



Concerns raised as many skip SPM to work in Singapore
 Attractive salaries across causeway may provide immediate financial relief for struggling families, but move lacks long-term stability, career growth and security, warns educationist.
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M'sia faces looming water crisis



Expert says country must upgrade and modernise treatment plants, improve distribution systems and conduct conservation awareness campaigns to prepare for high demand in future.
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PTPTN loan arrears exceed RM10 billion
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Early warning on need to strengthen unity
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Due to the low water tariff, many consumers do not feel the need to adopt water conserving practices.
 - AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THE SUN



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Identity of King misused in fake social media account

KUALA LUMPUR: The Johor Royal Press Office has cautioned the public not to fall for a fake social media account misusing the identity of His Majesty King of Malaysia Sultan Ibrahim and using images of the Johor royal family without permission.

The matter was shared in a post on Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar's official Facebook page. A screenshot of the fake X account was also shared.

"The public is advised to remain vigilant and not fall for fake accounts which are often used by scammers for fraudulent activities on Facebook and other social media platforms," said the post.

The Johor Royal Press Office stressed that impersonation and identity misuse were offences under the law and strict action would be taken against those involved.

Previously, it was reported that an Instagram account had falsely used the identity of Her Majesty Raja Zarith Sofiah, Queen of Malaysia. — Bernama



Fahmi with Nur-ul Afida, Arul Rajoo, Sun and REDtone Digital Bhd group CEO Lau Bik Soon (left) at the launch of the AI course for media professionals in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. — **BERNAMAPIC**

1.2m borrowers owe Higher Education Fund RM10.9b

➤ 'Corporation needs to review repayment collection mechanism, bolster monitoring of loan management'

KUALA LUMPUR: The Auditor-General's Report 1/2025 on the 2023 financial statements of federal agencies reveals that as of Dec 31, 2023, the National Higher Education Fund Corporation had RM10.853 billion in loan repayment arrears involving 1.2 million borrowers.

"Overdue education loan repayments also showed an increase from 2019 to 2023," said Auditor-General Datuk Seri Wan Suraya Wan Mohd Radzi in a statement following the tabling of the Auditor-General's Report 1/2025 in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

She said the corporation needs to review the education loan repayment collection mechanism and increase monitoring of its education loan management.

On the Fundamental Research Fund implementation by five research universities, Wan Suraya said it required periodical monitoring to ensure that projects are carried

out according to plan and achieve the set KPI.

"The audit report shows that the progress of the research projects is at a less than satisfactory level at 53.9%. Only 11.3% of projects implemented are at a good level while 7.3% are categorised as problematic."

On concerns regarding the financial position of the Solid Waste Management and Public Cleansing Corporation (SWCorp) as of Dec 31, 2023, she said its ability to cover operational costs and financial commitments in the future depends on additional financial assistance from the federal government.

She said the problems of the National Higher Education Fund Corporation, the Fundamental Research Fund and SWCorp are part of the main focus of the audit, one of the three focus areas in the auditor-general's report apart from the Financial Statement Verification and Financial Statement Analysis.

The auditor-general through the report also

submitted 10 recommendations for improvements to federal agencies.

They include proactive actions to improve federal agencies' internal control and financial system in line with the requirements of the accounting standards adopted to ensure accurate financial reporting and effective financial governance management.

Wan Suraya said the objective is to ensure the ability of federal agencies to continue operations based on continuous efforts and to reduce liabilities like financial commitments as well as dependence on the government.

Another recommendation is to review the direction and business plans of subsidiary companies that suffered losses and did not provide proper returns, Bernama reported.

Federal agencies are also recommended to pay serious attention to several issues, including closing down subsidiary companies with dormant or inactive status for more than five years.

The report has been uploaded on the National Audit Department's website, and the public can browse it at ikan.audit.gov.my.

Inquiries and views on the report can be addressed to jbaudit@audit.gov.my.

MCMC seeks clarification from TikTok

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) is in contact with TikTok to obtain clarification on the blocking of 18 local media organisations recently, said Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil.

He said according to initial information received from TikTok, the accounts in question were blocked for reporting on a recent molest case at a mosque in Batang Kali involving a young girl.

"The problem is TikTok's artificial intelligence (AI) itself. Here is a little warning."

He said AI can sometimes go too far and not understand that reports by media organisations are different from content produced by ordinary people.

"So I have asked for a discussion to be held in the near future to refine the functions of TikTok accounts owned by the media so that such action is not taken in the future."

He was speaking after launching an "AI in the Newsroom" course, organised by Bernama, the first in a series of AI-related training programmes for media professionals.

Also present were Bernama CEO Datin Paduka Nur-ul Afida Kamaludin, editor-in-chief Arul Rajoo Durar Raj and Huawei Malaysia CEO Simon Sun, Bernama reported.

Fahmi said the molest case report is a normal report as usually done by media organisations.

"The report should not be a problem. So, here I see the AI problem that TikTok needs to explain to us and then also to media companies."

Cabinet Paper on Multi-Lane Free Flow toll system soon

PUTRAJAYA: The Works Ministry will prepare a Cabinet Paper on the implementation of the Multi-Lane Free Flow (MLFF) toll system once the engagement process with relevant agencies is completed, said Works Minister Datuk Seri Alexander Nanta Linggi.

He said discussions with various government agencies are still ongoing, as the ministry wants the project to be well executed.

"Once this engagement process is completed, we will prepare a Cabinet Paper. Before that, we need to address several related issues with other agencies, including the Attorney-General's Chambers, to ensure the best possible outcome."

He was speaking after officiating at the opening of the 2025 Comprehensive Asset Management Seminar yesterday.

"The ministry is prepared to move forward quickly, but we must adhere to decisions made through negotiations or discussions with other agencies."

"We have been informed that other agencies also recognise the urgency of this matter. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has stressed the importance of expediting government initiatives."

On Feb 18, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) recommended that the ministry and the Malaysian Highway Authority conduct a more detailed cost-benefit analysis regarding the MLFF project.

PAC chairman Datuk Mas Ermeyati Samsudin said the recommendation was made after the committee concluded that implementing the MLFF would not fully resolve traffic congestion on

toll highways.

Following this, Works Deputy Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan said the MLFF system, to be implemented by PLUS Malaysia Bhd, is an independent initiative by the highway concessionaire.

Meanwhile, in his opening speech, Nanta called on all Works Ministry stakeholders and agencies to position Malaysia's asset management system among the world's best by achieving "World-Class Asset Management for Malaysia by 2027".

"This aligns with the prime minister's 2025 New Year's message, which calls for continuous improvement in government officers' performance, work procedures and service delivery in line with the principle of striving

for excellence."

He said as the leading ministry for infrastructure development and the construction industry, it remains committed to realising the Madani government's vision by enhancing infrastructure development and comprehensive asset management through digitalisation initiatives.

"We are actively implementing two key digitalisation projects, both of which serve as enablers for world-class asset management."

"The National Construction Information Platform and MYInfra, once completed, will facilitate more effective asset management covering budgeting, asset evaluation, operations and maintenance as well as stakeholder and customer management" — Bernama

Govt to address stunted growth among children

LANGKAWI: The Health Ministry aims to reduce the prevalence of stunted growth among children under five years old to 14.2% by 2030.

Its minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said findings from the National Health and Morbidity Survey showed that 21.2% of children experienced stunted growth in 2022.

"This marks a significant increase compared with the 16.6% in 2011 and we are continuing to see a rise in this growth disorder phenomenon."

He was speaking to reporters after launching the First 1,000 Days of Life: Langkawi Longitudinal Study (LLS) and the digitalisation initiative using the Cloud-Based Clinic Management System (CCMS) on Sunday.

He said stunting not only affects children's physical growth but also increases their risk of developing non-communicable diseases, including diabetes and obesity.

He also said stunting could impact cognitive development, affecting children's intelligence and mental capabilities.

"We have taken action on this issue under the National Strategic Plan to Combat the Double Burden of Malnutrition Among Malaysian Children 2023-2030, which involves multiple ministries."

He added that LLS is one of the ministry's initiatives to understand the various correlations and factors contributing to stunting among children in the country.

"The findings of this study would help the government implement the best interventions. It is not just about conducting research but also about how we can use the data to address issues related to stunting."

LLS, set to commence next month, will identify the factors influencing children's growth and development during the first 1,000 days of life, from early pregnancy to the age of two.

Dzulkefly said 13 healthcare facilities in Langkawi have been equipped with CCMS to enhance the efficiency of healthcare services on the island. - Bernama

Eyeball gummy candies banned after death of boy

LANGKAWI: The Health Ministry has ordered two online shopping platforms to remove advertisements promoting eyeball gummy candies following the death of a boy in Penang who allegedly choked on the sweets.

Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said: "We instructed district health offices to conduct enforcement on physical premises and seize remaining products being sold."

The ministry issued a statement banning the sale of the gummy product on all online platforms and in the domestic market.

Investigations found that the product breached the labelling requirements under the Food Regulations 1985 of the Food Act 1983.

On Thursday, the boy died at the Penang Paediatric ICU after allegedly choking on a gummy candy on Feb 18.

The Year Four student is believed to have bought the candy outside the school. - Bernama

'Water supply may not meet increasing demand'

■ BY QIRANA NABILLA
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➤ Academic suggests modernising treatment plants, improving distribution systems and conducting public awareness campaigns

PETALING JAYA: Experts have warned that Malaysia's water treatment infrastructure may struggle to meet growing demands due to increasing water needs for domestic, industrial and agricultural use, coupled with rapid urbanisation and economic development.

Universiti Teknologi Mara School of Civil Engineering senior lecturer and environmental management expert Dr Marfiah Ab Wahid said based on consumption rates, water demand could rise significantly, requiring additional treatment capacity and efficient distribution systems.

"Malaysia's population is set to hit 40 million by 2040. To meet the high future demand, we must invest in upgrading and modernising our water treatment plants, reducing non-revenue water, improving distribution systems and conducting public awareness campaigns on water conservation."

She said Malaysia has one of the highest water consumptions per capita in Southeast Asia, averaging 226 litres per person per day in 2023, which exceeds the World Health Organisation recommended usage of 165 litres and the 180 litre limit set

in the 11th and 12th Malaysia plans.

The National Water Resource Study (2000-2050) predicted that water demand in Malaysia will increase by 103% by 2050.

Marfiah said water consumption in Malaysia depends on the daily activities of each resident and, as reported by Air Selangor, 59.7% of water is used for domestic purposes while 40.3% is used for non-domestic purposes.

She said among factors contributing to high water consumption is the country's tropical climate, which leads to year-round high temperatures and humidity, increasing water needs for hydration, bathing and cooling.

"Most households and industries in Malaysia lack water-efficient technologies or practices, with older appliances and fixtures contributing to wastage. Water-saving methods, such as rainwater harvesting, are not widely adopted."

Marfiah said rapid urbanisation, commercial area development,

construction, service sectors and industrial growth have increased water demand.

She said it is estimated that over 70% of treated water is used for activities such as bathing, laundry and food preparation, with a portion also lost due to pipe leaks.

"In 2023, the National Water Service Commission reported that 34.6% of treated water was lost in Peninsular Malaysia and Labuan due to inefficiencies or leaks before reaching consumers.

"Leaks in the distribution system could lead to increased operational costs, affected water quality and regulatory challenges, which could negatively impact the efficiency of water treatment processes."

She suggested that Malaysia consider a tiered water pricing system in which the cost increases with higher usage to encourage water conservation but stressed the need to study its impact before implementing it.

Integrated Water Resource Management advocate and NGO

Malaysian Water Partnership chairman Datuk Nor Hisham Mohd Ghazali said the occasional water scarcity experienced over the past decade is mainly due to management issues rather than a lack of water resources.

"In Malaysia, we have not enforced mandatory conservation policies but introduced several voluntary measures. The Water Services Industry Act 2006 provides regulation and control of water wastage and losses. However, its effectiveness largely depends on the habits and behaviour of consumers."

He highlighted that Malaysia's low water tariffs contribute to high consumption.

"With water costing less than 20 sen per person per day, it is difficult to convince consumers that this is excessive. In countries such as Singapore, where water tariffs are about five times higher than in Malaysia, consumers are more likely to adopt water-saving practices."

"As long as tariffs remain low, there is little incentive to conserve water or invest in water-saving devices," he said, emphasising that when it comes to water, the government as well as private and public sectors have to play their roles in safeguarding the country's resources.

Minister denies system failure in LRT track tragedy

IPOH: Transport Minister Anthony Loke has denied that the Platform Intrusion Emergency Stop system at the Titiwangsa Light Rail Transit (LRT) station failed to function when a visually impaired man was run

over and killed after falling on the track on Saturday.

He said the system was functioning normally but as the train had reached its destination, the unfortunate incident could not

be avoided.

"I do not think it (the system) failed. Sometimes, if an object falls, the system will shut down but it just so happens that the train had arrived (at the time of the incident),

so it did not have time to shut down immediately. This is not because the system failed," he said during a press conference after the Ipoh BAS.MY Launch yesterday.

The system stops a train from approaching the platform immediately when it detects an object falling onto the track.

Loke said the details of the incident are under investigation.

He also said the ministry is working to improve the safety infrastructure at LRT stations, especially those that have been operating for a long time, including the Titiwangsa station.

He added that this includes installing passenger doors that block the gap between the station and the train.

"The Titiwangsa station, for example, does not have a passenger door. It has been operating for more than 20 years and we hope that we can improve the facilities at these stations for passenger safety. But it will certainly take time because we are doing it in phases."

He said as an immediate step, the ministry has asked security personnel at the stations involved to be more vigilant to ensure the safety of all passengers, especially persons with disability.

Loke said for the upcoming Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebrations, additional tickets for Keretapi Tanah Melayu trips, including the electric train service, would be added.

"Bus companies are encouraged to start applying for additional or temporary permits." - Bernama

(From left) Housing and Local Government Minister Nga Kor Ming, Loke and Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Saarani Mohamad with officials at the launch of BAS.MY in Ipoh yesterday. - BERNAMAPIC





Over 900 Johor students skip SPM, opt for jobs in S'pore

➤ Experts warn of long-term risks, urge vocational training and financial aid to keep youths in school

■ BY DEEPAKSHMI MANICKAM
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PETALING JAYA: More than 900 students in Johor skipped the 2024 Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) exams, with some choosing to work in Singapore instead due to higher wages.

Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek previously reported a 97% SPM attendance rate for 2024, meaning about 10,000 students nationwide missed the exam.

State education executive councillor Azman Tamin said low-skilled jobs across the border have become an attractive option, particularly for students from financially struggling families.

National Association of Private Educational Institutions secretary-general Dr Teh Choon Jin called the trend a red flag, pointing to deeper issues in the education system.

"This isn't just about the education system itself. It's about how students perceive its relevance to their futures. If they don't see a direct benefit in completing school, no policy will keep them engaged," he said.

While Singapore offers immediate financial relief, Teh warned that these jobs lack long-term stability, career growth and security.

"Without an SPM, let alone tertiary education, these students could end up trapped in low-paying jobs with no safety net once their physical capabilities decline.

"This is similar to the rising trend of young people choosing social media influencer careers over education. The mindset is the same - why struggle through exams when you can immediately earn in a stronger currency?" he said.

To counter this, he urged the government to strengthen vocational training by introducing industry-linked education pathways, such as work-study programmes and apprenticeships.

Teh said private colleges offer alternatives for students who skipped SPM but later wish to continue their studies. However, he stressed that SPM remains crucial as a basic qualification.

"Even with the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning route to higher education, SPM is still required as a base. Yet, these pathways are not widely promoted as mainstream options," he said.

He recommended modernising the education system with competency-based learning and micro-credential programmes, allowing students to progress at their own pace.

"A rigid, exam-centric system alienates students who don't fit the traditional mould," he added.

Teh said Malaysia must make secondary

education more appealing by integrating industry-driven subjects, digital skills and real-world applications into the curriculum.

He also called for scholarships and stipends to prevent students from dropping out due to financial hardship.

"If Malaysian salaries remain uncompetitive, students will continue to seek jobs across the border. Long-term solutions are needed to retain young talent in the country."

Parent Action Group for Education president Datin Noor Azima Abdul Rahim criticised state governments and schools for failing to support financially struggling families, leading to students skipping SPM and leaving for work in Singapore.

"Singapore does not require SPM for many jobs, making it easy for students to drop out. The lure of earning in Singapore dollars is strong, especially for those from poor families," she said.

While parents may try to persuade their children to continue studying, financial struggles often push them to prioritise immediate income over education.

"The cost of living in Singapore is higher unless they commute daily and without qualifications, career growth is difficult," she said.

Noor Azima warned that without intervention, Malaysia could face a generation of youth deprived of knowledge and called for stronger support for struggling students and their families.

"If this trend continues, more young people will believe there is nothing to gain from school when they are just trying to survive."

Perak poised to lead digital healthcare transformation

IPOH: Perak is well-positioned to spearhead digital healthcare transformation, supported by extensive 4G and 5G coverage, which has reached 99.76% and 81%, respectively, across populated areas in the state.

State Communications, Multimedia and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) Committee chairman Mohd Azlan Helmi said strong connectivity is a key enabler, demonstrating Perak's readiness to modernise and integrate its healthcare sector.

"With a robust and expansive internet network, the implementation of telemedicine and digital health monitoring can be further strengthened in Perak. This technology not only benefits urban populations but also ensures that rural communities have equal access to high-quality healthcare services," he said.

He was speaking when launching the Future Health For All (FH4A) pilot programme at Dewan Komuniti Taman Cempaka on Sunday, which was attended by over 200 local residents.

Mohd Azlan added that advancements in digital infrastructure should be fully leveraged to foster innovation, allowing the healthcare sector to keep pace with global progress while meeting the people's needs holistically.

The two-day pilot programme, which began on Sunday, is being rolled out at four locations in Perak: Dewan Komuniti Taman Cempaka, Dewan Serbaguna Seri Desa, Rishah Buntong 5 in Ipoh, Dewan Orang Ramai Balok, Kampung Balok Baru, Felda Trojak in Sungkai and Dewan Merdeka in Manjung.

"This pilot programme aims to raise awareness and educate more Perak residents on the crucial role of technology in the future of healthcare," he said. - Bernama

3,500 entrepreneurs given financial aid

KUALA LUMPUR: A total of 3,577 Indian entrepreneurs have received financing amounting to RM32.65 million under the Prosperity, Empowerment and A New Normal for Indian Women (PENN) programme as of Dec 31, 2024.

Entrepreneur and Cooperatives Development Deputy Minister Datuk Seri R. Ramanan said the initiative, managed by Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia, has helped Indian women venture into entrepreneurship, improving their livelihoods and benefiting their families.

"The ministry and its agencies are committed to encouraging women, including housewives, to engage in entrepreneurship by providing mentorship and training programmes that cover technology, skills, and business management," he said in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

He was replying to Datuk Muslimin Yahaya (PN-Sungai Besar), who asked about the ministry's efforts to encourage household couples, particularly housewives, to become micro-entrepreneurs through exposure to new technologies, skills training, and business courses.

The PENN programme was launched on April 13, 2024, with a special fund of RM50 million. - Bernama



ARTFUL FEAT ... Berjaya Starbucks Coffee Company Sdn Bhd set a national record in the Malaysia Book of Records for the most 'Bearista' art in a community project, featuring 25 life-size Bearistas at Pavilion Bukit Jalil on Feb 22. - ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

Kelantan eyes 50,000 tourist arrivals

KOTA BHARU: The Kelantan Tourism Information Centre (TIC) aims to attract 50,000 Indonesian tourists to the state this year, according to its director, Mohd Zaki Ismail.

He said Kelantan has become a new destination for Indonesian travellers following a promotional initiative by the Malaysian Budget and Business Hotels Association.

"Previously, many Indonesians, though familiar with Malaysia, did not know what Kelantan specifically had to offer. Last year, we conducted a promotional visit to Riau, Indonesia and as part of a reciprocal business-to-business visit, representatives from the Indonesian travel industry came to experience firsthand the unique attractions of the state of Cik Siti Wan Kembang," he told Bernama at a recent event in Pengkalang Datu.

Meanwhile, Riau Association of Indonesian Travel Agents Head Harlina Dian Sari said a 30-member delegation participated in the tour, all visiting Kelantan for the first time.

Fama boosts coconut imports to tackle supply shortage

PASIR PUTEH: The Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (Fama) has imported 640 tonnes of coconuts, marking a 30% increase in imports, including from Indonesia, to address the nationwide supply shortage since last month.

Fama director-general Abdul Rashid Bahri said the shortage is a global issue due to the coconut off-season, a factor previously highlighted in international coconut conferences.

"In response, Fama has expanded its sourcing

efforts to include Palembang, Indonesia, in addition to the Riau Islands, where we previously imported coconuts.

"We have also intensified efforts to procure coconuts from Sabah and Sarawak, and based on assessments at Fama purchasing centres, the supply has shown an upward trend."

He was speaking at the signing ceremony for a forward agreement on watermelon cultivation at Kampung Haji Wan Omar on Sunday, which was also attended by Kelantan Fama director

Wan Faizatul Aniza Ismayatim.

Abdul Rashid said the increased supply is expected to stabilise the coconut market nationwide, particularly in preparation for *Ramadan* and *Aidilfitri*.

"During my recent visit to Thailand, I found that the country also sources its coconuts from Vietnam, which presents an opportunity for us to secure a larger supply," he said.

On reports of coconut smuggling to Thailand, he said there is currently no concrete evidence of

Malaysian coconuts being exported illegally.

He added that those apprehended had valid licences to sell and wholesale coconuts, with their only violation being the failure to display signboards identifying them as licensed buyers and suppliers.

"We have no plans to restrict the issuance of these licences, as having more traders in the market is beneficial and helps prevent any single party from monopolising the business," he added. - Bernama

■ BY DEEPALAKSHMI MANICKAM
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Better initiatives to foster unity, address discrimination

PETALING JAYA: The National Unity Ministry will use findings from the State of Discrimination Survey 2023 by Architects of Diversity Malaysia as an early warning indicator to strengthen national unity.

The survey revealed that 64% of the 3,283 respondents experienced discrimination primarily based on economic status, age and ethnicity in the year before its results were released. Hindus reported the highest rate of religious based discrimination at 40%, Muslims 20%, Christians 26% and Buddhists 22%.

Indians also disproportionately faced discrimination in job applications, housing searches and interactions with law enforcement.

On Friday in Parliament, National Unity Minister Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang reaffirmed the government's commitment to fostering inclusiveness and highlighted key initiatives such as the Madani Harmony Initiative, Rukun Tetangga and the Socio-Cultural Community framework to strengthen social cohesion.

"This effort can be carried out through various platforms by the respective agencies as a reminder that unity is a shared responsibility,"

► Govt must develop clearer legal, policy frameworks that emphasise enforcement and good practices: Academician

he said.

ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute Malaysia Studies Programme senior fellow and co-coordinator Dr Lee Hwok Aun urged policymakers to develop clearer legal and policy frameworks to address discrimination, emphasising that enforcement and facilitation of good practices remain weak.

"Given the lack of clarity from legal and policy standpoints on what constitutes discrimination, there's neither enforcement of illegal practices nor facilitation of

good practices."

He acknowledged some ongoing efforts, particularly in the housing sector, but stressed that they must be broadened across other areas.

Lee said while the survey findings provided valuable insights, interpretation must be done with care.

"It highlighted how discrimination is widely experienced in Malaysia, with Indians more likely to report facing discrimination when applying for jobs, looking for housing or dealing with the police.

"But some situations experienced as discrimination might not always be so. For example, someone might feel discriminated against in a job application, but without a full view of the candidate pool, it is difficult to ascertain this."

He also said there is a need for a more structured approach on Malaysia's affirmative action policies.

"The policies aim to promote participation and develop the capability of designated groups in higher education, technical and professional jobs, enterprise and ownership.

"They are in the form of quotas or exclusive access to scholarships, university admissions, business loans and unit trust funds. They have mainly benefited the *Bumiputera*, although there are measures on a smaller scale for other races and *Orang Asli*

communities as well as women."

While the policies have increased *Bumiputera* representation in key areas, Lee pointed out a fundamental challenge.

"They have fallen short in developing capability. Malaysia must refine affirmative action to be more effective and fair for all designated groups. The goal should be to reduce inequalities in participation and capability across all communities."

Lee also stressed on the importance of universal and targeted policies to ensure equal opportunities for all, adding that there be clearer regulations and enforcement mechanisms to tackle workplace discrimination.

"A fair employment commission should be set up to provide oversight, enforce anti-discrimination laws and encourage good practices."

Stronger collaboration to fight new form of corruption

PUTRAJAYA: Technology abuse such as cyber threats could create a new breed of corruption, said Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission chief commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki.

He said stronger collaboration is needed from all stakeholders, including business and corporate entities, investors, traders, academicians, NGOs and civil society organisations in the fight against the threat of corruption and to develop technological solutions and best practices in transparency and governance.

He also said there is a need to increase competencies and institutional capacity to address current challenges and crises.

"The world in the next decades would be significantly different from today. Technology abuse such as cyber threats can create a new breed of corruption," he said in a recorded speech in conjunction with the opening of the Good Governance Conference (GGC) 2025 yesterday.

Azam said Malaysia must keep its long-term vision in positioning the country's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) ranking among the top 25 countries globally by 2033, in line with the national target outlined in the Mid-Term Review of the 12th Malaysia Plan.

"Achieving this goal requires Malaysia to reach a score of 68 to 70 points, thus aiming for a steady annual progress of at least two points.

"This aspiration and journey demand not only strategic and bold governance reforms, but requires a shared commitment that will propel us toward this transformative national goal."

Malaysia's rank in the 2024 CPI remained unchanged at the 57th place out of 180 countries, the same as in 2013.

To achieve a leap in performance, Azam said a special task force on CPI was established by the government in May 2024 led by the Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Shamsul Azri Abu Bakar.

"To enhance Malaysia's CPI, the task force is mandated to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the nine CPI surveys and provide recommendations for strategic improvements."

The task force is further supported by the establishment of six focus groups, each dedicated to relevant CPI survey sectors, namely enforcement, legislation, public fund management, business competitiveness, investment and strategic communications.

Azam said Transparency International's concern about the devastating effect of global corruption on the fight against climate crisis was genuinely valid.

He said corruption affects biodiversity loss and pollution, undermines access to better healthcare, education and the justice system, as well as weakens the quality of public investments, resulting in poor public infrastructure and contributing to the erosion of public trust. — Bernama

Cops bust job scam syndicate

IPOH: Perak police busted a fake job scam call centre syndicate targeting victims from China, operating from a homestay in Pulau Pangkor last Friday.

State police chief Datuk Noor Hisam Nordin said the Commercial Crime Investigation Department of the Perak police headquarters, in cooperation with the Manjung district police conducted a raid at 9.45pm, resulting in the arrest of 13 Chinese nationals and two locals linked to the scam.

Noor Hisam added that 12 Chinese men and one woman, aged between 26 and 41 years old, were detained along with a local married couple, aged 61 and 63.

He said investigations revealed that the 15 syndicate members had used the house as a call centre offering online job opportunities that primarily targeted victims in China.

"The jobs required victims to complete tasks involving online purchases to boost product ratings."

Noor Hisam said the victims were lured with promises of profits for completing tasks involving online purchases, but they never received any returns after making payments.

The local couple involved in the scheme rented the house and supplied food to the syndicate members, Bernama reported.

"During the raid, police also seized 12 laptops, six Wi-Fi modems and 88 mobile phones of various brands, estimated to be worth RM80,000.

"All 15 suspects were remanded for four days until today (Feb 25)," he said, adding that the case was being investigated under Section 420 and Section 120(B) of the Penal Code.

