still that clueless?

The media, the government and other agencies have continuously harped on the importance of child seats and yet there are some who simply do not understand it.

Allow me to share a statistic because there is no point being emotional about it, so lets let the facts do the talking.

According to the American National Highway Traffic

Safety Administration (NHTSA), car seats reduce the risk of fatal injury to an infant under one year old by a staggering 71%.

I am not sure if we have our own local study as my research did not reveal anything, but that is a stunning percentage.

Looking at it differently, an infant's chances of surviving an accident increase by 71% when in a child seat. Allow yourself a moment to let that sink in please.

Sure, the authorities do need to step up their game to ensure that all vehicles on the road abide by safety standards. But we can do our part too.

Cost is no longer an excuse because there are rent to own businesses out there where you can get a child seat for as low as RM80 per month.

This is not a paid promotion so I am not going to mention brands but a quick google search will put you in the right path if you want a good seat for your child.

Dear parents, always secure your child when in a car. Dear authorities, step up your game!

**VOLVO'S** first electric-only crossover, the EC40, is getting a new addition to its lineup in Malaysia for the 2026 model year.

The single-motor variant is now officially available, priced at RM248,888. That makes it RM40,000 cheaper than the current twin-motor version, while still coming in the fully-loaded Ultra trim.

Powering this new variant is Volvo's second-generation permanent magnet rear electric motor, developed fully in-house.

It produces 238hp, which is enough to send the EC40 from zero to 100kph in 7.3 seconds. Energy is supplied by a 70kWh high-voltage battery, offering up to 488km of range on the WLTP cycle.

For charging, the system supports fast DC input, taking the battery from 10% to 80% in just 26 minutes. A fresh look is also part of the update. A new Sand Dune exterior colour has been added to the palette, first seen on the 2025 EX90.

The shade carries a warm metallic tone with glass flakes that shimmer under sunlight, inspired by Sweden's west coast dunes. Alongside Sand Dune, buyers can also opt for Aurora Silver, Onyx Black, or Crystal White.

Inside, the EC40 continues Volvo's push for sustainability with a leather-free interior. The cabin is trimmed in Charcoal Connect suede textile and Charcoal Microtech, while new cutting edge accents on the dashboard and doors sharpen up the design.

The user interface has been given an upgrade too. Borrowed from the EX30,

# Lower price, fresh upgrades

*Volvo EC40 single-motor SUV first crossover in BEV range*



Volvo's latest system reduces the number of taps needed to access common features, making it easier and more intuitive.

This refresh enhances the experience on the 9-inch Google built-in centre display and the 12.3-inch driver's screen.

Its elevated ride height provides a commanding driving position, the large wheels and sculpted arches add to its presence, while the sloping roofline and swooping taillights give it a sportier, coupe-like edge.

True to Volvo's DNA, safety remains a central focus. The EC40 is equipped with the brand's Safe Space Technology suite, which includes the latest collision-avoidance systems, advanced driver assistance functions, and a reinforced body structure designed to protect both occupants and other road users.

To make the new single-motor EC40 even more attractive, Volvo Car Malaysia is including a package of ownership rewards for early buyers.

Customers will enjoy free first-year car insurance worth RM5,600 along with a wallbox charger voucher valued at RM5,000, available for a limited time.

With its lower entry price, sustainable materials, upgraded technology, and uncompromising safety, the single-motor EC40 broadens Volvo's electric appeal in Malaysia.

It now gives buyers the choice between performance-focused twin-motor power or the more accessible, efficient single-motor option – without losing the premium edge that defines Volvo's latest EVs.

## SHORTS

### PROTON e.MAS 5 READY TO ORDER

**PROTON** New Energy Technology Sdn Bhd (Pro-Net), a wholly owned subsidiary of Proton, has officially opened bookings for the all-new Proton e.MAS 5, Malaysia's most affordable electric vehicle.

The announcement followed a high-profile livestream held on Oct 4, which successfully introduced the compact EV to thousands of Malaysian viewers.

The biggest reveal of the night was the e.MAS 5's estimated price tag – RM60,000-RM80,000 – positioning it as the most affordable fully electric vehicle in Malaysia.

The compact SUV aims to make EV ownership more accessible to a wider range of Malaysians, offering a combination of smart design and sustainability.

For those ready to make the switch, bookings can now be made for just RM99. First 5,000 customers will also receive a limited-edition Proton e.MAS Touch 'n Go NFC card preloaded with RM100, along with an additional RM500 rebate on the booking fee.

### GAC EMKOO START FROM RM123,800

**WTC** Automotif (M) Sdn Bhd (WTCA), the official distributor of GAC vehicles in Malaysia, has officially introduced the all-new GAC Emkoo, a model it dubs the "future styled SUV".

Available in two trims – Premium and Premium Pro – prices start from RM123,800 and RM133,800, respectively. To mark the launch, WTCA is rolling out an exclusive early bird promo for the first 500 customers.

Buyers will enjoy a RM4,000 cash rebate alongside an accessory package worth RM10,000, which includes a 2-Channel DVR with 64GB memory card,

Emkoo-branded kicking plates, a luggage tray, and sport pedals.

On top of that, Premium buyers receive a Vcool solar tint and electric power tailgate, while Premium Pro customers get the upgraded Vcool security tint.

The GAC Emkoo is powered by a 1.5-litre TGDI engine paired with a 7-speed wet dual-clutch transmission.

It achieves 0-100kph in 8.8 seconds, with a top speed of 190kph/h, and records a fuel consumption figure of 6.6L/100km (NEDC).

### XPENG G6 ULTRA SMART COUPE HITS THE ROAD

**BERMAZ** Xpeng Sdn Bhd, the exclusive distributor of XPeng in Malaysia, has officially launched the new XPENG G6 Ultra Smart Coupe SUV. First introduced locally in August 2024, the updated G6 arrives with performance improvements, smarter features, and refreshed styling. Bookings are now open, with prices starting from RM178,888.

The Long Range Pro and AWD Performance models are equipped with an 80.5kWh LFP pack, replacing the 87.5 kWh lithium-ion batteries used in earlier versions. Thanks to the 800V SiC system, the G6 achieves a peak charging power of 451kW, enabling a 10% to 80% charge in just 12 minutes – the fastest in its class.

