

theSun

WEDNESDAY
APR 2, 2025

Malaysian Paper

www.thesun.my RM1.00 PER COPY

No. 8748 PP 2644/12/2012 (031195)

RM1



Gas leak fireball

Multiple blasts, colossal
blaze damage 49 houses,
injure 112 residents.

Report on > page 5

A breach in the pipeline caused a raging pillar of flames several storeys high that burned for more than six hours in Putra Heights. — ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THE SUN

theSun

We are now a 7-day Paper

starting from **April 2025**, featuring the latest news and trends.
Get local, world, business, entertainment & sports stories in 32 Full Colour pages

Sports
Blues end winless run

Biz & Finance
'Malaysia can become SE Asia supply chain hub'

Motoring
Marmalade-fuelled jungle adventure

Entertainment
Mbappe ready for Real

Finding the best newspaper subscription deal is no longer an arduous task.
Subscribe now to theSun, delivered to your doorstep.





SPREADING CHEER ... Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad, who is also Kuala Selangor MP, presenting *duit raya* to children at Kampung Assam Jawa's 75th anniversary *Bara'an* (Ziarah Raya) event in Kuala Selangor. — **BERNAMAPIC**

'Use free trade pacts to boost market potential'

➤ To face any possible impact from higher US tariffs, Malaysia should not be overly dependent on one or two major trading countries, says economist

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia should take advantage of all free trade agreements to further expand market potential as an early preparatory measure to face any possible impact from the implementation of tariffs by United States (US) President Donald Trump.

Putra Business School Master of Business Administration Programme director Assoc Prof Ahmed Razman Abdul Latiff said this could ensure that Malaysia is not overly dependent on one or two major trading countries such as the US and China.

Among the free trade agreements that Malaysia has signed are the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. It is also a BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) partner country.

He said as Asean chair, Malaysia should also take the opportunity to increase trade activities within the region.

Ahmed Razman said the impact of the tariffs on Malaysia and regional countries would only become clearer today when Donald Trump announces the rates to be imposed on 15 countries with which the US has trade deficits. He said five of these are Asean countries, namely Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia.

"In the 'dirty 15' list, Malaysia is likely to be among the countries with the lowest trade surplus with the US and therefore, if the US were to impose tariffs on Malaysian goods, the rate imposed is likely to be quite low or minimal."

He added that there is still room for the Malaysian government to negotiate for an

exemption from the tariffs.

The Investment, Trade and Industry Ministry had previously said US tariffs on Mexico, Canada and China could open up opportunities for Malaysian exporters to increase production and double their exports to the US.

The ministry had said in the Dewan Negara recently that the increase in prices of products from countries subject to tariffs would make Malaysian products a more competitive market alternative.

"Investor countries are also expected to look for new investment destinations as well as competitive product sources to avoid paying high tariffs."

Ahmed Razman said the smooth running of Asean-related meetings so far would have a positive impact on the country from an economic, investment and trade perspective, Bernama reported.

He said this was evident when Bank Negara Malaysia projected a 4.5% to 5.5% economic growth for the country this year, which would be driven by increased domestic economic activity alongside the influx of foreign investments, including from Asean countries.

Modest Raya celebration by Malaysian embassy

BANGKOK: The Malaysian Embassy in Bangkok celebrated Hari Raya Aidilfitri on Monday with a modest gathering, held amid the aftermath of the recent powerful earthquake in Myanmar that caused tremors in the Thai capital.

The 7.7 magnitude earthquake, which struck Myanmar on Friday, led to the temporary closure of several high-rise buildings in Bangkok for safety reasons, including the Malaysian embassy, located on the 17th floor of Kronos Office Tower.

Charge d'Affaires ad interim of Malaysia to Thailand Bong Yik Jui said this year's celebration was particularly poignant, occurring just three days after the tremors rattled Bangkok.

As a precaution, the customary *Aidilfitri* gathering had to be relocated from the embassy premises, which remained off-limits on Monday due to ongoing safety inspections.

"Many people are still shaken and traumatised after experiencing the earthquake, so this gathering is not only timely but also an opportunity for Malaysian embassy staff to come together and find comfort in the company of friends and family," he said on Monday.

The gathering was held at Defence Attache Brig-Jen Samsul Rizal Musa's residence near here.

Around 200 guests, including representatives from the embassies of Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines, attended the gathering wearing traditional attire.

Alongside catered food, guests brought homemade Malaysian dishes such as *nasi tomato*, *lemang*, *rendang*, *ayam masak merah*, *daging masak hitam* and an assortment of *kuih raya*. — Bernama

Asean to step up aid to Myanmar

PUTRAJAYA: More support and aid from Asean member states are expected to arrive in Myanmar to assist in rescue and recovery efforts as the death toll from last week's massive quake continues to climb.

The Foreign Ministry said in a statement that as Asean chair, Malaysia is working closely with fellow member states to support Myanmar in this time of need, reflecting the bloc's collective commitment to disaster response and regional cooperation.

The Special Malaysian Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team, MAS-01, arrived in Sagaing on Monday and is currently establishing a base of operations at the Sagaing Anniversary Football Pitch.

Equipped with command posts, medical facilities, decontamination zones and rest areas, the base is fully self-sufficient for up to 14 days of operations.

The ministry said the Malaysian team is the only international search and rescue team currently operating in Sagaing. — Bernama

Pakistan, Iran keen to strengthen bilateral ties with Malaysia: PM

KUALA LUMPUR: Closer Malaysia-Pakistan relations have opened up space to explore various new collaborations involving both countries, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Anwar, who is also finance minister, said this is the result of his meeting with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in October last year.

"*Alhamdulillah*, total Pakistani investment in Malaysia has grown well and now reaches around US\$397 million (RM1.76 billion). I welcome more new investments, especially in the fields of agriculture, petrochemicals and biomass," he said in a post on his Facebook page.

In the same post, he announced that he received a phone call on Monday from Shehbaz, who discussed bilateral relations,

among other things.

"We had the opportunity to re-evaluate a previously agreed MoU related to investment, trade, education, research, development and science, with both parties agreeing to expedite any outstanding matters to realise the cooperation."

"We also had the opportunity to exchange *Aidilfitri* greetings and pray for the well-being of the people of both countries. I pray that the blessings of Ramadan and *Aidilfitri* bring blessings to the friendly relations between Malaysia and Pakistan for the well-being of the people of both countries."

Anwar said the conversation also included developments in Gaza when Israel violated the ceasefire agreement and thwarted peace efforts

through violent attacks on the Palestinian people.

"We had the opportunity to exchange views and coordinate ideas on stopping violence and rebuilding Gaza."

He said Shehbaz would be making his maiden visit to Malaysia on May 9.

In a separate post, Anwar said he also received a phone call from Iranian President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian on Monday, during which they discussed efforts to strengthen bilateral relations between Malaysia and Iran, among other things.

"We expressed our commitment to strengthening the friendly relations between the two countries, especially by enhancing investment and trade, in addition to expanding cooperation in various potential areas."

"*Alhamdulillah*, the visit of Foreign Minister

Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan to Tehran last month brought positive developments in bilateral relations and cooperation."

He added that he would expedite and facilitate all efforts to expand cooperation in the fields of investment, trade, education, research and others.

Anwar said in their conversation, he also reiterated Malaysia's appreciation for Iran's firm and consistent stance in fighting for the rights of the Palestinian people.

"This is in addition to opposing the tyranny of Israel, which is blatantly violating the ceasefire agreement and thwarting peace efforts."

"We believe that solidarity and unity among Islamic countries and citizens of the world are very important in efforts to ensure lasting justice and peace in Gaza." — Bernama

Malaysia ranks second globally in QR code use

➤ As adoption surges, experts warn of rising fraud threats and urge public to stay vigilant

■ BY DEEPALAKSHMI MANICKAM
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia has emerged as the second-highest user of QR (quick-response) codes globally, trailing only behind China, reflecting the nation's rapid move towards a cashless society.

According to a recent study by global statistics platform Data Reportal, 66.1% of the population used QR codes on a monthly basis in 2023.

The global average stood at 50.8%, with five Asian countries ranking in the top ten for QR code usage.

The study, conducted in 2024, analysed smartphone-based QR code use among individuals aged 16 and above worldwide.

While QR payments are praised for their convenience, cybersecurity experts warn that sharing personal bank QR codes online may expose users to fraud, identity theft and financial loss.

RawSEC Malaysia CyberSecurity Community public communication secretariat Emma Rahim said cybercriminals could exploit QR codes for phishing attacks, unauthorised transactions and impersonation scams.

"If a payment website has security

vulnerabilities, hackers could replace the QR code with their own, redirecting payments to fraudulent accounts," she said.

"In social media groups in which users share QR codes, even administrators could alter the codes to misdirect funds."

Emma added that hackers could extract sensitive data from bank QR codes to create fake websites or apps, tricking users into revealing login credentials and banking details.

"If scammers gain access to a victim's bank account, they can initiate fraudulent transactions," she said.

"In more advanced scams, they might transfer a small amount to the victim and follow up with a phishing email claiming the transaction is linked to illegal activities such as terrorism financing, creating panic to manipulate the victim."

Despite the risks, QR payments have become a staple at Ramadan bazaars across Malaysia, embraced by both vendors and consumers.

For intern Amir Hakim, 22, cashless payments have made shopping more convenient.

"I rarely carry cash anymore because QR payments are so convenient. Almost every stall accepts them, making it easier to buy things without worrying about small change," he said. However, Amir acknowledged the occasional frustration of technical issues.

On busy nights at the bazaar, slow internet connections can delay transactions, leading to awkward moments while waiting for confirmation.

Kuih vendor Zainab Abdullah, 52, said the transition to QR payments has been gradual but inevitable.

"In the past two to three years, QR payments have surged. Most of my customers now prefer using them," she said.

Initially hesitant, Zainab and other vendors have adapted by using QR code payment speakers that provide real-time transaction alerts.

"It gives us peace of mind because we instantly know when a payment goes through," she added.

As QR code transactions continue to grow, Emma stressed the importance of immediate action if users suspect their QR codes have been compromised.

"The first step is to contact the bank, freeze or block the account, and change the password to prevent further unauthorised access," she advised.

She also warned users to avoid downloading banking apps from unofficial sources, such as links shared via social media or messaging apps, which could contain malware designed to steal personal data.

"Only use official platforms when downloading banking apps," she said.

Although legal protections are in place to safeguard consumers, Emma stressed the need for personal responsibility.

"Users must take proactive steps, such as enabling two-factor authentication and reviewing their bank's privacy policies to ensure their accounts remain secure."

As QR payments continue to dominate the digital landscape, she urged users to balance convenience with caution.

"Convenience should not come at the cost of security. Always verify the authenticity of payment platforms and remain vigilant against unsolicited messages or emails requesting personal or financial information."



While QR payments are praised for their convenience, cybersecurity experts warn that sharing personal bank QR codes online may expose users to fraud, identity theft and financial loss.
— AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THESUN

KL Tower still govt-owned, says ministry

KUALA LUMPUR: The Communications Ministry has emphasised that the KL Tower remains the property of the government, and the recent concession acquisition only involves a change in management and operations, implemented through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

In a statement, the ministry said the RFP was conducted as an open tender for a public-private partnership project, in line with the decision of the Cabinet.

"For this purpose, the Public-Private Partnership Unit under the Prime Minister's Department implemented the RFP process and the Cabinet subsequently certified the successful bidder based on the RFP evaluation. The successful bidder was announced by the government on May 29, 2024," the statement read.

According to the ministry, it is currently monitoring the latest developments following the issue of the KL Tower concession acquisition made under a concession agreement signed by the government.

The ministry also acknowledged the filing of a writ of summons and injunction application by Menara Kuala Lumpur Sdn Bhd (MKLSB) following the appointment of the new concessionaire.

"Therefore, the government, through this ministry, will ensure that any actions taken moving forward are in accordance with the legal process. In this regard, the ministry calls on all parties to allow the legal process to proceed smoothly," the statement added.

At the same time, all parties involved, including the public, have been advised not to issue any statements or engage in actions that could interfere with the ongoing legal proceedings.

"The Communications Ministry remains committed to good governance and will ensure that this matter is dealt with appropriately," it said.

In the meantime, the concession acquisition involving the KL Tower will not affect the operations or employees at the world's tallest communication tower.

In a set of frequently asked questions (FAQ) regarding the KL Tower concession, the ministry said negotiations with the new concessionaire, LSH Service Master Sdn Bhd (LSHSM), have included terms that ensure operations continue as usual.

The FAQ also mentions all current Menara KL employees under MKLSB have been guaranteed continued employment under the new management company, LSHSM, starting April 1.

"It is based on the principle of 'no less favourable,' and this clause has been included in the concession agreement between the government and LSHSM," according to the FAQ issued by the ministry.

On the matter of why the concession was changed, the FAQ explained that the existing concession period had expired. — Bernama

Malbatt team celebrates Aidilfitri in Lebanon

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian Battalion (Malbatt) 850-12 personnel celebrated Hari Raya Aidilfitri in Lebanon in the spirit of "Truly Malaysia", reflecting harmony and kinship.

The Hari Raya gathering, held at Dewan Jun Sang, Camp Marakah in Lebanon, was further enlivened by the presence of Malaysian Ambassador to Lebanon Azri Mat Yacob and battalion commanders from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (Unifil) Western Sector.

"The presence of these important guests shows appreciation for the spirit of international collaboration in ensuring peace and stability in Lebanon," Malbatt said in a statement.

The celebration began with the firing of a traditional bamboo cannon, followed by a spread of Malaysian delicacies and traditional dishes, giving Unifil personnel from various countries the chance to enjoy Malaysian cuisine.

The event also featured cultural performances by Malbatt 850-12's arts troupe, showcasing Malaysian culture. — Bernama

'Authorities, traders must cooperate to ensure harmony'

PUTRAJAYA: Local authorities and petty traders must play their respective roles with full trust and responsibility for harmony and mutual interests, said Housing and Local Government Minister Nga Kor Ming.

He said local authorities must conduct their duties with trust and integrity, while traders must ensure compliance with the law by obtaining valid licences or permits.

"I understand that many petty traders are

working hard to earn extra income for this festive season. At the same time, local authorities must carry out their responsibilities to ensure business areas are safe and convenient for the public.

"Cooperation and mutual understanding between both parties are key to harmony. If any problems or disputes arise, we must find a rational solution to avoid incidents that may jeopardise harmony," he said in a statement.

Nga added that the ministry would continue to ensure all local authorities comply with the stipulated standard operating procedures in the enforcement process to allow business activities to run smoothly.

Earlier, a widely shared video on social media showed a scuffle between Kuala Lumpur City Hall enforcement personnel and a balloon vendor, which received widespread public response. — Bernama

Challenges persist despite growing autism awareness

► Families struggle with therapy costs, limited access to specialists, gaps in education and support systems: Expert

BY DEEPAKSHI MANICKAM
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: Raising an autistic child in Malaysia continues to pose significant financial and emotional challenges, with parents struggling to afford therapy, access specialists and secure suitable educational support.

Despite growing awareness of autism spectrum disorder, critical gaps remain in the country's healthcare, education and financial assistance systems, said Universiti Teknologi Mara Faculty of Communication and Media Studies senior lecturer Dr Mohd Yusof Zulkhefi.

He told *theSun* that the cost of autism therapy in Malaysia varies widely but is often beyond the reach of many families.

"Services such as applied behaviour analysis, speech therapy and occupational therapy typically range from RM200 to RM400 per session.

"Given that therapy is ongoing and often high-frequency, the costs place a huge financial burden on families, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds," he said in conjunction with World Autism Awareness Day today.

Mohd Yusof, who is also an expert in autism and communication, said accessibility to therapy is another major hurdle.

"There is a shortage of trained autism therapists and specialists, especially in rural areas.

"This means families may have to travel long distances or endure long waiting times. Such delays in receiving intervention can negatively impact a child's development."

Mohd Yusof said while the Health Ministry does provide some financial aid, subsidies are often inadequate.

"There are government initiatives and NGOs offering support, but many families find them insufficient and not all parents are even aware of these resources. More structured and accessible funding mechanisms are needed."

He said beyond finances, many parents face



Mohd Yusof said while there are government initiatives and NGOs offering support, many families find them insufficient and not all parents are even aware of such resources. — ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

social stigma, a lack of understanding from educators and peers as well as limited access to community support.

"Parents often express a need for better support networks and training programmes to help them manage their children's unique challenges. Without proper guidance and awareness, they often feel isolated."

He said education is another major concern for families of autistic children, adding that while some public schools in Malaysia offer special education programmes, these are far from adequate.

"Many schools lack trained teachers, proper resources and inclusive policies to fully support autistic students. Improvements in teacher training and funding for special education are urgently needed."

Parents are often forced to choose between enrolling their children in mainstream schools for social integration or sending them to special needs institutions for more specialised care.

"Each option has its pros and cons. Mainstream schools may offer better social interaction, but without the necessary support,

autistic students may struggle.

"Special needs institutions provide tailored programmes, but they may limit exposure to more diverse learning environments."

Mohd Yusof also highlighted the importance of early intervention, although barriers persist.

"Many parents, and even some healthcare providers, are unaware of early signs of autism. This, coupled with inadequate screening in hospitals and preschools, leads to late diagnoses and missed opportunities for early treatment."

He said while public awareness of autism has improved in recent years, stigma still exists and remains a barrier to full inclusivity.