Noor Hisam said the police would check the passport status of the Chinese nationals with the Malaysian Immigration Department and take action under the Immigration Act 1959/63 if any violations or misuse of visit passes were discovered.

He also urged the public to be cautious and not trust any online job offers that required them to make payments to complete tasks.

Police deny online claims of robbery

KUALA LUMPUR: Police have denied allegations circulating on social media about a robbery and assault on a family in Bangi.

Kajang district police chief ACP Naazron Abdul Yusof said a social media post containing a police report and screenshots of conversations related to the alleged incident was detected on Sunday.

"Checks revealed that no report had been filed regarding the incident."

Naazron said police received a report on Saturday from a food delivery rider who claimed he was attacked and nearly robbed by four men in a car.

The 18-year-old, who was riding along Jalan Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Bangi from Bandar Seri Putra to Teras Jernang, was intercepted by a car.

"The complainant, fearing he was about to be robbed, fled on his motorcycle. One of the suspects struck him on the head, but he managed to escape.

"There was no loss of property, but the victim sustained minor injuries and bruises on his forehead from the assault."

He urged anyone with information on the incident to contact the nearest police station or the investigating officer Insp Afiq Rifdi Mohd Azmi at 011-2966 7474. — Bernama



CHARGES WITHDRAWN
... Sanusi was released of a sedition charge involving remarks about Al-Sultan Abdullah. — BERNAMAPIC

Kedah MB freed of sedition charge

SHAH ALAM: The High Court yesterday freed Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor of a sedition charge over his remarks about the 16th Yang diPertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah two years ago.

Judge Datuk Aslam Zainuddin ordered Muhammad Sanusi to be freed after his lawyer Awang Armadajaya Awang Mahmud objected to the prosecution's request for a discharge not amounting to acquittal.

"When the prosecution expressed its intention not to proceed with the charges, it means that the

case is stopped. So, if the intention is to stop, then I request that my client be acquitted and discharged," said Awang Armadajaya.

Earlier, DPP Datuk Masri Mohd Daud informed the court that the prosecution, having received representation from Awang Armadajaya, did not intend to pursue charges against Muhammad Sanusi and withdrew the charges.

On Dec 10 last year, Judge Aslam acquitted and discharged Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor of a sedition charge over remarks about the Sultan of Selangor Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah. — Bernama



Entrepreneur on mission to promote Johor batik

KOTA TINGGI: A woman craft entrepreneur from Tangkak dreams of recognition on the global stage for Johor batik, which features motifs representing the state's identity such as black pepper, pineapple and gambier.

D Warisan Berzaman owner Azizah Yusof, 51, said she has been in the business for 11 years, producing a variety of Johor batik products, including shirts, baju kurung, kebaya, cardigans, T-shirts, headscarves, sarong batik and textile.

She shared that her customers are not only from Malaysia but also from abroad, including Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea.

"Our foreign customers purchase our products at our booth at events organised by state government agencies such as Tourism Johor, including the recent Asean Tourism Forum.

"The feedback has been positive, with many praising the uniqueness of Johor batik for its distinctive charm. They also find our clothing comfortable to wear," she said when met at the 31st Asean Economic Ministers' Retreat at the Desaru Coast Conference Centre on Sunday.

Azizah is among Johor entrepreneurs participating in the exhibition held in conjunction with the retreat.

On the response received, she said it has been encouraging and the products at her booth managed to attract the attention of delegations from the Asean community.

"Many people stopped by the booth to ask about Johor batik. I am very grateful to be able to showcase my products."

According to Azizah, she set up her business to create job opportunities and train single mothers and people with disabilities (PwD) to generate income.

"My husband and I set up the business to help single mothers and PwD. We train them for free to make various products using remnants of batik fabric, such as key holders, pencil cases, hair ties and 'seremban' stones," she added. — Bernama



Ho (third from left) with members of PCCC during the press conference. — T.C. KHOR/THESUN

Public invited to take part in heritage event

► Volunteers sought for 18th edition of Meng Eng Soo Open Day in Penang

■ BY T.C. KHOR
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

GEORGE TOWN: Organisers of the Meng Eng Soo Open Day are calling for volunteers to take part in the

celebration, that coincides with George Town World Heritage Day, a public holiday.

"Last year, over 20,000 visitors visited the open day," said Penang Chinese Clan Council (PCCC)

chairman Ho Swee Choon during a press conference at the Meng Eng Soo Memorial Hall in Jalan Pintal Tali (Rope Walk) on Sunday.

PCCC also expects about the same number of visitors to this year's event, that will be held in July.

Held annually since 2008 and now in its 18th edition, the organisers are recruiting volunteers for cultural and immersive theatre activities, and curators.

"The continuation of culture relies on the involvement of the new generation. Each era's change has posed a test for the continuity of cultural heritage. It is precisely these challenges that have forged our deeper sense of mission," Ho said, adding that between 150 and 170 volunteers are needed.

Penang Cultural Inheritors Society event master planner Choong Earn Thong said the public is welcome to take part in the event.

"There are no restrictions on experience, age, occupation or education. Just bring your enthusiasm. We encourage students, particularly those who have just completed their SPM exams, to join us," said Choong.

He added that it would be a valuable opportunity to gain hands-on experience, develop new skills and grow through the planning process.

Ho said PCCC is urgently looking for volunteers with directing or theatre production experience to join their creative team.

On the day of the event, the immersive theatre will recreate Penang in the early 1900s along Rope Walk, from the intersection at Lebuh Chulia to the junction at Lebuh Kimberley.

"We also need actors to play various roles, from central characters to background figures like passers-by or someone casually sipping tea," he said.

Ho said PCCC is looking for youngsters aged between nine and 13 to join the team as junior curators, as well as function as junior guides to share stories and connect with visitors.

"No prior experience is needed, but participants should have enough time to practise and must attend at least four training sessions, online and offline," he added.

Application forms are available on the official social media pages of Meng Eng Soo Memorial Hall and the Penang Cultural Inheritors Society.

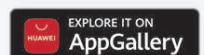
The open day for this year is themed "Jejak Warisan" and will be held on July 7 (Monday) from 5pm to 10pm, with free admission.

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Japan, Philippines to enhance military exchanges

MANILA: Japan and the Philippines agreed yesterday to further deepen defence ties in the face of an "increasingly severe" security environment in the Indo-Pacific region, Japanese Defence Minister Gen Nakatani said yesterday.

Nakatani met his Philippine counterpart Gilberto Teodoro in Manila for a meeting in which the two ministers tackled regional security issues, including the maritime situation in the East and South China Seas.

"The security environment surrounding us is becoming increasingly severe and that it is

necessary for the two countries as strategic partners to further enhance defence cooperation and collaboration to maintain peace and stability in Indo-Pacific," Nakatani said through a translator.

Nakatani said the Philippines and Japan have agreed to deepen cooperation on military exchanges, establish a high-level strategic dialogue among its military and deepen information sharing.

Security ties between the two US allies have strengthened over the past two years as Japan and the Philippines share common concerns

over China's increasingly assertive actions in the region.

Last year, Manila and Tokyo signed a landmark military pact allowing the deployment of their forces on each other's soil.

Japan and China have repeatedly faced off around uninhabited Japanese-administered islands that Tokyo calls the Senkaku and Beijing calls the Diaoyu.

The Philippines and China have also clashed frequently in the South China Sea around disputed shoals and atolls that fall inside Manila's exclusive economic zone.

Nakatani visited military bases in the northern Philippines on Sunday, including a naval station that houses a coastal radar that Japan donated as part of its ¥600 million (RM17.6 million) security assistance in 2023.

Manila was one of the first recipients of Tokyo's official security assistance, a programme aimed at helping boost deterrence capabilities of partner countries.

In December, the two countries signed a second security deal in which Japan agreed to provide rigid hull inflatable boats and additional coastal radar systems. – Reuters

Prabowo rolls out sovereign wealth fund

➤ Danantara will take control of govt holdings

JAKARTA: Indonesia yesterday launched a new sovereign wealth fund that will aim to manage state assets worth more than US\$900 billion (RM4 trillion) as President Prabowo Subianto looks to turbo-charge growth in Southeast Asia's biggest economy.

The recently inaugurated leader has pledged to take the archipelago's annual growth from 5% to 8%, ordering billions of dollars worth of cuts across government that last week sparked the first protests of his rule.

Prabowo signed a document at the presidential palace in Jakarta initiating the new fund known as Daya Anagata Nusantara, or Danantara, which is modelled on Singapore's investment arm Temasek and received approval this month in a parliament dominated by the president's ruling coalition.

"I, as the president of the Republic of Indonesia, sign ... the government decree ... about the organisation and governance of the Investment Management Body, Daya Anagata Nusantara," he said at the palace.

"It is not just an investment body, it is an instrument for national development that will optimise the way we manage our wealth. We are committed to being a developed nation."

Danantara will take control of government holdings in state companies, with an initial budget of US\$20 billion, according to state news agency Antara.

Investment Minister Rosan Roeslani has been picked as the chief executive of the fund, Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto told reporters after the signing.

The government has not specified which state-owned companies will fall under control of the fund but Prabowo has said he wants it to manage more than US\$900 billion in assets.



(From left) Ex-president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Prabowo and ex-president Joko Widodo at the launch at Merdeka Palace in Jakarta yesterday. – REUTERS/SPIC

As of 2023, government data showed state-owned enterprise assets were worth US\$637.5 billion, much lower than Prabowo's target.

He will use the fund as an investment vehicle and said it would "be invested in 20 or more high-impact national projects" this year.

Prabowo said the initial funding would be used for projects in nickel, bauxite, copper, food production, renewable energy and building an AI centre, oil refinery and petrochemical factory.

Danantara will be Indonesia's second sovereign wealth fund, after the Indonesia Investment Authority which was launched in 2021 and holds US\$10.5 billion in assets.

"This event marks a new era in the transformation of strategic investment management in the country," presidential secretariat spokesman Yusuf Permana said in a statement on Sunday.

"It is also part of the government's commitment to realising ... a grand vision

aimed at elevating Indonesia's economy to a higher level through sustainable and inclusive investments."

Prabowo's cuts to fund Danantara and an ambitious multi-billion-dollar free lunch programme have stoked student-led protests.

Austerity measures announced by Prabowo in late January sparked the rallies last week, underpinned by a social media movement known as "Dark Indonesia."

The fund will also report directly to Prabowo and some experts have cautioned that it will need proper monitoring and management, otherwise it could raise governance concerns.

Danantara's launch was also met with some opposition on social media by Indonesians angry at the government's handling of finances in a country long known for red tape and corruption.

"The state can't even manage life insurance properly. How can it manage a Sovereign Wealth Fund?" asked one user on X. – AFP

Bangladesh students to launch political party

DHAKA: Bangladeshi students, who were at the forefront of last year's protests that ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, are set to launch a political party this week, two sources with direct knowledge of the development said.

The Students Against Discrimination group spearheaded the protests that began as a student-led movement against public sector job quotas but quickly morphed into a broader, nationwide uprising that forced Hasina to flee to India as the unrest peaked in early August.

The student group is finalising plans to launch the new party during an event likely tomorrow, said the sources who did not want to be named as they are not authorised to speak to the media.

Nahid Islam, a student leader and adviser to the interim government that took charge of Bangladesh after Hasina's exit, is expected to lead the party as convener, the sources said.

Islam has been a key figure in advocating student interests within the interim government, led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, which has been at the helm of Bangladesh since August 2024. He is expected to resign from his current role to focus on leading the new political party.

Islam did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Yunus has said that elections could be held by the end of this year, and many political analysts believe that a youth-led party could significantly reshape the country's political landscape. Yunus has said he was not interested in running.

Yunus' office did not respond to a request for comment on the launch of the party.

The South Asian nation has been grappling with political unrest since Hasina left following weeks of protests during which more than 1,000 people were killed.

Officials from Hasina's government and security apparatus systematically committed serious human rights violations against the protesters during the uprising, the UN human rights commission said this month.

Hasina and her party deny any wrongdoing. – Reuters

French aircraft carrier strike group makes first visit to Subic Bay

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT ZONE: Rising tensions in the South China Sea have made freedom of navigation exercises "even more important", France's ambassador to the Philippines said on Sunday, as the nuclear-powered *Charles De Gaulle* made its first port visit to the country.

The aircraft carrier strike group, which includes a trio of destroyers, joined the Philippine Navy on Friday for drills in the disputed waterway that Manila said were aimed at enhancing "interoperability, communication, and defence capabilities".

The visit to Subic Bay north of Manila comes as the Philippines looks to strengthen relations with like-minded countries in the face of

increasingly tense confrontations with China over reefs and waters in the sea.

"Knowing the rise of tensions, it's even more important to uphold international law and the freedom of navigation, be it at sea or in the air", Ambassador Marie Fontanel said on the deck of the carrier.

She said France stood with countries, like the Philippines, that shared those values.

France, which has nearly 2 million citizens in its Pacific territories, has been seeking to reassert its importance in the region, where China and the United States are battling for influence.

The French Navy's months-long operation *Clemenceau 25*, which included exercises with

the United States and Japan in the Philippine Sea last week, was aimed at projecting power "in strategic zones where regional tensions are growing and the law of the sea is challenged by force", it said in a statement.

France is one of a handful of European countries that regularly conduct freedom of navigation patrols in the South China Sea.

China claims most of the sea including waters close to the shores of the Philippines and several other neighbours, ignoring an international tribunal ruling that its claims are without legal basis.

The Philippines and France have also been discussing a visiting forces agreement that

would allow them to deploy troops on each other's territory.

Manila already has similar pacts with the United States and Australia.

The Philippines said in November that its coast guard would acquire 40 fast patrol craft from France.

Philippine Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Ronnie Gil Gavan at the time called the deal the "largest so far single purchase" in Manila's effort to modernise its coast guard, with deliveries set to start in four years.

The US\$440 million (RM1.9 billion) deal is to be funded by development aid from the French government. – AFP



German leader vows 'independence from US'

➤ Merz expressed uncertainty about Nato

BERLIN: Conservative leader Friedrich Merz (*pic*) criticised the Trump administration just hours after his election win on Sunday, saying his priority would be strengthening Europe and achieving independence from the United States.



Speaking in a televised interview, Merz expressed unprecedented criticism of the United States, particularly in light of recent statements by President Donald Trump.

Last week, the Trump administration shocked European allies by telling them they must take care of their own security and rely less on the United States, while announcing talks with Russia to end the war in Ukraine without involving Europe.

US Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth warned Europeans that "stark strategic realities" would prevent the United States from being primarily focused on the security of Europe.

"After Trump's statements, it is clear that the Americans, at least this part of America, this administration, are largely indifferent to Europe's fate," said Merz.

He also expressed uncertainty about Nato's future ahead of its June summit.

"I am very curious to see how we would be heading towards the Nato summit at the end of June, whether we will even still be talking about Nato in its current form or whether we need to establish independent European defence capabilities much more quickly."

On Friday, Merz told public broadcaster ZDF that Germany would need to come to terms with the possibility that Trump might not stick with Nato's mutual defence pledge.

He said this meant that Berlin might need to become less reliant on the United States, with regard to their nuclear umbrella as well, and advocated talks with Europe's nuclear powers France and Britain about an expansion of their nuclear protection.

Merz, a transatlanticist, has been more hawkish against Russia than acting Chancellor Olaf Scholz, suggesting medium-



Weidel (left) and AfD co-leader Tino Chrupalla celebrating their party's improved performance on Sunday. AfD and Left party jointly secured one third of seats in the new parliament needed to block changes to the German constitution. – AFPIC

range Taurus missiles might be sent to Kyiv under his reign, which Scholz has strictly rejected.

Merz drew parallels between interference from Washington and Moscow in European affairs, citing recent interventions by Elon Musk, a close aide to Trump, in the German election campaign.

"The interventions from Washington were no less dramatic, drastic and ultimately outrageous than the interventions we have seen from Moscow.

"We are under such massive pressure from two sides that my absolute priority now is to establish unity in Europe."

On Sunday evening, Merz declared victory in German parliamentary elections after his Christian Democrats won nearly 28.5% of the vote, securing a clear lead over other parties.

Scholz's Social Democratic Party faced a historic defeat in the elections, projected to

receive 16.3%, which is the lowest vote share for the centre-left party since 1949.

Merz's remarks came after heightened tensions between the Trump administration and European governments in recent weeks.

US Vice-President J.D. Vance sparked controversy earlier this month when, in a speech at the Munich Security Conference, he criticised European governments and political parties for taking a stance against right-wing populist parties, excluding them from political processes.

Following his speech, Vance met far-right political party Alternative for Germany (AfD) co-chair Alice Weidel in Munich, indicating support just a week before Germany's parliamentary elections on Feb 23, representing a breach of diplomatic norms.

The conference organisers did not invite Weidel due to her party's anti-democratic positions. – Bernama

New Zealand to smoothen China ties

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's Foreign Minister Winston Peters will touch down in Beijing today for a three-day visit as relations between the two countries are strained after Chinese Navy vessels conducted live firing exercises in the Tasman Sea.

New Zealand and Australia officials said that China had conducted live-fire exercises in international waters between the two nations, giving little notice and forcing commercial airlines to divert flights.

The three ships are around 519km east of Tasmania, outside of Australia's exclusive economic zone, the New Zealand Defence Force said yesterday.

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said yesterday the limited notice that China had given that it would undertake live firing exercise would be raised in Beijing.

"There is nothing illegal here in terms of what we are compliant with international law. The issue for us is ... we'd appreciate a little bit more advance notice particularly on what is a busy air route," said Luxon.

Peters' visit to China is part of a trip that includes stops in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, Mongolia and South Korea. In Beijing he will hold talks with senior Chinese leaders, including Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

Peters said last week in a statement he would discuss with Chinese officials the bilateral relationship, as well as Pacific, regional and global issues that are of interest to both countries.

"China is one of New Zealand's most significant and complex relationships, encompassing important trade, people-to-people, and cultural connections. We intend to maintain regular high-level political dialogue with China," Peters said.

Peters has also voiced concerns that the Cook Islands, an independent country in free association with New Zealand, had signed a comprehensive strategic partnership and other agreements with China, without satisfactorily consulting with New Zealand. – Reuters

Retired hens revitalise Cyprus olive groves

AKAKI: Organic farmers in Cyprus have recruited hundreds of retired hens to fertilise olive groves in a pilot project they say boosts yields, counters disease and helps to manage food waste.

Saved from slaughter after their egg-laying years, hens peck and poop to their hearts' content among olive trees at the organically certified Akaki Grove, on the green foothills of the Troodos mountains west of Nicosia.

In a back-to-basics approach, farmer and grove owner Elena Christoforos and soil engineer Nicolas Netien have launched the Kot-Kot project. They collect food waste donations to feed hens, which in turn provide natural fertiliser for olive trees producing oil high in inflammation-busting polyphenols.

"We provide them with an old hens' home, they come here and retire," said Christoforos, surrounded by chickens while emptying bins of food waste donated by schoolchildren.

Hens reduce the presence of pests such as olive fly, a scourge for olive farmers in the Mediterranean, by pecking at larvae while simultaneously clearing surface weed cover.

Their droppings enrich the soil and feeding them with food waste reduces the amount of methane-producing organic matter going into landfill.

The hens can enjoy a long retirement among the olive trees, living for 8-10 years despite only laying eggs until the age of two.

Netien, who holds the world record for producing olive oil with the highest polyphenol content, said tree growth and yields had improved markedly since the hens arrived. – Reuters

Australia fines Telegram nearly A\$1 million

SYDNEY: Australia's internet watchdog has fined Telegram almost A\$1 million (RM2.8 million) for a delay in reporting about terrorism and child abuse material.

eSafety asked Telegram, along with other social media sites, about measures they had in place to tackle terrorist and violent extremist material on their services. Telegram was also asked about the measures it was taking to combat child sexual abuse material.

eSafety said yesterday other platforms had met the May 6, 2024, deadline, but Telegram didn't respond until Oct 31.

"eSafety considered Telegram to be non-compliant with the transparency notice and has given it an infringement notice for A\$957,780," its Commissioner Julie Inman Grant said.

She said the infringement notice sent an important message to industry that timely

transparency was not a voluntary requirement in Australia.

"If we want accountability from the tech industry, we need much greater transparency. These powers give us a look under the hood at just how these platforms are dealing, or not dealing, with a range of serious and egregious online harms which affect Australians," she said.

Inman Grant said the threat posed by terrorist and extremist material shared and promoted online posed a growing risk and tech providers must live up to their responsibilities to be transparent and put in place measures to prevent their services being misused.

"Research and observation have shown us that this material can normalise, desensitise and sometimes radicalise – especially the young who are viewing harmful material

online that they cannot unsee."

Telegram has 28 days to request the withdrawal of the infringement notice, pay it, or seek an extension to pay.

Telegram said it had fully responded to all of eSafety's questions last year, with no outstanding issues.

"The unfair and disproportionate penalty concerns only the response time frame, and we intend to appeal," the company said in an email.

Australia's spy agency in December said one in five priority counter-terrorism cases investigated involved youths.

The messaging platform has been under growing scrutiny around the world since its founder Pavel Durov was placed under formal investigation in France in August in connection with alleged use of the app for illegal activities. – Bernama/AFP

Pope had a 'good' night, says Vatican

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis, in critical condition battling double pneumonia, had a "good" night in hospital, slept and is resting, the Vatican said yesterday.

The 88-year-old pope was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital on Feb 14 after having trouble breathing for several days, and subsequently had pneumonia diagnosed in both lungs.

The Vatican described his condition as critical for a second day on Sunday and that he had an "initial, slight insufficiency" in his kidney function that day.

The prognosis for the pope, who required a transfusion of two units of blood on Saturday after experiencing a "prolonged asthma-like respiratory crisis", remains "guarded", according to the latest update.

"It was a good night, the pope slept and is resting," the Vatican said in a one-sentence update yesterday.

Double pneumonia is a serious infection that can inflame and scar both lungs, making it difficult to breathe. The Vatican has described the pope's infection as "complex", and that it was caused by two or more microorganisms.

Francis, who has been pope since 2013, has suffered bouts of ill health over the past two years. He is particularly prone to lung infections because he developed pleurisy as a young adult and had part of one lung removed. — Reuters



A Palestinian child receives a polio vaccine at a camp for displaced people in Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip on Sunday, a day after the third mass polio vaccination campaign began in Gaza, with the aim of delivering the first dose to nearly 600,000 children across the Palestinian territory. — AFP/IC

Hamas ties ceasefire talks to release of prisoners

► Ensure Israel fulfils terms, mediators told

CAIRO: Talks with Israel through mediators on further steps in a ceasefire agreement are conditional on Palestinian prisoners being released as agreed, Hamas official Basem Naim said on Sunday.

Israel said on Sunday it was delaying the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners it had planned to free the day before until Hamas met its conditions.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said that Israel was waiting to deliver the 620 prisoners and detainees "until the release of the next hostages has been assured, and without the humiliating ceremonies".

That was a reference to recent handovers by Hamas that UN officials said went against international law because they were not respectful.

The White House backed Israel's decision to delay releasing the prisoners, citing the treatment of hostages by Hamas. The delay was an "appropriate response" to the group's treatment of the hostages, National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes said.

President Donald Trump is prepared to support Israel in "whatever course of action it chooses regarding Hamas", he added.

Hamas has made hostages appear on stage in front of crowds and sometimes speak before they were handed over.

"Any talks with the enemy through mediators are conditional on the release of the 620 prisoners agreed upon in exchange for the four bodies and the six Israeli captives who were freed on Saturday," said Naim, a member of the Hamas political bureau.

"The mediators must ensure that the enemy adheres to the terms of the agreement as stated in the agreed-upon text."

The Palestinian Prisoner's Society said Israel is practising "state-terrorism against the prisoners and their families".

Ghasan Washahi, whose brother was set to be released on Saturday, said his family was disappointed with the delay.

"Every time there was a list of prisoners set to be released, we would wait, hoping Islam's name would be among them, but it was never there," he said, referring to his brother.

"My mother even started losing hope that he would be freed in the deal. And when his name finally appeared, Israel halted the deal."

Israel and Hamas have frequently accused each other of violations since the ceasefire started on Jan 19 but it has so far continued to hold. Hamas at one stage said it would stop handing over hostages because of alleged Israeli breaches.

The ceasefire has brought a pause in the fighting, but prospects of a definitive end to the war remain unclear.

Both sides have said they intend to start talks on a second stage, which mediators say aims to agree the return of all remaining hostages and the full withdrawal of Israeli troops. — Reuters

BRIEFS

CONSULATE BLASTS LOOK LIKE TERRORISM: RUSSIA

MOSCOW: Russia yesterday demanded a full French investigation into explosions at its consulate in Marseille which it said looked like an act of terrorism. There was no word on any casualties, and no immediate information on the extent of any damage. "The explosions on the territory of the Russian Consulate General in Marseille have all the hallmarks of a terrorist attack. We demand (from France) exhaustive and prompt measures to investigate, as well as steps to strengthen the security of Russian foreign missions," said Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova. — Reuters

7,000 KILLED SINCE JANUARY IN D.R. OF CONGO

GENEVA: Some 7,000 people have died since January in fighting in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the prime minister of the DRC told a meeting of the Human Rights Council in Geneva yesterday. Some 450,000 people are without shelter after 90 displacement camps were destroyed, Judith Suminwa Tuluka said. The M23's advance is the gravest escalation in more than a decade of the long-running conflict in eastern Congo. Rwanda rejects allegations from Congo, the United Nations and Western powers that it supports M23 with arms and troops. — Reuters

UN faces difficult votes on Ukraine

NEW YORK: Defying Kyiv and its European allies, Washington plans to submit today to the UN Security Council and General Assembly a draft text that calls for a "swift end" to the Ukraine conflict but makes no reference to its territorial integrity, in an early test of Donald Trump's muscular approach to the crisis.

Since Russian forces invaded Ukraine three years ago, the balance of power at the United Nations has been clear: the General Assembly, representing all members, has clearly and overwhelmingly supported Ukrainian sovereignty, while the 15-member Security Council has been

paralysed by Russia's veto power.

But Trump's return to the White House last month has brought a dramatic reshuffling of the diplomatic cards, as he undertakes a clear rapprochement with the Kremlin while dismissing his Ukrainian counterpart, the severely pressured Volodymyr Zelensky, as a "dictator".

Against this tense diplomatic backdrop, Ukraine and more than 50 other states are planning to introduce a text before the General Assembly saying it is "urgent" to end the war "this year" and clearly repeating the assembly's previous demands: an immediate cessation of Russian

hostilities against Ukraine and an immediate withdrawal of Russian troops.

Amid heated speculation that the United States might abstain from the General Assembly vote, Washington generated widespread surprise on Friday by proposing a competing text.

The US resolution is "simple (and) historic", Secretary of State Marco Rubio said late on Friday, as he urged member states to approve it.

The tersely worded US draft "implores a swift end to the conflict and further urges a lasting peace between Ukraine and Russia".

It makes no reference to Ukrainian

territorial integrity, a cornerstone of the previous resolutions passed by the assembly, with the United States under former president Joe Biden among its strongest supporters.

For Vassili Nebenzia, the Russian ambassador to the UN, the American resolution is "a good move", though he believes it should also "address the root causes" of the war.

According to diplomatic sources, the American delegation plans to submit that text to a Security Council vote today, according to the Chinese presidency of the council.

The vote will place European delegates in an awkward position.

To be adopted, a resolution needs the votes of at least nine of the 15 Security Council members, while not being vetoed by any of the five permanent members (the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China).

Even if the EU members (France, Slovenia, Denmark and Greece) along with Britain were to abstain, the resolution could still pass.