As for power, the RWD Long Range variant puts out 292hp and 440Nm of torque, which allows it to do 0-100kph in 6.7 seconds, while the AWD Performance variant churns out 480hp and 660Nm of torque, which cuts down the 0-100kph timing to 4.13 seconds. Both variants have a top speed of 202kph/h.

## New pricing, promotions for MGs

**MG** Motor Malaysia has introduced new pricing for its all-electric hatchback, the MG4, positioning it as one of the most accessible rear-wheel-drive EVs in its segment.

The MG4 Lux is now priced at RM100,888, the MG4 Lux Extended at RM128,888, and the high-performance MG4 XPower at RM138,888. The revised pricing translates into savings of more than RM28,000 for buyers.

The MG4 line-up caters to different types of drivers. The Lux focuses on everyday practicality, the Lux Extended is aimed at those who want greater driving range, while the XPower is designed for performance-oriented customers.

All variants retain the model's distinctive design and technology while offering a driving experience rooted in MG's British heritage.

The revised pricing reflects MG Motor Malaysia's strategy to make EVs more affordable in the local market.

To add further value, each MG4 purchase includes either a complimentary 7kW AC wallbox charger or charging credits.

Savings on these ownership perks amount to RM10,000 for the MG4 XPower and Lux Extended, and RM7,000 for the MG4 Lux.

Warranty coverage remains a key part of the package, with a 7-year/150,000km vehicle warranty, an 8-year/180,000km high-voltage battery warranty, and an 8-year/160,000km warranty for the drive motor and motor control unit,

whichever comes first.

Alongside the MG4 updates, MG has introduced a special promotion for the recently launched MGS5 EV.

The Ultimate Ownership Package, which offers savings of up to RM10,000, gives buyers the choice of a free 7kW AC wallbox charger or charging credits.

The MGS5 EV makes use of an ultra-thin Horizontal Battery Layout to increase interior space while keeping a low centre of gravity. An adaptive pressure control system improves battery safety and longevity by reducing cell expansion.

Customers can select between Com and Lux variants, with the Com available in either a 49kWh battery providing up to 340km WLTP range or a 62kWh pack offering up to 430km.

The Lux variant also uses the 62kWh battery, capable of 425km. All versions produce 170PS and 250Nm of torque, with a rear-wheel drive layout, and include 7kW AC charging as standard. Prices for the MGS5 EV begin at RM115,900.

MG Motor Malaysia has also announced new promotions for its petrol-powered models.

The MG HS now comes with rebates of up to RM12,000, while the MG5 offers rebates of up to RM8,000.

Buyers can also opt for six months of free instalments in addition to the rebates, making these models more accessible.

## Solve The Phrase And Sudoku

#1

□ □ V □ □ O U  
 F □ □ □ □ □ □ □ O U □  
 □ O M □ W O □ □ ?

Hint: Question from mother

Letters Remaining = DKRNSAYEHI

#2

G □ A □ □  
 □ C □ □ □ D □ N  
 □ N □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Hint: Football thrills

Letters Remaining = EMLYJUROIST

#3

M □ □ H T □ R □ D □ H □ R I  
 □ □ □ □ □ D □ □ R  
 S □ □ □ □ □ □ R

Hint: About a famous Malaysian

Letters Remaining = KNFOYPELGA

#4

□ □ I □ □ E E □  
 I □ □ □ I M □ □ E  
 E □ H □ L □ □ Y

Hint: Jane Goodall was

Letters Remaining = GANOPRT

#5

□ □ B □ □ □ R

Hint: The Beatles

Letters Remaining = AFOU

#6

□ □ N D □ □ □ □ G □ T  
 D □ N N □ □

Hint: Romantic

Letters Remaining = ILERACH

5		8	9	7	6		4	
	6		2	1	8	7		
2		7			5	8	6	1
1		5	7		2		8	9
	7			8	9	1		4
	8			6	4	5	3	
	5		6			4		3
7					1	2		
4		1	8		3	9		6

7		1	8				4	
8		4	2			5		7
5		9	7					
9		8		6		7		1
3			1	9	7		8	2
		7	5	8	4	3	6	9
	7	5	6	2	3	1		
1		2		7		6		
	8	3	9			2	7	4



GIANTS VS TITANS  
 Gamification for  
 a better planet  
 from FIRST RAY

Answers  
 will be uploaded  
 on Sunday,  
 October 19 @  
[thesun.my/puzzles](https://thesun.my/puzzles)

## Your weekend horoscope



**ARIES**  
March 21 – April 19  
Your bold energy encourages you to take the lead in situations that need direction.

People may naturally look to you for answers, and your quick thinking can help solve problems smoothly. Speaking clearly and listening with patience allows your ideas to shine even brighter. A spark of creativity may push you to try something new.



**TAURUS**  
April 20 – May 20  
Your calm and steady nature helps you stay grounded when things shift

around you. Responsibilities may feel heavier, but your practical approach allows you to handle them without rushing. Financial matters, personal goals or home concerns may need extra focus, and clear planning can ease your mind.



**GEMINI**  
May 21 – June 20  
Your curious and lively mind keeps you engaged with new ideas and people.

Social interactions feel easier, and sharing your thoughts may open doors to fresh opportunities. It is a good moment to focus on conversations that bring clarity and connection. Inspiration comes quickly, so choosing where to direct your attention is key.



**CANCER**  
Your nurturing nature brings comfort. Small acts of care strengthen your closest relationships. Creating a sense of peace in your surroundings helps you recharge and think clearly. Personal reflection can reveal what you truly want, making it easier to set healthy boundaries.



**LEO**  
July 23 – Aug 22  
Your vibrant energy draws attention and makes it easy for others to follow your lead. Confidence shines through your actions, inspiring those around you. Creative expression comes naturally, and exploring new ideas can bring joy and momentum.



**VIRGO**  
Aug 23 – Sept 22  
Your focus on details and steady habits helps you stay organised even when life feels busy. Tasks that once felt overwhelming become easier when broken into smaller steps. Others may turn to you for guidance, appreciating your reliability and calm approach. Avoid being too hard on yourself.



A house tucked at the end of a crescent-shaped road might seem like a dream but from a feng shui lens, this placement is a qi trap.

# Feng shui trap

House tucked at end of crescent-shaped road may be qi hazard

**TO** the untrained eye, a house tucked at the end of a crescent-shaped road might seem like a dream – quiet, private and seemingly safe from street noise or heavy traffic. But from a feng shui lens, this exact placement is a qi trap.