"We need more education initiatives and community outreach programmes to foster understanding. Society plays a vital role in ensuring autistic individuals receive the support they need to thrive."

"With rising autism cases, there is a pressing need to improve healthcare, education and financial support to ensure every autistic child receives the care and opportunities needed to reach his full potential."

Two more youth centres to open in Johor

JOHOR BAHRU: The Tunku Mahkota Ismail Youth Centre (TMIYC) in Pasir Gudang is set to open to the public by the end of the month, while the Iskandar Puteri branch is expected to open by July.

State Youth, Sports, Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives Committee chairman Mohd Hairi Mad Shah said this would bring the total number of operational TMIYCs to five, following earlier launches in Johor Bahru, Muar and Renggam in Kluang.

"We are awaiting a date to be set by His Royal Highness the Regent of Johor Tunku Mahkota Ismail for his consent to officiate at the TMIYCs."

He added that both new centres share similar design components, with a focus on providing facilities for youth activities and recreational spaces.

Mohd Hairi also revealed that the state government plans to build another TMIYC in Tangkak, with the groundbreaking ceremony expected later this year, Bernama reported.

He said the state government is committed to establishing a TMIYC in every district as part of ongoing efforts to empower Johor youth.

"Every district will have a TMIYC. The local authorities of Pontian and Kulai have also met me to discuss this initiative."

"Construction will depend on each authority's capacity and available funding, with additional allocations to be sought from the Youth and Sports Ministry, the Housing and Local Government Ministry and other relevant agencies."

TMIYC, the brainchild of Tunku Mahkota Ismail, serves as a platform for youths to engage in recreational and leisure activities in a relaxed setting.

Over 31,000sq m of potholes in Kelantan repaired

KOTA BHARU: The Public Works Department (PWD) has repaired over 31,180sq m of potholes in Kelantan since January, said state PWD director Nik Soh Yaacoub.

He said of the total, 21,580sq m involved federal roads, while 9,600sq m covered state roads.

"When we receive reports regarding potholes, we respond immediately and carry out repairs within 24 hours to prevent any untoward incident."

Previously, Works Minister Datuk Seri Alexander Nanta Linggi issued a stern warning to all road maintenance concessionaires, urging them to fulfil their responsibilities to avoid road crashes.

He cited a tragic incident on March 21, in which two siblings were killed on the Sengkang-Felda Inas-Bandar Tenggara road in Johor.

Nanta said under PWD's asset maintenance policy, the appointed federal road concessionaire is required to carry out temporary patching within a day if road damage occurs, with permanent repairs to be completed within three days.

He said large-scale repairs require prior budget approval, which is typically allocated annually. — Bernama

Call to donate surplus Aidilfitri food to underprivileged

SEREMBAN: The Syawal festivities are a time of joy and indulgence, often marked by an array of delicious dishes.

Yet, perfectly good leftovers are frequently discarded instead of being shared or saved.

This wasted surplus food could bring joy to those in need.

Beyond preventing waste, initiatives to save such food could also help reduce landfill impact, said Negeri Sembilan Solid Waste and Public Cleansing Management Corporation (SWCorp) director Cairul Hisham Jalaluddin.

"Based on a study of waste composition in Negeri Sembilan this year, food waste, particularly surplus food, accounts for 29% to 30% of landfill waste, compared with other solid waste."

"This not only results in financial losses, but also harms the environment."

"It is crucial to continuously educate

families on the importance of proper waste management."

Cairul Hisham said SWCorp has implemented various initiatives, including the Hargai Makanan, Elakkan Pembaziran (Value Food, Avoid Waste) campaign, aimed at raising public awareness on the importance of redirecting surplus food to those in need.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi had previously said according to statistics, Malaysia disposes 8.3 million tonnes of food waste each year, equivalent to each person generating 260kg annually, with 24% still suitable for consumption.

Cairul Hisham added that environmental impact during Syawal could be reduced by limiting the use of single-use packaging and choosing recyclable alternatives such as glass

or aluminium containers.

He also stressed the importance of separating waste into organic, recyclable and general waste categories.

Proper disposal of food and kitchen waste could significantly reduce the amount of rubbish sent to landfills.

In Negeri Sembilan, 28,993.94 tonnes of waste were sent to landfills during Syawal 2023, which rose to 32,413.96 tonnes last year, an 11.8% increase.

"So, there is a possibility of another rise in waste disposal during this year's Aidilfitri celebrations if proper waste management measures are not in place."

To maintain public cleanliness during the festive season, Cairul Hisham said his team would intensify operations, with 18 enforcement personnel deployed throughout Aidilfitri. — Bernama

Residents **rocked** by gas pipeline blasts

► Tremors from explosions rattle sliding door panes as far as 2.5km away

BY DEEPALAKSHMI MANICKAM
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: A gas pipeline explosion in Jalan Putra Harmoni, Putra Heights yesterday sent tremors through the surrounding area, with loud blasts and an inferno that left residents in shock.

Many in the area were left shaken, with some initially mistaking the tremors for an earthquake.

Nur Haziqah Qisitina, 23, a resident at USJ 20 in Subang Jaya, said she was woken by panicked shouts after her brother felt the vibrations.

"I live not exactly nearby, but the noise was deafening. It had a ringing sound to it. I was asleep when it happened, so I didn't feel much. But my brother woke up to a deep rumbling and slight tremors," she told *theSun*.

When she looked outside, she was stunned by the scale of the fire.

"At first, I thought it was just a house or a tree on fire. But when I stepped outside, I realised how massive it was. The flames were as tall as a building, and the sky glowed in an eerie orange. It felt like something out of a nightmare," she said.

Minutes later, she heard a series of deafening explosions.

"That was at around 8:30am. By then, the entire neighbourhood was outside, watching. The fire had grown even bigger, and the smoke wasn't just black, it had a menacing glow. It felt unreal," she added.

Sriganesh Senderam, 36, a businessman living 2.5km away, said he never expected to feel the explosion from such a distance.

"Despite being quite far, we still felt it," he said, describing how his home shook for nearly half an hour.

"The sliding door and main door rattled continuously. The explosion was intense and when we looked outside, we saw fire in a mushroom shape, with thick smoke rising into the sky," he added.

At first, he and his family believed they were experiencing an earthquake.

"We rushed to look outside from our double-storey house and saw the fire and smoke. This has never happened before, it was completely new and terrifying," he said.

Selangor deputy police chief DCP Mohd Zaini Abu Hassan said a total of 112 individuals and 49 houses were affected by the fire.

"The 112 injured individuals involved residents of Taman Harmoni and Kampung Kuala Sungai Baharu.

"Among them, 63 were transported to hospitals in Cyberjaya, Serdang and Putrajaya for treatment due to burns, respiratory issues and other injuries.

"The remaining 49 received initial treatment at the Sri Maha Kaliyamman Temple in Subang Jaya," he told a press conference at the Fire and Rescue Department and police special operations centre yesterday.

Mohd Zaini also said two temporary evacuation centres have been set up at the Nurul Iman Mosque and the Putra Heights Mosque for the affected individuals.

Selangor Fire and Rescue Department director Wan Razali Wan Ismail said the explosion involved a gas pipeline leak spanning 500m.

He said seven individuals, including two Malaysians, were rescued at the scene.

"Due to the explosion occurring near a housing area, evacuation operations were carried out to ensure the safety of residents," he said.

A total of 78 firefighters and emergency response teams were deployed.

While the supply valve of the affected pipeline has been closed, the exact breach point has yet to be determined.

"The fire has affected several houses, posing a risk to residents. Firefighting operations are ongoing, and we will provide updates as more information becomes available," said Wan Razali.

Meanwhile, Petronas Gas Berhad confirmed that the fire broke out at its main pipeline near Putra Heights at 8:10am yesterday. The affected pipeline has since been isolated.

"The safety of the surrounding community, environment and the security of gas supply to the nation remain our utmost priority," it said in a statement, adding that Petronas retail stations in the area were not affected.



An aerial photo taken in the aftermath of the incident shows the impact of the explosions and extent of damage to the area surrounding ground-zero. — PIC FROM WHATSAPP MESSAGE

Five injured in dog attack

ALOR SETAR: Five individuals were injured after being bitten by two dogs at Taman Desa Bidara in Kuala Ketil yesterday.

Baling police chief Supt Azmi Mokhtar said the victims have yet to lodge a report as they were receiving treatment at the Sultan Abdul Halim Hospital in Sungai Petani.

"Police received information at about 5:45am about two dogs roaming the area and attacking several individuals. A team was despatched to the scene to contain the situation and speak with the owner of the dogs.

"The 69-year-old owner later confined the dogs, and was instructed to surrender them to the Kulim Veterinary Office for examination and immediate quarantine," he said in a statement yesterday.

Earlier, a video on social media showed several individuals receiving treatment and being transported by ambulance after sustaining injuries from attacks by two black dogs.

When contacted, Baling district officer Yazlan Sunardi Che Yahya confirmed receiving a complaint about the incident.

"It was reported that several individuals were injured, but the severity remains unclear. However, based on the social media images, the injuries appear quite serious. Since this is a recurring dog attack case, I have requested the Veterinary Office to conduct an investigation, and take action against the owner."

He said the local authority can only capture stray or unlicensed dogs. In this case, the animals were not strays, but domesticated dogs displaying aggressive behaviour.

"I was informed that the dogs were kept at a business premises, but were housed at the owner's residence. They reportedly escaped from their cages before attacking the victims," he added.

Yazlan added that the dogs would first be handed to the Veterinary Office, and he would discuss the matter with the owner on whether they should be placed in an animal shelter or if deemed dangerous, euthanised.

"Any action taken must follow the relevant guidelines and laws," he said. — Bernama

Family trapped by water surge rescued

IPOH: A family of seven who were trapped by a water surge while on an outing at Lata Batu Hampar in Kuala Kangsar were rescued by a team of firefighters.

Perak Fire and Rescue Department operations division assistant director Sabarodzi Nor Ahmad said a distress call was received at 3:45pm on Monday and firefighters used a utility vehicle to get to the location as the site could not be accessed by standard vehicles.

"They found the family upon arrival and determined that everyone was safe. Firefighters then set up a rescue line using two trees as anchors to span the river, which was an estimated 10 feet wide and 1.2m deep," he said in a statement.

All seven family members were able to cross the river with personal flotation devices, guided by the rescuers and were handed to police for further relief efforts. — Bernama

One dead, 14 injured in two-vehicle crash

KLUANG: A trader was killed while 14 others were injured when the cars they were travelling in collided at Km25 of Jalan Renggam-Layang-Layang here on Monday.

District police chief ACP Bahrin Mohd Noh said the deceased was identified as 29-year-old Muhammad Amiruddin Kamaluzaman, adding that the 8pm crash involved a car and an MPV.

He said a 35-year-old woman was driving

the MPV with eight passengers, aged between three and 21, while the car was driven by Muhammad Amiruddin with five passengers aged between one and 60.

"From our investigations, we found that the MPV was heading from Renggam towards Layang-Layang while the car was coming from the opposite direction," Bahrin said in a statement yesterday.

He added that the MPV driver is believed to have lost control of the vehicle and veered onto the opposite lane, resulting in a head-on collision with the car.

Muhammad Amirudin, who suffered serious injuries to his face and head, died while receiving treatment at the Enche' Besar Hajjah Khalsom Hospital in Kluang while the MPV driver and all passengers involved also received

treatment at the same hospital.

Renggam Fire and Rescue station operations commander PBK I Abdul Rahim Razali said the MPV driver was pinned in the vehicle and had to be rescued using special equipment.

"The other victims were rescued by the public. A total of 10 firefighters from the Renggam and Layang-Layang stations were involved in the operation," he added. — Bernama

FOLLOW **theSun** ON FACEBOOK

/thesundaily



SCAN ME

Penang residents brace for 60-hour **water disruption**

➤ Move to facilitate final connection works for pipeline crossing Prai River at Ampang Jajar, Central Seberang Perai: CM

■ BY T.C. KHOR

newsdesk@thesundaily.com

GEORGE TOWN: More than 341,000 water account holders across all five districts in Penang are expected to face water supply disruption of up to 60 hours, from April 25 to 28, said Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow.

The Scheduled Water Supply Interruption (SWSI) will begin at 10am on April 25, and is expected to last until 10am on April 28.

The affected districts are Northeast District, Southwest District, North Seberang Perai, Central Seberang Perai and South Seberang Perai.

Chow said 23 water-related projects across nine installations would be carried out simultaneously during the SWSI, coinciding with work announced earlier by the Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) on Feb 10.

"This is to facilitate final connection works for the pipeline crossing the Prai River at Ampang Jajar, Central Seberang Perai.

"We want to take this opportunity to carry out all repair and replacement works at once so that future disruptions can be avoided," he said at a press conference in Komtar on March 27.

PBAPP chief executive officer Datuk K. Pathmanathan said 80 water tankers would be deployed to hotspots across the state to help residents cope with the disruption.

"These tankers can provide immediate relief and access to clean water. The standard allocation is 50 to 100 litres per round per household," he said.

Pathmanathan added that 800 PBAPP staff and 200 volunteers, including state



Pathmanathan said 80 water tankers would be deployed to hotspots across the state to help residents cope with the disruption. – **SYED AZAHAR SYED OSMAN/THE SUN**

assemblymen and MPs, would be on the ground to assist residents during the disruption.

"Please store enough water to last two days," he advised.

Chow said the total investment for the 23 projects is RM25 million, representing a significant infrastructure upgrade by PBAPP.

He added that the works would result in increased water supply, improved pressure, more stable availability and faster recovery in the event of future disruptions.

Chow explained that the April SWSI would involve essential maintenance and upgrades, including a partial shutdown of the Sungai Dua Water Treatment Plant (WTP).

"The main priority is the final connection works for the new RM8.7 million, 1.35m pipeline in Seberang Perai.

"PBAPP will carry out Phase 1 of the Sungai Prai river crossing pipeline section at Ampang Jajar on April 25," he said.

Other works include:

➤ Replacement of a leaking 1.2m valve on the pipeline at Jalan Pengkalan Tambang, North Seberang Perai District;

➤ Upgrades and repairs to strategic main pipelines; and

➤ Refurbishment of treated water pumps and the main pump house at Sungai Dua WTP.

Chow also said as only 50% of the Sungai Dua WTP would be shut down, recovery time is expected to be shorter than last year's disruption.

"The actual works will take about 18 hours, but restoring water supply takes time. Some areas will see earlier restoration, depending on location," he said.

PBAPP aims to restore 88% of the water supply to 300,185 of the 341,708 affected accounts within 48 hours.

Further details on the SWSI and the phased water supply restoration plan will be announced by PBAPP next week.

For enquiries, the public can contact PBAPP's 24-hour call centre at 04-255 8255 or email customer@pba.com.my.

No controversial *Baju Melayu* designs this year

KUALA LUMPUR: During Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebrations a few years ago, a controversial *Baju Melayu* design – sleeveless and made from sheer fabric – sparked outrage on social media for allegedly violating Malay cultural heritage.

This year, however, no such "experimental" versions of the *Baju Melayu* appeared to trend online, signalling growing awareness within the fashion industry of the importance of maintaining cultural authenticity.

Cultural activist and fashion designer Farel Mikhail said in recent years, he had observed many variations of traditional costumes that strayed from their original forms.

But this year, he noted, "things seem more controlled".

"Perhaps it's due to increased awareness in society, or the influence of social media, which now plays a strong role in shaping perceptions of traditional clothing, especially the *Baju Melayu*, with a stronger emphasis on modesty," he told Bernama. Farel also credited government-led campaigns and awareness efforts, including those by the Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry and non-governmental organisations, with helping to educate the public on preserving cultural values and heritage.

"The government and relevant bodies have become more active in protecting our cultural identity. These campaigns not only educate the public but also raise awareness among fashion designers about the need to respect traditional elements in their work," he said.

While some designers continue to introduce modern interpretations of traditional attire, Farel stressed the importance of understanding cultural boundaries and appropriateness.

"For instance, pairing a *tengkolok* (traditional headgear) with an overly flashy modern outfit or modifying heritage pieces without regard for cultural sensitivities, can spark controversies. We all have a role to play in preserving cultural values," he said.

He advised young designers to respect heritage elements when exploring creative expression, cautioning against using tradition purely for novelty.

"If you want to create *avant-garde* designs, that's fine. But when it comes to tradition and heritage, we must be more sensitive. It's like traditional food – when its identity is altered too much, it loses its essence. Fashion can evolve, but not at the expense of cultural identity."

EDUCATION

FOCUS 2025

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

theSun
Malaysian Paper
www.thesun.my

Contact us now for special deals on digital, video and print advertising.

☎ 03-7784 6688

✉ advertise@thesundaily.com



Minute of silence held for Myanmar quake victims

Media asked to halt broadcasting and display mourning symbols while prayers offered at temples and pagodas

MANDALAY: Myanmar held a minute of silence yesterday in a tribute to the victims of an earthquake that has killed more than 2,000 people, buckling roads and flattening buildings as far away as Bangkok.

Four days after the shallow 7.7-magnitude earthquake, many individuals in Myanmar are still sleeping outdoors, unable to return to ruined homes or afraid of further aftershocks.

The country came to a standstill at 0621 GMT, the precise time the quake struck on Friday, to remember those lost.

The military government asked the population to pause at that time, adding that media should halt broadcasting and display mourning symbols while prayers are offered at temples and pagodas.