Would France or Britain be prepared to cast their first vetoes in more than 30 years — even as their leaders, Emmanuel Macron and Keir Starmer, are expected this week at the White House for key talks? — AFP



COMMENT by Mohd Hazmi Mohd Rusli

Joining High Seas Treaty a strategic move

HUMAN civilisation has always been propelled by the extraction of resources. The spice-rich Malay Archipelago lured traders from China, India, Persia and as far as Europe, as spice was the most sought-after commodity at that time.

During British rule in the 18th century, Malaya was one of the priceless colonial possessions of the British as it was rich in various resources, such as tin and rubber. Thereafter in 1910, oil was discovered off the coast of Sarawak and it is now one of Malaysia's most important exports.

Nevertheless, these minerals are non-renewable. The depletion of land-based minerals has led to the seeking of mineral resources beyond national maritime territory into the deep seabed. The discovery of high-quality minerals in the deep seabed started in the late 19th century.

Deep seabed mining (DSM) is the process of extracting minerals from the ocean floor, with a focus on three primary types of minerals: polymetallic nodules, cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts and polymetallic sulphide.

These minerals can potentially support the mass production of essential electronics, such as smartphones and tablets, as well as stimulate the development of green technology sectors such as industries involving electric cars and wind turbines.

The International Seabed Authority (ISA) is an organisation established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 (UNCLOS). The ISA regulates and controls all mineral-related activities in the international seabed area.

Although commercial DSM has not started, several companies are trying to make it a reality. These companies include, among others, De Beers Group, China Minmetals Corporation, UK Seabed Resources Ltd and other establishments from Tonga, Nauru, Germany, Japan and Singapore. Although there are pressing needs to venture into this industry, Malaysian companies have yet to be actively

involved in DSM activities.

Recognising the imminent prospects of DSM and its potential impact on the marine environment, the world reached a pivotal moment for ocean protection on March 5, 2023.

The UN has adopted the High Seas Treaty, which is the world's first treaty to protect high seas biodiversity. The agreement is opened for signature in New York for two years starting Sept 20, 2023, and Malaysia is expected to be a signatory.

The treaty could assist in protecting the oceans from possible environmental degradation caused by DSM activities for metals such as silver, gold, copper, manganese, cobalt and zinc.

Nevertheless, DSM activities will not face scrutiny as provisions of the treaty do not overrule regulations laid down by the authorities that oversee existing high seas activities.

For instance, the High Seas Treaty would not regulate shipping activities managed by the International Maritime Organisation or the ISA, which oversees DSM. In other words, DSM would not face any obstacles or restrictions under international law.

Challenges for Malaysia

Malaysia faces several challenges in venturing into DSM. Firstly, limited understanding of the deep-sea environment.

Exploring the deep sea requires extensive scientific data, which Malaysia currently lacks due to limited engagement in deep-sea expeditions.

Secondly, high costs and technological requirements. Deep-sea exploration demands advanced technological equipment, vessels and substantial financial investment.

Costs could reach up to US\$1.4 billion (RM6.21 billion) over five years, with ocean research vessel operations alone ranging from US\$10,000 to US\$40,000 per day. The estimated cost of processing minerals is an additional US\$135 million.

Thirdly, there is a need for legal and technical expertise, and Malaysia must develop expertise in both aspects with

“Malaysia has long been a key player in maritime affairs and it is now imperative for the nation to expand its commitment by addressing the protection of biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction through the High Seas Treaty.”



The UN has adopted the High Seas Treaty, which is the world's first treaty to protect high seas biodiversity. — AFP/ICC

regards to DSM. Although Malaysia is a state party to UNCLOS, not all provisions, particularly those related to the deep seabed, have been incorporated into domestic legislation.

Without comprehensive legal frameworks, Malaysia could face challenges in DSM activities and partnerships.

Becoming state party to treaty

Malaysia plays a pivotal role as a steward of two of the world's busiest maritime corridors – the straits of Malacca and Singapore.

As a littoral state, Malaysia has consistently ensured safe navigation and minimised maritime risks within these vital waterways. This accomplishment highlights Malaysia's significant contributions to the preservation and well-being of the marine environment.

Malaysia has long been a key player in maritime affairs and it is now imperative for the nation to expand its commitment by addressing the protection of biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction through the High Seas Treaty.

Becoming a state party to this treaty would grant Malaysia a meaningful voice in safeguarding marine areas

beyond its national jurisdiction.

Adopting the High Seas Treaty would not require a complete overhaul of existing local laws. For instance, although Malaysia ratified the UNCLOS in 1996, the Territorial Sea Act was only enacted in 2012. Despite the delayed legislation, UNCLOS continues to be effectively implemented in Malaysia.

Similarly, any delay in Malaysia's membership in the High Seas Treaty could place the nation at a disadvantage regarding issues related to biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.

Furthermore, joining the High Seas Treaty would align with Malaysia's national interests.

It would strengthen the nation's influence in global maritime governance while reinforcing its commitment to environmental conservation, ensuring a balanced approach to economic and ecological priorities.

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EDUCATION

FOCUS 2025

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Strengthening China's soft power

CHINA has overtaken the UK to secure second place globally, advancing one position from the previous year, according to the Global Soft Power Index 2025.

The latest report by the influential brand valuation consultancy, Brand Finance, highlights China's remarkable progress in the ranking, reflecting its growing power and influence in world politics and international relations.

This report is based primarily on key indicators in economics and business while also measuring attributes related to culture and heritage, media and communication, education and science and sustainability.

Together, these factors are increasingly seen as the more influential and effective side of the power coin as compared with the flip side of hard power, which is associated with military power and intervention, coercive diplomacy and economic sanction.

The report notes that China has retained the top spot globally for "ease of doing business in and with" and "future growth potential" for the past four consecutive years. This is a picture quite different from the portrayal of "China collapsing" and "China in economic crisis" regularly featured in Western mainstream media and reproduced by supporting Asian media.

What is also notable is that China has soared to seventh place in the rankings for culture and heritage and media and communication attributes.

This trend is strengthening with the further opening up of the country to foreign visitors as well as the global impact of the movie *Ne Zha 2* (NZZ) and artificial intelligence (AI) app DeepSeek.

The impact of the latter two soft power successes in their respective fields has been so significant that even Western media outlets like CNN, BBC and *The New York Times* - known for engaging in anti-China reporting and ignoring or marginalising Chinese achievements - have

been reluctantly aroused to run stories on them, albeit with their mandatory negative comments.

Movie megahit

NZZ, the latest China-produced animation film hit, with its storyline of family, friendship, loyalty and sacrifice encapsulated within a framework of Chinese mythology and techno-wizardry has captivated movie audiences wherever shown.

It is expected to generate more than US\$2 billion (RM8.79 billion) in box office takings. This will make it the highest-ranking box office animated film in the world.

What is appealing to movie fans, especially American audiences viewing it in the small number of cinemas it is showing - 300 of the 9,595 movie theatres in the US - are not just the universal themes of courage and resilience but also the absence of messages relating to wokeness, political correctness and attitude.

Unlike in the West, where cultural dominance has been based on colonial conquest, religious expansion and political dominance, this example of film-making and cultural influence is different.

In today's high-tech era, films like NZZ demonstrate how technology, storytelling and cultural heritage can converge to create a new film-making and culture-dissemination model rooted in non-ideological equality and dialogue rather than the legacy Western model, with its message of white, Christian and ideological goodness, superiority and supremacy.

Movie audiences are no strangers to mythology-based storytelling. However, Chinese and other non-Western mythology and storylines have been under-explored in the global entertainment world despite their rich history and universal themes.

This is not only due to cultural and historical differences. It is more importantly an outcome of American dominance in the development of the movie industry since the early 20th century.

Hollywood, with US government support, has dominated the world box office for more than a century and helped to shape how audiences in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America view the US and the world.

Whilst this trend continues today, the success of NZZ and its sequel should encourage other countries to embrace cultural confidence and have the ability to tell their own stories. This, in turn, will influence the soft power and global rankings of nations worldwide.

Sputnik moment and bombshell impact

NZZ comes on the heels of DeepSeek, with the latter emerging like a bombshell in app stores around the world.

As the most downloaded AI app, replacing ChatGPT, the Chinese AI model has significantly impacted the global tech industry by its cost-effective low-budget development. This has caused major tech stocks to plummet and raised questions about the shifting power dynamics in the AI market.



"Many now see China as a major player in AI development that can challenge Western AI apps presently dominating the market and tech giants, such as Microsoft and Google."

Musk - unofficial 'president' of US and ultimate kingmaker

COMMENT
By Rahul Chouhan

IN the ever-evolving landscape of global power dynamics, one individual stands tall as the most influential unelected figure in the world - Elon Musk.

The billionaire entrepreneur, known for his ventures in space, electric vehicles and artificial intelligence, has subtly yet powerfully positioned himself as the unofficial "president" of the United States.

His influence extends far beyond technology, shaping political discourse, controlling vast streams of information and even affecting the nation's financial landscape.

Musk's acquisition of X (formerly Twitter) has transformed the social media platform into the most crucial tool for political campaigning. No longer just a tech mogul, Musk has become the puppet master, pulling the strings behind political narratives.

While conventional media outlets scramble to keep up, Musk's platform remains the go-to battleground for political ideologies, debates and propaganda.

President Donald Trump, never one to shy away from bold declarations, recently coined a new term for Musk: "enforcer-in-chief". This title is fitting, given Musk's unrelenting push to challenge the status quo and influence political discourse.

Whether it be his public spats with government officials, his ability to challenge mainstream narratives or his subtle



No longer just a tech mogul, Musk has become the puppet master, pulling the strings behind political narratives.

endorsements, Musk has proven that political influence does not necessarily require holding office.

Musk's reach is not limited to mere influence. With his extensive portfolio of companies, including X, SpaceX, Tesla and Neuralink, Musk has access to an unprecedented amount of critical data.

From private conversations on X to satellite imagery via Starlink, he holds a treasure trove of

information that even intelligence agencies envy.

His privileged access raises serious questions about national security and governance as he operates beyond the checks and balances of a traditional political leader.

Musk's ability to sway financial markets, particularly through Dogecoin (DOGE), is another testament to his unparalleled influence. His cryptic tweets alone can skyrocket or

plummet the value of cryptocurrencies, making him a key player in the decentralised financial revolution.

Moreover, his willingness to expose previous government dealings, especially those concealed under USAID and other bureaucratic entities, has made him a thorn in the side of the establishment.

His revelations have unearthed hidden projects and financial flows that were previously shielded from public scrutiny.

In an era where traditional political leadership is marred by bureaucracy and partisanship, Musk operates with an agility that no elected official can match.

His decisions impact not just America but the entire world, whether through technological advancements, geopolitical manoeuvring or financial disruptions.

While he does not hold an official government position, Musk's influence surpasses that of many world leaders. He is, without a doubt, the most powerful unelected individual on Earth.

Musk's rise to power is a testament to the shifting nature of influence in the modern world. In a digital era where information, technology and finance dictate political and economic landscapes, Musk has effectively positioned himself as the ultimate kingmaker.

Whether this serves the greater good or paves the way for an era of unchecked corporate dominance remains to be seen. One thing is clear - Musk is no longer just a businessman. He is, in many ways, the unofficial president of the United States.

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THE recent news of the deaths of Taiwanese actress Barbie Hsu and Chinese actor Liang Youcheng draw fresh attention to the dangers of influenza, with many wondering "how could this happen?" However, in spite of such news proving that influenza can be deadly, a wealth of misperceptions persists.

Many people still think that influenza is nothing to worry about, that it is just a concern in cold climates. Even when they do get sick, they think it will be mild and they will recover in a few days. Thankfully, most people recover well without any complications, but there are some individuals who do not do so well, as these recent high-profile cases highlight. However, many people are unaware or ignorant about influenza, until something like this happens.

Tippling point

Traditionally, influenza is associated with very high fever that comes very quickly – a person can be fine one day and have a high fever the next. Following that, they will have body aches, sore throat, and shortness of breath for some of them. These are the four classic symptoms associated with influenza and they happen within 24 to 48 hours.

Many people are tempted to just soldier on but a high fever that does not subside in three days is a sign that complications might be setting in. Those with symptoms such as restlessness, agitation and altered consciousness such as being confused, which is more common among children and older persons, should see a doctor immediately.

Do not overlook influenza

➤ Virus can have deadly consequences

Another easily missed warning sign is vomiting, as this is most often associated with food poisoning.

Among children, the signs can be slightly different. Children can deteriorate very quickly, become very quiet or sleepy, and get dehydrated easily.

They may also make a lot of sounds while breathing that is not normal, which is known as noisy breathing, and this means they are having difficulty breathing and may have low blood oxygen levels.

However, you should not wait until these signs appear before going to see a doctor! People can be busy or stubborn and find many reasons to avoid going to see a doctor, even when people around them can clearly see that they are unwell.

So, do not wait, especially if you fall into the category of high-risk, such as pregnant women and children below the age of five, adults who have comorbid conditions like asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure or heart disease, or those who smoke or vape. These factors increase the risk of complications, and the risk is even higher if those conditions are not well-controlled.

In addition, many people are not even aware of underlying health conditions that could heighten their risk hence a person can appear to be

in good health and still develop complications such as pneumonia.

What you can do to protect against influenza

Influenza vaccines, which were first used in 1945, are the most effective way to prevent influenza and should be taken annually to safeguard against the most current influenza strains and to protect against serious and potentially fatal complications.

One such complication is pneumonia, which was the leading cause of death among Malaysians in 2023, overtaking coronary heart disease for the first time in 20 years, with higher incidence among women, older persons 60 and above, and those of Chinese ethnicity.

Unfortunately, there is low awareness among Malaysians that influenza can be deadly and thus little motivation to protect themselves. In addition, Malaysia does not have clear seasons when influenza cases spike, instead we have sporadic outbreaks that are unpredictable. As it takes around two weeks for immunity to develop, those who wait to take the influenza vaccine unless there is an outbreak are still vulnerable to infection during this time. This is why annual influenza vaccinations are important. Simply put, the difference



Many people still think that influenza is nothing to worry about, that it is just a concern in cold climates.

between a vaccinated and unvaccinated person would be like a person who is trained in self-defense and a person who has no training. Both have the same risk for getting attacked but the person who is trained (the person who is vaccinated) has a better chance of fighting off an assailant (the influenza virus) compared to the person who is not.

Ideally, everyone aged six months and older are advised to get vaccinated, while a more targeted approach would be to vaccinate all individuals at higher risk for

complications, which are those below two and above 65 years, pregnant women, adults with comorbid conditions like diabetes, asthma, heart disease, kidney disease, obesity and people with weakened immune systems, as well as healthcare workers and caregivers of the very young or old. Remember, everyone is at risk and influenza does not pick and choose.

This article is contributed by IMU University Professor of Internal Medicine & Infectious Diseases Dr James Koh Kwee Choy.

Gut instincts: Taking control of digestive health

DIGESTIVE HEALTH is often overlooked until discomfort arises, but stomach and oesophageal cancers remind us of the importance of proactive care in managing our digestive health. In Malaysia, cancer was the third leading cause of death in 2022, rising from fourth place in 2021, according to the Ministry of Health.

While not among the most common cancers, stomach and oesophageal cancers still pose significant health risks, with stomach cancer accounting for three in 100 and oesophageal cancer one in 100 of all new cancer cases in 2020.

Early detection is crucial, but because stomach and oesophageal cancers often present with non-specific symptoms which are often overlooked, they are frequently diagnosed in advanced stages. This highlights the need for early symptom recognition, as late-stage cancer diagnoses have risen from 63.7% to 65.1%, according to the Malaysia National Cancer Registry Report 2017-2021.

Understanding stomach and oesophageal cancers

Stomach and oesophageal cancers develop when abnormal cells grow uncontrollably in the digestive tract. Stomach cancer primarily affects the stomach's main body, while oesophageal cancer develops in the oesophagus lining and is often associated with chronic acid reflux and Barrett's oesophagus — a condition in which the lining of the food pipe

changes due to prolonged acid reflux.

The symptoms of both cancers can be similar, particularly when the tumours develop at the gastroesophageal junction. This may include symptoms such as difficulty in swallowing (dysphagia), unexplained weight loss, loss of appetite, persistent heart burn and indigestion, nausea or vomiting, chest or upper abdominal pain.

The five-year survival rate for early-stage stomach cancer is 65–75% but drops to 5–7% at Stage 4. Similarly, localised oesophageal cancer has a survival rate of 47–55% for early-stage diagnosis but falls to 5–6% in advanced stages.

Key risk factors of stomach and oesophageal cancers

Stomach and oesophageal cancers are more prevalent in older adults, with six in 10 new stomach cancer cases diagnosed in individuals aged 65 and above. However, age is not the only factor, as lifestyle choices and underlying conditions also contribute to an increased risk.

Individuals with high-risk lifestyles should be proactive about screening as they are at a higher risk to develop oesophageal and stomach cancers. Those who smoke heavily, chew betel nuts (a habit linked to cancer-causing effects due to the presence of harmful chemicals), frequently consume very hot liquids, binge drink alcohol or regularly eat preserved foods are more susceptible to squamous oesophageal cancer which starts in the thin, flat cells

lining inside the oesophagus. On the other hand, those who are obese, smoking, have long-term gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) or suffer from Barrett's oesophagus are more likely to develop oesophageal adenocarcinoma, which begins in the glandular cells lining the lower oesophagus near the stomach.

For stomach cancer, the risk factors include GERD, those who consume high-fat and low-fibre diets, frequent consumption of smoked foods and Helicobacter pylori infections caused by bacteria in the stomach lining, leading to gastritis and increasing the risk of peptic ulcers and stomach cancer. Individuals with a family history of stomach cancer should also be particularly vigilant and consider early screening to manage their risk.

GERD and its link to oesophageal cancer

GERD is a condition where stomach acid frequently flows back into the oesophagus, causing irritation and, over time, increasing the risk of oesophageal cancer. Persistent acid exposure can lead to Barrett's oesophagus, a precancerous condition where the oesophagus undergoes abnormal changes. Smoking, overeating, excessive alcohol and even coffee consumption can worsen GERD, making effective management of the condition essential. While lifestyle modifications and medication often provide relief, persistent or worsening symptoms may require endoscopic or surgical intervention like fundoplication that

involves wrapping the top of the stomach around the lower oesophagus to strengthen the lower oesophageal sphincter and prevent acid reflux to reduce complications and improve patient outcomes.

Role of endoscopy in early detection

Endoscopic procedures such as gastroscopy and colonoscopy have significantly improved the ability to diagnose and treat gastrointestinal conditions. These procedures allow doctors to detect any abnormalities at an early stage and facilitating timely intervention. Gastroscopy enables detailed examination of the stomach lining, while colonoscopy provides insights into the health of the colon, helping to identify potential cancerous growths or inflammation.

Regular screenings are strongly recommended for individuals over 50 years old or those over 40 with a family history of gastric or colorectal cancer. In countries with a high prevalence of these cancers, such as Japan and South Korea, upper endoscopies are recommended to be done from age 40 and repeated every three years. Whereas in Malaysia, screening is still primarily focused on individuals with gastric issues, a strong family history of cancer, or those exhibiting warning symptoms for cancer such as like difficulty swallowing, bleeding, unexplained weight loss or abdominal pain.

Treatment options

Treatment for stomach and

oesophageal cancers often overlaps, especially for tumours at the gastroesophageal junction, with surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy being the standard approaches depending on the stage and location of the cancer.

Immunotherapy has shown promise for advanced oesophageal cancer, particularly in PD-L1-positive tumours, improving survival rates when chemotherapy is ineffective. In stomach cancer, targeted therapies are increasingly used for patients with specific genetic mutations, such as HER2-positive cases, which account for 10–20% of stomach cancers. In these cases, anti-HER2 therapy has been proven effective in slowing tumour growth and improving patient outcomes.

Early detection, lifestyle modifications and routine screenings are key in improving outcomes for stomach and oesophageal cancers. Although these cancers are not the most common in Malaysia, the high rate of late-stage diagnoses underscores the need for greater awareness. By staying informed, recognising symptoms early and prioritising regular screenings, individuals can take proactive steps in safeguarding their digestive health, enabling better health outcomes and improving overall quality of life.

This article is contributed by Sunway Medical Centre Velocity consultant clinical oncologist Dr Hafizah Zaharah Ahmad.



Malaysia, China to deepen collaboration in palm oil industry

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia and China will strengthen collaboration in palm oil supply chains, technological innovation, and market expansion this year, said Deputy Plantation and Commodities Minister Datuk Chan Foong Hin.

He added that both countries would also work together to enhance industry upgrading and expand the value of palm oil applications in food, high-end personal care products, pharmaceuticals, and renewable energy.

"Particularly in research and development and market transformation, the Malaysian Palm Oil Board is deepening cooperation with Chinese universities, research institutions, and enterprises.

"Our joint efforts are developing more nutritious edible palm oil, healthier personal care products, and more environmentally friendly biofuels, ensuring these innovations reach the market swiftly," he said in his speech at the opening of the Malaysia-China 30 Chief Executive Officers Forum on Oils and Fats on Sunday.

The forum was organised by the Ministry of Plantation and Commodities in partnership with Beijing Heyirong Invest Group, co-organised by the China-Malaysia Qinzhou Industrial Park and supported by the Dalian Commodity Exchange and Shanghai Bairong Industrial Co Ltd.

The forum provided a platform for top business leaders and experts to exchange insights and foster deeper cooperation in the oils and fats industry.

Beijing Heyirong Invest Group is one of the largest palm oil importers among Chinese local companies.

Chan also said that through co-development with China's food processing, fast-moving consumer goods, and renewable energy companies, the ministry aimed to accelerate the commercialisation of high-value palm oil products, allowing Chinese consumers to enjoy superior-quality palm oil products sooner.

"Malaysia remains committed to providing Chinese enterprises with a stable and high-quality supply, and the business leaders present today are the driving force behind the growth of Malaysia-China palm oil trade.

"Thus, we hope to further enhance supply chain collaboration, whether in long-term procurement strategies or brand promotion in China's consumer market, working together to broaden the application of palm oil products across China," he added. — Bernama

Miti expects Malaysia's trade to grow at least 5% this year

■ BY HAYATUN RAZAK
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KUALA LUMPUR: The Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry (Miti) has projected an increase of at least 5% in Malaysia's total trade this year, up from RM2.879 trillion in 2024.

However, Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz said the outlook remains subject to external risks including tariffs, new policies and potential trade conflicts.

"Just like the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund), which regularly revise their GDP growth forecasts due to geopolitical and geoeconomic factors, we will do the same. If you ask me today, my target for Matrade (Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation) is at least 5% growth. But given the challenges and assumptions made, we expect growth to align with GDP growth," he said in a media conference on the announcement of Miti's 2024 performance report card and 2025 direction yesterday.

The Finance Ministry has projected Malaysia's gross domestic product to grow between 4.5% and

➤ However, forecast is subject to external risks such as tariffs, new policies and potential disputes: Tengku Zafrul

5.5% in 2025.

Tengku Zafrul said: "Objectively speaking, I have to admit that when making forecasts, you need to be agile and allow for revisions. So, what I am saying today is the current target. However, if there are tariffs, new measures imposed by other countries, or a trade war, there will be an impact.

"We cannot deny that. Therefore, we will not hold them accountable for missing the target."

It is still too early to determine the actual impact of the tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump will have on the Asean economy, he said, adding that the policies could have positive and negative outcomes.

"On the positive side, the US administration's inclination towards protectionist policies may encourage investors to seek more stable and neutral markets like Asean. Strategies

such as reshoring, decoupling and derisking could also benefit Asean by driving an increase in foreign direct investment (FDI) and strengthening the region's position in the global supply chain."

On the negative side, Tengku Zafrul said this could disrupt supply chains and may have adverse effects on the Asean economy.

He said shortages of certain goods or commodities could trigger inflation, while the possibility of product dumping due to shifts in export flows could affect local economies.

"Malaysia will continue to monitor and closely observe developments on these issues. Asean must remain neutral, proactive and flexible in addressing these challenges to ensure regional economic stability," he added.

In 2024, the value of Malaysia's total trade increased by 9.2% to a

record high of RM2.879 trillion, surpassing the RM2 trillion mark for the fourth consecutive year.

Exports exceeded RM1 trillion for the fourth consecutive year, rising by 5.7% to RM1.508 trillion. This figure surpassed 87.2% of the export target set for 2025 under the Mid-Term Review of the 12th Malaysia Plan.

Meanwhile, imports increased by 13.2% year-on-year to RM1.371 trillion, surpassing RM1 trillion for the third consecutive year.

On a separate matter, Tengku Zafrul said free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations between Malaysia and the European Union (EU) are expected to be finalised next year.

He said discussions regarding palm oil have been successfully resolved between both parties.

"I am pleased to report that palm oil is no longer an issue in this FTA negotiations. We have successfully addressed their (EU's) concerns by complying with the required standards. However, there are other new areas that we need to focus on. Before we can finalise this matter, there is still a lot to be done.

"Unlike previous FTAs, this one is more comprehensive as it includes digital and green aspects. We want to ensure that this agreement benefits all parties. In any FTA, we must ensure that Malaysian companies are prepared to participate and take advantage of it. Otherwise, the positive impact of this FTA will be difficult to realise.

"My target is to complete the EU FTA by next year. However, the exact date has not been determined, and I will provide updates in due course. I am working hard to make this happen," he added.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the resumption of Malaysia-EU FTA negotiations last month.

The announcement was made during Anwar's working visit, in his capacity as finance minister, to Brussels, Belgium, on Jan 19 to 20.



Tengku Zafrul speaking at a media conference on Miti's 2024 performance report card and 2025 direction at Menara Miti yesterday. — BERNAMAPIC

M'sian embassy, Matrade working with Cuba to boost economic ties

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian embassy in Havana, in collaboration with Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade) in Miami, the United States, aims to collaborate with Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment to expand trade and investment opportunities.

The Malaysian embassy and Matrade Miami will also work closely with the Cuba Chamber of Commerce

as well as its Centre for the Promotion of Foreign Trade and Investment.

Miami-based Malaysia Trade Commissioner Ahmad Shanizam Ab Ghani said Malaysia sees significant potential to strengthen economic ties between the two countries, particularly in expanding trade.

"While Malaysia recognises the challenges posed by the unilateral coercive measures imposed on Cuba, the ongoing trade between our two

countries shows that enhancing economic ties is still possible. Malaysia stands ready to explore more opportunities for establishing new areas of cooperation with Cuba for the mutual benefit of both countries," he said in a statement yesterday.

Additionally, he said both countries could further expand trade in palm oil, rubber products, healthcare, and medical services.

This year marks the 50th anniversary

of Malaysia-Cuba relations.

Last year, total exports to Cuba jumped 115% to US\$6.85 million (RM30.1 million) from US\$3.18 million in 2020, driven by Cuba's increasing reliance on Malaysian products, especially in key industries such as palm oil-based products, as well as processed food and beverages.

Moving forward, Ahmad Shanizam said that given Cuba's ongoing economic reforms and efforts to modernise

its food and manufacturing industries, Malaysia is well-positioned to expand exports of high-value goods such as processed halal food, pharmaceuticals, and medical equipment.

"Furthermore, technological collaboration in manufacturing and industrial development could open doors for Malaysian firms to invest in Cuba or establish joint ventures to produce goods locally," he said. — Bernama



Watershed moment as MAHB is delisted from Bursa

➤ Privatisation after takeover by GDA consortium marks end of airport operator's 25-year run as listed company

KUALA LUMPUR: Today will see a watershed moment for Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd (MAHB) as it is delisted from Bursa Malaysia following the successful privatisation exercise by the Gateway Development Alliance (GDA) consortium.

Trading in shares of MAHB, which manages domestic and international airports, has been suspended since Feb 20 in preparation for the delisting.