In traditional feng shui, the flow of energy, or qi, is vital. Just like water, qi needs to move smoothly through an environment, nourishing everything it touches.

But when a house is positioned at the very end of a curve, such as a cul-de-sac or the inner tip of a roundabout, the energy flow slows down and stagnates. This is called qi zhi, meaning “stuck qi”.

At first, living in such a location may feel peaceful. But over time, many residents in homes such as these may experience challenges such as:

- ➔ Sluggish wealth growth.
- ➔ Limited career movement or visibility.
- ➔ Social isolation or difficulty attracting “helpful people” (gui ren).
- ➔ Health stagnation, especially related to digestion and circulation.

### Why does this happen?

When qi travels along a curved road, it flows like a river, gently and continuously. But as it reaches the end of the curve, it has no natural exit, causing

the energy to spiral, weaken or pool inappropriately.

Unlike a home located slightly along the arc of the curve (where qi continues to move), houses situated at the tail end absorb everything but release nothing. That includes good luck and opportunities.

This is important in Period 9 Feng Shui (a feng shui cycle, occurring from 2024 to 2043, that ushers in an era of transformation, innovation and progress), where momentum, connectivity and visibility play bigger roles in success and influence.

When your house is “too hidden”, you become easy to forget – by people, luck and opportunity.

### What can be done?

If you are already living in such a home:

- ➔ Ensure the main door is brightly lit and clear of obstructions.
- ➔ Place live, moving elements near the entrance, such as a water feature or fluttering plants, to re-stimulate qi.
- ➔ Use mirrors or bright accents to “push” energy outward and reconnect with the road’s flow.

Ultimately, feng shui is not just about beauty or placement – it is about energy efficiency. A house is hidden at the end of a curve may be beautiful, but it is not energetically efficient.

*This article is contributed by metaphysics researcher Daniel Siew. Discover more at [www.danielsiew.com](http://www.danielsiew.com)*



**LIBRA**  
Sept 23 – Oct 22  
Your natural sense of harmony makes it easier to smooth over misunderstandings and bring people together. Friendly conversations and gentle honesty strengthen bonds in personal and work settings. A focus on balance helps you handle responsibilities without feeling overwhelmed.



**SCORPIO**  
Oct 23 – Nov 21  
Your deep focus and determination help you uncover solutions where others may see obstacles. Emotional connections may feel intense, but honest conversations bring understanding and strength. Trust grows when you allow others to see your softer side, even if it feels unfamiliar. Quiet reflection gives you clarity about what truly matters.



**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov 22 – Dec 21  
Your adventurous outlook encourages you to explore new experiences and ideas. Curiosity leads to exciting conversations and connections, and your enthusiasm lifts the mood wherever you go. Friends and group activities may bring unexpected opportunities that spark growth.



**CAPRICORN**  
Dec 22 – Jan 19  
Your steady approach helps you stay focused even when responsibilities feel demanding. Long-term goals may stand out more clearly, making it easier to plan your next steps. Others may notice your dedication and trust your leadership. Remember to balance hard work with rest.



**AQUARIUS**  
Jan 20 – Feb 18  
Your unique way of thinking helps you see possibilities others might miss. Friendships and group efforts feel lively, and your ideas may inspire those around you. At the same time, carving out time for personal reflection keeps your energy balanced.



**PISCES**  
Feb 19 – March 20  
Your gentle and intuitive nature makes it easy to understand others, even if they do not say much. This sensitivity brings comfort to those around you, but protecting your energy keeps you from feeling drained. Creative activities or quiet time can help you clear your mind and find inspiration.



302 Jobs

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**MEDIA SALES - Specialist**

**Job Description**

- Building and sustaining strong working relationship with advertising agencies and clients.
- New business development and business retention.
- Conceptualise, plan and execute creative and innovative marketing campaigns to enhance brand visibility and engagement.
- Create, develop and continuously improve marketing material, presentations and proposals that showcase our products/services effectively.

**Requirements**

- SPM level with at least two years of experience.
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- Assist the IT team in delivering effective support and services across the group.
- Develop, implement, and manage IT strategy, infrastructure, and operations.
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  - Plan and perform periodic mechanical and electrical maintenance on all printing and auxiliary equipment as instructed by the Maintenance Supervisor.
  - Ensure all repair work is completed the same day meets operational standard.
- 2. Preventive Maintenance**
  - Prepare sufficient rubber roller, sock rollers, and other components for nightly operations.
  - Conduct scheduled preventive maintenance and update relevant checklists, including:
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    - Folder, Cary Reel Stand, Water Fountain System, Main Motor, Dampener Motor
    - Drive Control Panel, Web Break Detectors, and other auxiliary equipment
  - Grease and top up oil on the Folder, Cary Reel Stand, and Printing Units
- 3. Inventory & Reporting**
  - Check and maintain adequate spare parts for presses and auxiliary equipment.
  - Record daily work in the maintenance logbook.
  - Report worn on faulty parts requiring replacement to the Maintenance Supervisor.
- 4. Operational Readiness**
  - Inspect all press lines and auxiliary equipment to ensure readiness before each night operation.
  - Verify that sock rollers, water trays, stoppers, folder belts, folder pins, and slitter knives are in proper condition
  - Confirm no cotton rags, tools, or debris remain on machines after servicing.
- 5. Additional Duties**
  - Assist in scheduled waste collection, labeling, and proper storage.
  - Participate in in-house projects such as:
    - Repairing washrooms, air conditioners, pallet trucks, trolleys, and conveyors.
    - Welding, painting, lighting, wiring, piping, cement work, and other building maintenance tasks.

**Qualifications & Skill (recommended)**

- Technical certificate or diploma in Mechanical/Electrical/Industrial Maintenance (or equivalent experience).
- Hands-on experience with printing press equipment is preferred.
- Ability to work rotating shift and respond to urgent repair calls.
- Strong troubleshooting and problem-solving skills.

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**Responsibilities:**

- 1. Equipment Maintenance & Repair**
  - Responsible for theSun compliance with the relevant governmental authorities legislation and to establish in-house Occupational Safety & Health and Environment policies and procedures.