The gesture is part of a week of national mourning declared by the military government, with flags to fly at half-mast on official buildings until April 6 "in sympathy for the loss of life".

It said on Monday 2,056 have been confirmed dead, with more than 3,900 injured and 270 missing, and at least 19 dead in neighbouring Thailand.

The toll is expected to rise as rescuers reach towns and villages where communications have been cut off by the quake.

Mandalay, Myanmar's second city and home to more than 1.7 million people, suffered some of the worst destruction.



Individuals standing near a collapsed fire station in Sagaing, Myanmar on Monday. – REUTERS/PIC

"I do not feel safe. There are six or seven-floor buildings beside my house that are leaning and could collapse at anytime," said watchmaker Soe Tint after sleeping outside.

Some of those camping out have tents but many have been bedding down on blankets in the middle of roads, staying as far away as possible from damaged buildings.

On the outskirts of Mandalay, a crematorium has received hundreds of bodies for disposal, with many more to come as victims are dug out of the rubble.

Fear of aftershocks has forced the city's 1,000-bed general hospital to move its patients into the car park, where they lie on gurneys with only a thin tarpaulin rigged overhead to shield them from the sun.

The military government said it is doing its best to respond to the disaster, but there have

been multiple reports in recent days of the military carrying out airstrikes on armed groups opposed to its rule, even as the country reels from the quake's devastation.

United Nations special envoy to Myanmar Julie Bishop called on Monday for all parties to cease hostilities and focus on protecting civilians and delivering aid.

Military government chief Min Aung Hlaing issued a rare appeal for foreign assistance.

International aid efforts have included an emergency appeal for US\$100 million (RM443 million) to help victims from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

China, Russia and India have sent teams of responders to Myanmar while the United States said it has dispatched a group of "humanitarian experts". – AFP

Ethiopia begins cholera vaccination push

ADDIS ABABA: The Ethiopian government has launched a cholera vaccination campaign in the southwestern part of the country, targeting about one million people at risk, reported Xinhua.

The Ethiopian Health Ministry said vaccinations would be conducted in all zones of the country's Gambella Region and refugee camps during the coming week.

This move comes as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and various other humanitarian agencies have called for concerted efforts to contain the "rapidly spreading" cholera outbreak across the Gambella Region, bordering South Sudan.

Ethiopian Health Minister Mekdes Daba said in addition to expanding access to cholera vaccines, maintaining environmental and personal hygiene are essential proactive measures to prevent cholera outbreaks.

On Monday, international medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) warned that the humanitarian crisis is "rapidly unfolding" on both sides of the South Sudan-Ethiopia border as escalating violence, displacement and "a widespread cholera outbreak" are pushing communities to the brink.

Noting that South Sudan has been grappling with cholera outbreaks since last year, MSF said the latest wave, which began in Upper Nile State, is spreading further in the country and across the border into Ethiopia's Gambella Region.

WHO raised the alarm over the rapid spread of the disease, warning that the outbreak, which was first detected in Gambella's Akobo district early last month, has spread to eight districts and four refugee camps.

Humanitarian agencies have called for urgent support to health facilities and the provision of safe water as unsafe water and inadequate sanitation are fuelling the spread of cholera.

They said escalating clashes between government forces and armed groups in South Sudan's Upper Nile State have led to increased cross-border movements, with refugees and injured people fleeing to Ethiopia, exacerbating the cholera outbreak in Ethiopia's Gambella Region. – Bernama-Xinhua

China launches military drills around Taiwan

BEIJING/TAIPEI: China began joint army, navy and rocket force exercises around Taiwan yesterday as a "stern warning" against separatism and called Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te a "parasite" as Taiwan sent warships to respond to China's navy approaching its coast.

The exercises around the democratically governed island, which China views as its own territory, come after Lai called Beijing a "foreign hostile force" last month.

China detests Lai as a "separatist" and in a video accompanying the Eastern Theatre Command's announcement of the drills, depicted him as a cartoon bug held by a pair of chopsticks above a burning Taiwan.

"The focus is on exercises such as combat readiness patrols at sea and in the air, seizing comprehensive control, striking maritime and land targets, and imposing blockade controls on key areas and routes," the Eastern Theatre

Command said.

Taiwan's government condemned the drills, with the presidential office saying China is "widely recognised by the international community as a troublemaker" adding that the government has the ability to defend itself.

It rejected Beijing's sovereignty claims, saying only the island's people can decide their future.

Two senior Taiwan officials said more than 10 Chinese military ships have approached close to Taiwan's 24 nautical mile (44km) contiguous zone and Taiwan sent its own warships to respond.

Taiwan has not detected live fire by the Chinese military, one of the officials said.

Taiwan's Defence Ministry said China's Shandong aircraft carrier group entered the island's response area on Monday, adding that it dispatched military aircraft and ships and activated land-based missile systems in response.

The drills took place after US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth left the region following visits to Japan and the Philippines, in which he criticised China and said Japan is "indispensable" for addressing Chinese aggression.

A senior Taiwan security official, citing internal assessments, said Beijing needed to avoid "perceived confrontation" with Washington prior to the US-China trade talks, and so Taiwan has become a pretext.

"Taiwan is their best excuse. That is why they chose to launch military drills as soon as Hegseth left Asia."

The *de facto* US embassy, the American Institute in Taiwan, said the United States would continue to support the island.

"Once again, China has shown that it is not a responsible actor and has no problem putting the region's security and prosperity at risk," a spokesperson said in a statement. – Reuters

Two killed in attack on Sudan refugee camp

KHARTOUM: At least two people have been killed in an attack on a refugee camp in Sudan's North Darfur state, a medical source told AFP on Monday, blaming paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The source at the Saudi hospital in the state capital El-Fasher, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the attack on the Abu Shouk refugee camp also left seven wounded.

A volunteer aid group in El-Fasher earlier reported "intense bombardments" at the camp and explosive drones flying over the city.

RSF, led by Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, has been battling the military, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, since April 2023.

The war has created what the United Nations (UN) describes as the world's worst hunger and displacement crisis. More than 12 million people have been displaced, tens of thousands killed and a UN-backed assessment declared famine in parts of the country.

While the military has reclaimed the capital Khartoum in recent days, Africa's third-largest country remains essentially divided in two.

The army holds sway in the east and north while RSF controls most of the vast Darfur region in the west and parts of the south.

El-Fasher is the only regional state capital that RSF has not conquered, despite besieging the city for months.

On Monday, paramilitaries announced that they had killed scores of soldiers and driven the army out of the Khor al-Daleb region of South Kordofan state, near areas controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North, which has allied with RSF. – AFP

Brunei celebrates Aidilfitri with foreign envoys

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN: Brunei Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah celebrated Hari Raya Aidilfitri on Monday with foreign envoys.

The sultan, along with other members of the royal family, welcomed foreign delegates from more than 20 countries at Istana Nurul Iman, the royal palace of Brunei.

Apart from foreign diplomats, Brunei's Cabinet ministers, senior government officials and other invited guests joined the first day of the Hari Raya celebration at the palace.

The sultanate celebrated Hari Raya with a three-day national holiday starting on Monday.

Istana Nurul Iman opened its gate for two days from yesterday, enabling the public to meet and convey their greetings to the royal family during the festive celebration. – Bernama-Xinhua

Call for Volkswagen to face fresh trial over fraud

PARIS: Prosecutors in Paris have called for German carmaker Volkswagen to face justice in France to compensate French consumers over the Dieselgate emissions fraud scandal, according to a court filing seen by AFP yesterday.

In one of the biggest scandals to hit the auto industry, Volkswagen admitted that in 2015, it had sold 11 million vehicles equipped with devices designed to cheat environmental regulations by lowering car emissions during testing.

On top of numerous lawsuits still pending against the company in the United States and other countries, French prosecutors have called for it to face charges of aggravated fraud in France too.

The company contested the French allegations, saying it was not liable to face trial in the Paris case.

In a court filing in February that was later seen by AFP, prosecutors said nearly a million French customers had to pay for servicing and repairs after the emissions breach was revealed.

They said a 2021 report by experts concluded that the company had used the test-cheating software under a "cost-benefit" strategy "approved by management".

They cited as an aggravating factor the harm to health from the nitrogen dioxide emissions, whose levels were falsely represented by the manufacturer.

Volkswagen told AFP that it "contests the grounds of the accusations of aggravated fraud" and "judges that French consumers did not suffer any harm such as to make them liable for compensation".

It said vehicles sold in France had been covered by a court case in Germany that ended in 2018 with it paying out a billion euros (RM4.79 billion) in compensation.

"A double conviction on identical allegations is totally prohibited."

The Paris prosecutors insisted the French charges were "complementary" to the German case, with a focus on consumer rights. — AFP

BRIEFS

THIRD TERM POSSIBLE: TRUMP

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said on Monday Americans want him to run for another term, a step banned by the US constitution but which he continues describing as possible. "People are asking me to run. I never looked into it. They do say there is a way you can do it," Trump was asked about the prospect of a race pitting him against former president Barack Obama, who served two terms. "That would be a good one, I would like that," Trump said. "I am not joking" about the idea of seeking a third term, Trump said on Sunday in an interview with NBC News. — AFP

SPACEX LAUNCHES FIRST CREWED POLAR ORBIT

CAPE CANAVERAL: SpaceX launched the first human spaceflight directly over Earth's polar regions on Monday in a days-long, privately funded orbital mission involving four astronauts. Named "Fram2", the mission will be taking the first X-ray in space and growing mushrooms in microgravity. Mission commander Chun Wang, a Chinese-born Maltese adventurer, selected the rest of the crew, namely vehicle commander Jannicke Mikkelsen, mission pilot and robotics researcher from Germany Rabea Rogge, and mission specialist and medical officer Eric Phillips. The team trained for eight months in preparation. — AFP

FIRE AT TESLA DEALERSHIP

ROME: A fire broke out at a Tesla dealership on the outskirts of Rome on Monday, local authorities confirmed. The Rome fire brigade said arson is a potential cause but it is too early to determine. Authorities are reviewing surveillance footage and examining the aftermath to collect evidence. — Bernama-Xinhua



LAUNCHING CAREERS ... New employees of All Nippon Airways Group attending an initiation ceremony at a hangar of Haneda Airport in Tokyo, Japan yesterday. — REUTERS/PIC

Le Pen seeks to keep presidency hopes alive

➤ Court hands down five-year ban on running for office, politician vows to appeal

PARIS: Far-right leader Marine Le Pen fought yesterday to keep alive her dream of winning the French presidency after a court handed her a five-year ban on running for office.

She was found guilty of creating fake jobs at the European Union parliament on behalf of her National Rally (RN) party and the judge ordered the ban to come into force with immediate effect. She has denied all charges.

The punishment came as a thunderbolt to French politics and judicial authorities have condemned threats made against the judges in the case.

If it stands, their verdict would mean that Le Pen would be unable to launch a fourth campaign for the presidency.

Analysts said the 2027 election would be her best-ever chance.

In a TV interview, Le Pen remained defiant, insisting that there could still be time for an appeals court to overturn the verdict.

Should she be unable to stand, RN party leader Jordan Bardella, 29, would be the likely candidate.

Le Pen said Bardella has the "capacity" to be president.

The verdict has been condemned by the Kremlin, billionaire tycoon Elon Musk and hard-right European politicians ranging from Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban to Geert Wilders of the Netherlands.

US President Donald Trump's administration weighed in as State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said: "Exclusion of people from the political process is particularly concerning given the aggressive and corrupt lawfare waged against Trump in the United States."

Le Pen was also given a four-year prison term by the Paris court. Two years of the term were suspended and the other two would be served outside jail with an electronic bracelet.

Twenty-four people were convicted, all

being RN party officials or assistants.

Le Pen said she would appeal the "political decision" and vowed that in "no way" would she retire from political life, in an interview with the TF1 network on Monday.

"I am not going to let myself be eliminated like this. I am going to pursue whatever legal avenues I can. There is a small path. It is certainly narrow but it exists."

An appeal would be lodged "as quickly as possible" and Le Pen said the judiciary should "get a move on".

Describing herself as a "favourite" to win the 2027 election, Le Pen characterised the judge who delivered the verdict as saying "I do not want Marine Le Pen elected" and lashed out at "practices we thought were for authoritarian regimes".

"I am going to appeal because I am innocent," Le Pen said, acknowledging that as things stood, she was "eliminated" from the presidential race.

In France, the parliamentary leader of the right-wing Republicans, Laurent Wauquiez, said "political debates should be decided at the ballot box". — AFP

US sanctions Chinese officials over rights abuses

WASHINGTON/HONG KONG: The United States on Monday sanctioned six senior Chinese and Hong Kong officials for "transnational repression" and eroding the autonomy of Hong Kong, in the first major move by the Trump administration to punish China over its crackdown on the city.

"Beijing and Hong Kong officials have used Hong Kong national security laws extraterritorially to intimidate, silence and harass 19 pro-democracy activists, who were forced to flee overseas," the State Department said.

Western countries have criticised Beijing for imposing the national security law on Hong Kong and using it to jail pro-democracy activists, as well as shutter liberal media outlets and civil society groups.

Beijing said the law, which punishes acts such as subversion and foreign collusion with up

to life in prison, has brought stability after mass pro-democracy protests in 2019.

The sanctions announced on Monday put blocks on property, funds or transactions within the United States for these individuals, including Dong Jingwei, a former senior official at China's main civilian intelligence agency who is now the director of China's Office for Safeguarding National Security in Hong Kong.

Dong was previously China's top spy catcher who had oversight of counter-intelligence. He was also vice-minister of state security, a role that included hunting down foreign spies in China and nationals who colluded with foreign countries.

Paul Lam, Hong Kong's top legal official as secretary for justice, who has driven prosecutions against scores of democratic activists, was also sanctioned.

Security and police officials Sonny Au, Dick Wong, Margaret Chiu and Raymond Siu were also sanctioned for their role in "coercing, arresting, detaining or imprisoning individuals" under the security laws.

China's Foreign Commissioner's office in Hong Kong said the sanctions were "despicable" and a sinister attempt to undermine Hong Kong's prosperity and stability.

The Hong Kong government condemned the sanctions that "clearly exposed US barbarity under its hegemony".

China's record on human rights has long been a focus for Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

The sanctions "demonstrate the Trump administration's commitment to hold to account those responsible for depriving people in Hong Kong of protected rights and freedoms", the State Department said. — Reuters

Hamas issues call to arms over evacuation order

► Let everyone break their silence: Senior official

CAIRO: A senior Hamas official urged supporters worldwide on Monday to take up weapons and fight plans to displace Gaza's people as Israel issued a sweeping evacuation order in the territory's south, stepping up its renewed offensive.

The idea of forcing Gazans to leave the devastated territory for neighbouring countries, such as Egypt and Jordan, was first floated by US President Donald Trump and has since been seized on by right-wing Israeli politicians, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who vowed on Sunday to implement it.

"In the face of this sinister plan, one that combines massacres with starvation, anyone who can bear arms, anywhere in the world, must take action," Sami Abu Zuhri said.

"Do not withhold an explosive, a bullet, a knife or a stone. Let everyone break their silence."

AFPTV images showed residents of southern Gaza leaving the area on Monday,

following the Israeli military's evacuation order warning of renewed operations.

Some Palestinians rode in cars piled high with belongings while others pushed heavy carts and others carried nothing at all.

The order, posted to X by army spokesman Avichay Adraee, included a map showing a swath of southern Gaza in red, including the city of Rafah.

It said the military was "returning to fight with great force to eliminate the capabilities of terrorist organisations in these areas", urging residents to head to the Al Mawasi area, northwest of Rafah.

Rafah resident Najah Dhahir, fleeing with her nine-month-old baby, said "they told us we had two hours to evacuate" before the Israeli army arrived.

The head of the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees said: "People are treated like pinballs, with constant military orders playing with their fate and lives."

Hamas's call to arms came a day after Netanyahu offered to let the group's leaders leave Gaza while demanding it disarm.

The group has expressed a willingness to relinquish administration of Gaza but warned that its weapons are a "red line".

On Sunday, Netanyahu said after the war,

Israel would ensure overall security in Gaza and "enable the implementation of the Trump plan", which initially called for the mass displacement of all 2.4 million people living in the Palestinian territory, calling it a "voluntary migration plan".

UK-based Alan Mendoza, founder of the Henry Jackson Society think tank, said it appeared that Israeli authorities were taking Trump's plan seriously.

"This alarms Hamas because their very existence depends on controlling Gaza," Mendoza told AFP.

Hamas has also been "shocked" by last week's protests in Gaza against the group.

"Internally, Hamas led their own people to disaster and so if they make (the external pressure) a national cause, then they can get people to rally around the flag."

Days after taking office in January, Trump floated a proposal to move Gaza's population out of the war-battered territory, suggesting that Egypt or Jordan could take them in.

Both countries, along with other Arab allies, governments around the world and Palestinians, flatly rejected the notion.

Trump later appeared to backtrack on the proposal, saying he was "not forcing" his widely condemned plan. – AFP



A Palestinian family evacuating with their belongings piled on the roof of a car as they flee areas around the southern city of Rafah after the Israeli army issued orders for them to leave the area. – REUTERS/PIA

Three killed in Israeli strike in Beirut

BEIRUT: At least three people were killed and seven wounded in an Israeli airstrike on Beirut's southern suburbs yesterday, the Lebanese health ministry said, further testing a shaky four-month ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah.