The government contends that the privatisation would allow the company to respond more swiftly to industry demands and expand its capacity at a quicker pace and in the process attract more airlines.

Whatever the future holds, the delisting marks the end of a 25-year corporate journey for the airport operator as a listed company, since its debut on Nov 30, 1999, at a price of RM2.50 a share.

MAHB had made a commendable opening fetching a 60-sen premium at RM3.10 on the Main Board of the then Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE), where 985 lots were traded. In the first five minutes of trading, investors rushed to purchase MAHB's shares, driving the price to RM3.44 per share, with 181 lots done.

Upon its market debut, MAHB became the

first listed airport management company in Asia and only the sixth in the world to do so.

The delisting and privatisation will see MAHB emerge as a single-shareholder company, fully owned by GDA, with the government remaining a special shareholder.

Following its takeover by the Khazanah Nasional Bhd-led GDA, all five independent non-executive directors have tendered their resignations, effective upon MAHB's delisting.

On Feb 12, GDA, a consortium comprising Khazanah Nasional, Employees Provident Fund, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority and BlackRock's Global Infrastructure Partners, acquired 1.64 billion MAHB shares, or 98.68% of MAHB's total issued shares, as of 5pm that day.

Subsequently, on Feb 13, MAHB submitted its application for delisting from Bursa Malaysia's Main Market, with its shares trading publicly for the last time on Feb 19. It was last traded at RM10.90 per share, with 134,900 shares changing hands.

Following that, it proposed to compulsorily acquire all of the remaining MAHB shares at RM11 per share from dissenting shareholders, invoking the provisions of Section 222 of the Capital Markets and Services Act 2007.

Today, MAHB manages 39 airports across



Malaysia, including five international airports, 17 domestic airports, and 17 STOLports (short take-off and landing airports) as well as the Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen International Airport in Türkiye.

Back in 1999, MAHB was the concessionaire for the management of the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang for a 50-year period, commencing May 5, 1998. It also manages and operates five international airports, 15 domestic airports and 17 STOLports around the country.

To recap, GDA and its shareholders announced a preconditional voluntary offer on May 15, 2024, to acquire all MAHB shares not already owned by the consortium, at an offer price of RM11 per share, equivalent to RM18.4 billion.

The consortium is led by two Malaysian government-linked investment companies — Khazanah Nasional through wholly owned subsidiary UEM Group Bhd and EPE. The privatisation is expected to foster growth for MAHB through initiatives that will enhance passenger experiences, increase airline connectivity, upgrade airport infrastructure and provide benefits to Malaysia's economy. — Bernama

Sime Darby reports Q2'25 net profit of RM305 million, declares 4 sen dividend

PETALING JAYA: Sime Darby Bhd reported a net profit of RM305 million for its second quarter ended Dec 31, 2024 (Q2'25), compared with RM2.3 billion in the corresponding quarter last financial year, which had benefitted from a gain of RM2 billion on the disposal of Ramsay Sime Darby Health Care.

Group revenue for the quarter increased by 14.2% to RM17.7 billion, compared with RM15.5 billion in the corresponding quarter of the previous financial year (Q2'24).

Core net profit for the quarter amounted to RM305 million, a 13.4% improvement compared with RM269 million in the corresponding quarter last year.

The group's performance was mainly driven by the UMW division, which contributed RM272 million in profit before interest and tax (PBIT) due to higher sales of Perodua vehicles.

During the quarter under review, the industrial division recorded a PBIT of RM337 million, reflecting a marginal decrease of 4%. The division's Australasia operations recorded lower profits mainly due to the impact of the reduction in parts prices as a result of the weaker Australian dollar versus the US dollar. Nevertheless, higher contributions from the Malaysia and Singapore operations helped soften the impact.

The motors division reported a reduced PBIT of RM118 million in Q2'25 due to lower vehicle sales in Malaysia and Australasia, offset by higher electric vehicle sales in Singapore.

For the first six months of FY 2025, the group's net profit stood at RM1.1 billion, a 32.9% improvement from last year's corresponding period in the absence of discontinued operations.

Reflecting its commitment to enhancing shareholder value, Sime Darby announced an interim dividend of 3 sen per share and a special dividend of 1 sen per share for the financial year ending June 30, 2025.

Capital A to disclose internal targets along with quarterly results

KUALA LUMPUR: Capital A Bhd will issue internal targets along with its quarterly financial results in order to give shareholders and the investment community a clearer understanding of the company's financial outlook.

The company said this move is part of its commitment to ensure transparency, accountability, and investor confidence.

"With most past uncertainties that previously impacted our business now behind us, the timing for this move is right. This initiative is designed to support sustainable growth and strategic decision-making," CEO Tan Sri Tony Fernandes said in a statement yesterday.

He said Capital A will issue internal targets alongside its quarterly financial results, outlining key assumptions and their potential impact on previously stated targets.

"Additionally, we will provide insights into external market factors beyond our control that may influence our financial performance, ensuring that the market remains well-informed about our evolving business landscape," he said.

Capital A's first internal targets will be shared alongside its fourth quarter of 2024 financial disclosures, scheduled for release later this week.

"These internal targets are solely management aspirations and do not constitute financial estimates, forecasts, or projections under Bursa Malaysia's financial forecasting and disclosure standards," the company said.

Capital A also noted the significant progress in the disposal of its aviation business to AirAsia X and confirmed that it has been addressing queries from Bursa Malaysia on its PN17 status. — Bernama



Acting Sultan of Johor Tunku Ismail Ibni Sultan Ibrahim (centre) with, from left, BA Group executive director/joint CEO Mohamad Naifuddin Bujang Mohidin, Peh, Yeoh Seok Hong and YTL Communications chief marketing officer Yeoh Keong Ren at the partnership agreement signing ceremony.

BA Group, YTL Comm to deploy fibre optic network

PETALING JAYA: Bullish Aim Group (BA Group), an innovator in telecommunications infrastructure, and YTL Communications Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of YTL Power International Bhd, have entered into a strategic joint venture to develop next-generation common fibre infrastructure.

This groundbreaking partnership aims to address the surging demand for high speed connectivity and robust data services, positioning Malaysia as a regional leader in the digital economy.

The collaboration will see the deployment of a unified fibre optic network designed to enhance data transmission capabilities and foster greater efficiency for telecom providers and businesses.

The initiative aligns with Malaysia's digital transformation goals by providing scalable,

high-capacity connectivity solutions that benefit industries ranging from cloud computing and artificial intelligence to Internet-of-Things and 5G. The joint effort will also reduce duplication of infrastructure, lower costs for service providers, and ensure a more sustainable and inclusive approach to technology development.

BA Group managing director and joint CEO Datuk Lion Peh said: "This partnership with YTL Communications marks a significant milestone in our commitment to revolutionise the telecommunications landscape. Together, we aim to create a common fibre infrastructure that not only boosts the efficiency of data services but also propels Malaysia's standing as a digital powerhouse in Southeast Asia."

YTL Communications and YTL Power

managing director Datuk Seri Yeoh Seok Hong commented: "With Johor being the major hub for data centres, this joint venture will invest in and build the fibre backbone necessary to bring the new digital economy to fruition, driving exponential growth and deployment of digital services and leading-edge technology. We are excited to partner with BA Group to bring reliable, high-speed connectivity from Johor to every corner of the nation and across the globe."

The development of the fibre infrastructure will begin in the first quarter of 2025 and is expected to provide coverage to major townships in Johor, including underserved areas. Both companies are confident that the joint venture will create significant economic opportunities and further drive Malaysia's digital transformation agenda.

MSM posts RM96m profit before tax in Q4'24

➤ Sugar producer maintains year-on-year growth, returns to profitability for the whole financial year

KUALA LUMPUR: MSM Malaysia Holdings Bhd, the producer of the national refined sugar brand "Gula Prai", recorded a profit before tax (PBT) of RM96 million for the fourth quarter (Q4) of the financial year ending December 2024 (Q4'24), 81% increase compared to PBT recorded in the same quarter last year (Q4'23) of RM53 million.

This, the company in a statement said, is attributed to enhanced production efficiency from improved capacity utilisation, higher yield and better energy efficiency leading to lower gas consumption.

During the quarter, the group recorded significant turnaround in profitability, from lower production cost driven by lower NY11 raw sugar cost and USD rate, albeit higher freight cost.

The group achieved 11% higher sales volume in Q4'24 compared to the same quarter last year, indicating strong demand from domestic and export market. However, the group's revenue of RM944 million was marginally lower 1% from the corresponding period last year, from 11% lower average selling price (ASP).

The group achieved higher capacity utilisation of 64% in Q4'24 compared to the Q4'23 of 52% and better improvement in efficiency yield to 97% in Q4'24 compared to 95% in Q4'23.

MSM Group CEO Syed Feizal Syed Mohammad said, "MSM's profitability is a result of stronger operational performance

driving cost efficiencies as targeted. Commercially, sales volume increased by 11%. However, this growth was offset by an 11% decline in the ASP. Included in the revenue is the government incentive afforded to the local sugar industry to address the anomaly in the sugar economics of the unchanged control ceiling price being the lowest priced in the Asean region."

For the 12 months (12M) FY24, MSM recorded a turnaround PBT of RM75 million compared to loss before tax (LBT) of RM28 million in the corresponding period last year.

Revenue for 12M'24 increased to RM3.54 billion, a 15% rise from RM3.09 billion in the same period last year.

The increase in revenue is attributable to a 6% higher ASP and an 8% increase in sales volume. Production cost for the year increased mainly due to 3% rise in NY11 and 22% rise in freight costs. However, refining cost has improved by 11%, driven by better capacity utilisation and higher efficiency yield.

"The sugar industry continues to face prolonged high input costs, with global freight and natural gas prices remaining elevated. Additionally, raw sugar prices are volatile due to fluctuations in global production volumes. To mitigate these risks, MSM continues to enhance our raw sugar hedging practices as part of broader risk management strategy. Despite these challenges, we remain committed to strengthening both our domestic and export markets amid steady

demand, while actively exploring additional regional opportunities. Furthermore, the Joint Sugar Industry is working closely with the government to finalise a sustainable pricing mechanism for the domestic retail segment and to manage imported refined sugar. This collaborative effort is essential in ensuring food security and the long-term sustainability of local sugar industry. MSM will continue its year-on-year growth and profitability with target to return as a dividend paying stock backed by a dividend policy," said Syed Feizal.

"MSM concluded 2024 on a sweet note by celebrating its 60th anniversary. The Prai refinery - an iconic landmark in Penang and Malaysia's first sugar refinery - has been a cornerstone of the nation's food industry since 1964, providing livelihoods and fuelling economic growth at both state and national levels. We extend our heartfelt thanks to our stakeholders, partners, customers, and especially our loyal consumers for their unwavering support over the years. As a pioneer in the local sugar industry, we continue to set benchmarks in quality, innovation, and sustainability. With decades of expertise, award winning practices, and a steadfast commitment to excellence, we remain dedicated to supporting Malaysia's food security and driving economic growth," Syed Feizal added.

Since 1964, MSM has firmly established itself as a leading national sugar refinery and amongst top 10 refiners in the world exporting to over 20 countries till date, providing high quality refined sugar products to ensure Malaysia's food security. MSM's growth has sustainability through a step-up ESG framework fully embedded in business and operations.

FedEx launches shipping tool to simplify import process

KUALA LUMPUR: Federal Express Corporation (FedEx) yesterday launched a Collaborative Shipping Tool to simplify the import process for customers.

This seamless collaboration during Airway Bill (AWB) creation between importers and shippers enhances overall efficiency when moving goods across the globe.

The Collaborative Shipping Tool is currently available in Apac, Europe, US, Canada, Middle East, Indian subcontinent, and Africa.

According to study by the International Trade Centre, failed pickups and lack of shipment visibility are among the top challenges faced by importers globally.

Such inefficiencies directly impact business operations, underscoring the need for digital solutions like the Collaborative Shipping Tool.

In a press statement, the company said that this shipping tool allows importers to share the AWB creation process directly with shippers, enabling them to confirm shipment details and schedule pickups based on their readiness. This collaborative feature is designed to improve the success rate of shipment pickups, ensuring greater efficiency in the import journey.

"As global supply chains grow increasingly complex, businesses must adopt smarter logistics solutions to remain competitive," said FedEx Asia Pacific marketing and customer experience senior vice-president Salil Chari.

"At FedEx, he added they are leading the way by leveraging digital innovation to help their customers anticipate challenges and navigate the changing marketplace.

"The Collaborative Shipping Tool fosters seamless collaboration between importers and shippers, allowing businesses to optimise their supply chains and reduce inefficiencies. By simplifying imports, we're not just enhancing operations - we're shaping the future of logistics," he said.

MAG, Singapore renew partnership to promote travel

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG) and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) have renewed their partnership to drive travel demand from Malaysia to Singapore.

This collaboration will focus on joint marketing initiatives and curated offerings to strengthen Singapore's appeal as a top destination for Malaysian travellers, while driving tourism spending and footfall to key attractions.

As part of the renewed partnership, MAG and STB will launch destination marketing campaigns featuring Malaysia Airlines and Firefly crew experiencing Singapore's iconic attractions including Gardens by the Bay, the Singapore Flyer, Resorts World Sentosa's S.E.A. Aquarium and Universal Studios Singapore, Mandai Wildlife Reserve's Parks, and the Museum of Ice Cream.

To celebrate the third year of this partnership, both organisations will introduce enhanced travel benefits for MAG customers including boarding pass privileges in Singapore. These initiatives are strategically timed to capitalise on peak travel periods including year-end holidays, school breaks, and festive seasons - ensuring greater accessibility and value for travellers. This also follows Firefly's expansion of its Subang Jet operations, with the launch of direct flights to Changi International Airport beginning March 25, providing more travel options for both business and leisure travellers.



From left: CelcomDigi chief enterprise business officer Afizulazha Abdullah, Kamal, British Standards Institution Sdn Bhd managing director Evelyn Chye, TUV Nord (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd general manager Eva Soo, and CelcomDigi chief technology officer Kesavan Sivabalan at the ISO certifications conferment ceremony.

CelcomDigi earns ISO certifications for data security and management

PETALING JAYA: CelcomDigi Bhd yesterday received two global certifications - ISO/IEC 27001: Information Security, Cybersecurity, and Privacy Protection - Information Security Management Systems (ISMS), and the ISO 22301: Business Continuity Management Systems (BCMS) - demonstrating its compliance with international best practices in data and cyber security, operational resilience, and business continuity.

The ISO/IEC 27001 was awarded by the TUV Nord Cert GmbH, a renowned independent

certification body that audits management systems across industries including information and cyber security while the ISO 22301 BCMS was awarded by the British Standards Institution (BSI) Group.

CelcomDigi chief transformation officer Datuk Kamal Khalid said, "Trust is the cornerstone of our business. We strive to building a brand that Malaysians can trust and rely on. Earning the ISO/IEC 27001 and ISO 22301 certifications is a testament to our relentless pursuit of upholding operational resilience and data security. Both the

certifications validate our efforts to continuously maintain and uplift our practices to meet globally benchmarked standards, ensuring our partners, employees, and customers experience reliability, trust, and minimal disruption in the event of a crisis."

As cyber threats and operational risks continue to evolve, CelcomDigi works to remain at the forefront of business continuity and information security standards, while building a resilient, secure, and trusted digital ecosystem for all.



A worker collecting palm oil fruit at a factory in Sepang. – REUTERS/SPIC

India's annual palm oil imports to **fall behind** soft oils

➤ Buyers shifting to cheaper alternatives, says industry official

NEW DELHI: Palm oil's share of India's annual edible oil imports is set to drop below soft oils for the first time as its rising premium over soyoil and sunflower oil pushes refiners toward more affordable alternatives, the head of an industry body said.

Lower palm oil imports by India, the world's biggest buyer of vegetable oils, could weigh on benchmark Malaysian palm oil prices and support US soyoil futures.

"Palm oil is getting pricey due to supply issues, so buyers are naturally shifting to soyoil and sunflower oil instead," said Sanjeev

Asthana, president of the Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA), in an interview with Reuters.

The country's palm oil imports in the 2024/25 marketing year ending in October 2025 could fall to as low as 7.5 million metric tonnes, the lowest in five years, said Asthana, who is also the CEO of Patanjali Foods Ltd.

Palm oil is losing market share to soft oils, which are projected to account for a slightly larger volume of imports, he said.

Palm oil accounted for 56% of India's total edible oil imports in the last marketing year, but in the first three months of the current year its share fell to 43%, the SEA data showed.

Palm oil has been trading at a premium over rival oils for the past few months as supplies from top producers Indonesia and Malaysia were affected by floods at a time when Jakarta has also moved to increase the tropical oil's use in biodiesel.

The current premium for palm oil is not sustainable, and once it begins trading at a discount, likely within two months, Indian buyers will increase their imports, Asthana said.

Soyoil imports in the current year could increase by 1 million to 1.5 million tonnes from last year's 3.4 million tonnes, while sunflower oil imports may rise slightly from last year's record level of 3.5 million tonnes, he said.

India meets nearly two-thirds of its vegetable oil demand through foreign sourcing.

It buys palm oil from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, while soyoil and sunoil come from Argentina, Brazil, Russia and Ukraine.

The rising availability of local oils, which will help fulfill incremental demand, is expected to keep the country's total edible oil imports steady at around 16 million tonnes this year, Asthana said. – Reuters

Foundation Healthcare said to be eyeing over US\$100 million from funding round

SINGAPORE: Foundation Healthcare Holdings is looking to conduct a funding round that could raise more than US\$100 million (RM441 million) and value the Singaporean private healthcare group at more than S\$1 billion (RM3.3 billion), said two sources with knowledge of the matter.

Foundation Healthcare is in talks with at least one adviser about the funding round after receiving interests from potential investors, the sources said.

The funding round could be a precursor to a potential initial public offering of Foundation Healthcare on the Singapore Stock Exchange in a few years, the sources added.

Foundation Healthcare said in an e-mailed response to Reuters that it does not comment on specific transactions.

The plan comes as healthcare assets across Southeast Asia gain favour with investors betting on the region's growing affluence and ageing population while eyeing the sector's potential to weather challenging economic conditions.

IHH Healthcare, an operator of private hospitals in Asia, in September announced the acquisition of Malaysian private hospital chain Island Hospital in a deal valuing the latter at RM3.92 billion.

Founded in 2023, Foundation Healthcare has grown to having 91 specialists, two medical centres and 67 clinics in Singapore, according to its website.

It is backed by SeaTown Holdings, an indirect unit of Singapore's state investor Temasek Holdings. Other investors include venture capital firm East Ventures and Indonesian conglomerate Emtek, according to a press statement in December 2023.

The company, whose clinical programmes such as general surgery and those focused on women and children are among the largest in Singapore's private healthcare sector, had raised more than S\$400 million in debt and equity to fund its acquisitions, the statement said at the time. – Reuters

Olam to sell 44.6% stake in agribusiness to Saudi Arabia for US\$1.78 billion

SINGAPORE: Olam Group said yesterday it will sell a 44.58% stake in its agricultural products business Olam Agri for US\$1.78 billion (RM7.8 billion) to state-owned Saudi Agricultural and Livestock Investment Company (SALIC).

The transaction, which values Olam Agri at US\$4 billion, will give SALIC an 80% controlling stake in the business.

The stake sale will result in a gain of US\$1.84 billion for Singapore-based Olam Group, the firm said in an exchange filing.

Olam will divest its remaining 19.99% stake in the unit three years after the completion of the first phase, giving SALIC full control of Olam Agri, it said.

Including the 35.43% stake sold to SALIC in December 2022, Olam Group will unlock US\$3.87 billion in gross proceeds from the complete divestment of Olam Agri.

Olam Group also intends to list its ingredients business, ofi, on the premium segment of the London Stock Exchange alongside a secondary listing in Singapore.

"With this transaction, we can now focus our attention on seeking strategic options to unlock value for the remaining Olam Group businesses and ofi, including the pursuit of an ofi IPO," group CEO Sunny Verghese said. – Reuters

Thai industrial sentiment hits 10-month high

BANGKOK: A Thai industry body said it wanted more government support to counter global trade risks even as data showed industrial sentiment at a 10-month high, and the prime minister repeated calls for the central bank to cut interest rates.

The Federation of Thai Industries (FTI) said its industrial sentiment index rose to a 10-month high of 91.6 in January from 90.1 in December, bolstered by government stimulus, exports and tourism.

But it said uncertainty over US President Donald Trump's trade policies has subsequently affected business confidence, adding to the challenges industry faces from an influx of Chinese products and stubbornly high household debt.

"The government has to move a bit faster in

implementing safeguards," said FTI vice-chairman Apichit Prasoprat.

Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra told a business forum that speeding up government investment would stimulate activity and job creation to reach a target of 3% growth this year, and said the central bank should cut rates to help the public.

Last Tuesday, she had said the government would push for 3.5% growth this year and would seek to work more closely with the central bank.

Southeast Asia's second-largest economy grew 2.5% in 2024, lagging regional peers.

The Bank of Thailand will review policy settings tomorrow.

At its last meeting in December, it held interest rates steady after a surprise cut in October.

The Bank of Thailand Governor told Reuters last month the policy rate remained suitable given high household debt, even though growth could miss the government target.

Separately, Danucha Pichayanan, head of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC), said good preparations were the key to shielding the economy from the fallout of Trump's trade policies.

The government is concerned that Thailand's trade surplus with the United States could make it a target for tariffs.

"If we can prepare well for trade volatility, I believe the Thai economy will grow more than expected," Danucha said.

Last week, the NESDC said it was maintaining its forecast range for economic growth of 2.3% to 3.3% this year. – Reuters

Well-off Hong Kong daunted by record deficits

► Experts urge government to make careful cuts as economy wobbles

HONG KONG: Hong Kong is facing its toughest fiscal test in three decades following a painful run of mammoth deficits, with experts urging the government to make careful cuts as the economy wobbles.

The Chinese finance hub last saw a string of deficits after the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s – but their scale was a fraction of the HK\$252 billion (RM143 billion) shortfall in the 2020-21 fiscal year.

Hong Kong has recorded annual deficits exceeding US\$20 billion in three of the past four years, according to official figures.

The city's finance chief Paul Chan said on Sunday that the deficits were caused by "multiple internal and external challenges" and that a new budget to be unveiled tomorrow will tightly control public spending.

While Chan earlier predicted a return to surplus in "three or so years", a former government minister told AFP that the situation is "not just due to economic cycles" spurred by the coronavirus pandemic.

"If you look at Hong Kong versus other economies in the region, for example Singapore, those other economies have done much better," said Anthony Cheung, who oversaw transport and housing policies.

Adding to the headache is the exodus of companies and high-paid workers as the city's international reputation took a hit after Beijing quelled pro-democracy protests and imposed a sweeping national security law in 2020.

Singapore and Hong Kong suffered towering deficits in 2020 because of the pandemic, but the former has been able to keep spending relative to income in check as firms shift there from the Chinese city, helping it outperform its fiscal targets.

The challenge for Hong Kong is not just to balance its books, but to find fiscal sustainability amid US-China tensions and a slowdown in the world's second-largest economy, Cheung said.

"In the past, we assumed that Hong Kong was geopolitically well-positioned.

"Now we have to be more careful about such presumptions."

Hong Kong is required by its mini-constitution to "strive to achieve a fiscal balance" – a holdover from British colonial rule that kept the market mostly free from government intervention.

After returning to China in 1997, it kept taxes low and refilled its coffers with the help of land-related

revenue, selling land to developers with deep pockets.

But last year Hong Kong collected just US\$2.5 billion that way, from a peak of US\$21.2 billion in 2018.

"(Land-related revenue) by itself has contributed to the majority of the income decline," said Yang Liu, a financial economist at the University of Hong Kong.

"We have a very inactive land market and declining housing prices. That's one reason that people (don't) trade, so there's no tax (income)."

Hong Kong still has healthy cash reserves and low government debt compared with most economies around the world.

But the prospect of three straight years in the red has fuelled public debate on how to spend less.

"All the new initiatives will be under much stronger scrutiny, so (the government) will be a lot more disciplined, a lot more careful," Liu said.

In his upcoming budget speech, the finance chief is set to put the latest deficit at "under HK\$100 billion", adjusting for money raised from bond sales.

There are calls to roll back a transport subsidy for those aged 60 to 64, which can grow into a major burden on the government as Hong Kong's population ages.

Lawmaker Edmund Wong cautioned against pay cuts for civil servants, which he said may cause private-sector employers to follow

suit, but urged the government to slim down.

"In the long term, we can greatly reduce the manpower which the government is employing now," he told AFP.

The deficits could prompt Hong Kong to rethink how it makes money, though past discussions on expanding the tax base – such as a goods and services tax – went nowhere.

The city's low ratio of debt to GDP – which the government last year put at no more than 13% – means it can afford to issue bonds to fund huge undertakings, experts say.

Officials have signalled they will push ahead with a massive infrastructure project in northern Hong Kong, while backing away from a separate plan to create artificial islands.

As tensions flare between the United States and China, Hong Kong is seeking untapped growth potential in the Middle East and Southeast Asia that can translate to government revenue down the line.

The city's economic fortunes are ultimately tied to how investors view the city as a regional and global hub, said Cheung.

"We have to continue to showcase Hong Kong as a city that welcomes all kinds of views, all kinds of people, so long as they stay within the parameters of the national security legislation," the former minister said. – AFP

Shein's annual profit down by more than a third, FT reports

SHANGHAI: Online fast-fashion retailer Shein's profit dropped by more than a third last year, adding to its challenges ahead of a planned listing on the London Stock Exchange, the *Financial Times* reported on Sunday.

Net profit was down almost 40% at US\$1 billion (RM4.4 billion) in 2024, the report said, citing two people with knowledge of the matter.

Shein's sales for the full year rose by 19% to US\$38 billion, the report said, adding that the figures were from internal projections ahead of finalised accounts.

The company does not publish profit guidance but the 2024 figures were far lower than the US\$4.8 billion in net profit and US\$45 billion in sales it had projected for 2024, the report added, citing a presentation seen by the newspaper.

Shein did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Reuters this month reported that Shein was set to cut its valuation in the planned initial public offering (IPO) in London by almost a quarter to about US\$50 billion.

Bloomberg reported last week that Shein was under pressure to cut its valuation as low as US\$30 billion.

The *Financial Times* has also reported that the London listing could be postponed to the second half of the year after US President Donald Trump moved to end a tax exemption enjoyed by Shein, potentially denting profitability and pushing up its prices in the United States. – Reuters

Alibaba to invest 380 billion yuan in AI, cloud computing

BEIJING: Chinese tech giant Alibaba said yesterday it will spend 380 billion yuan (RM233 billion) on artificial intelligence and cloud computing over the next three years, a week after co-founder Jack Ma was seen meeting President Xi Jinping.

Investors have piled into Chinese technology stocks since the start of the year, with Alibaba – which runs some of the country's biggest online shopping platforms – seeing its shares soar to three-year highs.

The gains have been boosted since the Hangzhou-based firm announced robust sales growth last week, adding to signs that the sector is staging a comeback from years of gloom sparked by a government crackdown.

Alibaba plans to "invest at least 380 billion yuan over the next three years to advance its cloud computing and AI infrastructure", a company statement said.

The firm said its strategy was aimed at "reinforcing (Alibaba's) commitment to long-term technological innovation... (and) underscores the company's focus on AI-driven growth".

The statement did not detail how the company would allocate the funds or what specific projects would be supported.

It did add that the investment would exceed its total AI and cloud spending over the past decade.

Alibaba last week reported an 8% bump in revenue for the three months through December, beating



A woman posing for a selfie next to signage for Alibaba in Shanghai. – AFP/ICC

estimates to reach 280 billion yuan – and triggering a 14% surge in its Hong Kong shares on Friday.