**Requirements:**

- To develop in-house Environment, Safety and Health policies and procedures.
- To liaise with all departments on Occupational Safety and Health needs.
- To organize training from time to time in conjunction with external assistance for workers on Occupational Safety & Health and Environment.
- To prepare indexes on industrial accident, medical (Occupational Health issue), environment impact from time to time to measure the organizational climate of the company.
- To identify workplace risk, where necessary, and recommend actions plans to reduce and eliminate safety & health risk and fire hazards.
- To investigate all industrial accidents or near misses and devise effective preventive measures to eliminate repetition.
- To develop, implement and monitor Occupational Safety & Health and Environment training program and conduct in-house training periodically.
- To conduct periodical safety audits.
- To organize and conduct emergency response exercise.
- To develop Medical Surveillance record.
- To liaise with the relevant governmental authorities relating to Environment, Safety and Health issues.
- To keep abreast and advise on any development issues related to Environments, Safety and Health.
- To act as a Chairman in the regular Environment, Safety and Health Committee meeting.
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**SHORTS**

**BROOK WARY OF AUSTRALIA ENGLAND BATTER** Harry Brook has cautioned against underestimating Australia in the Ashes series, even as doubts linger over the availability of their captain and fast bowler, Pat Cummins, for the opener in Perth.

Australia coach Andrew McDonald conceded on Friday that Cummins is running out of time to be fit for the first Test.

McDonald said Cummins had not yet been ruled out, however, adding that the 32-year-old probably needed to be back bowling at least four weeks before the opener to avoid further setbacks.

Losing Cummins for the first test alone would be a significant setback for Australia, given he has been ever-present since making his Ashes debut in the 2017-18 series. With Cummins fit and firing, Australia have never lost the urn since reclaiming it in 2017.

"He is an amazing bowler and has been for many years. He bowls at high pace with high skill," Brook told reporters at the Professional Cricketers' Association Awards.

"With him out of their side for the first game, from (the reports) we've seen, hopefully that plays into our hands. But they have a hell of a lot of good, quick bowlers out there.

"Guys who can come into the side, and when their tails are up, they can plough through teams. So, we can't take anybody lightly."

This year's Ashes begins in Perth on Nov 21, before a day-night match in Brisbane, the third test in Adelaide, and the traditional Melbourne and Sydney tests in December and January.

**JAISSWAL MISSES DOUBLE HUNDRED OPENER** Yashasvi Jaiswal fell short of a double hundred, but India cruised to 427-4 at lunch to continue their ascendancy against West Indies.

Jaiswal fell for 175 after an almighty mix-up with skipper Shubman Gill, who was batting on 75 at the break with Dhruv Jurel on seven at the other end.

Despite not being at his aggressive best, Jaiswal batted like no West Indies bowler could get him out at the Arun Jaitley Stadium. It took a miscommunication with Gill to deny the opener what could have been his third test double hundred.

Jaiswal drove Jayden Seales to Tagenarine Chanderpaul at mid-off and was halfway down the pitch before realising Gill was not interested.

The 23-year-old turned and made a mad rush but it was too late. Jaiswal trudged off the field after a majestic knock studded with 22 fours.

Promoted to No. 5, Nitish Kumar Reddy got a life on 20 when Anderson Phillip dropped him at mid-off. Reddy smashed a couple of sixes in his brisk 43 but fell short of a half-century after fluffing his slog-sweep against Jomel Warrican. India, who won the opening Test in Ahmedabad in three days, are bidding for a 2-0 series sweep.

# 'Lies and false impressions'

Palou says McLaren misled him in chasing his F1 dreams

**FOUR** times IndyCar champion Alex Palou (*pic*) told a High Court hearing yesterday that racing in Formula One was his dream but a contract he signed with McLaren in 2022, and then broke, was "based on lies and false impressions".

The Spaniard, who won this year's Indianapolis 500, said in a witness statement he now felt Formula One was used by current champions McLaren as a "negotiating tactic" to get him to sign for their less competitive IndyCar team.

McLaren Racing are seeking some US\$20 million (RM84.5m) from the 28-year-old after he backed out of a move three years ago and stayed with the Chip Ganassi Racing (CGR) outfit. The driver has admitted breach of contract but argues he owes nothing.

"My motivation in signing the March 2022 McLaren contract was that I had just won my first IndyCar

Championship... and I thought it was still a good time in my young career to get to F1 and try and have a chance there," said Palou.

"After I won the IndyCar championship, I thought it would be tough, but feasible to get a chance in F1."

Palou said everything changed with McLaren when Australian Oscar Piastri, the current F1 championship leader, announced on Twitter he was replacing compatriot Daniel Ricciardo for the 2023 season.

Despite that, Palou signed another contract with McLaren after being assured by McLaren boss Zak Brown that F1 remained a possibility.

"Zak told me in various conversations we had in person, including during the

time I was testing with McLaren at the track in September and October 2022, that he really loves IndyCar and wanted to get a driver from IndyCar to F1," he said.

"Zak told me he believed we could make it happen and that he would give me all the preparation I needed to be an F1 driver for McLaren."

Palou said Brown told him over dinner in October 2022 that it was not his decision to sign Piastri, previously reserve for Renault-owned Alpine, but that of now-departed principal Andreas Seidl.

"Zak told me that Oscar's performance would be evaluated against mine for the 2024 seat," said the Spaniard. The Spaniard said he talked to Red Bull's motorsport consultant Helmut Marko in

June 2023 about a possible drive with AlphaTauri (now Racing Bulls) as his McLaren dream faded.

The Austrian asked how much it would cost to get a release from McLaren but, on talking with Brown, lost interest.

Brown, attending the hearing after being questioned on Tuesday and Wednesday, smiled and occasionally shook his head during the session.

Accused by McLaren's counsel Paul Goulding of being the one stringing the team along, and signing an IndyCar contract he had no intention of fulfilling, Palou replied: "Absolutely not. I think you're twisting the story."

He said also that while CGR would be paying his legal costs, his salary was reduced accordingly and not among the top three in IndyCar.

The hearing will resume on Oct 20 with closing submissions due on Nov 5. - Reuters



## Hadjar makes brutal Rosberg 'talent' dig as Mercedes legend called out

**ISACK HADJAR** reckons that Nico Rosberg's psychological strength enabled him to battle Lewis Hamilton and ultimately secure the 2016 Drivers' Championship crown, claiming that "it was definitely not with his talent" - a remark that sparked quite the reaction from Racing Bulls' press officer.

Rosberg partnered Hamilton for four seasons from 2013 to 2016, spending the initial three campaigns trailing in the wake of the iconic Briton. Nevertheless, following his Mercedes teammate's World Championship triumphs in 2014 and 2015, he seized his opportunity for glory when it arrived.