The Israeli military said it attacked a Hezbollah militant "who had recently directed Hamas operatives and assisted them".

The attack took place a few days after a previous strike by Israel on the southern suburbs of the Lebanese capital, a Hezbollah stronghold known as the Dahiyeh.

There was no immediate statement from Hezbollah on the identity of the target.

The strike appeared to have damaged the upper three floors of a building in Beirut's southern suburbs, a Reuters reporter at the scene said, with the balconies of those floors

blown out. The glass on the floors below was intact, indicating a target strike. Ambulances were at the scene to recover casualties.

There was no evacuation warning issued for the area ahead of the strike and families fled in the aftermath to other parts of Beirut, according to witnesses.

The ceasefire agreement halted the year-long conflict and mandated that southern Lebanon be free of Hezbollah fighters and weapons, Lebanese troops deploy to the area and Israeli ground troops withdraw from the zone. But each side accuses the other of not entirely living up to those terms.

The truce has looked increasingly flimsy lately. Israel delayed a promised troop withdrawal in January and said it intercepted rockets fired from Lebanon in March, which led it to bombard targets in Beirut's southern

suburbs and southern Lebanon.

The Iran-aligned Hezbollah has denied any involvement in the rocket firings.

The US State Department said yesterday Israel was defending itself from rocket attacks that came from Lebanon.

"Hostilities have resumed because terrorists launched rockets into Israel from Lebanon," a State Department spokesperson said, adding that Washington supported Israel's response.

The Israeli-Lebanese conflict was ignited by the Gaza war in 2023 when Hezbollah started firing rockets at Israeli military positions in support of its ally Hamas.

The Gaza war, in which Palestinian health authorities say more than 50,000 have been killed, was triggered when Hamas militants attacked Israel on Oct 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people, according to Israeli tallies. – Reuters

Iran warns of nuclear response to threats

TEHRAN: Iran would have to acquire a nuclear weapon if attacked by the United States or its allies, an adviser to the country's leader warned on Monday, following a threat by US President Donald Trump.

The comments came after Iran's leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei promised to hit back if Trump carried out a threat to bomb the Islamic republic if it did not make a deal to address its nuclear programme.

"We are not moving towards (nuclear) weapons but if you do something wrong in the Iranian nuclear issue, you will force Iran to move towards that because it has to defend itself," Khamenei's adviser Ali Larijani told state TV.

"They threaten to do mischief. If it is carried out, they will definitely receive a strong counterattack," Khamenei said.

The message was sent to the United Nations (UN) Security Council in a letter by Iran's UN ambassador Amir Saeid Iravani, which condemned what he called "warmongering provocations".

Iran "will respond swiftly and decisively to any act of aggression or attack by the United States or its proxy, the Israeli regime," the envoy added.

On March 7, Trump said he had written to Khamenei to call for nuclear negotiations and warn of possible military action if Tehran refused.

On Thursday, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Iran would not engage in direct talks "under maximum pressure and the threat of military action".

Trump said US and Iranian officials were "talking" but did not give details. – AFP

Russia and US discuss peace settlement

MOSCOW/WASHINGTON: The Kremlin said on Monday Russia and the United States were working on ideas for a possible peace settlement in Ukraine and building bilateral ties despite US President Donald Trump saying he was "pissed off" with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump told NBC News that he was angry after the Russian leader criticised the credibility of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Trump later reiterated to reporters that he was disappointed with Putin but said: "I think we are making progress, step by step."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow was continuing to work with Washington and Putin remained open to contacts with Trump.

"We are working on the implementation of some ideas related to the Ukrainian settlement. This is a time-consuming process, probably due to its complexity."

Trump said: "I want to see (Putin) make a deal so that we stop Russian and Ukrainian soldiers and other people from being killed." – Reuters

Ukrainian charged in Poland as Soviet spy

WARSAW: Prosecutors in Poland have charged a Ukrainian man, who was born in Russia, with participating in activities linked to Russian intelligence, they said yesterday.

The Polish Internal Security Agency detained the man in March, and a district court in Warsaw decided to detain him for three months.

"The suspect's activities consisted in reconnaissance of military facilities in Poland on behalf of the aforementioned intelligence," prosecutors said, adding that it was a crime punishable by between five and 30 years' jail.

Warsaw's support for Kyiv in its defence against Russia's invasion has made Poland a target for Russian espionage and sabotage.

"The suspect admitted to the charge and provided an explanation in which he described the ideological motives for his activities resulting from his ties with Russia," prosecutors said. – Reuters

COMMENT by Dr Nahrizul Adib Kadri

We are our stories

A FEW years ago, I attended a reunion with some old friends from primary school. As we caught up, I noticed something interesting: almost every conversation began with the same question – “So, buat apa sekarang (What do you do)?” It was as if our jobs had become the default way to define ourselves, the shorthand for who we were.

At first, of course, it seemed harmless. But as the evening went on, I could not help but wonder: Aren't we not more than our job titles? What happens when the work we do becomes the only story we tell about ourselves?

The truth is that tying our identity solely to our careers is a risky game. It is like building a house on a single pillar – impressive at first glance, but dangerously unstable.

When our sense of self is rooted in external achievements, we become vulnerable to the inevitable ups and downs of professional life. A promotion can feel like validation while a setback can feel like failure. And when retirement or redundancy comes along, it can feel like losing a part of ourselves.

Marcus Aurelius, the Stoic philosopher and Roman emperor, once wrote: “You have power over your mind, not outside events. Realise this, and you will find strength.” His words remind us that our true worth is not determined by our job title, salary or

position on the corporate ladder. It is found in the way we think, the values we hold and the relationships we nurture.

This is not just about finding balance; it is about reclaiming our humanity. We are multifaceted beings, shaped by our experiences, interests and relationships. Yet, in a world that often reduces us to our roles – engineer, teacher, manager or student – it is easy to forget that.

Think about it: When was the last time you introduced yourself without mentioning your job? When was the last time you pursued a hobby simply because it brought you joy, not because it added a line to your resume? These small acts of self-discovery are reminders that we are more than what we do for a living.

Consider the life of Leonardo da Vinci. While he is best known as an artist, he was also a scientist, inventor and philosopher. His curiosity knew no bounds and his legacy is a testament to the power of embracing multiple passions.

Da Vinci did not define himself by a single title; he defined himself by his endless pursuit of knowledge and creativity. Of course, this isn't to say that our careers do not matter – they do. Work can be a source of purpose, growth and fulfilment but it should not be the only source.

When we diversify our sense of self – when we see ourselves as parents, friends, artists, learners and dreamers –

“When our sense of self is rooted in external achievements, we become vulnerable to the inevitable ups and downs of professional life. A promotion can feel like validation while a setback can feel like failure.”



Da Vinci did not define himself by a single title; he defined himself by his endless pursuit of knowledge and creativity. – **BERNAMAPIC**

we build a stronger and more resilient identity.

How can we start untangling our self-worth from our job titles? Begin by reflecting on the aspects of your identity that exist beyond your professional life.

What are the things that make you, you? Maybe it is your love for cooking, your ability to make people laugh or your dedication to a cause you care about. These are the threads that weave the tapestry of your life, and they deserve just as much attention as your career.

Here is a simple exercise: Write down five things that define you outside of work. They can be roles, hobbies, values or even quirks. Keep this list somewhere visible and revisit it whenever you feel your identity narrowing to a single dimension.

As Rumi once wrote: “You are not a

drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop.” You are not your job title. You are a mosaic of experiences, passions and relationships. You are a storyteller, a dreamer, a creator. You are more than what you do – you are who you are.

The next time someone asks, “What do you do?”, try answering with something unexpected. Share a hobby, a dream or a value that defines you. You may just inspire them to see themselves in a new light, too. Because in the end, life is not about the titles we hold; it is about the stories we live.

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

theSun

“SUBSCRIBE NOW”

Finding the best newspaper subscription deal is no longer an arduous task.
Subscribe now to theSun, delivered to your doorstep.

Stay informed **7 days** a week starting from **1st April 2025**
with the latest news and trends

Get daily local, world, entertainment & sports stories in 32 Full Colour pages

only
RM1
per copy



SCAN TO SUBSCRIBE

**BEST
VALUE**

*Not inclusive of vendor service charge

☐ 1-year subscription at normal price RM361* (361 issues)

☐ + RM70 administration fee to get **2nd year free** *Special offer only valid until 30th April 2025

☐ 1-year subscription (361 issues) for only RM300* (Normal price RM361)

☐ 6-month subscription (180 issues) for only RM160* (Normal price RM180)

PERSONAL PARTICULARS

Name: _____ NRIC: _____

Race: ☐ Malay ☐ Chinese ☐ Indian ☐ Others

Profession: _____

Commencement date: _____

Delivery Address: ☐ Residence ☐ Office

Postcode: _____ State: _____

Tel: _____ Mobile No: _____

E-mail: _____

DETAILS OF CURRENT NEWS VENDOR (IF ANY)

Vendor name: _____

Contact no: _____

For your convenience, you may call or send in your subscription particulars via any of the following:

Tel: KL/PJ 03-7781 4000, 03-7784 6688 (9.30am - 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Whatsapp No: +6018-292 9936

Post: P.O. Box 179, Jalan Sultan, 46720 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan

Attn: Subscription

Email: subscribe@thesundaily.com

*Terms & Conditions apply

Important note: SMCSB reserves the right to revise the price at any time without prior notice.

Pay to Maybank (Account number 508177700420). Account name: SUN MEDIA CORPORATION SDN BHD.

Enclosed is my payment of RM _____ payable to SUN MEDIA CORPORATION SDN BHD.
(Please WhatsApp your bank-in slip to 0182929936 or email to subscribe@thesundaily.com)

World's cop-out on climate action

IN Part Three, we saw how Malaysia's global ecological crisis rating slipped down to -6 points, more than halfway to the absolute bottom of -10, which represents complete defeat by climate change. We need to raise ourselves up, and perhaps the geopolitical arena presents an opportunity.

Humanity is more used to fighting us-versus-them wars, and all governments prefer to swing national budgets towards defence against neighbours rather than fight the climate war. Climate mitigation, which once occupied the top spot of the agenda for climate action, has been pushed to the bottom.

Mitigation is the effort to slow down or stop climate change. The world has mostly given up as few countries are willing to divert money into climate mitigation at the expense of defence spending. Hence, the going concern is for climate adaptation at minimal expenditure.

We institute measures to minimise the impact of climate change. However, instead of reducing global warming, we install more air-conditioners – a cop-out.

At the beginning of the year, we heard World Economic Forum (WEF) managing director Mirek Dusek lament: "Rising geopolitical tensions and a fracturing of trust are driving the global risk landscape" (*theSun*, Jan 21).

A WEF survey showed that armed conflict is the top risk in 2025. The survey indicated that the top longer-term global risk was climate change, biodiversity loss, critical change to the earth's systems and a shortage of natural resources.

The Ukraine, Gaza and the African wars are the major conflicts. The West seems also to be looking forward to a bold Taiwan independence and the thrilling prospect of a Taiwan Straits-South China Sea war.

Let us focus on the Gaza War – in which Malaysia is psychologically entangled. Here is a golden opportunity to design a true peace solution to resolve the conflict between Israelis and Arabs, Jews and Muslims. When the night is the longest and killings reach their crest, it is time to find a way.

Malaysia is uniquely positioned as one of the few countries where the Torah (in the form of the biblical Old Testament), Gospel and *Quran* are read frequently as a religious practice by 73% of the population in total.

Jews, Christians and Muslims are

familiar with the scriptural narrative of the "Flood" and Noah's Ark. However, none of them see the message. And what is the message? The "Flood" represents potential climate change destruction of all human lives and wildlife.

Who gets the privilege of entering the Ark of Salvation? All species of wildlife and one family of humans. Only one family. What does that tell you? The message is that humanity is one family and it is bonded to all wildlife. We survive together or drown together in the flood of climate change.

If Malaysia had looked beyond the Gaza War and offered a permanent solution, it would have catapulted our nation to the top echelon of global leadership. Do not remain a sectarian player; develop a vision of world peace and how we can be a prime mover.

A true peace formula is already in the Torah, Gospel and *Quran*. The Torah says: "The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself..." (Leviticus 19:33-34). This verse explicitly states that strangers should be treated like native-born citizens, reinforcing the idea of equality and kindness.

A passage from the Gospel: "Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and great Commandment. And the second is: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-39).

In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus expands the idea of "neighbour" to anyone in need, regardless of ethnicity, religion or background. Jesus pushes neighbourliness to its highest level – not just loving friends but also showing kindness to enemies. "You have heard that it was said,

'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." (Matthew 5:43-44)

In verses 2:213, 4:1, 5:32, 21:92 and 49:13, the *Quran* teaches that all humans are one family, created by God with equal dignity. Differences in race, tribe and nation exist for mutual understanding, not division. Brotherhood is built on justice, mercy and righteousness, extending to all people, not just fellow believers.

Malaysia should have proposed



Climate mitigation, which once occupied the top spot of the agenda for climate action, has been pushed to the bottom. – REUTERS/PIC

the formation of a unique Mideast Union comprising the independent nations of Israel and Palestine that share one foreign policy, a common defence arrangement and joint utilisation of natural resources.

A two-state solution that Malaysia supports is not workable as it will be like North and South Korea, where two hostile armies face each other at the border. War can break out anytime.

Without embracing a vision of universal peace, Malaysia is forgoing a plus point that it can easily get. Do not wait until climate change drowns both the Israelis and Arabs. It will be too late for peace when Noah's Flood arrives.

Get all the Muslim and European nations, as well as China, India and Russia to support the Mideast Union proposal.

How much attention is the world placing on Gaza without any plan for a true scripture-based solution? Who is paying attention to the biggest enemy – climate change – humanity's deadliest ever foe that we created?

Let us turn north to Ukraine. Imagine this scene: the united powers of climate change have surrounded a fortress and are armed with arrows of burning forests and cauldrons of flood waters.

The western wall of the fortress, called Gaza, is defended by regiments that are battling each other instead of fighting climate change. The southern wall, called Africa, is in shambles with multitudinous warring armies. An ominous dark cloud hangs over the eastern wall, called the Taiwan-South China Sea. The northern wall, called Ukraine, is also crumbling as the regiments along its parapet have been fighting each other for years.

Is Russia, as the invader, solely to blame for the Ukraine War? Western Europe ignores Russia's historical

fears of a Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) attack on its territory.

Nato is a military alliance formed in 1949 to confront Russia. Since 1991, it has expanded significantly eastward, incorporating Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and many other countries right into 2020. Estonia and Latvia share borders with Russia. Another Nato member, Finland, also shares a border with Russia. Technically, Nato military assets can be placed just metres from Russia's border.

Under President Viktor Yushchenko (2005 to 2010), Ukraine pushed for Nato membership. Realising the threat to Russia, he later abandoned Nato membership plans and focused on ties with Moscow. But a new pro-Western government under Petro Poroshenko came to power in 2014 and it revived Nato ambitions.

In 2017, Ukraine's Parliament adopted a law making Nato membership a strategic goal. In 2020, Nato granted Ukraine enhanced opportunities partner status, strengthening military cooperation.

In February 2022, Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine. Instead of negotiating a withdrawal by offering to give up its bid for Nato membership, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine formally applied for Nato membership in September 2022.

The following year, Nato members exacerbated the problem by pledging long-term support and removing the need for Ukraine to go through the usual membership action plan process.

Just think: If Canada and Mexico were to join a military alliance hostile to the US, wouldn't the US invade its two neighbours without hesitation?

In 1962, the US made plans to invade Cuba because of a Russian military presence on the island. In fact, the US had attacked Cuba the previous year in a minor Bay of Pigs invasion. Yet, the West believes that its troops have the right to be stationed just a step away from Russia's borders.

One month before Russia invaded Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin appealed to the West to respect a 1999 deal that no country can strengthen its own security at the expense of others, and he accused the West of luring Russia into war by ignoring its security concerns over Ukraine, with which it shares a 6,992km border.

Malaysia could have played a role in averting the Ukraine War had it leveraged its special relationship with Britain to make a strong case that it should get Nato to back off.

We are well-read in European history. We know that France invaded Russia in 1812, Germany invaded Russia in 1941 and Britain fought Russia in the Crimean War (1853-1856) to prevent it from gaining naval access to the Mediterranean.

Funds needed for climate action are being spent on warfare. The defence spending by Nato countries has gone up to as high as 4% of gross domestic product (GDP) and the total reached US\$436 billion (RM1.94 trillion) last year. Poland is targeting to spend 5% of its GDP. It is the same bad scenario in Russia.

For lack of a world-family peace vision and global leadership, no points for Malaysia in geopolitics.

In Part Five, we shall discuss the devastating effects that an Asia-Pacific conflict will have on the climate.

Joachim Ng champions interfaith harmony.

Comments: letters@thesundaily.com



CONNECTING FAITHS
BY JOACHIM NG
"Humanity is more used to fighting us-versus-them wars, and all governments prefer to swing national budgets towards defence against neighbours rather than fight the climate war."

Malaysia must prioritise green shipping: Consultant

► Global maritime industry leaning towards protecting environment

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia should embrace and prioritise green shipping trends to remain relevant despite its strategic advantage along the Strait of Malacca, a global management consultant said.

For starters, Port Klang, situated along the vital sea lane, could be developed as a hub for green fuel as global shipping transforms to minimise the impact of maritime operations on the environment, Yuma Ito, a partner with Arthur D Little, Southeast Asia, said.