CEO Eddie Wu said last week that the quarterly results "demonstrated substantial progress in (Alibaba's) 'user-first, AI-driven' strategies and the re-accelerated growth of our core businesses".

The company and its industry peers endured years of dampened

investor confidence after Beijing launched an aggressive regulatory crackdown on the tech sector in 2020.

But they have been riding higher in recent months, buoyed by the launch of a chatbot by DeepSeek that has upended the AI industry.

The turnaround comes as the world's second-largest economy continues to battle sluggish consumption and persistent woes in the property sector.

At a meeting with business luminaries last week, Xi hailed the private sector and said the current economic problems are "surmountable" – a move interpreted as a show of support for big tech.

Ma remains an influential figure despite no longer being an Alibaba executive and shunning the limelight since authorities brought down affiliate Ant Group's IPO in 2020. – AFP

Samsung Electronics, union agree on 5.1% wage hike

SEOUL: Samsung Electronics and its labour union in South Korea have reached an agreement for a 5.1% wage increase, the company and the union said in separate statements yesterday.

Members of the National Samsung Electronics Union (NSEU), whose roughly 36,000 members make up about 30% of the company's South Korean workforce, will vote on the preliminary deal from Feb 28 to March 5, the two sides said.

The agreement includes 30 shares in Samsung Electronics and other perks such as vouchers to purchase company products, they said.

The union carried out strikes last year, but the company said at the time they did not lead to any production disruptions.

The labour dispute has been a distraction for the world's biggest memory chipmaker, which is struggling to navigate competition in semiconductors used for artificial intelligence applications. – Reuters

Nvidia set to provide AI trades reality check

➤ Chip maker's market cap swing could reach US\$260 billion post-results in either direction

NEW YORK: Nvidia's profit report this week could steer the US stock market's course, as investors seek confirmation that the AI-driven investment trend, which has powered equities for two years, is intact after last month's panic-selling triggered by the Chinese startup DeepSeek.

Seen as a bellwether of the burgeoning AI industry, Nvidia is the world's second most valuable company, with a 6.3% weight on the S&P 500, according to LSEG.

Its shares have skyrocketed over 550% over the last two years.

A recent stumble, however, came after DeepSeek unveiled a lower-cost AI model that was seen as a threat to the dominance of US rivals, driving Nvidia down roughly 17% on Jan 27, equivalent to US\$593 billion (RM2.6 trillion) – a record one-day market value loss.

Shares have almost fully recovered from the tumble and the company said DeepSeek's advances prove the need for more of its chips, but apprehensive investors fear earnings could revive some market turbulence.

"It's a tough setup going into the conference call because there is some anxiety of wanting to kind of call the top on Nvidia. So I would not be surprised to see rotation and

fairly violent market reaction under any circumstance," said Mike Smith, Allspring's head of growth equity team.

He said investors could rotate out of AI trades into sectors such as healthcare, software and financials.

Nvidia options imply a 7.7% swing for the shares in either direction following the results, in line with the stock's average move of 7.6% on the day after results over the last 12 quarters, according to data from options analytics service ORATS.

With the AI chip maker's market capitalisation hovering around US\$3.4 trillion, the options-implied stock move equates to a market value swing of about US\$260 billion, roughly the size of Wells Fargo.

Nvidia is expected to post tomorrow a fourth-quarter profit of US\$20.89 billion, driven by a roughly 72% rise in revenues from a year earlier, LSEG data showed.

With good fourth-quarter numbers on their way, all eyes will be on the guidance Nvidia provides for both supply and demand for its chips to justify its own rich valuation, as well as the sector's outlook.

Nvidia recently traded at about 32 times forward 12-month earnings estimates, down

from about 40 in early November, according to LSEG Datastream.

The S&P 500 trades at 22 times forward earnings.

"Nvidia is the last piece of the market puzzle right now that might help reset investor sentiment," said Matt Orton, chief market strategist at Raymond James Investment Management, adding the equities market has performed well despite uncertainties around US tariff and fiscal policy, a drop in retail sales and a hotter-than-expected consumer price index.

"It can be the catalyst to help the market break out once again."

Markets have changed since the selloff triggered by DeepSeek, as Nvidia has lost a lot of its power to move all stocks since the beginning of this year.

The correlation between the chipmaker and the S&P 500 fell to 30% in 2025 from 71% last year, according to Schwab's calculations.

Still it does not mean stocks are bulletproof in case the bellwether Nvidia disappoints.

"It's important to separate the difference between the psychological effects of Nvidia on the market from the statistical effect. To me, it is more of a psychological move," said Schwab's trading and derivatives strategist Joe Mazzola.

Investors will also be watching this week's release of US inflation numbers for January, especially after data last month showed that inflation increased by the most in eight months in December, amid robust consumer spending on goods and services. – Reuters

British firms seek fewer staff but offer higher salaries

LONDON: British employers advertised the fewest jobs for the month of January in four years last month but salaries continued to rise strongly, according to figures published yesterday that illustrate the challenge facing the Bank of England (BoE).

Job search company Adzuna said the number of vacancies on offer fell by 4.5% compared with January last year to just under 828,500, the lowest January figures since 2021, Adzuna said.

However, the average advertised salary increased by 7% compared with a year earlier, keeping up a strong run of gains.

"This reflects the increasing competition for talent in key sectors, even as overall hiring slows," Andrew Hunter, co-founder of Adzuna, said.

The biggest wage increases were offered in the maintenance, manufacturing and retail sectors.

The BoE expects a slowdown in the labour market in 2025 which could help reduce inflationary pressures in the economy and allow the central bank to continue reducing interest rates to help an economy that is barely growing.

Official data released last week showed the labour market held up better than expected in the final quarter of 2024 with pay rising by 6%, although the number of job vacancies on offer was also the lowest for a January since 2021 at 759,000.

A survey of purchasing managers suggested private-sector employers cut back on staff in February. – Reuters

ECB official warns of risk of 'sleepwalking' into excessive rate cuts

BRUSSELS: European Central Bank policymaker Pierre Wunsch said the euro zone faces the risk of "sleepwalking" into excessive interest rate cuts and must be prepared to stop soon, the *Financial Times* reported yesterday.

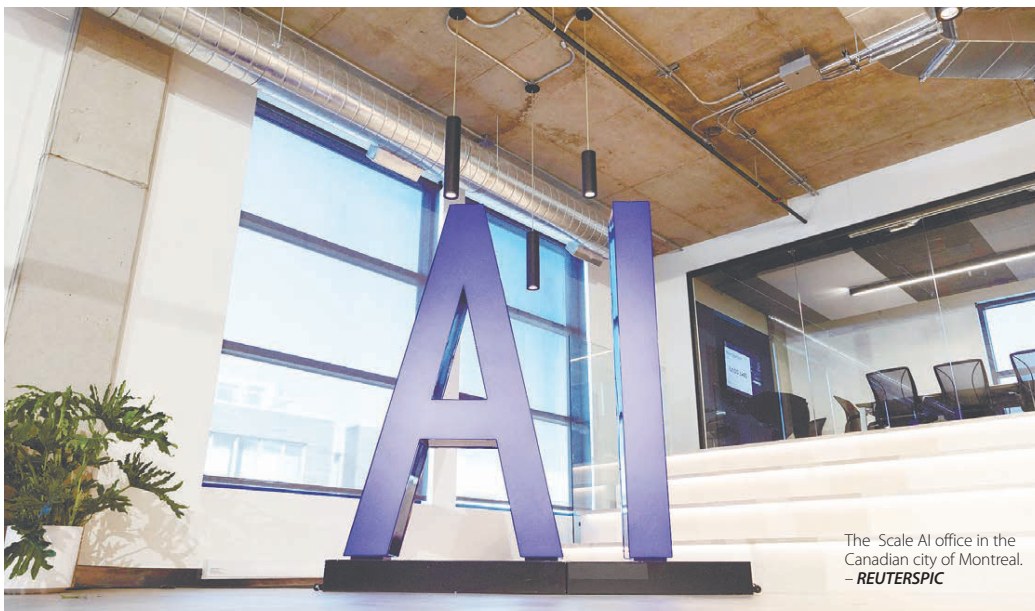
The Belgian central bank governor said he felt "relatively comfortable" with the market expectation of 2% rates by the end of the year "give or take 50 basis points", the FT said.

On Jan 30, the ECB cut its deposit rate by 25 basis points to 2.75%, and policymakers guided for a further reduction in March as concerns over lacklustre economic growth supersede worries about persistent inflation.

"I'm not pleading for a pause in April but we must not sleepwalk to 2% (interest rates) without thinking about it. If the data justify a new cut, we'll cut. If they don't, we might have to pause," the *Financial Times* quoted Wunsch as saying on Friday.

He also highlighted growing uncertainty over the appropriate level of interest rates, saying he was "not even sure" whether rates remained restrictive for growth and inflation.

The ECB has cut interest rates five times since last June and policymakers are increasingly vocal in their debate about just how much farther rates must come down when inflation is still a bit too high but economic growth is barely above zero. – Reuters



The Scale AI office in the Canadian city of Montreal. – REUTERS/PIC

Qatar signs deal with firm to use AI to boost govt services

DOHA: Qatar's government has signed a five-year deal with AI data firm Scale AI to deploy artificial intelligence-powered tools and training in a push to improve government services in the Gulf Arab state, a senior Scale AI executive told Reuters on Sunday.

"(This deal) can be a blueprint for other governments around the world, and it allows us to really commit in a way that I think could drive

impact even faster," said Trevor Thompson, global head of growth at the San Francisco, California-based company.

The deal will allow Qatar's government to adopt tools such as predictive analytics, automation and advanced data analysis in an effort to streamline operations, said a statement by Qatar's Communications and Information Technology Ministry.

Scale AI will develop more than 50 possible uses of artificial intelligence for Qatar's government over the next five years, the statement added.

Thompson declined to say how much the deal is worth.

Qatar, a wealthy gas producer and longtime ally of the US, is in a race to become an AI leader amid rising competition from neighbouring

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Founded in 2016, Scale AI provides large amounts of accurately labelled data for use in training tools such as OpenAI's ChatGPT.

The company also helps its customers, which include tech giant Microsoft, Wall Street bank Morgan Stanley and AI firms such as OpenAI and Cohere, to create and refine data sets. – Reuters

MARKET ROUND-UP: FEBRUARY 24

Bursa Trade Statistic

24 Feb 2025

Retail (20.13%) Net (in RM mil.)		Institution (37.32%) Net (in RM mil.)		Foreign (42.55%) Net (in RM mil.)	
+87.22		+156.82		-244.04	
Bought (in RM mil.)	Sold (in RM mil.)	Bought (in RM mil.)	Sold (in RM mil.)	Bought (in RM mil.)	Sold (in RM mil.)
510.42	423.20	944.32	787.50	865.20	1109.24

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

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

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SUNBIZ presents a summary of the day's trading activity on Bursa Malaysia and other markets in an easy to digest format.

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

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Bursa Indices

INDEX		CHANGE
FBMEMAS	11,917.00	-74.60
FBMKLCI	1,584.25	-6.78
CONSUMER PRODUCTS	523.76	+3.74
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS	161.35	-3.70
CONSTRUCTION	277.12	-10.70
FINANCIAL SERVICES	19,306.50	-11.40
ENERGY	768.87	-16.80
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	504.16	+2.70
HEALTH CARE	2,035.64	-2.26
TRANSPORTATION	1,036.98	-1.62
PROPERTY	1,048.44	-17.80
PLANTATION	7,570.30	+111.90
FBMSHA	11,607.00	-109.00
FBMACE	4,905.69	-15.20
TECHNOLOGY	54.65	-1.53

TURNOVER: 2.698 bil **VALUE: RM2.319 bil**

Bursa ends lower in step with most regional peers

BURSA Malaysia ended in negative territory yesterday after a lacklustre trading session in tandem with the downbeat performance in most regional markets.

At 5pm, the FBM KLCI fell 6.78 points, or 0.43%, to 1,584.25 from Friday's close of 1,591.03.

The market bellwether opened 4.64 points easier at 1,586.39 and moved between 1,577.95 and 1,586.39 throughout the day.

On the broader market, decliners led gainers 719 to 304, while 459 stocks were unchanged, 871 untraded, and 10 suspended.

Turnover declined to 2.69 billion units worth RM2.31 billion from 2.99 billion units worth RM2.63 billion last Friday.

Rakuten Trade Sdn Bhd vice-president of equity research Thong Pak Leng said key regional indices finished mostly lower following a major sell-off on Wall Street last Friday.

"Back home, the benchmark index continues to find support around 1,580 and remains in a consolidation phase as trading volumes remain weak.

"Investors are holding back in anticipation of new market catalysts, and we expect this range-bound movement to persist. Should market participation improve, the FBM KLCI may gain the momentum needed for a breakout," he told Bernama.

Heavyweights Maybank gave up two sen to RM10.48, Public Bank shed three sen to RM4.47, Tenaga Nasional dropped 34 sen to RM13.64, and IHH Healthcare eased one sen to RM7.25, while CIMB gained two sen to RM8.38.

As for active stocks, Ingenieur Gudang was flat at five sen, MY E.G. Services slipped three sen to RM1.01, Gamuda decreased 27 sen to RM4.49, and Inari Amertron dipped 11 sen to RM2.24.

Top 20 Actives

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
HSI-CWCD	0.180	-0.020	-10.00	1,814,899
HSI-PWDN	0.100	-0.005	-4.76	1,111,192
INGENIEU	0.050	-	-	640,295
HSI-PWDS	0.190	-0.025	-11.63	554,436
HSI-PWDV	0.095	+0.010	+11.77	421,230
MYEG	1.010	-0.030	-2.89	411,051
GAMUDA	4.490	-0.270	-5.67	389,254
INARI	2.240	-0.110	-4.68	388,520
HM	0.140	+0.010	+7.69	369,009
HSI-PWDW	0.105	-	-	333,816
RGB	0.420	-0.025	-5.62	274,848
SFPTECH	0.395	-0.010	-2.47	251,413
HARTA-C2L	0.030	-0.015	-33.33	239,848
SUNLOGY	0.295	-0.010	-3.28	232,884
TANCO	1.680	-0.180	-9.68	229,515
HSI-CWCC	0.355	-0.035	-8.97	222,479
KAB	0.330	-	-	216,819
YEWLEE-WA	0.315	-	-	209,357
TWL	0.020	-0.005	-20.00	204,981
DIALOG	1.640	-0.030	-1.80	199,184



Top 20 Gainers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
NESTLE	91.500	+1.000	393
UTDPLT	32.500	+0.660	9,283
KLK	21.420	+0.420	6,096
PETDAG	20.900	+0.400	2,670
DINO45801028	102.500	+0.300	1
HLBANK	20.740	+0.240	12,654
HSI-CWCS	0.460	+0.220	252
HSI-CWAS	0.550	+0.185	604
HSI-CWAW	1.130	+0.170	95
MISC	7.310	+0.160	11,472
HSI-CWCO	1.120	+0.135	20
SDG	5.000	+0.130	18,441
NPC	2.820	+0.120	177
PPB	11.020	+0.120	5,492
PINGAN-C24	0.270	+0.110	4
RVIEW	2.920	+0.110	167
TIMCOM	4.990	+0.110	15,637
HTPADU	2.860	+0.100	4,555
NSOP	4.000	+0.100	44
KLCC	8.300	+0.090	77

Top 20 Gainers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
BCMALL	0.010	+100.00	3,566
EAH	0.010	+100.00	63,600
GIIB-WA	0.010	+100.00	30,100
TWL-WE	0.010	+100.00	2,001
HSI-CWCS	0.460	+91.67	252
PINGAN-C24	0.270	+68.75	4
IOICORP-C61	0.025	+66.67	5,810
PETDAG-C11	0.050	+66.67	805
HSI-CWAS	0.550	+50.69	604
ITRONIC-WA	0.015	+50.00	3,000
YB-LA	0.015	+50.00	25,018
GENM-C3A	0.035	+40.00	14,967
IOICORP-C65	0.035	+40.00	1,800
99SMART-C1	0.095	+35.71	500
COMPUGT	0.020	+33.33	5,694
FOCUS	0.020	+33.33	7,162
GENTINGC3H	0.020	+33.33	20,351
SG	0.020	+33.33	2,102
SIME-C89	0.060	+33.33	995
SUNWAY-C33	0.020	+33.33	297

World Stocks/Commodities

INDEX	CLOSING	DAILY CHANGE	DAILY CHANGE (%)
DJIA [US]	43,428.02	-748.63	-1.69
S&P 500 [US]	6,013.13	-104.39	-1.71
NASDAQ [US]	19,524.01	-438.35	-2.2
NYSE [US]	19,881.54	-268.31	-1.33
EURO STOXX 50 [EUR]	5,474.14	-0.71	-0.01
FTSE 100 [UK]	8,670.15	10.78	0.12
DAX [GER]	22,448.85	161.29	0.72
NIKKEI 225 [JPN]	38,776.94	98.9	0.26
TOPIX INDEX [JPN]	2,736.53	1.93	0.07
HANG SENG INDEX [HK]	23,341.61	-136.31	-0.58
CSI 300 [CHN]	3,969.72	-8.72	-0.22
MSCI ASIA PACIFIC	190.6	1.82	0.96
SHANGHAI SE COM [CHN]	3,373.03	-6.08	-0.18
KOSPI INDEX [SK]	2,645.27	-9.31	-0.35
SENSEX INDEX [IND]	74,552.44	-758.62	-1.01
ASX 200 [AUS]	8,308.24	12.04	0.15
ALL ORDINARIES INDX [AUS]	8,560.14	-10.79	-0.13
FBM KLCI	1,584.25	-6.78	-0.43
STRAITS TIMES INDEX (S'PORE)	3,932.09	2.14	0.05
WTI [US\$/BBL.]	70.23	-0.17	-0.24
BRENT [US\$/BBL.]	74.34	-0.09	-0.12
GOLD [COMEX] [US\$/T OZ]	2,960.50	7.3	0.25
SILVER [COMEX] [US\$/T OZ]	33.24	-0.09	-0.28
PLATINUM [US\$/T OZ]	970.33	-2.67	-0.27
COPPER [COMEX] [US CENTS/LB.]	459.45	-2.1	-0.46
COPPER 3MO [LME] [US\$/MT]	9,559.00	-4.5	-0.05
CORN [US CENTS/BU.]	501.25	-3.75	-0.74
WHEAT [US CENTS/BU.]	596	-8	-1.32
SOYBEAN OIL [CBOT] [US CENTS/LB.]	47	-0.34	-0.72
COCOA [ICE] [US\$/MT]	9,140.00	-1,127.00	-10.98
RUBBER [S'PORE] [US CENTS/KG]	206.4	1.4	0.68

As at 5pm, Feb 24

Top 20 Losers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
MPI	19.620	-0.780	3,591
DLADY	30.020	-0.580	67
PCHEM	3.740	-0.400	186,664
TENAGA	13.640	-0.340	73,391
ALLIANZ	18.480	-0.320	413
HLIND	13.420	-0.280	121
GAMUDA	4.490	-0.270	389,254
GESHEN	4.550	-0.260	848
SUNCON	4.270	-0.180	83,244
TANCO	1.680	-0.180	229,515
MBMR	5.380	-0.170	8,101
GENP	5.540	-0.160	8,653
SCGBHD	1.130	-0.150	198,113
ATECH	3.020	-0.140	602
GCB	4.070	-0.140	20,350
HEIM	26.840	-0.140	1,127
DIALOG-C1Y	0.020	-0.130	1,800
SAM	3.780	-0.130	5,212
TANCO-WC	1.400	-0.130	90,343
AJI	14.880	-0.120	161

Top 20 Losers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
DIALOG-C1Y	0.020	-86.67	1,800
FRONTKN-C34	0.005	-75.00	700
HSI-PWBY	0.010	-66.67	11,887
S&FCAP-WC	0.005	-66.67	6,942
TROP-CL	0.010	-66.67	137
VS-C90	0.005	-66.67	2,000
AXIATA-C1K	0.055	-63.33	50
INARI-C3D	0.015	-62.50	5,000
HSI-CWAY	0.075	-55.88	3,911
99SMART-CE	0.005	-50.00	1,000
CCK-CB	0.010	-50.00	151
HONGSENG	0.005	-50.00	16,841
IJM-C91	0.005	-50.00	1,000
INARI-C3C	0.015	-50.00	2,620
INGENIEU-WB	0.005	-50.00	3,441
MSC-CQ	0.005	-50.00	1,600
NATGATE-CA	0.005	-50.00	200
SAMAIDEN-CA	0.005	-50.00	4,000
SIMEPROP-C32	0.020	-50.00	5,750
SPSETIA-HD	0.005	-50.00	10,600

MARKETS/FROM THE BROKERS

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

Compiled by SunBiz Team

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Local institutions' net buying on Bursa surges to RM194m: MIDF

KUALA LUMPUR: Local institutions continued to support Bursa Malaysia with net purchases totalling RM194.2 million in domestic equities last week, compared with net purchases of RM77.9 million in the week ended Feb 14.

In its fund flow report for the week ended Feb 21, MIDF Amanah Investment Bank Bhd said local institutions net bought on three out of the five trading days last week, with net inflows on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday totalling RM130.8 million, RM85.4 million and RM35.3 million, respectively.

However, local retail investors ended their buying streak of four consecutive weeks on Bursa Malaysia with a net outflow of RM24.8 million in equities, amounting to two weeks of net selling thus far in 2025.

MIDF Amanah said foreign investors continued to sell equities in Bursa Malaysia for the 16th consecutive week, although the pace of outflows slowed to RM169.4 million compared to RM503.3 million in the week that ended Feb 14.

Foreign investors were net sellers on every trading day except Friday, with Monday experiencing the largest outflow of RM151.9 million.

On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, the outflows amounted to RM18.5 million, RM65.1 million and RM27.1 million, respectively.

"Friday experienced a net inflow of RM93.2 million, ending a 24-day consecutive streak of net foreign outflows," the report said.

The top three sectors that recorded net foreign inflows were financial services (RM117.2 million), construction (RM111 million) and technology (RM77.6 million). – Bernama

Ringgit rallies against dollar as US-China trade tension eases

THE ringgit extended its gains to close stronger against the US dollar yesterday, supported by easing US-China trade tension and weaker US economic data that initially pressured the dollar.

By 6pm, the ringgit appreciated to 4.4080/4110 from 4.4165/4200 at Friday's close.

SPI Asset Management managing partner Stephen Innes said the rally seemed set to continue, reversing the trend after US President Donald Trump issued a new order for a key US government committee to tighten restrictions on Chinese investment in important sectors like technology and energy.

"That was enough to boost the dollar, reducing some of the ringgit's earlier gains. Although the ringgit still ended the session stronger, there are worrying signs emerging on the trade front," he told Bernama.

Bank Muamalat Malaysia Bhd's chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid noted that the ringgit appreciated against the US dollar today to as high as RM4.3925 in the early afternoon before settling around RM4.4060 late in the evening.

Meanwhile, the ringgit was traded mostly higher against major currencies.

It weakened against the Japanese yen to 2.9471/9495 from 2.9346/9371 but strengthened against the British pound to 5.5704/5742 from 5.5851/5895.

The ringgit was mixed against Asean currencies.

It appreciated against the Singapore dollar to 3.2950/2975 from 3.3021/3049 but was lower against the Thai baht at 13.1508/1672 from 13.1354/1528.

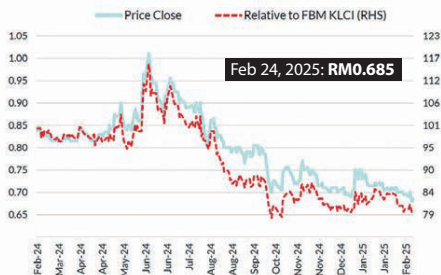
The local note was almost flat against the Indonesian rupiah to 270.7/271.1 from 270.7/271.0 and was unchanged against the Philippine peso at 7.62/7.63.

Exchange Rates

FOREIGN CURRENCY	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.4760	4.3420	4.3320
1 Australian Dollar	2.8680	2.7520	2.7360
1 Brunei Dollar	3.3530	3.2550	3.2470
1 Canadian Dollar	3.1470	3.0630	3.0510
1 Euro	4.7030	4.5520	4.5320
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.5840	2.4890	2.4730
1 Singapore Dollar	3.3530	3.2550	3.2470
1 Sterling Pound	5.6750	5.4970	5.4770
1 Swiss Franc	5.0240	4.8100	4.7950
100 UAE Dirham	123.2700	116.8900	116.6900
100 Bangladesh Taka	3.7600	3.5020	3.3020
100 Chinese Renminbi	62.1400	59.5100	N/A
100 Danish Krone	64.6300	59.4800	59.2800
100 Hongkong Dollar	58.2100	55.3200	55.1200
100 Indian Rupee	5.2600	4.9300	4.7300
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0284	0.0257	0.0207
100 Japanese Yen	3.0080	2.9120	2.9020
100 New Taiwan Dollar	14.7000	N/A	N/A
100 Norwegian Krone	41.3900	38.0600	37.8600
100 Pakistan Rupee	1.6300	1.5300	1.3300
100 Philippine Peso	7.8500	7.4000	7.2000
100 Qatar Riyal	124.1400	117.8500	117.6500
100 Saudi Riyal	120.6700	114.5500	114.3500
100 South Africa Rand	25.2600	22.8200	22.6200
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	1.5500	1.4300	1.2300
100 Swedish Krona	43.5300	39.6300	39.4300
100 Thai Baht	13.9400	12.3600	11.9600

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

Tasco Bhd Buy. Target price: RM1.00



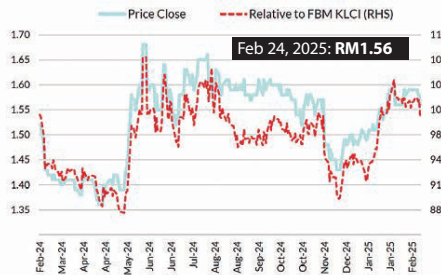
Source: Bloomberg

Q3'25 numbers softened within TASCOS' international business solutions (IBS) segment. Results were mainly dragged by the air freight forwarding (AFF) segment, which recorded a Q3'25 PBT of RM1.8 million (-43% QoQ) while the ocean freight forwarding (OFF) division's PBT contracted by 11% QoQ to RM0.7 million. These were largely due to softer shipment volumes from its fast-moving consumer goods or FMCG, automotive, aerospace, E&E, and electric glass customers, amidst geopolitical uncertainties casting a pall over regional trade activities. However, favourable rates have resulted in its IBS segment securing a better PBT margin of 5% in Q3'25, vs 4.6% in Q2'25 – management is optimistic that this will improve further in Q4'25.

TASCOS' domestic business solutions (DBS) segment's PBT fell by 16% QoQ, largely on lower contributions from the contract logistics (CL) and cold supply chain (CSC) arms. Its CSC PBT slipped 1.7% QoQ as handling of goods were weak amidst slower demand, partly impacted by the ongoing Gaza-Israel boycott. Within the CL segment, warehousing PBT plunged by 28% on the lesser movements of goods amid slower demand, offset by customs clearance PBT which tripled QoQ on top of a 9% rise in haulage PBT. Despite the slower movement of goods in and out of the warehouse, TASCOS' CL PBT margin stayed at 9% (vs 8.9% in Q2'25), likely from a high warehouse occupancy rate of 98% as at end-Dec 2024. Coming into Q4'25, we may see improving volume handling QoQ for the DBS segment due to seasonal festive demand.