Following his surprising retirement announcement from Formula One after clinching the World Championship in 2016, Rosberg has been candid about the psychological adjustments and tactical manoeuvres he employed to outmanoeuvre Hamilton after three years playing second fiddle.

Hadjar referenced Rosberg's strategy whilst discussing with *The Telegraph* a potential switch to Red Bull for the 2026 campaign.

The French-Algerian prodigy has impressed during his debut

season, yet now confronts the intimidating challenge of competing directly against Max Verstappen, having witnessed the Dutchman overwhelm a succession of gifted teammates.

"That's how he got to fight against Lewis... It was definitely not with his talent," he remarked. This allegedly prompted a dramatic reaction from the



Racing Bulls press officer, who 'almost spat out his latte at the comment'.

He continued with a laugh: "I don't mean [to be] rude. It's just, for me, it's... Nico was not as talented as Hamilton, and he knows it. He was not gifted like Lewis. But he fought with him very hard."

"Because up there (mentally), he was making the most of his guys around and the car. I heard good stories about him."

In GP2, he was impressive. He was doing the set-up. He's a very smart guy. That is what I want to be able to do."

Thus far, Verstappen has overwhelmed Pierre Gasly, Alex Albon, Sergio Perez, Liam Lawson and Yuki Tsunoda during his time as a Red Bull driver, with none of those racers bouncing back to secure a seat with a leading team after departing the Milton Keynes outfit.

This naturally raises concerns for Hadjar as speculation continues linking him with Laurent Mekies' squad.

"I mean, yes, but at the same time, you don't want to hide," he revealed.

"Sure, it would be a bit scary, but I look for that. It's what I always wanted to do as a kid."

"It was never to just drive F1 cars, it's to compete against the best in the world. It's what I'm here for. What's the best ever like?"

Because he (Verstappen) is the benchmark.

"I also feel like timing-wise, it's interesting that there are new regulations coming next season. Everyone starts from zero again."

So if it happens, it could also be very good.

But honestly, either way, I'm still young. I believe whatever God decides is the right thing." - Express Newspapers

## Piastri is starting to crack: Herbert

BY KIERAN JACKSON

**JOHNNY HERBERT** believes Oscar Piastri is starting to show "tiny cracks" in his armoury amid the pressure of an F1 title race.

Australian racer Piastri, known for his cool-headedness, voiced his anger over team radio at his McLaren team after teammate and title rival Lando Norris collided with him in the process of a first-lap overtake at the Singapore Grand Prix last Sunday.

Piastri labelled the move "unfair" and was furious when race engineer Tom Stallard informed his driver that McLaren would not

intervene or force Norris to give the place back. Norris ended up finishing third, with Piastri in fourth.

With six races left, Piastri still has a 22-point lead over the Briton and 63-point gap over Red Bull's Max Verstappen.

But ex-F1 driver Herbert said the Australian is showing signs of the "pressure building."

"We're seeing those little, tiny pressure cracks from Oscar from all his comments," three-time grand prix winner Herbert said.

"The cool Oscar Piastri that everyone was talking about at the beginning of the season

is not there.

"The pressure's building and when that pressure pot builds in a championship battle, it's the one who has that stronger mentality, to try and get rid of that negative Singapore result for Oscar, but then have the positivity going into the next race."

"It wasn't the perfect result for Lando, but he was ahead of Oscar."

It's come down to 22 points. So, he's piling the pressure on Oscar, but he's doing a great job as well. He's showing his speed once again and they're both very, close anyway."

With McLaren wrapping up the construc-

tors' title in Singapore, Herbert believes the papaya-clad team should now let their drivers race all out for the drivers' championship.

"This is really where they (Piastri and Norris) all show their inner strengths and mental strengths as well," Herbert said.

"The key to this is McLaren letting them race because they won the Constructors' for a second year running which was very impressive, now it's letting their drivers go."

The next race is the United States Grand Prix (Oct 17-19) in Austin, Texas. - The Independent

## Rice expects big names to be back soon

**DECLAN RICE** says England still need their notable absentees despite describing his side as an "unreal team".

Thomas Tuchel's side followed up last month's World Cup qualifying statement win over Serbia with a 3-0 friendly success over local rivals Wales.

Goals from Morgan Rogers, Ollie Watkins and Bukayo Saka inside the opening 20 minutes at Wembley put Craig Bellamy's side to the sword and continued the momentum as things begin to click under the German head coach.

Their improvements over the last two camps have been without big names Jude Bellingham, Phil Foden and Cole Palmer as a host of other players have taken their chance.

But Rice, who captained his country in Harry Kane's absence on Friday, said: "I think every time you play for England, you want to grab the shirt, you want to grab your chance."

"But we do miss Jude, for sure. We miss Phil, we miss Cole, we miss loads of players for reasons that the manager's obviously said."

"We are obviously an unreal team, and they're in the team as well. Let's not get away from that."

"What they've done in an England shirt is incredible. We're looking forward to having them back next camp, hopefully."

"As a team, we want to keep integrating everyone as much as possible before the World Cup."

"I think that's the most important thing, and we've done that in the past."

Rice says he feels "unstoppable" as he continued his impressive start to the season.

The 26-year-old thriving for Tuchel's side as they build momentum towards a World Cup challenge next year and that is complementing his excellent club form, where he has helped Arsenal to the top of the Premier League table after seven games.

The midfielder said: "It's because I've got two managers who lay it out really easily, the game plan I have to do and where I have to be, and obviously I'm the one who has to go and execute it."

"But when you have confidence in football, you feel unstoppable at times. (I) ended the season really strong last year, probably didn't start the first one or two games of this season as good as I wanted, but I've picked up my form now and feel really strong."

"I feel fit. I feel really confident in my game, so hopefully the only way is up for me with England and Arsenal, so there's a lot of positive things to come." - The Independent



**Declan Rice.**  
- REUTERSPIC



Wales look dejected after England scores their second goal.  
- REUTERSPIC

## 'Wales will bounce back'

Belgium qualifier cannot come sooner for Dragons, says midfielder Ampadu

BY PHIL BLANCHE

**ETHAN AMPADU** insisted "bruised" Wales will recover from their Wembley defeat and bounce back for Monday's (Tues 2.45am Malaysian time) massive World Cup qualifier against Belgium.

Wales were dismantled by England inside the first 20 minutes of Friday's friendly.