Green shipping features include cleaner energy technologies on ships, maritime organisations prioritising sustainability, green funds and the development hydrogen as an alternative energy source.

This would go a long way in ensuring that Malaysia remains relevant in the international maritime market while meeting green shipping demands, he told Bernama.

Arthur D Little is a global management consulting firm with 51 offices across 39 countries.

He said Malaysia could also develop targeted policies to increase the adoption of cleaner fuels and green technologies based on energy-efficient port requirements.

"Concentrate on strengthening legal frameworks by considering alignment with international standards."

To this end, Malaysia should ensure its regulations align with international standards such as the International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) Energy Efficiency Design Index and Carbon Intensity Indicator, said Ito.

These frameworks offer emission reduction mechanisms for both new and existing vessels, he said.

This is crucial for Malaysia to stay relevant in the global market.

It is worth noting that the European Union

(EU) had implemented the FuelEU Maritime regulation, which mandates that ships calling at EU ports must gradually transition to using low-carbon and renewable fuels, essentially requiring them to use "green fuel", starting fully on Jan 1, 2025.

This aims to decarbonise the maritime sector by promoting cleaner energy technologies on ships.

"Effective implementation of monitoring systems and reasonable compliance measures can help ensure that market participants are confident in meeting green shipping requirements."

"One area that Malaysia can emulate is Green Ship Programme, which incentivises energy-efficient technologies in alignment with the IMO goals," he said.

Ito also said that adopting similar policy changes, Malaysia can encourage maritime organisations to prioritise sustainability.

"Financial incentives such as tax exemptions and green funds, as demonstrated by Singapore, can drive investments in cleaner technologies and green systems," he said.

Previously, Malaysia Shipowners' Association (MASA) chairman Mohamed Safwan Othman said capital expenditure for green shipping is 30% higher than that for traditional vessels.

Mohamed Safwan added that Malaysia's shipping industry is capital-intensive and the financing rates for shipping in Malaysia are not competitive compared to neighbouring countries like Singapore and Hong Kong.

"Green initiatives in Malaysia are relatively small in scale compared to neighbouring countries. Looking at private equity as an alternative, it is here that it is not as developed as in those countries," Mohamed Safwan said.

Ito said Malaysia's strategic location along the Strait of Malacca presents significant opportunities for attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and testing innovative green shipping solutions.

Ito highlighted that Peninsular Malaysia's strategic location along one of the world's busiest shipping lanes offers a key advantage in maritime trade but cautioned that it also brings environmental challenges, making it crucial to

balance economic growth with conservation to sustain Malaysia's marine resources.

"These include the potential for oil spills and other types of marine pollution, which risk damage to important marine ecosystems like mangrove forests, coral reefs and other marine life."

He emphasised that Malaysia's extensive coastline and marine resources are not only economically significant but also central to its history and cultural identity as a maritime nation.

Through the National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR), Malaysia aims to establish its first low-carbon hydrogen hub by 2030, and it is part of a broader strategy to achieve 70% renewable energy capacity by 2050, positioning Malaysia as a leader in the regional and global green hydrogen market.

Sarawak's hydrogen strategy bodes well for the country's ambition, particularly with Bintulu Port being Malaysia's sole liquefied natural gas (LNG) export gateway.

Sarawak Premier Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg had announced in January a multi-billion Tanjung Embang deepsea port project in Kuching to serve as a strategic gateway for energy exports and imports.

Abang Johari said this port will facilitate green hydrogen bunkering, LNG exports and other energy resources.

On the development of Sarawak's hydrogen project, Ito said hydrogen aligns with Malaysia's national emission goals, offering a versatile, carbon-neutral solution for sectors such as power generation and heavy transport.

"When developed from renewable sources like hydroelectric power, it complements the country's NETR strategy," he said.

It pointed out that Malaysia would position itself as first mover in hydrogen, with Sarawak further strengthening the country's leadership in Asean.

"This enhances Malaysia's potential as a dominant hydrogen supplier in the region, contributing to Asean's vision of an integrated, sustainable power grid. Malaysia can guide the region in adopting hydrogen technologies and foster cooperation to meet collective climate goals," he said. - Bernama

Hong Leong Investment Bank pioneers ESG margin financing

KUALA LUMPUR: Hong Leong Investment Bank (HLIB) has launched its ESG Share Margin Financing solution, making it the first Malaysian investment bank to offer a dedicated share margin financing for ESG-focused securities, listed on Bursa Malaysia.

The product allows investors to finance up to 65% of their margin of financing into companies that are constituents of the FTSE4Good Bursa Malaysia (F4GBM) index.

HLIB is also offering a promotional interest rate of 4.95% (minimum facility of RM100,000) to encourage both new and existing customers to participate in sustainable investing. This initiative underscores HLIB's dedication towards advocating for ESG investing.

According to HLIB Group managing director and CEO Lee Jim Leng, the decision to offer margin financing for ESG securities is a testament to the burgeoning green economy, leading to increased investor interest in the ESG sector.

"The surge in growth of the green economy will naturally lead to increased interest in ESG investments, with a Grand View Research report projecting a robust 18.8% CAGR for the global ESG market from 2024 to 2030."

"At HLIB, we see this growth as a prime opportunity for investors. Our ESG margin financing is designed to enable them to participate in this expansion, while simultaneously supporting sustainable companies and building portfolios that reflect their environmental, social and governance values. We believe this will create a financial environment where profit and purpose are intrinsically connected."

HLIB has also recently launched its newly upgraded Futures trading platform, HLeFutures. This new trading platform provides investors with an enhanced trading experience that caters to both experienced traders and customers who are looking to start trading, providing a comprehensive, personalised trading experience to diversify portfolios and risk management.

"Investing to us is not merely about diversifying your portfolio. It should be an easy financial habit to acquire and integrate into our lifestyles. This new platform is a step in that direction, as we strive to encourage more Malaysians to start investing, utilising a seamless digital platform that allows for a more convenient and comprehensive trading experience," Lee said.

Unity Group spearheads major carbon reduction effort

KUALA LUMPUR: Hong Kong-listed Unity Group Holdings International Ltd is spearheading a major carbon reduction effort in Malaysia, targeting a 25-million-tonne cut in CO2 emissions, through its sustainability projects.

This initiative not only strengthens global carbon credit adoption but also accelerates the shift toward a low-carbon economy.

With the growing urgency to combat climate change, Unity Group cements its role in advancing global sustainability solutions.

Unity Group chairman and CEO Mansfield Wong said the company believes in the strength of collective action and its philosophy "We Know, We Act" drives it to create solutions that set new standards for the industry.

"We must act now and act together. Our mission is to transition from global warming to global cooling through innovation, collaboration, and meaningful climate action."

Unveiled at the International Carbon Credit Day Conference, Unity Group's Green Pioneer Programme focuses on reducing environmental impact with ultra-high energy-efficient ESG lighting that features ultra-efficient ESG lighting that uses 75% less energy than standard LEDs, lasts up to 40 years, and has a defect rate of just 0.01%,



Wong (left) handing over the appointment certificate to H'ng.

revolutionising energy efficiency.

Additionally, the Green One Day Programme with the slogan, "Healthy Life, Healthy Earth", encourages daily meal replacement of Shine+ pesticide-free vegetables, reducing carbon

footprints by up to 50%, whereas the ESG Digital Indoor Farming delivers 250 times the yield of traditional farming, minimising resource use.

It also launched The Carbon Credit Management initiative helps businesses offset

emissions and fund global sustainability projects.

During the conference, the company partnered with Professor Datuk Dr Eric H'ng, a leading expert in carbon credit standards and management. He was appointed as Unity's lead researcher to oversee the setup and standardisation of its Carbon Credit Management framework.

He is also a national representative & convener for ISO Standards and adviser to the Ministry of Green Technology on carbon trading.

"Unity is the first lighting company globally to adopt Carbon Credit Management, with its ESG lighting allowing up to a three-usage cycle claim in carbon credit over 21 years. With Malaysia ranking among the top in Asia for carbon credit pricing, ranging from RM50 to RM80 per tonne, it's expected to double by 2030. Companies need to take immediate action to offset emissions, and Unity is at the forefront of this effort," H'ng said.

Over three years, the company has worked with the Selangor government on ESG initiatives, to transform 6,000 strata buildings with its ultra-efficient ESG lighting, for a greener Selangor.

Unity is planning a secondary listing on Bursa Malaysia to boost liquidity, valuation, and its investor base, supporting its expanding energy management and solar services in Malaysia.



StemCell First enters expansion mode

► Regenerative medicine centre exploring collaborations with local hospitals in the region

■ BY JOHN GILBERT
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: Stemcell First Sdn Bhd, a centre for regenerative medicine, has allocated up to RM20 million to enhance infrastructure and improve accessibility to its services in Malaysia and across the region.

This investment will support Stemcell First's expansion efforts, including setting up clinics, establishing collaborations with local partners and facilitating cutting-edge technology transfers.

"We are actively expanding into Indonesia and Thailand. Our clinic in Thailand is already operational, while in Indonesia, we are seeking strategic partnerships with local laboratories. Although we do not currently plan to establish a clinic in Indonesia, we are exploring collaborations with hospitals in the region.

"This expansion aligns with our commitment to advancing healthcare accessibility and innovation, ensuring that more people benefit from our groundbreaking medical solutions," Stemcell First group chief operating officer Allen Law told *SunBiz*.

StemCell First was incorporated three years ago, focusing on advanced gene and cell therapy. The company offers advanced therapies for chronic conditions such as Parkinson's, diabetes and cancer.

Law said one of StemCell First's latest offerings is the Multiple Cancer Early Detection (MCED) test, which

allows individuals to assess their likelihood of developing cancer in the coming years through a simple 10ml blood test.

He said the company's MCED test is different from conventional cancer screenings available at hospitals.

While standard blood tests are widely known, MCED is still relatively new in Malaysia and not yet familiar to the general public.

Law pointed out that, unlike regular blood tests, MCED requires a specialised process. The collected blood samples are sent to an overseas laboratory for advanced analysis, which takes about one month to generate results.

"This process involves complex scientific analysis, allowing us to screen for nine types of cancer at an early stage – even before symptoms appear. Traditional blood tests cannot provide this level of predictive insight.

"In terms of cost, MCED is more expensive due to its advanced technology and logistical requirements. While standard blood tests range from RM80 to RM1,000 for premium screenings, MCED currently costs between RM3,000 and RM4,000. This pricing reflects the cutting-edge analysis and comprehensive detection capabilities it offers," Law said.

He said StemCell First's customer base can be categorised into two main groups.

The first group consists of individuals at high risk of cancer, particularly those with a family

history of the disease. If a person's parents or close relatives have been diagnosed with specific types of cancer, they may want to undergo testing to assess whether they have inherited any genetic risk factors.

The second group includes individuals with medium to high net worth who prioritise their long-term health. They opt for MCED as a proactive measure to ensure they remain healthy in the coming years.

"Currently, Malaysia is our primary market, as MCED was launched less than six months ago. At this stage, we are offering the service exclusively in Malaysia while working to resolve logistical challenges before expanding into Thailand and Indonesia," Law said.

StemCell First is taking a structured approach to securing collaborations in Thailand and Indonesia.

Law said the first step is conducting due diligence on potential laboratory partners to ensure they meet the company's stringent medical standards.

"We require labs to be clinically certified and possess CGMP certification, ensuring they can perform essential processes such as centrifugation and DNA extraction. Once we have identified suitable partners, we will proceed with negotiations, covering key aspects such as pricing, turnaround time, and workforce capacity.

"As for the timeline, we are confident in securing a partnership this year. However, our immediate focus is on Thailand, as we are strategically allocating resources to ensure a smooth expansion."

Law also said that one of the key challenges has always been bridging



Law (left) and Dr Su Wei Xin, group consultant of Stemcell First.

the gap between basic research and market implementation. "However, opportunities are expanding, especially with Asia's growing prominence."

Globally, education levels are rising, and more skilled talent are entering the industry, leading to an increasingly competitive and dynamic market, he noted.

"Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand are all making progress in this space, each developing their own strategies and solutions. Singapore, too, has established a presence in this field, contributing to the region's overall advancement," Law said.

When asked about collaborating with insurance companies Law said such a partnership would be an ideal scenario for StemCell First, as pricing remains one of the biggest challenges

in medical treatments.

"High treatment costs can prevent patients from accessing life-saving care. Insurance coverage would not only make our services more accessible but also significantly enhance our long-term revenue.

"Our goal has always been to work with insurers, but this requires going through a rigorous assessment process. Insurance companies operate based on risk calculations, determining what they can cover and how premiums are structured.

"To gain their support, we must provide comprehensive data for evaluation. Only after this thorough assessment can they make an informed decision on whether to offer coverage for our services," Law explained.

Medical tourism, preventive care to drive M'sian healthcare sector growth

■ BY HAYATUN RAZAK
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: Industry observers opined that Malaysia's healthcare sector will show growth in 2025, driven by medical tourism, an ageing population and the adoption of digital technologies.

Meet Ventures partner John Lim said the Malaysian healthcare sector is poised for growth with the rise of medical tourism and preventive care.

From the lens of a technology investor and innovation consultant, he said, Malaysia is gaining a reputation as a medical tourism hub due to its relative affordability, skilled medical professionals and high-quality healthcare facilities.

"From a demand perspective, patients from the Asean region are coming to Malaysia for medical treatment as it could be more expensive or more difficult to access in their home country.

"From a supply perspective, universities such as IMU University, a leading private university specialising in the healthcare sector, also

help to groom new healthcare professionals to meet the growing demand," he told *SunBiz*.

He added that with the proportion of citizens aged 65 and above steadily increasing, there is likely to be a growing demand for geriatric care, chronic disease management and long-term healthcare solutions.

"Preventive care will also be increasingly important to promote healthy ageing through lifestyle interventions and early disease detection," he said.

Lim said Malaysia's healthcare sector in 2025 will see significant advancements driven by digital transformation.

"Recent developments in AI-driven solutions for predictive diagnostics, robotic-assisted surgery, and administrative automation will enhance efficiency and reduce costs. More hospitals will also adopt smart hospital technologies to optimise patient care," he added.

Lim said technology-driven solutions such as remote monitoring, AI-assisted diagnostics, and telehealth will also become crucial



Malaysia is gaining a reputation as a medical tourism hub. – BERNAMAPIC

in efficiently managing elderly patients. "In fact, some Malaysian hospitals such as Subang Jaya Medical Centre have already launched and implemented these connected healthcare services."

According to RHB Investment Bank Bhd, the growth outlook for

Malaysia's healthcare sector in 2025 is promising, with investors' continued appetite for high-quality healthcare assets remaining intact. It said this sustained demand from investors would be driven by a permanent, structural shift due to the country's ageing population.

It added that the government's recent initiatives in setting up national health insurance and takaful products represent more sustainable measures in ensuring equitable access to public and private healthcare.

"Such mechanisms are similar to Singapore's MediSave, where income earners are mandated to contribute a portion of their salary to a pool of funds (managed by a government-owned entity), and the savings can be used for medical treatment when needed," it said in a research note, while maintaining an "overweight" rating on Malaysia's healthcare sector.

However, the investment bank's research division said the regulatory overhang arising from the diagnosis-related group (DRG) pricing mechanism could affect investor sentiment in the near term.

"Ultimately, we believe the implementation of the DRG pricing mechanism still requires extensive study and engagement with various stakeholders, given the complexity of each medical procedure and its underlying costs."



SCAN ME

■ BY **JOHN GILBERT**
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Timber Association (MTA) has expressed concern over a proposal by the European Union (EU) to list seven timber genera – Anthoshorea, Doona, Pentacme, Neohopea, Richetia, Rubroshorea and Shorea – under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

In a letter addressed to Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, MTA president George Yap (*pic*) highlighted the EU proposal's potential economic and ecological repercussions and urged a more balanced approach to conservation.

He said the EU's proposal, outlined in a letter dated Nov 14, 2024, requested responses from Malaysia and 16 other range states by Nov 29, 2024.

"However, Malaysia has yet to submit an official reply," Yap said in the letter to the Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Ministry (NRES Ministry) seen by *SunBiz*.

MTA emphasised that the Forest Research Institute Malaysia has identified only five species within these genera as critically endangered, questioning the necessity of a blanket listing for the entire Shorea genus, which constitutes a significant portion of Malaysia's forest cover and timber production.

The association argued that Malaysia already employs robust conservation measures, including the Total Protected Area system to prevent species extinction, Sustainable Forest Management, Reduced-Impact Logging practices and en-

Address challenges posed by EU proposal, ministry urged

► Malaysian Timber Association voices concern over push to list seven timber classes under CITES

richment planting and certification schemes to ensure responsible forestry.

MTA also pointed out that deforestation in Malaysia is driven by multiple factors, including urban development and population growth, rather than timber production alone. It described the EU's approach as disproportionate, particularly since the Shorea genus is a vital economic resource for Malaysia's timber industry.

The association said a CITES Appendix II listing would impose strict trade regulations, potentially disrupting livelihoods and harming local communities dependent on the sector.

MTA commended Nik Nazmi and the ministry for acknowledging these concerns and agreed on the need for a strategic response.

It noted that in addressing the issue, the NRES Ministry and the MTA have outlined a three-pronged approach. These include high-

level discussions, during which the minister engages with the Ministry of Plantation and Commodities to align national policies.