BUY with RM1.00 TP. – RHB Research, Feb 24

Sports Toto Bhd Neutral. Target price: RM1.60



Source: Bloomberg

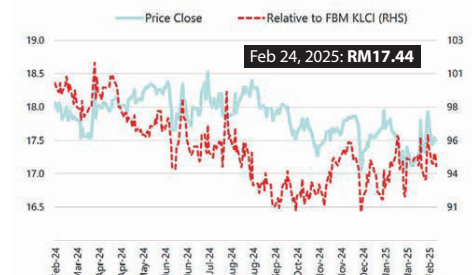
H1'25 core earnings of RM92 million (+7.9% YoY) came in at 47% and 43% of our and Street's full-year forecasts – within our expectations but below Street's. Second interim DPS of RM0.02 was declared and will go ex on 27 Mar, bringing the YTD DPS to RM0.04 (H1'24: RM0.05), within expectations.

YoY, H1'25 revenue dipped slightly by 1.3% to RM2.9 billion, primarily due to softer gaming revenue (-1.9%) driven by fewer draw days (81 in H1'25 vs 84 in H1'24), while motor revenue (-0.5%) remained flat. However, H1'25 EBIT margin expanded slightly by 0.3ppts to 5.9%, on a lower accumulated prize payout. QoQ, Q2'25 revenue rose 2.6% to RM1.5 billion, boosted by the gaming (+10.5%) segment, thanks to stronger ticket sales amid higher accumulated jackpot prizes. Together with a lower prize payout of 58.5% (compared to 59.6% in Q1'25), core earnings rose 20.2% QoQ to RM49.7 million.

We expect a strong Q3'25 sales growth, supported by January's record-breaking Supreme 6/58 jackpot run and the seasonal boost from Lunar New Year demand. We believe the historic jackpot prize aided in attracting the younger demographic (who traditionally were less inclined to purchase lottery tickets), and helped SPTOTO reclaim market share from illegal NFOs. Beyond the immediate term, competition from illegal operators remains intense, and management is awaiting a decision on its appeal to resume operations in the northern states to regain lost ground. Meanwhile, HR Owen is expected to face ongoing challenges from soft economic conditions, elevated inflation, and high interest rates in the UK.

NEUTRAL with RM1.60 TP. – RHB Research, Feb 24

Petronas Gas Bhd Neutral. Target price: RM18.51



Source: Bloomberg

FY24 core earnings of RM1.8 billion (-2% YoY) came in within expectations, at 98% and 97% of our and Street full-year estimates. A fourth interim DPS of 22 sen was declared, lifting FY24 DPS to 72 sen (Q4'23: 22 sen). Q4'24 core earnings fell 7% QoQ, dragged by higher maintenance activities and weaker sales volume from the utilities segment. Cumulatively, FY24 revenue inched up marginally by 1% driven by higher gas processing revenue following higher reservation charges and higher gas transportation revenue but partially offset by weaker utilities revenue on lower product prices. FY24 core earnings fell marginally by 2% on higher operating costs led by higher maintenance activities.

Maintenance activities are expected to remain elevated in FY25 coupled with the elevated cost of doing business to persist. Capex spending is guided to be higher this year with a larger allocation to non-regulated capex. These include the two jointly-owned power plants in Sabah – 52MW Sipitang power plant and 100MW Kimanis Power (Dua) plant with an estimated capex of RM230 million and RM700 million, respectively. The two plants are scheduled to be commercialised by end-2026 and Mar 2026. The projects' internal rate of return or IRR is guided to be in line with Malaysia's power plant returns. The >RM100 million third LNG storage tank project at Pengerang is still progressing as planned, with the commercial operation date scheduled for mid-2025. We are generally positive on the development of Malaysia's first LNG-driven air separation unit (ASU) in Pengerang although the earnings contribution may not be significant.

NEUTRAL with new RM18.51 TP. – RHB Research, Feb 24

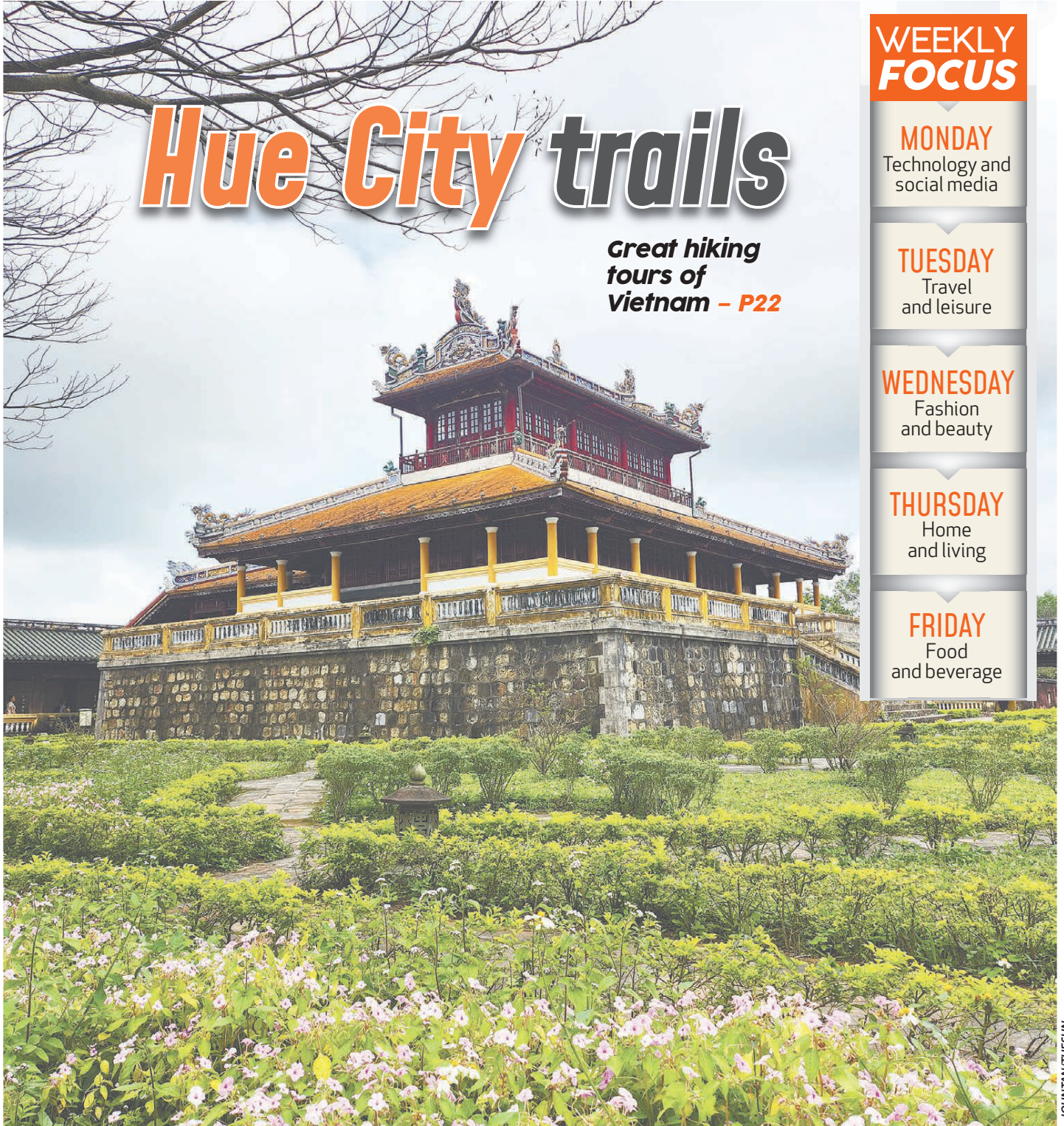


the Sun **LYFE**

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Hue City trails

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JOHNTAN/THESUN

INSIDE **p23** India claims record crowds at mega-Hindu festival

p24 China experience winter sports boom



Main entrance to the Imperial City of Hue. – JOHN TAN/THESUN



The Nguyen Dinh Chieu Walking Street. – PIC COURTESY OF VIETNAM DRIVE



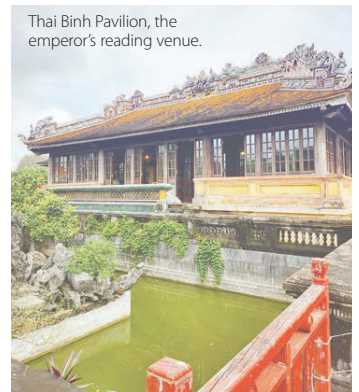
A REFRESHING RETREAT NEAR KUALA LUMPUR
colmartropicale.com.my



Walking meditation is among the movement therapies at Alba Wellness Valley Resort. – PIC COURTESY OF ALBA WELLNESS VALLEY RESORT



The Bach Ma National Park Gate.



Thai Binh Pavilion, the emperor's reading venue.

BY JOHN TAN

FINDING tranquility in today's fast-paced world is not always easy. Given our hectic schedules and commitments, it can be hard to find time to reconnect with ourselves and the environment around us.

Spiritual trips, therefore, are ideal as it presents us with the opportunity to immerse ourselves in mindfulness and growth. Hue City in Vietnam is among the destinations suitable for those seeking to embark on a spiritual trip.

In conjunction with the Skechers recent D'Lites Hiker Healing trip, *theSun* had a chance to indulge in mindful activities that Hue City has to offer.

Movement therapies at Alba Wellness Valley Resort

Located 30km northwest of Hue City, the Alba Wellness Valley resort is famous for its wellness offerings, servicing a variety of health and well-being activities to guests.

theSun tried out two of its movement therapies upon checking in. The Walking meditation, which is among the programme's highlights, was the first indulgence of the day.

Scheduled around 7am, the session was the first effort to snatch guests away from the hustle and bustle of city life. The peaceful and calming nature of the practitioner's mantras blended well with the surrounding greenery, allowing guests to connect with themselves mentally and spiritually with ease.

More tranquillity was achieved with the *Kundalini* yoga session. Contrary to other forms of yoga, *Kundalini's* purpose is to activate one's *Kundalini* energy or *shakti* which is located at the base of the spine.

This form of yoga focuses on bringing this energy through chanting, singing, movements and breathing exercises in specific patterns. As this energy is awakened, a heightened state of

Exploring Hue City

theSun takes trip around central Vietnam, indulging in healing outdoor activities



Skechers D'Lites Hiker in light grey for men. – PIC COURTESY OF PETER PHOON CHUN WEI



Shoes come in black and white for females.

awareness is achieved, proving the truth in its secondary name – the yoga of awareness.

Considering the resort's emphasis on yoga to key living, a generous amount of dedication and patience was spent on guests to realise their state of awareness and peace.

Strolling along Huong River (Perfume River)

Outside of the Alba Wellness Valley resort, tranquillity can be found along the walking streets of the Huong River, also known as the Perfume River.

Situated on the southern bank of the Perfume River, the Nguyen Dinh Chieu Walking Street spans over 380m long, made for walking, sightseeing, relaxation, public art and street activities. Claustrophobia has no place here as there are no vehicles or nearby houses.

There is an adequate space for walking too, suitable for a big group of tourists to roam around and indulge in the river's fragrant smell that derives from the flowers that flow through the river.

Aside from its scent, the street stands out for the relief it offers to its guests. Once you step foot inside, it is easy to detach yourself from your capitalist worries.

This is because the street is separated from urban life by a system of parks, which includes the University of Education Park, Phan Boi Chau Flower Garden and Tu Tuong Park.

In between these parks are French architectural buildings used as art centres and museums. Accompanying them are food and leisure stores that offer tourists a taste of the local cuisine and fun.

Immersing in history at Imperial City of Hue

Those seeking to get lost in history should pay a visit to the Imperial City of Hue. Designated as a Unesco World Heritage Site, this historical gem offers a glimpse into Vietnam's royal past.

One has the privilege of exploring the legacy of the Nguyen Dynasty through its vibrant palaces and intricate temples here. Some of the highlights inside include the Ngo Mon Gate, which is the grand entrance to the Imperial City. It features five entrances and an elaborate top.

Among others are Thai Hoa Palace, Imperial Citadel and Forbidden Purple

City. The Thai Hoa Palace was the emperor's throne room and was used for crucial state ceremonies.

Imperial Citadel and Forbidden Purple City were where the emperors and their families used to live. But differing from the Imperial Citadel, Forbidden Purple City contains numerous architectural structures.

Each of them has specific functions such as the Khon Thai Palace, which was the Queen's residence and the Thai Binh Pavilion, the emperor's reading venue.

Jungle trekking at Bach Ma National Park

The pride of the Hue people, the Bach Ma National Park is among the top attractions to try out in Hue City. The park is famous for its cascade waterfalls and lush forests, making it an ideal escape for nature lovers.

Together with Skechers, *theSun* explored the various sections of this 220 square kilometres national park. Our hiking experience first kicked off at the Bach Ma National Park Gate.

Here, we were introduced to our English-speaking tour guide and were briefed on the different park zones. It then proceeded to our drive up to the Five Lake Cascades (Ngu Ho).

This section is a series of five swimming holes and waterfalls, each reflecting the beauty of Ngu Ho Lake. Getting to each destination, however, can be rocky.

While easy navigation is promised at the first lake, a high amount of adaptability and flexibility is required at other sections such as lakes 2 and 4. The entrances there, for instance, are more narrow and steep.

But the struggle is worth the climb as the view at the Rhododendron Waterfall is breathtaking. Upon conquering the five different lakes, the trail would lead to the summit of the Rhododendron Waterfall.

Having an altitude of 300m in height, one is able to witness and feel the park in all of its glory. The tiny crystal droplets of water, chilling air and lush foliage are all up for you to admire and indulge in.



Kundalini yoga is among the many yoga options.

See also page 23



Summit at the Rhododendron Waterfall.

Nature's hike around Vietnam

Secure footing

Our trip, overall, was an enriching and fulfilling experience. That said, it was not without some hurdles as unforeseen circumstances presented themselves during our time in Hue City.

The heavy downpour, for one, made it tricky to trek at Bach Ma National Park. Having a secure foundation that offers exceptional grip and stability is therefore advisable.

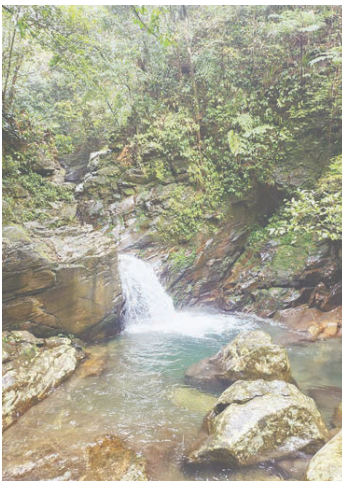
From page 22

If you are looking for footwear for hiking, consider the latest Skechers D'Lites Hiker. Newly launched on Feb 10, as part of Skechers's new sports adventure collection, the footwear is engineered to offer unmatched traction, cushioning and breathability.

"The Skechers D'Lites offer a balance of durability, support and trend-forward aesthetics, making them perfect for everyday exploration. It combines a classic hiking silhouette with modern lightweight cushioning and superior grip, featuring a Goodyear Rubber outsole for extra durability," said Skechers Southeast Asia managing director Zann Lee.

The footwear comes in light grey and natural brown for men. As for women, they are available in natural multi and black and white.

You can get them for RM459 a pair at selected Skechers outlets, including Pavilion Bukit Jalil, Pavilion Damansara Heights, Pavilion Kuala Lumpur, Sunway Pyramid and KLCC.



Waterfall at Lake 2.



The Kumbh Mela festival will end tomorrow. - AFP/IC

Convergence of devotees

India says over 420m pilgrims have visited Hindu mega-festival

INDIA'S government revealed earlier this month that more than 420 million pilgrims have ritually bathed at the world's largest religious festival, estimates organising authorities say are calculated using artificial intelligence and surveillance cameras.

It is not possible to independently verify the mind-boggling figure, more than the population of the US and Canada combined, which is a staggering statistic even for the world's most populous nation of

1.4 billion people.

"More than 420 million devotees took a dip in the holy Triveni Sangam," the government's Press Information Bureau said, referring to the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati rivers.

The Kumbh Mela, a six-week-long Hindu celebration of prayer and bathing held every 12 years in the northern city of Prayagraj, will end tomorrow.

Religion and politics are deeply intertwined in India, and critics said the festival is being promoted to burnish the credentials of Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who himself took a ritual dip on Feb 5.

Modi's close ally Yogi Adityanath, also from the Bharatiya Janata Party, is a firebrand monk and chief minister of Uttar Pradesh

state, where the festival is taking place.

The organisers said they are using a network of cameras and overhead drones, with artificial intelligence systems crunching data to calculate the number of devotees - and manage crowds.

But, that did not prevent a deadly stampede on Jan 29 that killed at least 30 people and injured 90 others. The deaths took the sheen off Adityanath and his government's claims of stellar management of the event. Officials insisted for hours that no one was seriously injured, despite graphic television footage from the scene.

The festival is rooted in Hindu mythology, a battle between deities and demons for control of a pitcher containing the nectar of immortality.

Pilgrims believe the ritual bathing helps them attain salvation. - AFP

Malaysian Gen Z travellers look to TikTok for inspiration

TIKTOK is the leading source of inspiration for Malaysian Gen Z travellers (aged 18-27), with nearly one-third (30%) citing it as their go-to platform, according to digital travel platform Agoda's latest Gen Z Travel Survey.

TikTok is followed by travel apps, such as the Agoda mobile app, at 15%. Recommendations from friends or family account for 14% of travel inspiration. In contrast, the generation aged 44-59 relies more on Google, with 23% using web search as their main source of inspiration.

The survey also found a third (34%) of Malaysian Gen Z travellers prefer travelling with a partner, while almost a quarter (24%) enjoy family trips and 19% primarily travel with a group of friends.

Beaches and islands are the most sought-after destinations, capturing 30%. Urban city adventures follow closely, appealing to 21% of Gen Z travellers. Meanwhile, cultural and historical sites are tied with cold-weather destinations, each named as the preferred destination type by 11%.



The survey shows beaches and islands are the most sought-after destinations by Gen Z travellers. - PEXELSPIC



Snow show

➤ China winter sports sector zooms along despite climate risk ahead

PACKED slopes, plush turtle butt pads and US\$11 (RM48.30) passes, this is low-cost skiing in China, where winter sports are on a government-greased track to take in a projected US\$137 billion this year.

The trend is bucking the sluggish consumption seen elsewhere in China's post-Covid economy - though experts warn climate change and other environmental concerns could risk wiping out some of those gains further down the trail.

President Xi Jinping has dubbed the ski industry a "mountain of gold and silver" and worked to position China as a winter sports leader, hosting major international events like the Asian Winter Games in the northeastern city of Harbin this past week.

With the Games fever in the air on a cold but clear Sunday this month, rental boots flew off the shelves at the city's Mingdu Ski Field as a constant stream of people headed for the pistes.

"This is my first time skiing," said student Deng Meiting as she strapped a green turtle crashpad around her backside for protection.

"I wanted to try it out because snow sports are hot, everyone wants to try skiing," said the 18-year-old, who was visiting Harbin for the Games.

The cheapest daytime passes at the two-slope ski area cost around US\$11 for two hours, including gear hire.

"There is a pretty low entry barrier for beginners," said first-time skier Hu Enjie, who was visiting from the eastern Chinese city of Nanjing.

More capacity added
Industry data shows more and more people are paying into a pastime that is synonymous with wealth and



Performers taking part at the Harbin 2025 Asian Winter Games. - AFPIC

luxury in Europe and North America. Visits to ski areas from May 1, 2023 to April 30, 2024 were up 16% compared to the same period a year prior, according to the China Ski Industry White Book.

The boom has been a plus for instructor Yang Biyuan, who said he is earning about one-third more than last year.

The 26-year-old expects to make around 15,000 yuan (RM9,142) this month, which is considerably more than the average monthly wage for city workers.

"When I started (teaching) in 2020... the majority of those on the slopes were people who knew how to ski and snowboard," said Yang at Mingdu.

But there have been more and more first-timers needing lessons, the Harbin native said, making it possible to find enough work at a small ski area near home instead of at a remote resort.

Around the country, even more capacity is being added - last year alone, China built 30 new resorts.

Climate risk
The enthusiasm may be there - but the snow might not be for much longer, experts say, with warming temperatures shortening skiing seasons around the world.

China already relies heavily on artificial snow, with natural conditions in most parts of the country unreliable.

That is set to get worse, with China logging its hottest year on record in 2024.

"Even if you make all the snow, if the temperatures are too high for it to stick to the ground, ultimately you've achieved nothing," explained sports ecology expert Madeleine Orr.

Ski resorts in North America and Europe need around a hundred open days a winter to be financially viable, she said.

China's jam-packed runs - the source of much grumbling on social media - could help ameliorate that and make the math work.

"If they are able to bring in huge numbers of people in a slightly shorter season because they've incentivised participation in these

sports somehow, then you could feasibly cut that hundred days down," said Orr.

China also leads the world when it comes to indoor ski resort building, boasting half of the world's top 10 based on snow area, according to Daxue Consulting.

However, producing all that man-made snow consumes vast amounts of water and energy.

Environmental organisations roundly criticised the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics for using artificial pistes in a drought-affected region.

"From an economic standpoint... (China) could make (its) snow sport investment sustainable. But from an environmental standpoint, no," said Orr. - AFP

Egypt unveils first ancient royal tomb since Tutankhamun



The tomb was excavated by a joint Egyptian-British mission. - AFPIC

EGYPT'S antiquities authority says it has found the ancient tomb of King Thutmose II, the first royal burial to be found since the famed discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922.

The tomb, discovered near the Valley of the Kings in Luxor in southern Egypt, belonged to King Thutmose II of the 18th dynasty, who lived nearly 3,500 years ago.

Thutmose II was an ancestor to Tutankhamun himself, and his half-sister and queen consort was Pharaoh Hatshepsut.

Her giant mortuary temple stands on the west bank of the Nile at Luxor a few kilometres (miles) from where the tomb of Thutmose II was found.

Although preliminary studies suggest its contents were moved in

ancient times - leaving the tomb without the iconic mummy or gilded splendour of the Tutankhamun find - the antiquities ministry on Tuesday called the discovery "one of the most significant archaeological breakthroughs in recent years".

It has been excavated by a joint Egyptian-British mission, led by the Supreme Council of Antiquities and the New Kingdom Research Foundation.

The tomb's entrance was first located in 2022 in the Luxor mountains west of the Valley of the Kings, but was believed at the time to lead to the tomb of a royal wife.

But the team then found "fragments of alabaster jars inscribed with the name of Pharaoh Thutmose

II, identified as the 'deceased king', alongside inscriptions bearing the name of his chief royal consort, Queen Hatshepsut", confirming whose tomb it was, the ministry said.

Shortly after the king's burial, water flooded the burial chamber, damaging the interior and leaving fragments of plaster that bore parts of the Book of Amduat, an ancient mortuary text on the underworld.

Some funerary furniture belonging to Thutmose II has also been recovered from the tomb in "the first-ever find" of its kind, according to the ministry. It quoted mission chief Dr Piers Latherland as saying the team will continue its work in the area, hoping to find the tomb's original contents. - AFP

Setting a solid foundation

➤ UTAR provides good choices with its foundation programmes

UNIVERSITI Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) provides high school graduates with quality yet affordable education through its one-year foundation programmes. Each is structured to prepare students to progress to their degree programme of choice.

The foundation programmes are offered by the Centre for Foundation Studies (CFS) at both the Kampar and Sungai Long campuses.

Students can either choose to pursue the Foundation in Arts or Foundation in Science programmes. The Foundation in arts programme allows students to choose between the arts and social science stream, and the management and accountancy stream.

Those pursuing the Foundation in Science programme, on the other hand, will be able to choose between the physical science stream and the biological science stream.

"UTAR's foundation programmes are tailored to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of every student. Whether you are exploring the sciences, delving into the arts, or venturing into business, the comprehensive curriculum provides a customised learning path that aligns with academic goals.

"This personalised approach ensures that students receive the right balance of foundational knowledge and subject-specific expertise," said CFS Director of Sungai Long campus, Melissa Stefanie Netto.

"The foundation programmes serve as a bridge between the high school education and specialised degree programmes. The programmes offer a seamless transition, allowing you to explore a variety of subjects before committing to a specific field of study.

"This not only helps students make informed decisions about their academic and career path but also enhances their

adaptability and versatility in an ever-evolving job market," added CFS Director of Kampar Campus Tan Lee Siew.

The well-established UTAR Foundation programmes are designed to equip students with the necessary fundamental knowledge and essential skills, as well as sharpening their presentation skills and English language proficiency, ensuring a smooth transition to over 140 undergraduate programmes and postgraduate programmes at UTAR.

UTAR also offers scholarships and loans to students who achieve excellent academic results.

Students who attain 5As or above in their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) will be automatically considered for the UTAR Scholarship for top achievers, which offers tuition fee coverage of up to 100% for the foundation programme, depending on the number of A's achieved.

In addition, UTAR places importance on the mental well-being of its students. The Department of Student Affairs (DSA) provides counselling services to students on their campuses. The DSA's qualified counsellors are always available to offer academic, career and personal advice to help students transition to university life.

It is recognised as one of the country's fastest growing private higher education institutions since its inception in 2002. The University now has about 20,000 students with campuses in Kampar, Perak, and Bandar Sungai Long, Selangor. UTAR offers a variety of courses from foundation studies to bachelor, master's and PhD.

Visit UTAR's Open Day on 1-2 March from 9am to 4.30pm at both their Kampar and Sungai Long campuses. For more information, go to www.utar.edu.my or call 05-468 8888 (Kampar Campus), 03-9086 0288 (Sungai Long Campus).



UTAR continues to attract students from all over Malaysia due to its affordable fees and strategic campuses.



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UTAR's Kampar campus in serene surroundings.

Perseverance paves the road to success

➤ MSU paves the way for success with its emphasis on resilience and dedication

AS an alumnus of Management and Science University (MSU), where she completed two courses, Dr Azura Abbas stands out as a dedicated doctor, business owner, and mother of three, who fell in love with medicine while completing her foundation in science at the university.

"When I began my studies, the general expectation was men became engineers while women became doctors," she said.

"It felt as though we were being steered in that direction. But during the course of my foundation and later while pursuing my Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (MBBS) degree, I realised this was the course for me."

Her journey began with a foundation in science between 2007 and 2008 at MSU, which she completed in a year. She then pursued five years of medical studies in Bangalore, India.

"I earned my MBBS and later pursued a master of science in medical physiology, also at MSU," she said. "I completed it during the Covid-19 pandemic."

As Dr Azura progressed in her

studies, her passion for medicine deepened. She realised that being a doctor was not just about treating individuals, but also about making a difference for the community while building a fulfilling career.

Upon her graduation, Dr Abbas worked for four years before deciding to pursue her master's at MSU. It was during this time that she founded Klinik Medina, her private practice, which now has branches in Sri Kembangan and Ampang.

According to her, starting a clinic was just the beginning as many well-established Malaysian clinics presented a formidable marketing challenge for her to stand out in a competitive industry.

"However, I believe in *rezeki* (blessings and sustenance)," she explained. "If we provide patients with genuine care and affordable prices, the business will grow. Even without a big name, word-of-mouth marketing is powerful, and my clinic is steadily gaining traction."

Dr. Azura also noted how much MSU had grown, since her foundation years there.

"Before MSU became what it is today, it was known as Kolej Universiti Teknologi dan Pengurusan Malaysia (KUTPM)," she recalled.



Dr Azura feels students should not only be academically excellent but also be determined and passionate in pursuing their career choices.

"Back then, it was a small institution with classrooms scattered across different locations.

"We had to move between buildings for classes sometimes next to stalls or printing shops which was quite challenging."

Her medical studies later took her to Bangalore, which had more structured medical facilities and she completed her degree.

When she later pursued her master's degree at MSU, she was impressed by the improved facilities and the campus growth in terms of students.