As goals from Morgan Rogers, Ollie Watkins and Bukayo Saka underlined the gulf in class between the two sides.

Although Wales did not concede again and kept the scoreline to 3-0, manager Craig Bellamy was forced to defend choosing England - who are ranked fourth in the world - as opponents four days from Belgium's visit to Cardiff. Wales must beat Belgium to retain hopes of finishing top of their qualification

group and reaching next year's finals automatically, although their strong Nations League showing last year almost certainly guarantees them a play-off spot in March.

Asked if morale had been damaged by being swept aside by England, Leeds midfielder Ampadu said: "Maybe naturally in the moment, because we're all professionals."

"We came here with the highest expectations of ourselves. We wanted to put on a better performance and show what we can do."

"What we've been practising and what we're capable of."

"But whether we like it or not, we have to go again on Monday and we know how big it is."

"So whether the morale's gone or the ego is a little bit bruised we have to pick ourselves up as a team, which we will do."

"We've already spoken about that. It's time to go again."

While Thomas Tuchel took aim at England fans, insisting his players deserved more support from the "silent" Wembley crowd, Wales were applauded by many of their 7,000-strong travelling support at the final whistle.

Ampadu said he expected the "Red Wall" to be at their loudest for the visit of group favourites Belgium at Cardiff City Stadium.

"I was disappointed (at the end)

because the support they gave us and the performance we put out, especially in the first 20 minutes, they deserve more," said Ampadu.

"That sums us up as a nation. We always stick together, no matter what comes our way. We don't take that for granted."

"We know what Monday's going to be like at Cardiff City Stadium. We've had a few games like this and we know those moments, so it's one that we're relishing."

"We expected more from ourselves here, we prepared well, but we just did not execute, especially in the first half."

Wales also trailed 3-0 to Belgium in the first half in June before fighting back to draw level, only for Kevin De Bruyne to grab a late winner for the hosts.

Bournemouth forward David Brooks said: "I feel we should have learned the lesson from Belgium really. We can't start games like that."

"When you're 3-0 down against a quality side like that it's going to be a very long night."

"A few of us were probably just half a yard off where we needed to be, but in the second half we showed a bit more of what we're about."

"Quick turnaround and hopefully we can put it right on Monday. Belgium is obviously the main one." - The Independent

# Arsenal punished for breaking FA rules against Man United

**ARSENAL** have been hit with a suspended fine of £500,000 (RM2.8m) for breaching FA Cup rules ahead of their third round match against Manchester United back in January. The disagreement revolved around the away ticket allocation for United. The Red Devils were given 8,000 seats at the Emirates, fewer than they should've received.

According to FA regulations, visiting clubs

must be allocated up to 15% of the ground capacity, which is more than the percentage required for Premier League matches.

United lodged a complaint with the FA after not receiving the maximum 9,000 tickets, but Arsenal cited safety issues. The Safety Advisory Group maintained that the upper tier at the Emirates couldn't be used for away fans due to concerns over persis-

tent standing.

Now, nine months after the match was played and United emerged victorious on penalties, the FA has delivered its verdict.

A statement read: "It was alleged that Arsenal FC had breached the 2024/25 FA Cup Rule 192, and the matter was referred to the PGB (Professional Game Board) for consideration.

"The PGB concluded that Arsenal FC had failed to comply with the 2024/25 FA Cup Rule 192 and imposed a suspended £500,000 fine.

"The fine is suspended pending Arsenal FC's confirmation that it is able to comply with this requirement for the 2025/26 FA Cup third round and continued compliance for any further rounds of this season's competition."

The ruling means the lengthy dispute between the clubs has finally come to an end. United also triumphed on the pitch, winning on penalties after a 1-1 draw following 90 minutes and extra-time. - Express Newspapers

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**TOTO 4D PRIZE PAYMENTS GUARANTEED IN FULL**

**4D** 1st Prize **3083**  
2nd Prize **4354**  
3rd Prize **3165**

Special	Consolation
7979 2349	6113 3455
3586 4591	6576 0647
8609 0166	5906 3362
2621 7155	1384 8889
0027 4311	3250 7096

**4D JACKPOT**  
Jackpot 1 **RM 16,533,643.66**

3083 4354	4354 3083
3083 3165	3165 3083
4354 3165	3165 4354

Jackpot 2 **RM 224,827.57**  
Winning combination of any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of Special prizes.

**4D Zodiac**

1st Prize **3083** + **ROOSTER**  
2nd Prize **4354** +  
3rd Prize **3165** +  
4th Prize **Special Prize** +  
5th Prize **Consolation Prize** +  
6th Prize **Any 4D drawn number**

**TOTO 5D & 6D PRIZE PAYMENTS GUARANTEED IN FULL**

**5D** 1ST **9 2 4 0 3**  
4TH **2 4 0 3**  
2ND **7 3 9 5 0** 5TH **4 0 3**  
3RD **5 8 9 7 6** 6TH **0 3**

**6D** 1ST **7 5 9 1 5 1**  
2ND **7 5 9 1 5** or **5 9 1 5 1**  
3RD **7 5 9 1** or **9 1 5 1**  
4TH **7 5 9** or **1 5 1**  
5TH **7 5** or **5 1**


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Jackpot **RM 3,406,136.10**

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# Finnish bidder confirms takeover plans

Businessman Ziliacus wants to invest in United

**FINNISH** businessman Thomas Ziliacus has revealed he is plotting to approach investors in a fresh attempt to buy Manchester United. He also insists he would be keen to collaborate with co-owner Sir Jim Ratcliffe and other potential backers.

Ziliacus spearheaded one of numerous groups that lodged offers for the club in 2023 when the Glazer family declared they would consider either a complete or partial sale of United.

However, his supporter-driven proposal arrived too late in the process and Ratcliffe's Ineos secured nearly 30% whilst taking charge of football matters.

This week, speculation has emerged that the club might be sold with reports of a potential offer from the UAE. Saudi Arabia's Turki Al-Sheikh suggested that a businessman is in "advanced talks" with United's leadership.

Speaking exclusively to the *MEN*, Ziliacus has disclosed that he intends to contact prospective investors, including Ratcliffe, in an effort to acquire a stake in United or the entire club.

Ziliacus said: "Last week, I was sitting and thinking through all the possibilities of investing in Manchester United and drafting a basic plan on how I could approach certain parties to see if something could be done.