Further, Malaysia will seek support from Asean member states and other affected range states, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, to oppose the EU's proposal.

Thirdly, a brainstorming session with the Malaysian Timber Industry Board and MTA members to be held this month to formulate a detailed response to the EU's six key questions.

"The MTA reaffirmed its commitment to biodiversity conservation but stressed that CITES regulations must also consider socio-economic impacts. The association pledged to



assist the government in preparing technical and socio-economic counter arguments while rallying support from regional trade bodies and the international community," MTA said in the letter.

MTA noted that the letter to the NRES Ministry underscores the delicate balance between environmental preservation and economic sustainability. It said that while Malaysia remains committed to protecting endangered species, the association advocates for a fair and evidence-based approach that does not unfairly penalise the

timber industry.

"With coordinated efforts between the government, industry stakeholders and regional partners, Malaysia aims to present a compelling case against the EU's broad-brush CITES proposal. The timber sector now awaits further developments as the NRES Ministry prepares its official response, hoping a mutually beneficial resolution can be achieved," the association said.

Human touch must lead in AI-driven customer experience, says futurist

PETALING JAYA: As artificial intelligence (AI) continues to reshape customer engagement strategies across Malaysia and the region, futurist, author and speaker Anders Sörman-Nilsson (*pic*) has urged businesses to rethink how they build connections with customers in an increasingly digital-first world.



Speaking at the Zoom CX Summit APAC 2025, Sörman-Nilsson said, "Businesses must start preparing for a new, more human-centric, technology-enabled future of customer experience (CX)."

"In today's digital-first world, to truly win the minds and hearts of customers, we have to do things well. This means looking at things from both a high-touch and a high-tech perspective, blending human intelligence with artificial intelligence."

Hosted by Zoom, the summit brought together CX leaders and technology experts from across the region to explore how businesses can stay ahead in the "experience revolution", a term used by Zoom's head of CX sales (Asia-Pacific and Japan) Lukas Carruthers, to describe the growing demand for more intelligent, empathetic and seamless customer interactions powered by AI.

Carruthers said that while AI can streamline customer journeys

and offer real-time insights, the technology must not undermine trust and human connection.

"The most successful brands leverage AI systems as an enabler of human connection. AI handles routine tasks, predicts issues before they escalate, and enables real-time insights, while humans focus on

what they do best – building relationships with empathy, creative solutions, and genuine care," he said.

A key theme of the summit was the need to strike a balance between AI innovation and human empathy.

Carruthers acknowledged that businesses face ongoing challenges, including fragmented customer journeys, agent burnout, and the need to scale personalisation.

However, he emphasised that overcoming these hurdles opens opportunities to lead in customer experience transformation.

Carruthers said the future of CX in the Asia-Pacific lies in embracing AI-first platforms that prioritise human connection. "Organisations need to adopt CX solutions that deliver cutting-edge AI-powered experiences while ensuring that empathy, trust, and transparency remain at the forefront of every interaction."

MNH's 2025 prospects strong, backed by RM892m order book: HLIB Research

PETALING JAYA: Hong Leong Investment Bank Bhd (HLIB Research) views the operational outlook for MN Holdings Bhd (MNH) in 2025 as strong.

The group boasts a record-high order book of RM892.4 million and a robust tender book of RM1.5 billion.

"Also, we see better pricing for Tenaga Nasional Bhd's (TNB) projects, driven by the limited pool of M&E contractors and the strong pipeline of projects set to roll out in RP4. Additionally, MNH has highlighted a potential shift in DC development focus to the central region from the southern, which we reckon is favourable for the group's UUE segment.

"The upcoming LSS5, LSS5+, and LSS6 projects will provide further upside to MNH's order book," HLIB Research said in a report.

HLIB Research noted that as of March 13, MNH's order book hit a record RM892.4 million, with over 50% coming from DC sector and TNB projects.

Despite this strong position, tender activity remains healthy. RM1.5 billion worth of projects are currently being bid on, with 70% involving TNB and DC opportunities.

HLIB Research noted that half of DC-related tenders come from existing clients, while the other half represent new business from Western-based DC operators.

"The group maintains a selective approach, pursuing projects that either strengthen its track record or deliver attractive margins, with ample opportunities still available in the market," the bank-backed research firm said.

Further, HLIB Research noted that the upcoming LSS5, LSS5+, and LSS6 projects (totaling 6GW) are set



MN Holdings' businesses include provision of substation engineering services and solutions to private and public utilities companies in the power industry in Malaysia. The group boasts a record-high order book of RM892.4 million and a robust tender book of RM1.5 billion. – **MN HOLDINGS PIC**

to boost MNH's order book, surpassing TNB's 4GW ESA for data centres.

"Unlike CGPP, LSS requires timely execution, ensuring quicker project rollout. MNH expects improved pricing power due to the larger market opportunity – LSS5 and LSS5+ alone exceed cumulative past utility-scale quotas – and limited competition among M&E specialists.

"Higher project capacities should also translate to bigger

contract values and stronger margins," HLIB Research said.

HLIB Research maintains a "buy" call for MNH with an unchanged target price of RM1.54.

"We favour the group for its strong exposure to high-growth sectors such as solar and data centres.

"Additionally, MNH is well-positioned as a proxy for Malaysia's rising power demand and stands to benefit from TNB's capex upcycle," HLIB Research said.

M'sia can tap Uzbek GSP for EU access

Uzbekistan envoy sees strong prospects for halal tourism as AirAsia X gears up for Tashkent flights and potential Samarkand route

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian investors, food producers and downstream palm oil products manufacturers should exploit Uzbekistan's strategic location and use it as a launch pad to further penetrate the lucrative markets of Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and even China.

Uzbekistan's Ambassador to Malaysia Karomiddin Gadoev also said there was immense potential for the development of halal tourism in Uzbekistan, more so with AirAsia X, which will begin flights to Tashkent this September, possibly considering mounting a flight to the holy city of Samarkand.

Elaborating on the economic benefits, he said Malaysian investors could take advantage of the European Union's (EU) Generalised System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) accorded to his country.

By setting up manufacturing operations such as for food products, they could penetrate the lucrative European market which has a consumer base of 559 million people, considered among the world's largest markets.

"Malaysia must take advantage of our trade preferences to access the EU market seamlessly, more so with 6,243 eligible goods qualifying for duty-free treatment under GSP+, he told Bernama after recently appearing as a guest on Bernama TV's "The Nation" programme.

Alluding to the advantages of increased bilateral economic linkages between Tashkent and Kuala Lumpur, he said Uzbekistan, which reportedly has 600 million barrels of conventional oil reserves and 1.8 trillion cubic metres of natural gas reserves, has invited Petronas to explore oil and gas investments.

As an inducement to lure investments, the Uzbek government is offering attractive incentives for investors looking to establish or expand their businesses in the country, he said.

He cited how Uzbekistan with a market size of 35.6 million people could also be used as a base for Malaysian products to penetrate the immense CIS markets comprising 12 nations including Russia.

A trade privilege, the GSP is a duty-free scheme that grants developing countries preferential access to the EU market while GSP+ includes additional elements such as advocating human and labour rights, environmental protection and good governance.

Gadoev said that under the GSP+ framework, investors could leverage duty-free access for a wide range of products, making exports more competitive and in the process reap cost savings due to the elimination of import taxes.

This is undoubtedly a huge advantage and a striking contrast to tariffs now being imposed by developed economies.

Gadoev elaborated that Uzbekistan provides tax exemptions and other benefits depending on the volume of the investment, adding that if investors pour in US\$15 million (RM66 million) and more, they could enjoy a 10-plus years of tax exemption.

He revealed that businesses undertaking investments within its free economic zones (FEZ) and special industrial zones could enjoy similar privileges.

"We discussed the proposed joint special industrial zone between Uzbekistan and Malaysia (in Uzbekistan) as a free economic zone."

This means if Malaysian investors bring more investments, they will have tax exemption for everything, he said.

"They could also enjoy comprehensive benefits such as zero taxes on income, land, water and electricity for qualifying investments, access to developed infrastructure and essential utilities and simplified customs procedures to facilitate business operations," he said.

The proposed joint industrial zone came about after talks between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev during the latter's official visit to Malaysia on Feb 4 and 5.

Uzbekistan is currently Malaysia's second biggest trade partner among Central Asian countries with total trade amounting to RM369.8 million in 2024, mainly in Malaysia's favour.

Gadoev said Uzbekistan offers huge opportunities for trade and economic linkages with Asean as well as tourism with Southeast Asia's population close to 700 million making it one of the largest and fastest-growing regions in the world.

Tourism was a significant sector for economic growth, and Uzbekistan sees Malaysia and Indonesia as strategic partners in developing tourism, he said.

"Malaysia and Indonesia could be good



Gadoev sees strong trade and travel potential between Uzbekistan and Asean, driven by Southeast Asia's large, growing population. — PIX COURTESY OF EMBASSY OF UZBEKISTAN

partners for Uzbekistan in developing tourism, especially halal tourism and ziyarat tourism or pious visitation which includes pilgrimages to holy places, tombs and shrines.

According to reports, the holiest place in Samarkand is the Shah-i Zinda necropolis, a complex of mausoleums and tombs, particularly revered for housing the tomb of Kusam ibn Abbas, a cousin of Prophet Muhammad and considered a place of pilgrimage.

"We are now working very closely with Malaysia to establish the umrah plus packages, whereby Malaysian pilgrims could enjoy a three to four-day stay in Uzbekistan after their umrah or hajj.

Flight time between Tashkent and Jeddah is slightly more than five hours.

"We are trying to involve regions in Indonesia into this initiative as well," said Gadoev.

AirAsia's flights from KL International Airport to Tashkent are set to begin in September, which would be key in increasing

tourism activities in the country.

"AirAsia would like to make Uzbekistan the hub between Asia, Asean countries and the CIS, and further extending links to Europe and its surrounding regions.

"This would make Uzbekistan a bridge between East Asia and Europe and some other regions of the world," he said.

Gadoev said he had a meeting recently with Capital A Bhd chairman and co-founder Kamarudin Meranun and AirAsia X CEO Benjamin Ismail on the airline's inaugural flight to Tashkent.

He said low-cost airline AirAsia X would begin ticket sales for the Kuala Lumpur-Tashkent-Kuala Lumpur route in May, with regular flights set to commence in September this year, operating four times a week.

Besides Uzbekistan's capital city, Gadoev suggested that AirAsia could introduce a direct flight to Samarkand, which is the centre of Islamic scholarly study and was strategically located along the ancient silk route between China and India.

Kim Loong registers RM22.8m net profit in fourth quarter of FY25

KUALA LUMPUR: Kim Loong Resources Bhd (KLR) reported a 54.4% quarter-on-quarter (QoQ) decline in net profit to RM22.8 million in Q4 of FY25.

This drop was attributed to a shortage of fresh fruit bunch (FFB) supply and increased operational costs in its milling segment.

However, on a year-on-year basis, KLR's net earnings for FY25 grew by 9.5% compared to FY24, as higher palm product prices offset the lower FFB production.

AmlInvest Research noted that KLR's FY25 net profit came in 14% below the research firm's forecast and 10% below market consensus.

The underperformance was driven by a 16% QoQ decline in FFB output and weaker milling margins, which impacted the group's Q4 results.

However, KLR declared a final gross dividend per share (DPS) of 5 sen, bringing the total gross DPS to 15 sen for FY25. This translates to a solid dividend yield of 6.5%.

AmlInvest Research said KLR showed improved earnings in FY25 due to higher

crude palm oil (CPO) prices.

The average realised CPO price rose 12.4% year-on-year to RM4,291 per tonne, helping offset a 5.9% decline in FFB production.

The milling segment, which includes palm product processing and electricity sales, recorded a 6% year-on-year increase in EBIT to RM117.4 million.

However, the EBIT margin slipped to 7.1% in Q4 due to tighter FFB supply and elevated operational costs.

"We believe flooding disruptions in Johor partly caused the FFB shortage.

"We maintain 'buy' on KLR with a lower target price of RM2.75 from RM3.09 a share previously.

"We have reduced KLR's FY26 net profit by 11% and FY27 net earnings by 9% to account for higher operational costs and a lower FFB production from our earlier estimates.

"We have assumed that KLR's FFB output would improve by 6.9% in FY26 compared to a 5.9% decline in FY25," AmlInvest Research said.



Decline in earnings due to shortage of fresh fruit bunch supply and higher operational costs in the milling segment. — KIM LOONG RESOURCES WEBSITE

SpaceX eyes Starlink hub in Vietnam

Company plans multiple ground stations, sources say

HANOI: SpaceX is readying a ground station in Vietnam for Starlink satellites and plans many more, two people with knowledge of the talks told Reuters, in a move that would herald its launch in the country and would help authorities police internet traffic.

The possible investment follows Vietnam's decision, amid US tariff risks, to allow Starlink to operate under a five-year pilot programme by which owner Elon Musk can retain full control of SpaceX's local subsidiary, circumventing strict limits on foreign ownership.

Hanoi has asked SpaceX to set up at least one ground station in Vietnam, according to a decision by

the prime minister, dated March 23 and reviewed by Reuters.

That station could be up and running as early as May or June in the central Vietnamese city of Danang, and may be part of a network of up to 15 in the country, said the two people, who were briefed about the deliberations.

It is unclear whether the plans would move forward if Vietnam is slapped with high tariffs, which US President Donald Trump has said will be announced on April 2 for countries the administration reckons are unfairly benefiting from their trade with the United States.

SpaceX and Vietnam's Technology Ministry did not reply to requests for comment.

The plan would make Vietnam the host of one of the largest such Starlink networks.

Starlink operates in more than 100 countries and territories, but does not disclose how many ground stations it has.

Not all of the countries have a ground station, which communicate with satellites and forward data to users.

Starlink Installation Pros, a company that says it specialises in installing Starlink services but is not related to Starlink, says on its website Starlink has about 150 ground stations globally, with nearly half in the United States.

Starlink is still completing its application to operate in Vietnam, and is also in talks for the possible provision of secure intranet communication services, said one of the people, a Vietnamese official, who noted the intranet plan had not yet been approved by the government.

The Vietnamese government has authorised Starlink to serve a maximum of 600,000 customers – a limit that, in a country with internet prices lower than Starlink's and where only remote, poor areas are not covered by high-speed connections, may encourage

Starlink to offer additional services.

The second source, who was briefed about a meeting in March between representatives for Starlink and local authorities, said Starlink's investment would be about US\$3 million (RM13 million) for the ground station in central Vietnam.

Both sources said that the plan entailed the establishment of 10-15 stations across Vietnam, but that regulatory steps had so far only been taken for the first.

They declined to be named because the information was not public.

Negotiations to obtain favourable ownership conditions for Starlink, which Vietnam initially opposed, resumed in recent months amid increasing risks that Vietnam might face damaging tariffs from the Trump administration over its large trade surplus with Washington, which topped US\$123 billion last year.

A third person familiar with the discussions described Vietnam's

change of tack on Starlink as an "olive branch" to Musk, a close ally to Trump.

Starlink had run a free trial service in Vietnam, one of the sources and another Vietnamese official said.

Ground stations optimise Starlink's services in a country.

At the same time they allow regulators to monitor more closely data transfers, which is a crucial issue in tightly controlled Vietnam, one of the sources said.

All traffic generated in Vietnam "must pass through this gateway", the prime minister's March decision says, setting requirements on data storage, identification of users and suspension of service on security grounds.

SpaceX has pledged to invest US\$1.5 billion in Vietnam, according to a report published in September on the Vietnamese government portal, and has told suppliers to move some production operations to the nation. – Reuters



This handout photo shows homes inundated by floodwaters in the town of Windorah in central-west Queensland.

– AFP/QUEENSLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

Floods swamp Australia's cattle country

SYDNEY: Whole herds of cattle have drowned in vast inland floods sweeping across the Australian outback, officials said yesterday, as the muddy tide drenched an area the size of France.

Swollen rivers burst their banks after unusually heavy downpours last week over outback Queensland, an arid region home to some of the country's largest cattle ranches.

Officials said more than 100,000 livestock – cattle, sheep, goats and horses – had been swept away, were missing, or had drowned.

"These are only early indications of the magnitude of this disaster and while these preliminary numbers are shocking, we are expecting them to continue to climb as flood waters recede," said state agriculture minister Tony Perrett.

"It's heartbreaking to consider what western Queenslanders will be going through over the weeks and months as they discover the full extent of losses and damage – and start the long slog to start again."

Flood waters stretched some 500,000 sq km across sparsely populated western Queensland, Perrett said, a landmass roughly equivalent to France.

Industry body AgForce told local media some cattle ranches may have lost almost 100% of their herd.

The government Bureau of Meteorology said some towns had recorded as much as 500mm of rain in the space of a week – their typical yearly total.

"Unfortunately, more rainfall is on the way," forecaster Dean Narramore said.

"The reason why we are so concerned about that is because we have numerous flood warnings current for much of Queensland."

Muddy livestock survived by crowding together on the few small hills cresting above the flood waters, photos posted to social media showed. Queensland's fire department used helicopters to drop bales of fodder near surviving animals cut off from food.

Australia's so-called "channel country" is one of the nation's biggest cattle fattening grounds.

Most of the time its sweeping plains are dry and inhospitable.