"The new campus had well-equipped labs, and all the necessary chemicals and materials. It was an exceptional learning environment," she said.

To Dr Azura, success did not necessarily mean being highly intelligent from the start. While cognitive abilities are partly inherited, external factors such as environment, education, and social influences play a significant role.

"Intelligence alone is not the main ingredient of success," she shared.

"You need the courage to try. Confidence and perseverance

are also key factors, because you cannot succeed if you stay in your comfort zone."

"If you stay committed and keep pushing forward, you will eventually achieve your goals," she encouraged. "Stay strong, keep striving, and you will achieve your goals."

For a full range of programmes and information please contact the MSU engagement department at 03-55216868 or email enquiry@msu.edu.my or access their website at www.msu.edu.my.



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IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT JOHOR BAHRU
COMPANIES (WINDING-UP) NO. JA-28NCC-22-02/2025

In the Matter of Section 465(1)(e) read with Section 466(1)(a) of the Companies Act, 2016

And

In the Matter of PS SELATAN SDN BHD (Company No. 20181013142 (1275158-U))

Between

SOUTHERN PREMIX SDN BHD (Company No. 38886-H) ...Petitioner

And

PS SELATAN SDN BHD (Company No. 20181013142(1275158-U)) ...Respondent

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a petition for the winding-up of the abovesaid company by the High court was on 07.02.2025 presented by the said company and that the said petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Johor Bahru, Johor at 9.00 o'clock in the morning, on the 03.04.2025, and any creditor or contributor of the said company desiring to support or oppose the making of an order on the said petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his counsel for that purpose, and a copy of the petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributor of the said company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's address is at B-05 & B-06, Plaza Kelana Jaya, Jalan SS7/13B, Kelana Jaya, 47001 Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

The Petitioner's solicitor is Messrs Chor Pee Anwaral & Company, Advocates & Solicitors at Bangunan Rasheed-Chor Pee, No. 64 (First & Second Floor), Susan 1, Jalan Tan Abdul Razak, 69088 Ibrahim International Business District, Johor.

Sgd
Messrs Chor Pee Anwaral & Company

NOTE:- Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said petition must serve on or send by post to the abovesaid Messrs Chor Pee Anwaral & Company, Advocates & Solicitors, or if a firm, or his or their solicitor (if any) and must be served, or, if posted, must be sent by post in sufficient time to reach the abovesaid not later than 3.00 o'clock afternoon of the 02.04.2025.

This Advertisement of Petition is prepared by Messrs Chor Pee Anwaral & Company, Advocates & Solicitors at Bangunan Rasheed-Chor Pee, No. 64 (First & Second Floor), Susan 1, Jalan Tan Abdul Razak, 69088 Ibrahim International Business District, Johor, solicitors for the Petitioner.

Dated this 25th day of February 2025.

sgd
Messrs. Kee Sem, Siu & Huey Solicitors for the Petitioner

The Petitioner's solicitors are Messrs. Kee Sem, Siu & Huey of Block C, Rivercity, Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah (formerly Jalan Ipoh), 51200 Kuala Lumpur. (603) 9212 2888 (603) 4044 0448 Email: general@ksshlegal.com [R f : A S X / L K S / G L O 6 / UTSB/240209]

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT KUALA LUMPUR IN THE STATE OF WILAYAH PERSEKUTUAN KUALA LUMPUR (COMMERCIAL DIVISION) PETITION NO. WA-26NCC-14-09/2024

In the matter of Unico Technology Sdn Bhd (Registration No. 198901012434 (189742-K));

AND

In the matter of Section 116 of the Companies Act 2016

UNICO TECHNOLOGY SDN BHD Registration No. 198901012434 (189742-K) ... PETITIONER

NOTICE OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Order of the High Court of Malaya at Kuala Lumpur dated 23rd December 2024 confirming the reduction of the capital of Unico Technology Sdn Bhd ("the Company") from RM10,000,000.00 to RM4,000,000.00 and the Minutes approved by the Court showing the reduction of the share capital of the Company and the several particulars required by the Companies Act 2016 were registered by the Registrar of Companies on 18th February 2025.

Dated this 25th day of February 2025.

sgd
Messrs. Kee Sem, Siu & Huey Solicitors for the Petitioner

The Petitioner's solicitors are Messrs. Kee Sem, Siu & Huey of Block C, Rivercity, Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah (formerly Jalan Ipoh), 51200 Kuala Lumpur. (603) 9212 2888 (603) 4044 0448 Email: general@ksshlegal.com [R f : A S X / L K S / G L O 6 / UTSB/240209]

LOOKING FOR BIOLOGICAL PARENTS OF A BOY

Date of Birth: 21th April 2008

The boy was born at Taman Desa Hospital Center (TDMC) Hospital Sdn Bhd and was later handed over to a chinese couple, Ms. Lai Chooi Foon and Mr. Ong Hai Hean on 22nd April 2008.

Any information, please contact: Lai Chooi Foon, 012-2119128

322 Notices

PERSYTIHARAN JUALAN DALAM MAHKAMAH TINGGI MALAYA DI PULAU PINANG PERMOHONAN UNTUK PERLAKSANAAN NO: PA-38-1443-12/2024

Dalam perkara mengenai Seksyen 256 dan 257 Kanun Tanah Negara, 1965

Dan

Dalam perkara mengenai Gadaian Perserahan No. 0701SC2020002879 (bertarikh: 09/09/2020) ke atas semua bahagian tanah yang dipagang di bawah Geran Mukim No. Hakmilik: 2580, Lot 3673, Mukim 16, Daerah Seberang Perai Tengah, Pulau Pinang dan

Dalam perkara mengenai Aturan 83 Kaedah-Kaedah Mahkamah, 2012

ANTARA

Public Bank Berhad (No. Syarikat: 6463-H) ...PLAINTIF

Ketua Pengarah Insurans sebagai pentadbir harta kepada Ng Lee Keng (No. Kad Pengenalan: 628617075216) ...DEFENDAN

Menurut Perintah Mahkamah Tinggi Malaya di PULAU PINANG mengenai Perintah Jualan dan Perintah bertarikh 8 Oktober 2024 dan 4 Februari 2025, adalah dengan ini dipaparkan bahawa Timbuan Pendaftaran/Perolehan Kanun Pendaftaran Pusat Operasi e-Lelong di Kuantan

AKAN MENJUAL SECARA LELONG AWAM Pada hari Isnin, 10 Mac 2025, Pada Jam 11:00 pagi, SECARA ELEKTRONIK DI LAMAN WEB e-LELONG, PUSAT OPERASI e-LELONG, KOMPLEKS MAHKAMAH KUANTAN, PAHANG DARUL MAKMUR

NOTA: Bakal pembeli adalah dinasihatkan agar membuat carian Hakmilik secara rasmi di Pejabat Tanah dan memeriksa semua langganan, bebanan serta mengenai paksi dengan tepat hartanah tersebut sebelum jualan lelongan dijalankan.

Sila layari <https://elelong.hakmahkamah.gov.my/indexwebv>

BUKUT-BUKUT HAKMILIK:

No. Hakmilik : Geran Mukim No. Hakmilik : 2580
No. lot : Lot 3673
No. Mukim / Daerah / Negeri : 16 / Seberang Perai Tengah / Pulau Pinang
Pegangan : Hakmilik Kekal
No. Petak/No. Tingkat/ No. Bangunan :
Keluasan Tanah : 1195.0000000000 kaki persegi
No. Bangunan : 111.0000000000 meter persegi
Pemilik Berdaftar : Ng Lee Keng
Syarat Nyata : Tanah ini hendaklah digunakan untuk tujuan kerdaman sahaja.
Tidada
Sektan Kepentingan : The Subject property is presently charged to Public Bank Berhad vide Presentation No. 0701SC2020002879 registered on 15th September 2020.
Bebanan / Lain-Lain :
Kawasan Rizab :
Kaveat :

LOKAS DAN PERIHAI HARTAHAMAH :
Hartanah tersebut adalah an intermediate double storey terraced house yang berlatarbelakang di No. 48, Lorong Machang Bubok 9, Taman Machang Bubok, 14020, Bukit Mertajam, Pulau Pinang

HARGA RIZAB :
Hartanah tersebut akan dijual atas "superlimana sedia ada" terlekat kepada satu harga rizab sebanyak RM 400,000.00 (RINGGIT MALAYSIA: EMPAT RATUS RIBU SARUAA) dan kepada syarat-syarat jualan yang dipaparkan. Pembida yang berminat hendaklah mendepositkan 10% daripada harga rizab dalam bentuk Bank Draft di atas nama PUBLIC BANK BERHAD / HARI BEKERJA sebelum tarikh lelong awam. Baki harga belian hendaklah dibayar oleh pembeli yang berjaya kepada PUBLIC BANK BERHAD dalam tempoh seratus dua puluh (20) hari dari tarikh jualan. Untuk butir-butir selanjutnya, sila berhubung dengan:-

Firma Guaman : WONG-CHOI & MOHD NOR
Alamat : NO. 27, 1ST & 2ND FLOOR JALAN MAJU JAYA PUSAT PERNIAGAAN MAJU JAYA, 14000, PG, MY
No. Telefon : 04-3388855
No. Faks : 04-3388855
No. Rujukan : WCMN(BM)/PBB-HL/2023-100/MLK(RS/J)

CALL TO PLACE CLASSIFIED ADS

KLANG VALLEY PENANG | KEDAH PERAK | PERLIS | PAHANG | KELANTAN TERENGGANU

MS. Shoba / MS. Balqish
TEL: 03-7784 8888
WHATSAPP: 018 261 6626

MALACCA | N.SEMBILAN

MR. Rajah
TEL: 012-628 2844
FAX: 06-764 2051

JOHOR BAHRU

MS. Anne Lim
TEL: 013-770 6699
FAX: 07-355 5549



Virat Kohli.
- AFP/ICC

Return of the king

Virat shuts down 'noise' with landmark century

CRICKET icon Virat Kohli said he shut down "the noise" to compile an unbeaten 100 and become only the third man to make 14,000 runs in one-day internationals in yesterday's six-wicket triumph over Pakistan in the Champions Trophy.

Virat's 51st ton in the format in Dubai led India to a comfortable victory over their arch-rivals and to the brink of the semifinals.

The knock from the 36-year-old stood out in the high-pressure match as the former captain came into the 50-over tournament with speculation over his cricket future.

"My job was clear - to control in the middle overs, not take risks against spinners and take on the pacers. I was happy with the template, it's how I play in ODIs," said man-of-

the-match Virat.

"I have a decent understanding of my game. It's about keeping the outside noise away, take care of my energy levels and thoughts. It's easy for me to get pulled into expectations and frenzy around games like these."

Pakistan skipper Mohammad Rizwan said his respect for Virat had rocketed.

"I wonder how hard he would have worked when the whole world was saying he is out of form but coming into a match which is awaited by the world, he scores runs easily," said Rizwan. "I praise his hard work and fitness."

India captain Rohit Sharma said, "Virat loves representing the country, doing what he does the best, which is what he did today. People sitting inside the dressing room aren't surprised with what he did."

Virat entered the match with 13,985 runs in 298 ODIs and went past

14,000 runs with a flowing punch through the covers off pace bowler Haris Rauf.

He is just the third man to achieve the feat after India icon Sachin Tendulkar (18,426) and Sri Lankan great Kumar Sangakkara (14,234).

Virat, who was out for 22 in the opening win over Bangladesh, put on 114 runs with Shreyas Iyer as he drove and flicked with aplomb to reach his 82nd ton across all formats with a winning boundary.

He took off his helmet and raised his bat to a standing ovation from the crowd that chanted his name.

"I have never thought of Virat struggling for runs," said Iyer.

"It's just that the mindset he possesses over the years, he is always hungry for runs and I remember yesterday he came almost an hour before us for the practise session. Looking from outside he looked as crisp as he looks all the time." - AFP

322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF EMPIRE TOWER (MALAYSIA) SDN. BHD.
198601003907 (153066-V)
(IN MEMBERS' VOLUNTARY LIQUIDATION)

NOTICE OF FINAL MEETING UNDER SECTION 459 (1) OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN pursuant to Section 459 (2) of the Companies Act, 2016 that the Final Meeting of the abovementioned Company will be held at No. 11-1, Jalan 1/57A, Batu 3, Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah, 51200 Kuala Lumpur on Friday, 28 March 2025 at 10.00 a.m. for the following purposes:-

- 1) To receive an account from the Liquidator showing the manner in which the winding-up has been conducted and the property of the Company disposed of and to hear any explanation that may be given by the Liquidator.
- 2) To determine pursuant to Section 518 (3)(b) of the Act, the manner in which the books, accounts and documents of the Company and of the Liquidator thereof, shall be disposed of.

NG YING HUEY
LIQUIDATOR
Dated this: 25 February 2025

No. 11-1, Jalan 1/57A,
Batu 3, Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah,
51200 Kuala Lumpur.

Note : A member entitled to attend and vote at this Final Meeting is entitled to appoint a proxy to attend and vote in his stead. A proxy must be a member of the Company.

Alonso has high expectations

FERNANDO ALONSO expects Aston Martin to start the Formula One season in a much better place after learning some hard lessons last year.

The Silverstone-based team, who showed off their new Mercedes-powered AMR25 car online on Sunday before testing in Bahrain starts tomorrow, finished fifth for the second year running in 2024.

Expectations had been high after double world champion Alonso took six podiums in the first eight races of 2023 but the Spaniard failed to finish higher than fifth last year while team mate Lance Stroll had a best of sixth.

Dan Fallows, who was technical director, was moved aside last

November with the team bringing in former Ferrari technical director Enrico Cardile and Red Bull's title-winning designer Adrian Newey, who starts on March 3.

The season starts in Australia on March 16.

"I think we did learn a lot last year. The second part of the season was sort of experiments going on just in the way of learning even more things into the 2025 car", Alonso told reporters.

"The simulator has been updated as well, so we've been working a lot in the sim to be able to develop the car a little bit more precisely than in the last few seasons.

"We have new tools. We have new

organisation. We have new people in place to tackle some of the weaknesses that we for sure identified last year. So I think we start in a much better place.

"We still need to work a lot, for sure. We lost a little bit of time and months last year and we think we will catch up very soon."

Stroll agreed: "There was a lot of experimenting through the course of last year and I think we learnt a lot why some of the upgrades didn't bring us what we wanted.

"Everything that has gone into the development of this year's car has really taken a lot of the lessons we learned from last year." - Reuters

BRIEFS

Dream over for Pakistan

PAKISTAN captain Mohammad Rizwan admitted yesterday that his team's Champions Trophy dreams had "ended" after a shattering loss to bitter rivals India. Hosts Pakistan went down by six wickets in Dubai for their second defeat in the 50-over tournament to all but bow out of the semifinal race.

"Yes, I would say it has ended, that's the truth," Rizwan told reporters when asked if his side had reached the end of the road. "Our Champions Trophy depends on others and I as a captain I don't like this. If we could have done something on our own then it would have been different. We admit to our losses against New Zealand and India but don't want to sit eyeing other results."

Venus out of Indian Wells

FORMER world No. 1 Venus Williams will not compete at next month's Indian Wells tournament despite the WTA 1000 event giving the 44-year-old American a wild card. Williams, who played only two tournaments last season, said at a speaking event in Denmark that she had not been told of the wildcard before the tournament announced it on Wednesday and added that she was unable to compete due to prior commitments.

"I found the announcement super amusing because, I don't know, people seem to be happy, so I was like, 'Maybe I'll just go with it, I don't know,'" Williams said at the event in the city of Naestved. "I'm actually not going. I'm going to be overseas. I love Indian Wells, I would love to be there and if I could have accepted it, I would have been like, 'Yes, but I already made commitments."

... but Djokovic to play after injury worries

NOVAK DJOKOVIC will play at Indian Wells, the ATP 1000-level tournament confirmed on social media, as the Serbian shakes off injury concerns and resumes his hunt for a 100th singles title. The 24-times Grand Slam winner retired from his Australian Open semifinal against Alexander Zverev with a hamstring issue last month, and lost in the Qatar Open first round last week. The 37-year-old said that he "played without pain" in Doha, but his disappointing display raised concerns among fans that he would not play in the Southern California event. "A legend returns to the desert," the tournament wrote on X yesterday, quieting concerns about whether he would play.

322 Notices

IN THE HIGH COURT OF MALAYA AT JINJIB BARU
COMPANIES (WINDING-UP)
NR. JA-28862-21-02/2025

IN THE MATTER OF HADHARI RESOURCES SDN BHD Company No. 200301015223 (17643-H)

Between
SOUTHERN PREM SDN BHD (Company No. 58886-H) ...Petitioner

And
HADHARI RESOURCES SDN BHD (Company No. 200301015223 (17643-H)) ...Respondent

ADVERTISEMENT OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a petition for the winding-up of the abovementioned company by the High court was on 07.02.2025 presented by the said company and that the said petition is directed to be heard before the Court sitting at Jember Bahru, Johor at 9.00 o'clock in the morning, on the 08.04.2025, and any creditor or contributor of the said company desiring to support or oppose the making of an order on the said petition may appear at the time of hearing by himself or his counsel for that purpose, and a copy of the petition will be furnished to any creditor or contributor of the said company requiring the same by the undersigned on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

The Petitioner's address is at B-05 & B-06, Plaza Kelana Jaya, Jalan SS7/13B, Kelana Jaya, 47301 Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

The Petitioner's solicitors are Messrs Chor Pee Anwarul & Company, Advocates & Solicitors at Bangunan Rasheed-Chor Pee, No. 64 (First & Second Floor), Susur 1, Jalan Tun Abdul Razak, 60800 Ibrahim International Business District, Johor.

Sgd
Messrs Chor Pee Anwarul & Company

NOTES: Any person who intends to appear on the hearing of the said petition must serve on or send by post to the abovementioned Messrs Chor Pee Anwarul & Company, Advocates & Solicitors at Bangunan Rasheed-Chor Pee, No. 64 (First & Second Floor), Susur 1, Jalan Tun Abdul Razak, 60800 Ibrahim International Business District, Johor, solicitor for the Petitioner.

Dated 25 February 2025

LEE PENG LOON
Liquidator

322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT 2016 SECTION 458
NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING OF COMPANY AND CREDITORS
IN THE MATTER OF SOUTH SEA ENTERPRISE SDN. BHD.
199201006031 (237535-D) (In Members' Voluntary Winding Up)

NOTICE OF FINAL MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT A Final Meeting of South Sea Enterprise Sdn Bhd be convened pursuant to Section 459(1)(b) of the Companies Act 2016 will be held at 51-21-A Menara BHL Bank, Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah, 10050 Georgetown, Penang on Tuesday, 25 March 2025 at 9.30am for the following purposes:

AGENDA

1. To receive the Liquidator's Statement of Accounts and explanations that may be given by the Liquidator.
2. To resolve that the books, accounts and documents of the Company and of the Liquidator, be and/or destroyed at the expiration of five (5) years after the Company has been dissolved.

Dated 25 February 2025

LEE PENG LOON
Liquidator

322 Notices

COMPANIES ACT 2016 SECTION 458
NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING OF COMPANY AND CREDITORS
DOLOMITE PROPERTIES SDN. BHD.
(IN CREDITORS' VOLUNTARY LIQUIDATION)
[Registration No.: 197301001815 (15302-U)]

NOTICE is hereby given that a meeting of the company and the creditors will be held at Me.Reka, Lot 1A-3, Level G1 (below Publika's Eat Food Village), Publika Shopping Gallery, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, on the 7 March 2025 at 2.30 p.m.

AGENDA

1. To lay before the meeting an account of the Liquidators' acts and dealings and of the conduct of the winding up from 8 December 2022 to 7 December 2023 and 8 December 2023 to 7 December 2024 as required under section 458(1) of The Companies Act, 2016.

Dated this 25th day of February, 2025

Dato' Adam Primus Varghese bin Abdullah
Mazpersion Anak Simon
LIQUIDATORS

No signature is required

NOTE:
1) A member or creditor who is unable to attend may wish to appoint another person as representative of the said member or creditor provided that a letter of authorization by the member or creditor is produced to the Liquidator on the day of the meeting.

322 Notices

COMPANIES ACT 2016 SECTION 458
NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING OF COMPANY AND CREDITORS
DOLOMITE INDUSTRIES COMPANY SDN. BHD.
(IN CREDITORS' VOLUNTARY LIQUIDATION)
[Registration No.: 19590100157 (15045-K)]

NOTICE is hereby given that a meeting of the company and the creditors will be held at Me.Reka, Lot 1A-3, Level G1 (below Publika's Eat Food Village), Publika Shopping Gallery, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, on the 7 March 2025 at 3.30 p.m.

AGENDA

1. To lay before the meeting an account of the Liquidators' acts and dealings and of the conduct of the winding up from 8 December 2022 to 7 December 2023 and 8 December 2023 to 7 December 2024 as required under section 458(1) of The Companies Act, 2016.

Dated this 25th day of February, 2025

Dato' Adam Primus Varghese bin Abdullah
Mazpersion Anak Simon
LIQUIDATORS

No signature is required

NOTE:
1) A member or creditor who is unable to attend may wish to appoint another person as representative of the said member or creditor provided that a letter of authorization by the member or creditor is produced to the Liquidator on the day of the meeting.

322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF TWIN STARS AGENCIES SDN. BHD.
(In Members' Voluntary Winding-up)

NOTICE OF FINAL MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT pursuant to Section 459(1) of the Companies Act, 2016, the Final Meeting of the Members of the abovementioned Company will be held at Suite 1.00A, Level 11B, Akademi Etiga, 23, Jalan Melaka, 50100 Kuala Lumpur on Thursday, 27th March 2025 at 11.00 a.m. for the following purposes:-

AGENDA

1. To receive and consider the Liquidator's Final Account showing how the winding-up has been conducted and to receive any explanations thereof; and
2. To resolve, under Section 518(3)(b) of the Companies Act, 2016, that the books, accounts and documents of the Company shall be destroyed after the expiration of 3 months from the date of the dissolution of the company.

(Signed)
TAN TENG MAN
(Liquidator)
Dated: 25th February 2025

Note : A member entitled to attend and vote at the above meeting may appoint a proxy to attend and vote on their behalf and such proxy need not be a member of the Company. Proxy form will be sent by or may be obtained from the Liquidator. The instrument appointing a proxy must be lodged with the Liquidator at Suite 1.00, Level 11B, Akademi Etiga, 23, Jalan Melaka, 50100 Kuala Lumpur not less than 48 hours before the time set for holding the meeting.

322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF CHIP LOONG SHARK'S FIN SEAFOOD SDN. BHD.
(In Members' Voluntary Winding-up)

NOTICE OF FINAL MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT pursuant to Section 459(1) of the Companies Act, 2016, the Final Meeting of the Members of the abovementioned Company will be held at Suite 1.00A, Level 11B, Akademi Etiga, 23, Jalan Melaka, 50100 Kuala Lumpur on Thursday, 27th March 2025 at 2.00 p.m. for the following purposes:-

AGENDA

1. To receive and consider the Liquidator's Final Account showing how the winding-up has been conducted and to receive any explanations thereof; and
2. To resolve, under Section 518(3)(b) of the Companies Act, 2016, that the books, accounts and documents of the Company shall be destroyed after the expiration of 3 months from the date of the dissolution of the company.

(Signed)
TAN PENG SAM @
CHENG PENG SAM
(Liquidator)
Dated: 25th February 2025

Note : A member entitled to attend and vote at the above meeting may appoint a proxy to attend and vote on their behalf and such proxy need not be a member of the Company. Proxy form will be sent by or may be obtained from the Liquidator. The instrument appointing a proxy must be lodged with the Liquidator at Suite 1.00, Level 11B, Akademi Etiga, 23, Jalan Melaka, 50100 Kuala Lumpur not less than 48 hours before the time set for holding the meeting.

PSG sink Lyon to stay unbeaten

ACHRAF HAKIMI scored twice and Ousmane Dembele kept up his remarkable recent form in front of goal as Paris Saint-Germain won 3-2 away to Lyon yesterday to maintain their unbeaten record in Ligue 1 this season.

All the goals were scored in the second half, with Hakimi opening the scoring on 53 minutes and Dembele doubling PSG's lead just before the hour mark.

Rayan Cherki pulled one back for the hosts late on to potentially set up a grandstand finish, only for Hakimi to strike again. Corentin Tolisso then grabbed a second for Lyon in stoppage time.

PSG have won 18, drawn five and lost none of 23 domestic league outings this season and are a huge 13 points clear of nearest chasers Marseille at the top of the table.

They have not lost a domestic game this season and have not been beaten at all by French opposition since a 3-1 defeat at home to Toulouse last May.

"The team has really grown in terms of character. We showed great emotional and physical control," said PSG coach Luis Enrique.

"Our idea has been to play attacking football from the start. We look for players to offer fans not only victories and titles but also an attractive way of playing," he said.

"Today the team has continued to improve. In terms of personality, the team has grown in a match that became tense, the second half was wonderful in terms of emotional and physical control."

His team next face fourth-tier Saint-Brieuc in Brittany in the French Cup quarterfinals on Thursday (4.10am Malaysian time), before hosting Lille in Ligue 1 at the weekend.

That will be followed by the home leg of their Champions League last-16 showdown with English Premier League leaders Liverpool on Thursday, March 6 (4am).

Lyon, meanwhile, remain sixth but have now lost two of their four matches under new coach Paulo Fonseca.

This result is a blow to their hopes of qualifying for next season's Champions League as they now sit five points adrift of the top four.

"It is not easy against PSG because they are so strong," Fonseca admitted. — AFP/Agencies

Napoli concede Scudetto lead to Inter

NAPOLI conceded top spot in Serie A to Inter Milan ahead of this weekend's title showdown in Naples after falling to a shock 2-1 defeat at promoted Como yesterday.

Antonio Conte's team are a point behind reigning champions Inter, who narrowly beat Genoa on Saturday, due to Assane Diao's drilled winner in the 77th minute for Como.

Inter visit next in a match which could well be crucial to the destination of the Scudetto, while Atalanta lurk a further two points back after smashing Empoli 5-0 with Ademola Lookman netting a brace after his penalty row with coach Gian Piero Gasperini.

And Napoli head into that fixture in their worst form of the season, with no wins and just three points from their four matches in February.

"What we need to think about is our

performance in the second half. We left our desire in the dressing room," said Conte to DAZN.

"In the second half it was like there was another team on the pitch. We were passive... There are mental steps that we have to make and we also need time. But the second half wasn't good enough, neither the approach nor the mentality.

"They had more hunger than us, and when that's the case there's not a lot you can do."

Napoli shot themselves in the foot in the seventh minute when Amir Rrahmani passed the ball into his own net from miles out, but the away side looked to be on the way to a win when Giacomo Raspadori slotted home the leveller 10 minutes later.

But Diao's third goal in as many games decided an entertaining match at Como's lakeside

Stadio Giuseppe Sinigaglia and put Cesc Fabregas' team seven points above the relegation zone in 13th place.

The U-21 Spanish international has scored five times since signing from Real Betis in January, one of a host of winter signings for wealthy Como.

Lookman scored two classy goals as Atalanta shot themselves right back into the title race, but the Nigeria forward seemed unconvinced about suggestions his spat with Gasperini was over.

Gasperini angered Lookman after Tuesday's Champions League elimination by Club Brugge by calling his star attacker the worst penalty taker he had ever seen.

Asked by *Sky Sport* if the row was behind him, Lookman shrugged his shoulders and said "finished?," fuelling rumours of an exit in the summer. — AFP

Real maintain title charge

Modric, Vinicius strike to keep Madrid on par with Barcelona

LUKA MODRIC scored a brilliant goal from long range to help Real Madrid secure a 2-0 win against Girona on Sunday which took them back level with Barcelona at the top of La Liga.