"This is about joining forces with the right parties with the sole aim of bringing Manchester United back to where it should be as the number one club in the world.

"I mean, my love for the club has

gone nowhere and I think the opportunity is still there. So I would really welcome an opportunity to talk to the key players and see what can be done.

"The key players, of course, today, Ratcliffe, then if other parties would be keen to join as well, then that would be great. Some of the investors, I think it's almost everything or nothing, meaning either they own the club alone or they are not interested.

"So you would have to find the investors who are willing to look at what is best for the club and not what is best for the investor."

Ziliacus maintains that should he secure any influence over the club, he would incorporate a supporter-driven scheme, with his proposal representing a partnership rather than an outright acquisition. He suggests this approach is something the Glazer family presently refuses to consider.

Ziliacus has expressed his willingness to collaborate with any investor, including former bidder, Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim. He stated: "I actually have nothing against working with people like Jim Ratcliffe or any investor, whoever that may be. Because I'm not in this to have a trophy that I can show off to other people.

"I'm in this to make a club that I've been a fan of since I was 12 years old the best club in the world. My heart cries when I see how things are going today.

"Manchester United are so far below where the club should be and could be if things were managed the right way." - Express Newspapers

Thomas Ziliacus. - AFPPIC

**WINNING NUMBERS** **damacai**  
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Draw Date: 11/10/25 (Sat) Draw No: 5979/25 Venue: WISMA GENTING, KL

**1+3D SUPER 1+3D**

1st Prize	8330
2nd Prize	6137
3rd Prize	3308

Starters	Consolation
4014 6173	5509 9688
1440 6236	9669 5302
2613 7313	0290 1168
7201 6906	6365 0516
2873 8705	6690 8461

**1-3D Jackpot**

Jackpot 1 **RM8,178,238.90**

8330 + 6137	6137 + 8330
8330 + 3308	3308 + 8330
6137 + 3308	3308 + 6137

Jackpot 2 **RM111,222.80**  
Winning pair matches any 1 of Top 3 & any 1 of 10 Starter Prizes.

**3+3D Bonus**

1st Prize	Bonus	1st Prize Bonus
428 330 +	BOAR	RM230,000.00
2nd Prize	Bonus	2nd Prize Bonus
886 137 +	MONKEY	RM380,000.00
3rd Prize	Bonus	3rd Prize Bonus
093 308 +	BOAR	RM549,097.10

Starters	Consolation
454 014 636 173	105 509 459 688
971 440 746 236	039 669 715 302
972 613 727 313	700 290 401 168
577 201 006 906	096 365 860 516
022 873 038 705	396 690 328 461

**3D**

1st Prize	2nd Prize	3rd Prize
330	137	308

**3D Jackpot**

Jackpot **RM734,515.70**

330 + 137 + 308	137 + 308 + 330
330 + 308 + 137	308 + 330 + 137
137 + 330 + 308	308 + 137 + 330

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## Hon Jian-Haikal reach semis

**NATIONAL** men's doubles pair Choong Hon Jian-Muhammad Haikal Nazri created an upset over Kim Astrup-Anderson Skaarup Rasmussen to storm into the last four of the Arctic Open 2025 in Vantaa, Finland, Friday.

The unseeded Malaysian pair took 39 minutes to dispose the third seeds 23-21, 21-15 in the quarterfinals of the Super 500 tournament held in Vantaa Energia arena.

Meanwhile, national No. 1 men's doubles pair and top seeds Aaron Chia-Soh Wooi Yik emerged victorious against unseeded Taiwanese duo Liu Kuang Heng-Yang Po Han, 21-19, 19-21, 21-17. The 2022 world champions will face eighth seeds from Thailand Kittinupong Kedren-Dechapol Puavaranukroh after they came from behind to pull off a shock win over fourth seeds Liang Wei Keng-Wang Chang of China 19-21, 21-14, 21-19. - Bernama

## Muhammad Ridwan to ride on brother's fighting spirit in Thailand

**THE** absence of national track cyclist Muhammad Shah Firdaus Sahrom at the 2025 SEA Games following recent surgery on his right knee injury has not dampened the spirit of his younger brother Muhammad Ridwan to rock Thailand this December.

Although disappointed not to be able to race with his brother, Muhammad Ridwan said he will ride with his brother's fighting spirit to bring honours to the country in his debut at the biennial sports games.

"If he (Muhammad Shah Firdaus) is there (at the 2025 SEA Games), maybe we can have a deep talk about strategy, but the opposite happened and I am a bit disappointed.

"However, I will still do my best there for the country, this is my last competition for this year.

"So, hopefully at least I can deliver one gold medal in the team sprint event. I think we can do it, God willing," he said when met recently.

The 24-year-old rider said his brother also often gives him tips, especially from the tactical aspect, for racing at the Hua Mark Velodrome, Bangkok.

Muhammad Ridwan is scheduled to compete in the men's keirin event and the men's team sprint with Muhammad Fadhil Mohd Zonis and Mohd Akmal Nazimi Jusena at this SEA Games.

National track cycling head coach Harnizam Basri previously said that Muhammad Shah Firdaus' injury actually occurred when he was involved in an accident during the men's keirin final at the 2024 Olympic Games.

The injury resulted in a fracture in the cartilage of his right knee, forcing him to undergo surgery at a private hospital recently. - Bernama

**THE** Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) has been urged to promptly resolve the appeal process regarding the decision of the International Football Association Board (Fifa) to impose disciplinary action on the national football governing body and Harimau Malaya's seven heritage players.

Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports Adam Adli Abd Halim said the appeal must be made quickly and meet the conditions and regulations set by the world football governing body.

In addition, he said FAM also needs to be more transparent in conveying information to the public so that there is no speculation that could disrupt the national football development ecosystem.

"We hope FAM can quickly resolve the appeal and ensure that it complies with everything that has been understood by Fifa.

"We also hope that the appeal process runs with full transparency and integrity. In this matter, we are taking an approach so that FAM is also more transparent in conveying information to the public.

"Fans and supporters of the Harimau Malaya squad only want true and accurate information. FAM needs to be careful in managing this matter," he said after officiating the Terengganu-level 2025

# FAM urged to accelerate appeal

Process regarding heritage players must be resolved

National Sports Day (HSN2025) at the Gong Badak Sports Complex here today.

Also present was chairman of the state committee on Youth, Sports and Non-Governmental Organisation Development, Hishamuddin Abdul Karim.