But cattle gorge themselves on the pastures that sprout whenever wet season rains fill the dry creek beds – or channels – that snake through the region. – AFP

China property giant Vanke posts first annual loss since 1991

HONG KONG: Debt-laden Chinese property giant Vanke reported annual losses of 49.5 billion yuan (RM30 billion) on Monday, citing falling sales and shrinking profit margins despite Beijing's attempts to revive the housing market.

Vanke said 2024 was an "exceptionally challenging year" in a filing to the Hong Kong stock exchange and apologised for "distress caused ... due to the significant decline in sales, substantial losses and pressure on our liquidity".

Beijing has in recent years grappled with a prolonged crisis in the country's vast real estate sector, once a key pillar of the economy but now beset with sprawling debt.

Hong Kong-listed Vanke is part-owned by the government of Shenzhen and was China's

fourth-largest real estate firm by sales last year, according to research firm CIRC.

Vanke said on Monday that it "failed to break free from expansion inertia of high-debt, high-turnover and high-leverage in a timely manner, which led to problems" such as aggressive investment and over-expansion.

Last year marked Vanke's first annual loss since it was listed in 1991 and the magnitude exceeded the company's January estimates.

Vanke partly attributed the losses to "significant decrease in the settlement scale and gross profit margin of the development business".

Chief operating officer and executive vice-president Liu Xiao resigned from his position on Monday "due to work adjustments", the firm said. – AFP

Vodafone Idea soars on govt's plan to convert dues into stake

MUMBAI: Indian telecom company Vodafone Idea's shares rose 20% yesterday after the country's government said it would convert a part of the firm's outstanding spectrum auction dues into equity, giving it a lifeline amid its struggles with its debt load and better-funded rivals.

Its shares were last up 20% at 8.16 rupees, on track for their biggest one-day gain in 15 months.

The government's stake in Vodafone Idea will increase to 48.99% from 22.6% after it converts 369.5 billion rupees (RM19 billion) of the dues, the company said late on Sunday.

Vodafone Idea's current spectrum dues are estimated at

US\$18 billion, while its net debt stood at US\$25 billion as of September 2024, brokerage firm CLSA said.

Analysts said this move will offer relief to Vodafone Idea, which has been hit harder than its larger rivals Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel from high spectrum dues along with its heavy debt.

The government's decision eases concerns for the company's repayments in fiscal year 2026 and also improves the outlook for raising debt, Nomura analysts said.

CLSA analysts echoed Nomura's comments, adding that the conversion of spectrum dues to equity will take care of Vodafone Idea's repayments until calendar year 2027. – Reuters

Trump says will be 'very kind' with tariffs

► American duties causing anxiety but no 'dramatic' economic impact: IMF chief

WASHINGTON: US trading partners were bracing yesterday for an expected fresh raft of Donald Trump tariffs, while the US president promised to be "very kind" in addressing what he says are unfair trade imbalances.

Trump - who has been making unprecedented use of presidential powers since taking office in January - said he could announce today exactly what "reciprocal tariffs" will be imposed.

The Republican billionaire insists that action is needed because the world's biggest economy has been "ripped off by every country in the world", and is promising "Liberation Day" for the United States.

Asked for details, he told reporters on Monday: "You're going to see in two days, which is maybe tomorrow night or probably Wednesday."

But he added: "We're going to be very nice, relatively speaking, we're going to be very kind."

Critics warn that the strategy risks a global trade war, provoking a chain reaction of retaliation by major trading partners like China, Canada and the European Union.

Over the weekend, China, South Korea and Japan agreed to strengthen free trade between themselves.

But Trump said he was not worried the levies would push allies toward Beijing, adding that a deal on TikTok could also be tied to China tariffs.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the goal today would be to announce "country-based tariffs", although Trump remains committed to imposing separate, sector-specific charges.

The uncertainty has jolted markets, hammering equities across the board and stoking recession fears.

Asian stocks, which fell sharply Monday after Trump said his tariffs would include "all countries", rebounded a little yesterday.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that advisers have considered imposing global tariffs of up to 20%, to hit almost all US trading partners.

Trump has remained vague, saying his tariffs would be "far more generous" than ones already levied against US products.

Trump's fixation on tariffs is fanning US recession fears.

Goldman Sachs analysts raised their 12-month recession probability from 20% to 35%.

This reflects a "lower growth forecast, falling confidence, and statements from White House officials indicating willingness to tolerate economic pain".

China and Canada have imposed counter-tariffs on US goods, while the EU unveiled its own measures to start mid-April.

For now, IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva said Trump's tariffs were causing anxiety, but their global economic impact should not be dramatic.

Ryan Sweet of Oxford Economics said to "expect the unexpected", anticipating that Trump would "take aim at some of the largest offenders".

Besides reciprocal country tariffs, Trump could unveil additional sector-specific levies on

the likes of pharmaceuticals and semiconductors.

He earlier announced auto tariffs to take effect tomorrow.

Economists have expected the upcoming salvo could target the 15% of partners that have persistent trade imbalances with the United States, a group that US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent dubbed a "Dirty 15".

The US has some of its biggest goods deficits with China, the EU, Mexico, Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Canada and India.

US trade partners are rushing to minimise their exposure, with reports suggesting India might lower some duties.

Vietnam said yesterday it would slash duties on a range of goods including cars, liquefied gas and some agricultural products.

Japan announced it will set up around 1,000 "consultation centres" for businesses hit by US tariffs.

Speaking by phone to his US counterpart on Monday, Mexican Foreign Secretary Juan Ramon de la Fuente urged the preservation of free trade agreements between North American countries, and discussed the automobile industry, where 25% tariffs are poised to come into effect on April 3.

European Central Bank president Christine Lagarde said on Monday that Europe should move towards economic independence, telling France Inter radio that Europe faces an "existential moment".

Separately, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer spoke with Trump on "productive negotiations" towards a UK-US trade deal, while German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said the EU would respond firmly to Trump but was open to compromise. - AFP

In shift, OpenAI announces open AI model

SAN FRANCISCO: Artificial intelligence powerhouse OpenAI, the creator of ChatGPT, on Monday announced it is building a more open generative AI model as it faces growing competition in the open-source space from Chinese rival DeepSeek and Meta.

The announcement marks a strategic shift by OpenAI, which until now has been a fierce defender of closed, proprietary models that do not allow developers to modify the basic technology to make artificial intelligence more adapted to their goals.

OpenAI and defenders of closed models - which include Google - have often decried open models as more risky and vulnerable to nefarious uses by bad actors or foreign adversaries.

OpenAI's embrace of closed models has also been a bone of contention in its battles with former investor Elon Musk, the world's wealthiest person, who has called on OpenAI to honour the spirit of the company's name and "return to the open-source, safety-focused force for good it once was".

Putting pressure on OpenAI, many large companies and governments have proved reluctant to build their AI products or services on models they have no control over, especially when data security is a concern.

The core selling point of Meta's family of Llama models or DeepSeek's models is addressing these worries by letting companies download their models and have far greater control to modify the technology for their own purposes and keep control of their data.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said earlier this month that Llama hit one billion downloads, while the release of DeepSeek's lower cost R1 model in January rocked the world of artificial intelligence.

"We've been thinking about this for a long time but other priorities took precedence. Now it feels important to do," OpenAI's chief executive Sam Altman said on X.

As it builds its new model, the company plans to gather developer feedback through a series of events starting in San Francisco in the coming weeks, followed by sessions in Europe and Asia-Pacific regions. - AFP

US president confident of finding TikTok buyer before deadline

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump again downplayed risks that TikTok is in danger of being banned in the United States, saying he remains confident of finding a buyer for the app's US business by a Friday deadline.

The hugely popular video-sharing app, which has over 170 million American users, is under threat from a law that passed overwhelmingly last year and orders TikTok to split from its Chinese owner ByteDance or face a ban in the United States.

Motivated by widespread belief in Washington that TikTok is ultimately controlled

by the Chinese government, the law took effect on Jan 19, one day before Trump's inauguration.

But the Republican president quickly announced a delay that has allowed it to continue to operate; that delay is set to expire on April 5.

"We have a lot of potential buyers. There's tremendous interest in TikTok," Trump told reporters onboard Air Force One late on Sunday.

"We have a lot of people that want to buy TikTok."

"We're dealing with China also on it, because they may have something to do with it," the

president said, adding: "I'd like to see TikTok remain alive."

Any deal to divest TikTok from ByteDance will require the approval of Beijing, and Trump has said he may offer to reduce tariffs on China as a way to get Beijing's approval for the sale.

Trump, though he supported a ban in his first term, has lately become the app's greatest defender, seeing it as a reason more young voters supported him in November's election.

One of his major political donors, billionaire Jeff Yass, is also a major stakeholder in parent company ByteDance. - AFP

Regulators tell 23andMe to protect genetic data

SAN FRANCISCO: The US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) on Monday warned genetic testing firm 23andMe to honour its promise to protect people's personal information as it navigates bankruptcy.

The pioneering US company, which sells a mail-back saliva test to determine ancestry or certain health-related genetic traits for less than US\$200, filed for bankruptcy this month and is looking for a buyer two years after hackers gained access to millions of profiles.

"Any bankruptcy-related sale or transfer involving 23andMe users' personal information and biological samples will be subject to the representations the company has made to users about both privacy and data security," FTC chairman Andrew Ferguson said in a letter to the company's bankruptcy trustees.

Ferguson noted that 23andMe assures users that the company does not share their personal information with third parties, including police, without user permission or valid court orders.

The bankruptcy announcement on March 23 prompted warnings for 23andMe customers to ask the company to delete their data to safeguard privacy.

At its height a few years ago, the DNA testing craze saw millions of consumers rushing to discover their ancestry and health information, with tests from 23andMe becoming popular holiday gifts.

The Silicon Valley-based company, which went public in 2021, claims 15 million customers and has seen its sales decline in recent months as the testing craze faded and the company suffered a data breach. - AFP



Attendees visiting the 23andMe booth at the RootsTech annual genealogical event in Salt Lake City in the US. - REUTERS/PICT



UK court hears car loan case as banks risk huge payout

LONDON: The UK's highest court yesterday opens a hearing to determine whether controversial car loans were unlawful, in a case that could cost banks billions of pounds in compensation.

Lenders are appealing a landmark ruling by a Court of Appeal in November that deemed it unlawful for car dealers to receive a commission on loans without

sufficiently informing borrowers.

It is estimated that millions of drivers would be eligible for compensation should the Supreme Court side with borrowers in the three-day hearing.

The loans, which were around for 14 years from 2007, incentivised car dealers to give higher interest rates in return for a higher commission.

Britain's financial watchdog has

made the commissions illegal.

The Supreme Court will consider two cases against South African lender FirstRand bank and one against British bank Close Brothers.

In preparation for the ruling, British banks have set aside considerable sums, including Lloyds Bank, which has earmarked nearly £1.2 billion (RM7.1 billion).

Consumer group Which!

estimated it could cost banks up to £16 billion, while other analysts expect the sums to be higher, with those at HSBC suggesting it could hit £44 billion.

The highest figures could put it on the same scale as the fallout from payment protection insurance (PPI), one of Britain's most costly consumer scandals, according to analysts.

Amid concerns over the economic

fallout, the UK government made an unsuccessful attempt to intervene in the case earlier this year.

Analysts said that the government may be concerned about the impact on banks' willingness to provide credit at a time when the economic outlook remains uncertain.

While the hearing is due to conclude tomorrow, a judgment is not expected until the summer. – AFP

Political support tarnishes crypto industry

► Early investors in \$LIBRA, \$TRUMP make huge profits while majority of buyers suffer losses

LONDON: Support for cryptocurrencies from US President Donald Trump or Argentine leader Javier Milei has seen investors lose billions of dollars and is damaging a sector struggling for credibility, researchers told AFP.

"The entire crypto industry is being tarnished," said Claire Balva, strategy director for fintech company Deblock.

Prosecutors are reportedly examining whether Milei engaged in fraud or criminal association, or was in breach of his duties, when he praised the \$LIBRA cryptocurrency on social media in February.

The token's value soared from just a few cents to almost US\$5 and then crashed. Milei deleted his blessing hours later.

He denies all allegations made against him.

"I did not promote it," Milei told broadcaster TN in February, adding it "is a problem between private parties because the State does not play a

role here" and "I acted in good faith."

The price collapsed after a handful of early investors decided to sell at a huge profit, causing colossal losses for the majority of those who purchased \$LIBRA.

It also dragged down prices of other cryptocurrencies, including bitcoin.

Hayden Davis, who helped launch \$LIBRA, said he had been inspired by the initial success of Trump's memecoin, \$TRUMP, that marked the president's inauguration.

Having reportedly made Trump at least US\$350 million, according to the *Financial Times*, about 810,000 buyers went on to lose more than US\$2 billion combined, stated crypto data group Chainalysis.

A memecoin is a cryptocurrency that rides on the popularity of a viral personality or phenomenon on the internet and is often seen as a purely speculative asset.

Trump is offering multiple products linked to digital currencies, notably through his World Liberty

Financial exchange, increasing accusations of a conflict of interest.

On paper, his support for crypto projects could boost the sector's legitimacy.

"But at the same time, it can backfire," said Larisa Yarova, director of the Centre for Digital Finance at Southampton Business School.

"Any conflicts that will emerge from it... hackers, speculative attacks, problems in relation to these specific coins or these specific projects" can prove counterproductive, she said.

There is scepticism also over the launch in February of the memecoin \$CAR by the Central African Republic.

"The domain name had been reserved only a few days before" launch, noted Balva, which "shows that there was too little preparation."

The Central African Republic was the second country to adopt bitcoin as legal tender, after El Salvador in 2021, which has since reversed course owing to a lack of local popularity.

Bitcoin was launched in 2008 as a way to free transactions from traditional financial institutions, notably banks.

Cryptocurrencies are based on blockchain technology, which publicly records transactions between

people holding and exchanging them.

In the absence of a centralised authority, the system relies on "trust" in the people "who are endorsing these products," said Maximilian Brichta, a doctoral student of communication at the University of Southern California.

Many traders will use automated programmes to buy a new token as early as possible in the hope of reselling it for maximum profit.

Milei defended himself by likening losses endured by buyers of \$LIBRA to someone entering a casino and knowing they may not win.

However with crypto, it is argued by some that the "game" is rigged from the outset.

To avoid price manipulation, "when launching a cryptocurrency, best practice dictates that the first investors... hold a very small share of the offering" and are prevented from selling for "several years," said Balva.

Except that at the launch of \$LIBRA, "more than 80%" of the available tokens were in the hands of "a handful of large holders (who) controlled all the liquidity and could liquidate it all at any time," she added.

According to Balva, this was "either monumental recklessness or outright fraud". – AFP

Aston Martin to sell stake in Formula One team

LONDON: Luxury carmaker Aston Martin Lagonda said on Monday it planned to sell its minority stake in the Aston Martin Aramco Formula One team to help turn around its loss-making core business.

At the same time, Aston Martin's main shareholder, the Yew Tree Consortium, plans to raise its stake in the group to 33%, a statement said.

Aston Martin, the model beloved by fictional British spy James Bond, added that the combined action will increase the group's liquidity by more than £125 million (RM718 million).

The consortium is led by Canadian Lawrence Stroll, whose son Lance Stroll drives for the Formula One team.

The company said its long-term Formula One sponsorship deal will not be affected.

"A long-term contract is now in place to ensure the Aston Martin name remains at the pinnacle of motorsport for decades to come," said a statement from the F1 team.

Aston Martin chief executive Adrian Hallmark said the new investment will "accelerate our progress into being a sustainably profitable company".

The company last month announced it would cut about 5% of its workforce as weak Chinese demand contributed to losses widening in 2024. – AFP

Tesla car sales in France drop to lowest Q1 in four years

PARIS: Tesla's sales in France fell year-on-year for a third consecutive month in March, contributing to the lowest first-quarter sales figures in the country since 2021 for Elon Musk's electric car brand, data showed yesterday.

The billionaire CEO, a close ally of US President Donald Trump, has stirred controversy by courting far-right parties in Europe, which has added to Tesla's sales slump ahead of the much-anticipated launch of its new Model Y mid-size SUV.

Tesla registered in March 3,157 car sales in France, a 36.83% drop from last year, for a total of 6,693 car registrations in the first quarter, data from French car body PFA showed.

Its market share in the country dropped to 1.63% in the quarter ending March, and lost ground to brands not accounted for by the PFA, including BYD and other Chinese EV makers, whose

total share of the market rose to 3.19%.

Overall new car registrations in France fell 14.54% in March and were down 7.83% in the first quarter.

Tesla is set to report its global first-quarter deliveries and production numbers today.

Analysts expect data from France and other key European markets this week to provide an important indication of the group's performance in the quarter and consumer sentiment towards the brand.

In response to the company CEO's right-wing activism, Tesla cars have also become targets for vandalism across several countries.

On Monday, Musk said that an overnight fire at a Tesla dealership in Rome that destroyed 17 cars was an act of terrorism, reiterating earlier comments by Trump.

Tesla share prices closed at US\$259.16 on Monday. – Reuters



Damaged and destroyed Tesla charging stations, burnt during 'Tesla Takedown' protests, in the French city of Saint-Chamond. – AFP/IC

Humans and AI: Three trends for 2025

ARTIFICIAL intelligence (AI) is no longer an abstract concept—it's now a part of everyday life. Since 2020, Malaysia's AI market has surged, growing at an annual rate of 27.63% and is projected to reach RM4.6 billion this year.