Vinicius Junior wrapped up the win late on as Carlo Ancelotti's side produced a solid display at the Santiago Bernabeu.

After rivals Barcelona and Atletico Madrid, now third, both won on Saturday, the pressure was on for the champions in the extremely tight title race.

Madrid had not won in their prior three league games but flexed their muscles by thrashing Man City in the Champions League in midweek.

"It's a very important win, we have to stay in the fight," Modric told *Real Madrid TV*.

"We can't let our level slip and consider ourselves satisfied, we can still grow as a team."

The Croatian's goal was the highlight of the match.

"I was by myself, I controlled the ball, I hit it well and it went in," Modric added.

"I don't know if it's one of the most spectacular I've scored, it was really nice, it's always special to score at the Bernabeu."

Madrid were without

suspended England international Jude Bellingham after his red card the previous weekend.

Last year's surprise title contenders Girona were hard for Madrid to break down but far less threatening in attack than at their fluent best.

Paulo Gazzaniga saved well from Kylian Mbappe and Vinicius let a good attacking opportunity break down instead of looking for his French strike partner.

Girona winger Viktor Tsygankov should have struck for the visitors but blazed a good opportunity over the bar, snatching at his shot.

With the game trickling towards half-time, Modric sent Madrid ahead with a rocket from distance.

The 39-year-old midfielder controlled the ball after a corner was cleared into his path and hammered a superb strike beyond the helpless Gazzaniga.

"Modric is a gift for football, he should continue as long as he wants," Ancelotti told reporters.

"What he does, he does very well, we've been lucky

to have a legend with us."

Madrid had further chances to extend their lead in the second half, with Vinicius clipping the crossbar with a curling effort from the edge of the box.

Gazzaniga made a fine save to thwart Mbappe after the former Paris Saint-Germain star controlled a dropping ball brilliantly.

Eventually Mbappe fed Vinicius with a perfectly-weighted pass for the second goal, which the Brazilian brushed past the Girona goalkeeper.

David Alaba started for *Los Blancos* for the first time in over a year after a severe knee injury.

"It's very important win for us, we are very happy, it's a good moment for us," the Austrian defender told *Real Madrid TV*.

"I am very, very happy, after the injury, I was ready to start this game."

Girona coach Michel Sanchez said his side, 12th, were bound to struggle against the European champions.

"Real Madrid know every point is vital and coming here at this point of the season is hard," said Sanchez. — AFP



Girona's Ladislav Krejci (left) in action with Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe. — REUTERS/IC

Relentless Bayern stay eight points clear

BAYERN MUNICH re-established their eight-point lead at the top of the Bundesliga with a deserved 4-0 victory over Eintracht Frankfurt yesterday.

France star Michael Olise broke the deadlock before the break, Japanese defender Hiroki Ito doubled the lead after an hour and Jamal Musiala capped another inspirational display with a beautiful late third.

It was no less than Musiala deserved as the architect of a key victory that keeps Bayern clear at the top and a step closer to regaining their Bundesliga crown.

Late substitutes Kingsley Coman and Serge

Gnabry combined in injury time with Gnabry adding a fourth to put the icing on the cake.

Bayern have won seven of their eight league games since the turn of the year, drawing just once, at champions Bayer Leverkusen, the previous weekend.

Bayern went into yesterday's game with Thomas Muller in attack as the German veteran deputised for Harry Kane, who came off the bench for the first time in his Bundesliga career after only making it through the first half of Bayern's midweek Champions League game against Celtic.

Eintracht are still adjusting to life without Omar Marmoush, winning only two of their six league games since the Egyptian's January departure to Manchester City, and have fallen off the pace at the top.

Bayern boss Vincent Kompany lauded his team's "hungry" after Eintracht only mustered two shots on target at the Allianz Arena.

"Now we have won but we will stay calm as we did the last few days (after the draws against Leverkusen and Celtic in the Champions League)," Kompany told a press conference.

"The couple of days leading into the game we

welt felt the team was sharper. There were a lot of reasons for us to get a result today.

"The intensity from both sides was pretty high from the start and we managed to tilt the game in our favour. The players showed they were hungry.

"The effort, the enthusiasm — it was all there. Our aim is always to bring that onto the pitch. And now we go calmly into the next game, where we want to win again."

Bayern veteran Thomas Muller added: "We sense how games are going and how it feels. At this stage of the season, it's only the results that count." — AFP/Agencies

Three Premier League talking points

LIVERPOOL took a huge step towards winning a record-equalling 20th English title as the Premier League leaders took advantage of Arsenal's costly defeat.

Bruno Fernandes wasn't happy despite troubled Manchester United's fightback to draw with Everton.

Southampton, Leicester and Ipswich suffered heavy defeats in a relegation fight that looks increasingly destined to end in failure for all three.

Here's a look at three talking points from the weekend's action:

Liverpool title march gathers pace

A weekend that offered the chance for Arsenal to close to within five points at the top, with a game in hand to come, ended with Liverpool 11 clear and storming towards the title.

The Gunners relieved any building pressure on the leaders with a shock 1-0 home defeat against West Ham, realistically waiving goodbye to their hopes of a first title in 21 years.

After dropping points at Everton and Aston Villa in recent weeks, Liverpool did not make the same mistake as Mohamed Salah inspired an impressive 2-0 win at spluttering Manchester City.

Liverpool twice missed out on the title to City by a solitary point during Jurgen Klopp's time in charge.

The German appeared an impossible act to follow at the beginning of the season, but Arne Slot has made a seamless transition to lead the Reds to the brink of a first top-flight crown since 2020.

Bruno urges United to lift standards

Bruno Fernandes urged Manchester United to "demand more" from themselves after Ruben Amorim's side dodged a bullet in Saturday's 2-2 draw at Everton.

Despite their escape act, Amorim's men are languishing in 15th place amid one of the worst seasons in the club's history.

United captain Fernandes called on his teammates to solve the crisis by dragging more intensity and focus from their performances.

"Every point now is massive for us because we are in a position that is very tough for us, that we shouldn't be and unfortunately every point counts for us at the moment," he said.

"We need to be aware that the position we are in is not the best. It's not where this club has to be, so we need to demand more from ourselves, understanding that we need every point in the league from now on every game we have ahead."

Relegation looms for promoted trio

Just 10 months ago, Leicester and Ipswich were celebrating automatic promotion to the Premier League, while Southampton were able to join them in the top-flight after beating Leeds in the playoff final.

The optimism engendered by those achievements has long since dissipated after woeful campaigns for a trio in grave danger of an immediate return to the second tier.

Southampton's 4-0 home defeat against south-coast rivals Brighton left them 13 points from safety with just 12 games left.

Third-bottom Ipswich and second-bottom Leicester are both five points from safety.

The pair's survival hopes took a big dent on Saturday when fourth-bottom Wolves enjoyed a surprise 1-0 win at high-flying Bournemouth.

AFP

Best season ever, says Salah

BY CARL MARKHAM

MOHAMED SALAH says his current record-breaking season with Liverpool is his favourite as the forward continues his incredible form to set new landmarks almost every week.

A man-of-the-match performance in the 2-0 win at Manchester City, which extended the club's lead at the top of the table to 11 points, saw him become the first player in Premier League history to score and assist in both games against the reigning champions in the same season.

He has now scored and assisted in 11 Premier League matches this season, the most by a player in a single season in one of Europe's big five leagues since Lionel Messi for Barcelona in 2014-15 (11).

In scoring the opener at the Etihad Stadium

he took his tally to 30 for the campaign, 25 of which have been in the League, and moved level with Gordon Hodgson in joint-third in the club's all-time goalscorers list with 241.

Asked if he was playing better than ever, Salah told *Sky Sports*: "I don't know. It is opinion. Maybe people prefer my first seasons or now but I prefer now because winning the League, helping the young players, it is special."

The Egypt international is entering the final four months of his contract with no sign yet that an extension will be agreed.

But that has not impinged on the 32-year-old's form as the quest for a second Premier League title, plus having a Carabao Cup final to contest and a last-16 tie against Paris St-Germain next month, is driving him on to greater heights.

"We need another title. Me and the big

guys in the team, we need another title," he added of the desire of the likes of him and fellow senior players Virgil van Dijk, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Andy Robertson and Allison Becker to double their tally of Premier League winners' medals.

Head coach Arne Slot admits he struggles to describe Salah's achievements, although he prefers to take an all-round view of the player's contribution.

"The numbers speak for themselves," he said, "What pleased me most is that mostly we have more ball possession."

"It's not so easy for an attacker if he has to defend, defend, defend and then gets the ball and has to do something special."

"That's sometimes difficult but at the moment not many things seem difficult for Mo." – The Independent

Howe bizarre *Newcastle boss reveal love-hate relationship with football after Forest scare*

BY DAMIAN SPELLMAN

EDDIE HOWE revealed his love-hate relationship with football management after emerging from Newcastle's nail-biting 4-3 Premier League victory over Nottingham Forest.

The 47-year-old stood on the sideline at St. James' Park yesterday as the Magpies climbed into the top five and to within three points of third-placed Forest on a day when his side conceded an early goal, raced into a 4-1 lead and then almost threw two points away.

Asked afterwards about his emotions, Howe said: "It's probably why I do love management, even though I hate it at the same time in moments."

"The elation which you feel for a split-second on some of the performance in that first half, the pride you see in the players doing well is then counteracted with all the feelings that the supporters feel, really, watching that game."

"You feel you have control on the sideline, but the reality is it's very difficult to influence the game in the way that you want to, so yes, a bit of love and hate in there."

"But ultimately again taking the bigger picture, we've won the game, as difficult as that second half was."

If Newcastle were stung by Callum Hudson-Ódoi's sixth-

minute opener, they did not dwell on it and responded in remarkable fashion, scoring four times inside 11 minutes to lead 4-1.

Lewis Miley started the ball rolling before Jacob Murphy and Alexander Isak twice beat

Matz Sels, the first of the Sweden international's goals coming from a penalty awarded for handball against Ola Aina after lengthy VAR review.

Nikola Milenkovic reduced the deficit with 27 minutes remaining and Forest passed up a series of further chances before substitute Ryan Yates stabbed home in the final minute of normal time to increase the tension at St James' Park, but ultimately to no avail.

Asked if a Champions League place is now the Magpies' to lose, a guarded Howe said: "I think there's a host of teams that will have that feeling."

"We're in there fighting and I back us if we're fighting and showing our best qualities, as we did in that first half."

"We'll hopefully be there towards the end fighting and competing for that place, but nothing is guaranteed. It's such a competitive league this year and you can see that from our recent home games."

Opposite number Nuno Espirito Santo also suffered contrasting emotions on Tyneside when his team repeatedly shot themselves in the foot before mounting a fightback.

The Forest boss said: "Of course we are frustrated. But even though we created huge chances, I think the big issue of this game for us in terms of analysis is these 15 minutes in which we lost the game. This is what we have to focus on."

"I'd prefer it was 10 minutes more because the momentum was there. We created chances and we were on top, so who knows, with a little bit more time, we could have got something from this game." – The Independent

City boss Guardiola defiant despite defeat

PEP GUARDIOLA insisted Manchester City were "really good" against Liverpool despite slipping to a 2-0 defeat at the Etihad.

Although they enjoyed plenty of possession, the champions appeared toothless in attack in the absence of the injured Erling Haaland.

On the contrary, the Reds were ruthless in the first half as Mohamed Salah and Dominik Szoboszlai scored the goals that put them 11 points clear at the top of the Premier League.

Guardiola, however, was defiant afterwards and defended his side's performance

"If you analyse the game today, we were really good," he said to *Sky Sports*. "We lost, and when you lose there is nothing much to say, but the way we played was really good."

When asked whether he now expected Liverpool to win the League, Guardiola could not bring himself to say yes, although he

suggested they were the only team who could lose it.

"How many points advantage for them over Arsenal? It's a lot. How many games have they lost?" he said.

When pushed as to whether he saw their rivals as champions-elect he added: "I didn't say yes."

The loss came just four days after City went out of the Champions League at Real Madrid, and Guardiola's men now face a fight to qualify for the competition next season. They stay fourth, but level on points with Newcastle below them.

However, the manager sent a warning to Liverpool that his club are on the right track to becoming a force again.

"I saw many things that this club has a bright future with the players that we have,"

he added.

"Except Kevin de Bruyne and maybe Nathan Ake, all the players are so, so young. What the club decides next for the future, there is a bright future for this club in the next years."

"Everyone knows that a part will be here next season for the older players but we have to build for the next step. There is a question of time."

"What we have done in previous seasons is good but now we are away from them."

Guardiola acknowledged his side lacked a cutting edge despite making a promising start before Salah's 14th-minute opener.

"Maybe we missed more productivity in the shots but we played against a fantastic team," he said. "Maybe at the start it was 50-50 and we could not convert." – Express Newspapers/The Independent



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Newcastle United's Lewis Miley (left) vies with Forest's Nicolas Dominguez (right). – AFP/PIC

RESULTS & STANDINGS

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE:

Manchester City 0 Liverpool 2 (Salah 14, Szoboszlai 37), **Newcastle 4** (Miley 23, Murphy 25, Isak 33-pen, 34) **Nottingham Forest 3** (Hudson-Odoi 6, Milenkovic 63, Yates 90).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	27	19	7	1	64	26	64
Arsenal	26	15	8	3	51	23	53
Nottm Forest	26	14	5	7	44	33	47
Man City	26	13	5	8	52	37	44
Newcastle	26	13	5	8	46	36	44
Bournemouth	26	12	7	7	44	30	43
Chelsea	26	12	7	7	48	36	43
Aston Villa	27	11	9	7	39	41	42
Brighton	26	10	10	6	42	38	40
Fulham	26	10	9	7	38	35	39
Brentford	26	11	4	11	47	42	37
Tottenham	26	10	3	13	53	38	33
Crystal Palace	26	8	9	9	31	32	33
Everton	26	7	10	9	29	33	31
Man Utd	26	8	6	12	30	37	30
West Ham	26	8	6	12	30	47	30
Wolves	26	6	4	16	36	54	22
Ipswich	26	3	8	15	24	54	17
Leicester	26	4	5	17	25	59	17
Southampton	26	2	3	21	19	61	9

LA LIGA: Athletic Bilbao 7 (Jauregizar 10, Nico Williams 35, 66, Sannadi 43, Sancet 45+2, Guruzeta 69, Inaki Williams 87) **Valladolid 1** (Sylla 47), **Real Madrid 2** (Modric 41, Viničius 83) **Girona 0, Getafe 1** (Mayoral 82) **Real Betis 2** (Isco 18, 77-pen), **Real Sociedad 3** (Zakharina 12, Kubo 48, Olayinka 80) **Leganes 0**.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	25	17	3	5	67	25	54
Real Madrid	25	16	6	3	54	23	54
A. Madrid	25	15	8	2	42	16	53
A. Bilbao	25	13	9	3	44	22	48
Villarreal	25	12	8	5	48	35	44
R. Vallecana	25	9	8	8	27	26	35
Real Betis	25	9	8	8	32	32	35
Real Sociedad	25	10	4	11	23	23	34

SERIE A: Como 2 (Rahmani 7-og, Diaio 77) **Napoli 1** (Raspadori 17), **Empoli 0** **Atalanta 5** (Gyasi 27-og, Retegui 33, Lookman 43, 55, Zappacosta 74), **Cagliari 0** **Juventus 1** (Vlahovic 12), **Verona 1** (Bernede 90+4) **Fiorentina 0**.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter Milan	26	17	6	3	59	24	57
Napoli	26	17	5	4	42	21	56
Atalanta	26	16	6	4	59	26	54
Juventus	26	12	13	1	43	21	49
Lazio	26	14	5	7	47	34	47
Fiorentina	26	12	6	8	41	28	42
AC Milan	25	11	8	6	37	26	41
Bologna	25	10	11	4	38	31	41

BUNDESLIGA: RB Leipzig 2 (Openda 45+2, Sesko 64-pen) **Heidenheim 2** (Hionsak 6, Pieringer 13-pen), **Bayern Munich 4** (Olise 45+2, Ito 61, Musiala 83, Gnabry 90+2) **Eintracht Frankfurt 0, Hoffenheim 1** (Orban 74) **Stuttgart 1** (Woltemade 9).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
B. Munich	23	18	4	1	69	19	58
B. Leverkusen	23	14	8	1	51	27	50
E. Frankfurt	23	12	6	5	49	33	42
Freiburg	23	12	3	8	34	36	39
Mainz	23	11	5	7	37	24	38
RB Leipzig	23	10	8	5	38	31	38
Stuttgart	23	10	6	7	41	34	36
Wolfsburg	23	9	7	7	46	37	34

FRENCH LIGUE 1: Nantes 3 Lens 1, Le Havre 1 Toulouse 4, Nice 2 Montpellier 0, Strasbourg 0 Brest 0, Lyon 2 Paris Saint-Germain 3.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Paris SG	23	18	5	0	62	22	59
Marseille	23	14	4	5	50	29	46
Nice	23	12	7	4	46	27	43
Lille	23	11	8	4	38	23	41
Monaco	23	12	4	7	45	31	40
Lyon	23	10	6	7	42	30	36
Strasbourg	23	9	7	7	37	32	34
Lens	23	9	6	8	26	25	33

Sawda's golden ride inspires Izzah Izzati

NATIONAL women's track cycling champion Nurul Izzah Izzati Mohd Asri is ready to take on the challenge of winning the 1km time trial event after junior athlete Sawda Hasbullah's "golden" ride at the 2025 Asian Track Cycling Championships (ACT).

Nurul Izzah Izzati said the 17-year-old athlete's achievement has fueled her enthusiasm to perform even better as a senior athlete in the elite category of the event scheduled for tomorrow.

On Sunday, Sawda created a sensation when she broke the Asian women's junior record for the 1km time trial event to win the first gold for the national junior track cycling squad by recording one minute 10.818 seconds (s), thus cracking the record set by Taiwanese athlete Liu Shang Ying (1:12.722s) in the qualifying round.

"I want to do my best because my junior (Sawda) also managed to record 1:10 minutes so I wouldn't do it the other way around... hopefully I can better the record

since I'm a senior athlete.

"Whatever it is, it's a morale booster for me because we've helped each other before. If she joins the elite athletes, she will definitely be a good competitor and we will be able to continue moving forward," she said when met.

The Kedah lass started the ATC 2025 campaign with flying colours when she set a new national record apart from defending the silver medal in the team sprint event, before also defending the bronze she won last year.

She is also hoping that positive results can be reflected in her mission to defend the gold medal in the keirin event that she won in the last edition.

"I have gained confidence in the sprint event so I want to come out more boldly to compete with other riders in the keirin event," she said. - Bernama



Izzah Izzati (left) and Sawda Hasbullah. - BERNAMAPIC

Muhammad Hafiz clinches Dubai bowling title

NATIONAL bowler Muhammad Hafiz Zainuddin secured his first international title of 2025 by winning the 11th Dubai International Bowling Tournament in the open division at the Dubai International Bowling Centre, Al Mamzar, UAE, on Sunday.

According to a statement from Malaysian Tenpin Bowling Congress (MTBC), the 25-year-old topped the standings after eight games with a total of 1,744 points.

He managed to edged Bahrain's Ahmed Al Mahri who scored 1,731 points while host nation bowler Hassan Al Zaabi finished third with 1,729 points and another Malaysian, Muhammad Syazirul Shamsudin was placed fifth with 1,722 points.

"Both of them competed under their own expense and only two Malaysians were at the championship in Dubai. Meanwhile, Rafiq Ismail, Ahmad Muaz and Tun Hakim are at home preparing to join Timmy Tan at the PBA World Series of Bowling.

"The trio will leave for USA on Feb 27. They will be in USA for a month competing in the World Series of Bowling in Reno, USA while another national youth athlete, Airel Amri Suhaimi will also compete in the WSOB," the statement read. - Bernama

High hopes of winning

Waterskier Aaliyah aims for the podium at UWC

MALAYSIA waterskier Aaliyah Young Hanifah is aiming to start the 2025 season with a bang by winning a medal at the International Waterski & Wakeboard Federation (IWWF) University World Championships (UWC) will begin tomorrow in Auckland, New Zealand.

The 21-year-old, who took a five-month break from competitions to pursue her studies and sit for her second year exams in the university, is optimistic of claiming podium finishes at the scenic Orakei Basin located in downtown Auckland.

Aaliyah said she continued her training in the past months at her base where she is pursuing her studies in the Florida Southern College despite not competing in tournaments.

"I have been training well despite the lack of competitions. I feel very charged up and raring to go in the competition participated by 78 athletes from 18 countries.

"My targets are podium results in jump, tricks and overall. If I can land a top of the podium spot in one of them it will be the icing on the cake," she said in a statement issued by the Malaysian Waterski & Wakeboard Federation (MWWF).

The last world events that Aaliyah had won medals was during the 2022 World Games in Alabama, USA where she bagged a bronze in women's tricks and the 2023 U21 World Championships in Chapala, Mexico where she clinched a bronze in women's jump.

Her current personal best (PB) of 8,450 points in tricks is also an Asian record, while her PBs for

jump and slalom events are 48.3m and 4.5/12/55, respectively.

Meanwhile, national head coach Hanifah Young said 2025 will be a crucial year for his charges as the sport will be returning to the SEA Games in Thailand in December and the 2027 edition in Malaysia.

"The MWWF had proposed a comprehensive training and competition programme to prepare the national athletes for both these SEA Games.

"We have only entered Aaliyah in the University Worlds, but will send more athletes to the Asian Championships that will be held in Bangkok in June as well as the World Championships that is scheduled in August in Recetto, Italy this year," he said. - Bernama

Overwhelming turnout at Selangor Asics Pickleball Open 2025



Team event champions 002 East-West.

THE Selangor Asics Pickleball Open was a smashing success. A total of 267 players participated in the two-day tournament held on Feb 15-16 at the Dink2 courts in Petaling Jaya.

The competition featured a team event covering men's doubles open, men's doubles (combined age 90+), mixed doubles (combined age 80+), and women's doubles (combined age 70+).

Additionally, men's and women's novice singles categories were introduced to encourage new players to experience competitive play.

In the singles division, Connie Chan emerged victorious in the women's category while on the men's side, Danny Tan claimed the top spot.

The team event saw 002 East-West dominate the competition, taking home the championship title. DINKIT secured second place, MYP SJ finished third, and Dink Dongs placed fourth. Each team featured six to eight players competing across different subcategories - men's doubles open, men's doubles, mixed doubles, and women's doubles.

Adding to the excitement, Dato' Mirwan Nawawi, Malaysia's national hockey legend, made a special appearance and showcased his newfound passion for pickleball. His team delivered an impressive performance, securing second place in the competition.

As part of the tournament, Asics introduced its latest pickleball innovation - the Asics GEL-DEDICATE™ 8 PB, a shoe designed to offer players superior stability and flexibility on the court.

The competition was co-organised by LinkedUp Asia Sdn. Bhd., the leading pickleball tournament organiser in Malaysia, alongside the State Government of Selangor and Asics Malaysia. This event is part of Asics Malaysia's ongoing efforts to showcase elite talent and encourage grassroots participation in the sport.

For Melina Hwang, Founder of LinkedUp Asia, the overwhelming turnout at the Open is further proof of the sport's rapid growth in Malaysia, particularly in Selangor.

"We were confident that the Selangor Asics Pickleball Open would be well-received, but we were still amazed by the enthusiastic support we received," said Melina.

"It speaks to the ever-growing popularity of pickleball in Malaysia and the undeniable passion of the community. We hope to build on this momentum and organise bigger and better tournaments moving forward."

A total prize pool of over RM15,000, including Asics shoes, was awarded to winners across all categories, adding to the excitement of the competition.



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It ain't over till it's over

Slot refuses to believe Premier League title in Liverpool's hands

BY CARL MARKHAM

LIVERPOOL head coach Arne Slot refused to consider the prospect that the Premier League title was theirs to lose after a 2-0 victory over Manchester City sent his side 11 points clear at the top.

First half goals from Mohamed Salah, his 30th of the season, and Dominik Szoboszlai were followed by a disciplined defensive performance after the break to secure a first League victory at the Etihad Stadium since November 2015.

Although second-placed Arsenal have a match in hand, Slot's team would have to lose three times - they have suffered one League defeat all season - in their last 11 matches to even offer the chance of being overtaken, and then only if Mikel Arteta's side were able to win every game.

But Slot is refusing to look beyond Wednesday's (Thurs 4.15am Malaysian time) visit of Newcastle despite joyous fans singing about winning the League at the final whistle.

"The fans can sing whatever they want, but we know as a team how hard we have to work for every single win," he said.

"It is only three days ago someone asked me if we had a dip on Wednesday (in a 2-2 draw with Aston Villa). I don't believe that as well as I'm calm now about this win.

"You can ask every single question you want, but it is so hard to judge the League table before every single game is played.

"In my opinion, Villa and City away (Liverpool's last two matches) are two very difficult games so you can drop points there.

"In every other league having a lead like this would be very comfortable - except for this one because this League every single game gives you a lot of challenges."

Slot did admit, however, the long-awaited League win at City - something predecessor Jurgen Klopp never managed against Pep Guardiola - felt important.

"If you play away at the Etihad and win it is always a big win, no matter what the League table looks like because if you play away against a Pep team it is almost impossible to have more ball possession than his team has," he added.

"We knew we had to defend a lot and that is what we did really well and there were some good moments in the counter-attack that went for us in the game."

Slot was asked whether, in his maiden season, he ever envisaged being in this position.

"No, because you never think like that. If you start somewhere you don't think where you are (going to be) in terms of points at the end of the season," he said.

"What we do know is no-one saw us a title contender when we started in the beginning of the season and I think no-one in the world of football expected City not to be so close to the one that leads the League if they are not the one that leads the League.

"Two years ago Liverpool played Champions League and wanted to compete for the League and that was difficult and

they ended up sixth.

"Last season they were in the Europa League and were competing until five, six, seven or eight games before the end.

"What I was curious was about can we do both? Until now we are doing quite a good job in both competitions, but also we have quite a difficult draw in the Champions League (against Paris St-Germain)."

Goalscorer Szoboszlai also downplayed the jubilant chants from the Liverpool away end that they're "gonna win the League".

Despite his goal and assist yesterday, Szoboszlai said he did not hear the supporters' songs because he was so tired at the Etihad.

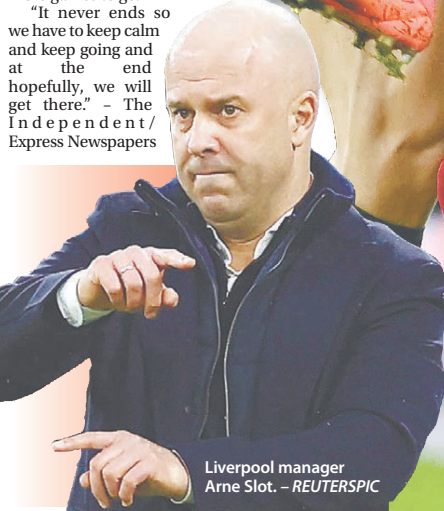
And he emphasised the urgency to focus on their next fixture against Newcastle United in midweek.

With the title race heating up, asked

about the Liverpool fans' song, he remarked: "I didn't hear it, I was so tired!

"We have to keep going and Newcastle is going to be a tough game and then 11 more games to go.

"It never ends so we have to keep calm and keep going and at the end hopefully, we will get there." - The Independent / Express Newspapers



Liverpool manager Arne Slot. - REUTERS/SPIC



Return of the king



Story on page 28

Real maintain title charge



Story on page 29

Man City's Josko Gvardiol (left) tussles with Liverpool's Mohamed Salah during their English Premier League match yesterday. - AFP/IC.



Howe bizarre

Story on page 30