Earlier, FAM and seven Heritage players were subject to action by the Fifa Disciplinary Committee after violating Article 22 of the Fifa Disciplinary Code (FDC) which deals with forgery of documents regarding citizenship records.

The seven players involved are Gabriel Felipe Arrocha; Facundo Garces; Imanol Machuca; Rodrigo Holgado; Joao Figueiredo; Jon Irazabal and Hector Hevel.

It is understood that FAM needs to submit an official appeal to Fifa no later than Oct 14 after receiving an official notice on Oct 6. - Bernama



## Uruguay played below par: Bielsa

Dominican Rep's Edarlyn Reyes (left) is challenged by Uruguayan's Jose Luis Rodriguez Bebanz at Bukit Jalil National Stadium on Friday night. - BERNAMAPIC

**URUGUAY** head coach Marcelo Bielsa admitted his team were far from their best after securing a 1-0 win over world number 142 Dominican Republic in an international friendly match at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil on Friday night.

Bielsa said the South American side deserved to win but felt the opponents were more satisfied with their performance.

"What the match leaves us with is that the opposing team should be more satisfied with their performance than we are with ours. What I mean is that the victory was fair but I imagine the rival team is happier with how they played than we are with how we played.

"In other words, I think that while we deserved to win, the rival played above their potential and we played below ours, below our own capabilities and resources," he told a post-match press conference, here, last night.

In last night's clash, 26-year-old midfielder Ignacio Laquintana marked his debut in style after emerging as the match-winner for La Celeste with a decisive second half strike to

salvage pride for the world No. 15 side.

Uruguay were without several key players due to injury and health reasons including Atletico Madrid's Jose Maria Gimenez, Al-Hilal striker Darwin Nunez, Real Madrid midfielder Federico Valverde, FC Barcelona defender Ronald Araujo, and Manchester United's Manuel Ugarte.

After facing the Dominican Republic, Uruguay will wrap up their tour in Malaysia against Uzbekistan at the Hang Jebat Stadium in Melaka tomorrow.

"Given that Uzbekistan have already qualified for the World Cup and with the motivation brought by the arrival of a new coach, we believe the match will be quite challenging," Bielsa said.

Meanwhile, the former Leeds United manager was full of praise for the match venue tonight.

"The stadium is beautiful and I didn't encounter any difficulty nor do I have any criticism of the stadium where we've played," said the 70-year-old Argentine coach. - Bernama

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SCAN ME



SEVERAL paper airplanes took a sharp flight down towards the dugouts at Wembley Stadium as England drifted a little during the second half of their 3-0 thrashing of Wales.

It was perhaps at this moment, with some fans distracted in a game long since settled, that Thomas Tuchel became irritated by a lack of energy from supporters.

The German had emphasised how it was "silent" despite their breathtaking display.

He had seen Morgan Rogers dazzle, Ollie Watkins strike in relief of the injured Harry Kane

desire to transform England into a team that resembles one from the Premier League.

And that first half certainly added evidence, following the sensational 5-0 win in Belgrade, that England have embraced this new identity and change from the Gareth Southgate era, moving the ball at speed to open up sides, while retaining an appetite for something special, as displayed by Saka's cracker on Friday.

England took up a 3-2-5 shape in possession, with Elliott Anderson striking up an exciting foundation alongside Declan Rice to allow the Three Lions to showcase five attack-



England manager Thomas Tuchel (left) and striker Harry Kane. - AFPPIC

ance on the field today (Fri, Oct 10).

"We will have top support in Latvia, we had excellent support in Serbia. But today we were 3-0 up after 20 minutes, we had ball win after ball win and I felt, 'why is the roof still on the stadium?' It could have helped us in some moments in the second half."

Latvia will bring another chance for England to shine and build more momentum, though Tuchel has been alert to fend off any kind of "favourites" tag entering the 2026 World

# Unwanted distraction

BY JACK RATHBORN

**Tuchel's 'silent Wembley' criticism should not take attention away from positive signs for England**

and Bukayo Saka deliver a rasping strike into the top corner of the net to turn cheers into gasps of admiration.

"We could have been 5-0 up at halftime," Tuchel claimed, and he wasn't wrong after Saka's one-on-one was repelled by a desperate Joe Rodon lunge and Watkins contrived to miss from a yard.

"We couldn't score the fourth and fifth ones. The stadium was silent. We didn't get any energy back from the stands. We did everything to win."

"Yes (we expected more from the fans). What more can you give in 20 minutes? We didn't let them escape.

"If you hear just Wales fans for half an hour, it's sad because the team deserved more support today."

While it was not the raucous, bouncing Wembley Stadium famously seen in the Euros semifinal win against Denmark, it was never likely to be that in a friendly against an overmatched side.

Tuchel's expectations are high, but his decision to spend energy on the lack of noise, for a spell in the second half no less, distracts from the clear and impressive progress in a relatively short space of time.

Tuchel has spoken about his

ing players with plenty of freedom to overwhelm teams when fully firing.

Jude Bellingham and Cole Palmer should thrive in this environment when they return and the competition for places brings a certain joy to the way the team plays, with motivation clearly preserved even for friendlies.

Perhaps forgotten in the slick play inside the final third is England's No 1: Jordan Pickford.

Now the first-ever goalkeeper to keep eight consecutive clean sheets in a run stretching back a year, the Everton goalkeeper's vital stops to deny David Brooks and Chris Mepham show a team ready to win in a multitude of ways.

"I have said the support in Serbia was absolutely fantastic," Tuchel said in a bid to soften his criticism a little.

"I said it and I meant it. I love English football fans and support they give. The atmosphere did not match the perform-

FROM LEFT: England's Morgan Rogers, Bukayo Saka, Ollie Watkins and Anthony Gordon.



Cup.

Kane, held back due to an ankle knock, maintained he would be fine to return in Riga (Wed 2.45am Malaysian time). Watkins also played down any concerns after whacking his knee on a post in the first half.

It makes for a settled side, outside of the full-backs, and an element of uncertainty for the time being.

Though Ezri Konsa and Djed Spence's performances showed a degree of interchangeability without Reece James, currently injured, and Myles Lewis-Skelly, lacking match sharpness out of Arsenal's starting line-up for the time being.

The England Band will help raise the volume in Riga, Los Angeles and beyond, but

Tuchel's moan should not overshadow a team in harmony fast approaching a World Cup year. - The Independent

More on page 13