This rapid expansion highlights a clear trend: businesses are integrating AI into their operations at an accelerating pace. But this shift isn't just happening internally—it's also deeply embedded externally in consumer-facing applications. Brands are leveraging AI agents to create more seamless, personalised experiences across apps, software, and digital platforms – enhancing how communities interact with technology.

At this point, I think we can all agree – AI has evolved to the point it is actively reshaping how we allocate resources, optimise efficiency, and drive progress. But like any powerful technology, AI is a double-edged sword. While it fuels digital transformation, it also blurs the line between humans and bots.

Let's be honest – with today's AI becoming increasingly person-like, it's hard to tell whether you're interacting with an individual or AI. As we move further into this AI-driven era, three key trends will redefine how we engage with

technology in 2025 and beyond.

The human-AI partnership

Have you noticed a significant shift in the way we work, communicate and make decisions since AI became a mainstream tool in our daily lives? Today, AI is embedded across industries – whether in highly technical fields like robotics, or administrative roles such as customer service, marketing, and recruitment. AI is no longer just a passive tool; it actively collaborates with people to enhance efficiency, playing a role much like a virtual assistant by automating routine tasks, allowing individuals to focus on higher-value goals that require human judgment and expertise. Reports show that 84% of Malaysians have integrated AI into their workflow, primarily to save time and improve efficiency. It also highlights another key finding where 77% of Malaysian professionals struggle with time and energy constraints in completing their work. These insights project the growing demand for AI as a supporting tool and spotlight the human-AI partnership as an emerging trend.

However, the ultimate goal of AI isn't to replace humans, and as AI continues to reshape productivity across organisations – authenticity

and transparency must remain at the core of this evolution. The key is not just innovation, but responsible integration – where technology serves as a partner, not a replacement.

Proof of human is the missing piece in AI-driven world

Verifying that a digital action is performed by a real, unique individual – rather than a bot or AI – was once an afterthought. With AI-powered bots increasingly being used for both productive and harmful purposes, verification has become essential. Automation is now a staple in customer engagement, but it has also contributed to rising concerns about misinformation, deepfakes and cybersecurity risks.

How urgent is this issue? In just one quarter, cyberattacks surged by 10% from Q2 to Q3 of 2024, with botnet-related attacks flagged as a growing cybersecurity threat. The rise of AI-generated entities has made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between human and automated interactions. This has led to the growing importance of proof-of-human solutions, such as digital authentication to help combat AI-related threats.

Human verification technologies like World ID help build trust in digital interactions and can be combined with tools like Face Auth to strengthen security. For example,

Deep Face leverages these integrations to detect deepfakes and other forms of digital fraud.

A 2024 report indicates that modern AI systems can now easily bypass traditional CAPTCHA challenges for online human authentication, highlighting the urgent need for proof-of-human solutions to be integrated into digital interactions. By 2025, the adoption of human-verification technologies is expected to become an industry-standard, ensuring digital interactions remain safe, transparent and fundamentally human-centric.

The return of a real human network

When the internet first emerged, online interactions were largely assumed to be between real individuals. However, as automation becomes more prevalent, the line between humans and AI has blurred making online interactions feel less certain.

A recent survey found that Malaysians are increasingly concerned about AI-related threats, with 54% worried about identity theft, 45% about deepfakes, and 32% about phishing. This underscores the importance of creating virtual spaces where trust is not assumed but actively validated.

To address this, digital platforms are integrating stronger verification mechanisms to ensure interactions

occur between actual people. Social networks, online marketplaces, and dating platforms are adopting identity verification and proof-of-personhood technologies to foster safer, more authentic online experiences. These solutions aim to return control to individuals, enabling them to engage in digital spaces where trust is a given and underlies every seamless performed transaction.

A shift toward networks without bots is driving the resurgence of peer-to-peer communities. Whether it's for social platforms, ticket sales, or online dating, ensuring that interactions are shaped by real people rather than bots makes online experiences more authentic and secure. Beyond security, this shift also enhances accessibility and inclusion, helping create a digital world where everyone can participate without the interference of automated bots.

As AI continues to shape our lives, preserving spaces for genuine human connection has never been more important. The future of digital interaction depends on ensuring that technology enhances – not replaces – real human engagement.

This article is contributed by Founding Team and World Foundation managing director Fabian Bodensteiner (pix).

THE GREEN EQUILIBRIUM

Electricity tariff 'rebasing' in Peninsular Malaysia

INCENTIVE Based Regulation (IBR) was implemented for Peninsular Malaysia beginning January 2014. Generation component that comprises fuel cost and capacity charges is a full cost pass through. A part of Tenaga Nasional Bhd's (TNB) Planning Dept was converted into single buyer and the operation was separately ring fenced. Single buyer with the transmission, distribution and retail falls under IBR regulation. These are the costs that are audited while its revenue and profit are capped.

2014 was the trial run year and the regulatory period (RP) was set to be reviewed every 3 years. When a base tariff is set, the corresponding natural gas and coal price will be fixed. Fuel cost fluctuates due to global market forces and the Imbalance Cost Pass Through (ICPT) mechanism was set at 6 months pass through during every RP to ensure efficiency and prevent steep changes to tariff. If the fuel cost drop lower than the benchmarked cost, a rebate will be given after 6 months and vice versa. This is to cushion the fuel cost volatility.

After few years, Kumpulan Wang Industri Elektrik (KWIE) was formed to manage ICPT, allocation from government for tariff impact reduction, saving from renegotiation of old Independent Power Producers' (IPP) Power Purchase Agreements (PPA) and incomes from the fund's own investment, etc. When fuel cost drops below benchmarked cost for a regulatory period (RP), the savings will be kept in KWIE and given as rebate. When the fuel cost goes higher than the benchmarked cost, a surcharge will be imposed to tariff after buffering with the KWIE fund. At

early stage, there were misconceptions that there was subsidy from government. Subsidy from government happens only when budget is allocated to KWIE and approved by parliament. If the fund is using savings from fuel cost, profit cap and revenue cap imposed to TNB, it is not subsidy as it is the money consumers paid in advance through tariff.

The matter that ruffled feathers recently was the announcement that base tariff increase will be almost 5 sen/kWh or 14%. The previous base tariffs were increased in a smaller margin for every RP and the tariff bands for all categories of consumers were maintained as the revenue stream for each tariff band was sufficient to meet the regulated revenue and profit. Under IBR, any over recovery will be channelled back to the tariff. Changes to base tariff are based on requirements set by Energy Commission. The vagueness of the recent announcement has caused panic. A 14% increase in base tariff will increase the revenue for electricity sector. However, if the domestic sector's tariff band is designed to avoid this increase, the cost will certainly be passed to the business sector.

Almost 75% of electricity generated in Peninsular Malaysia is consumed by non-domestic sector. This also means that the channelling of the cost impact to these sectors will increase the prices of goods and services. Thus, increase in cost of living is not avoidable.

There is less than 5 months before the government decide on the new base tariff for RP4. There are few



A 14% increase in base tariff will boost electricity sector revenue, but if domestic tariff avoids this increase, the cost will be passed to the business sector. – UNSPLASH PIX

issues that the government must address as short term and long term implementations:

- Government must make public details of RP3 and RP4 base tariff estimation just like how it was done transparently during RP1 and RP2. 14% increase must be detailed out to avoid any non-tariff infrastructure cost to be socialised.
- JPPPET meeting minutes and future plant up capacity planning must also be published. These annual

updates have been missing for the past few years. We have raised these issues with the current minister of energy as well recently.

- Carry out structured and meaningful stakeholder engagement before decide on the tariff review to ensure issues from various stakeholders can be addressed amicably.
- Renegotiate power plant projects that were awarded via direct negotiation. The saving can be used to pare down the cost impact to tariff.

➤ Implementation of Energy Efficiency across the board is vital. It is the fundamental step that will flatten the demand curve for electricity. We have also raised the risks and potential of energy transition as well as failure to address energy efficiency implementation to the minister of energy recently.

This article is contributed by Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia (Awer) president Piarapakan S.

IN Malaysia, the push towards Industry 4.0 is evident across key sectors, from automotive to precision manufacturing. For instance, Proton and Perodua are advancing their production capabilities by integrating smart automation and modular manufacturing, allowing them to customise vehicles—whether combustion, hybrid or electric—based on market demands. Similarly, local industrial players such as Pentamaster and Vitrox are leveraging high-tech automation to produce enclosures and electronic components tailored to client specifications with enhanced efficiency.

Producing individually, serially and with precision – these examples illustrate what Industry 4.0 means today. This transformation was preceded by an unprecedented restructuring of equipment. Modular manufacturing cells replaced rigid, monolithic production lines to reorganise linear process chains into more flexible and automatable systems. The goal: to produce not uniformly but ever more specifically.

[80% of CIOs in Asia are prioritising business model transformation through the adoption of AI, automation and data-driven strategies]

From March 31 to April 4, the German HANNOVER MESSE will not only showcase how far industry has come on its transformation journey but also where it encounters obstacles. While in the past analog machinery parks were the limiting factor, today, it is digital infrastructures themselves. The reason why is highlighted in an IDC survey: if 80% of CIOs in Asia plan to use AI and automation by 2028 to implement agile and data-driven business models, this can only succeed if IT systems can operate just as intelligently and autonomously – from clouds and software applications to networks.

No different in Southeast Asia, where digital transformation is accelerating, the demand for robust and efficient IT infrastructure is crucial. According to the Malaysian Investment Development Authority (Mida), the manufacturing sector accounted for RM43 billion in approved investments in 2024, highlighting the growing emphasis on digitalisation and smart manufacturing. As digital economies in Southeast Asia continue to expand, addressing IT infrastructure challenges will be key to unlocking the full potential of automation and AI-driven business strategies.

The need for seamless interconnectivity is becoming increasingly critical in Malaysia's evolving digital economy, especially as businesses transition to cloud-based solutions. Traditionally, implementing applications in distributed systems required manually combining and managing necessary components from various providers – a time-consuming and costly process. An alternative

How DE-CIX is shaping Malaysia's digital future



The manufacturing sector received RM43b in approved investments in 2024, reflecting a growing focus on digitalisation and smart manufacturing, according to Mida. - UNSPLASH PIX3

approach is demonstrated by Tellus: to virtually provision networks for sensitive, real-time-critical applications in distributed cloud environments. The research project led by DE-CIX has developed a prototype interconnection infrastructure. Software-defined, it enables seamless integration of services from different providers and ensures compliance with specific connectivity requirements – fully automated along the entire interconnection supply chain and based on the standards of the European Gaia-X initiative.

Streamlining interconnection service deployment through automation

As Malaysia advances towards digital transformation, greater flexibility in connectivity is crucial to enable seamless, autonomous processes across industries. A key development in this space is the IX-API initiative. In collaboration with global internet exchanges like AMS-IX and LINX, DE-CIX is pioneering an API that automates the provisioning of interconnection services, reducing complexity and cost. By aligning their IT infrastructure with this industry-standard interface, Malaysian businesses can seamlessly

connect to multiple internet exchanges, boosting digital efficiency and resilience. Moreover, this collaborative approach fosters knowledge sharing and expands market access, reinforcing Malaysia's position as a regional digital hub.

The connectivity challenge: AI algorithms in need of faster networks

In Malaysia's digital transformation journey, the increasing reliance on AI-driven applications is placing immense pressure on connectivity infrastructure. From software-defined networking to network-as-a-service and infrastructure-as-code – especially as AI becomes embedded in products, processes and business models, interconnection services play a crucial role. The connectivity demands driven by AI highlight why: wherever algorithms form the basis of data-driven processes, the success of smart applications depends primarily on two phases. During training, AI processes vast amounts of data locally to learn how to perform specific tasks. In the inference phase, models apply their acquired knowledge, generate predictions and solve problems – often in real-time across decentralised applications.

However, studies by Meta reveal that AI models spend 33% of their time waiting for networks. To ensure the best possible performance of digital applications and services, digital infrastructure operators like DE-CIX are exploring ways to minimise latency while bringing data, applications, algorithms and users physically closer together.

Enhancing Malaysia's digital infrastructure and manufacturing with AI & automation

As Malaysia pushes forward with its Industry 4.0 agenda, the integration of AI and automation into digital infrastructure and manufacturing is becoming a necessity. High bandwidth and low latency to seamlessly merge AI inference at the edge with cloud computing in real-time or stable, resilient and optimised network connectivity to control sensitive data flows – those who produce intelligently and flexibly require an equally smart and adaptable digital infrastructure.

To support Malaysia's growing smart manufacturing sector, digital infrastructure must be adaptable, secure and compliant, ensuring data is transported with minimal processing delays. Achieving this requires industrial processes and digital IT supply chains to operate intelligently, autonomously and flexibly in sync. This coordination must extend beyond individual carriers aligning on a single API to encompass the entire last mile across diverse applications, smart factory platforms and manufacturing systems.

More AI and automation for digital infrastructures and the production industry itself: With Malaysia's vision to become a regional digital economy hub – expected to contribute RM257.2 billion (25.5% of GDP) by 2025 – investing in cutting-edge interconnection services is critical. Under initiatives like MyDigital, concerns over connectivity, real-time data processing and AI-driven automation continue to be top priorities for businesses looking to scale efficiently in a competitive digital economy. As Malaysia advances its Industry 4.0 and smart factory initiatives, prioritising AI-driven automation and high-performance digital connectivity will be crucial in maintaining global competitiveness.

This article is contributed by DE-CIX CEO Ivo Ivanov.

Redefining hospitality careers for local future workforce

AS the sun rises over Kuala Lumpur's gleaming skyline, thousands of delegates stream into various convention centres across the city, embodying Malaysia's rising prominence in the global business events industry. From world-class medical conferences to international trade exhibitions, the country has positioned itself as a key player in an industry projected to reach US\$1.78 billion (RM7.9 billion) globally by 2030. Yet beneath this glittering success lies a growing challenge that threatens to undermine the industry's momentum: a critical shortage of skilled talent.

Growth of Malaysia's business events industry

The global business events industry is experiencing remarkable growth, with Southeast Asia having emerged as a dominant force. The region's business events market is expected to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 12.5% by 2028.

Malaysia's strategic location, modern infrastructure, and technological advancements make it particularly attractive for international events. Recent initiatives such as Visit Malaysia 2026 and Malaysia's Asean Chairmanship in 2025 further enhance its appeal, complemented by

visa-free entry for Chinese and Indian nationals.

The numbers tell a compelling story. By 2025, Malaysia is expecting to see 31.3 million tourist arrivals, with RM125.5 billion in tourism receipts. Looking further ahead to 2034, the sector is expected to contribute RM336.6 billion (12.1% of GDP) and create over 3.5 million jobs, employing one in six Malaysians. The country has already secured 123 international events from 2022 to 2030, further cementing its reputation as a premier business events destination.

However, this promising growth faces a significant challenge: without a robust hospitality workforce, this expansion may be unsustainable. The pandemic's impact on the sector was severe, with the Malaysian Association of Hotels reporting approximately 120 hotels closed either temporarily or permanently.

The workforce statistics are equally sobering. According to the World Tourism Organisation, Malaysia's hotel workforce decreased by 10% in 2020, dropping to 208,500 from 233,800 in 2019. The Malaysian Association of Hotel Owners reports that half of the hospitality workforce left the industry during the pandemic, many transitioning to other fields or self-employment.

Unlike in the US and Europe, generational workforce shifts are less pronounced in Southeast Asia. However, attracting and retaining hospitality talent remains a pressing challenge. Younger generations increasingly prioritise work-life balance and higher salaries, with many drawn to remote work or flexible job opportunities that align with their lifestyle and long-term career aspirations.

Addressing the talent gap

To address these challenges, collaboration between government, industry, and academia has become crucial. The hospitality industry must reposition itself as a dynamic and rewarding career path with clear growth opportunities. This transformation requires upskilling employees and equipping them with versatile skill sets to adapt to evolving industry demands.

Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre is leading this transformation by investing in comprehensive training programmes and cross-departmental mobility. This approach allows employees to explore diverse career pathways, benefiting both individual professional growth and organisational capabilities.

Educational partnerships are also proving

essential, with institutions providing students valuable industry exposure and hands-on learning experiences through internships, career fairs, and knowledge-sharing sessions.

Future-proofing the hospitality industry

The industry must also embrace technological innovation. Cloud-based systems now allow for real-time tracking of employees' skills, training progress, and career trajectories. AI-driven insights can identify high-potential employees and recommend targeted development programmes, streamlining hiring processes and improving long-term workforce planning.

A positive and supportive work environment helps keep employees. When hospitality businesses focus on engagement, recognition, and work-life balance, they lower staff turnover and build loyalty.

As Malaysia continues to attract major international events and conferences, its success will increasingly depend on the strength and sustainability of its workforce development initiatives.

This article is contributed by Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre general manager John Burke.



the Sun **LYFE**

WEDNESDAY | APR 2, 2025

Editorial
T: 03-7784 6688
F: 03-7785 2625
E: lifestyle@thesundaily.com

Advertising
T: 03-7784 8888
E: advertise@thesundaily.com



WEEKLY FOCUS

MONDAY

Technology and
social media

TUESDAY

Family
and parenting

WEDNESDAY

Fashion
and beauty

THURSDAY

Home
and living

FRIDAY

Travel
and leisure

SATURDAY

Food
and beverage

Kebaya *chic*

*Reimagining traditional
wear – P22*

INSIDE

p23

MagLifestyle's
Raya collection

p24

Billboard honours
women in music

p25

Fala Chen's return
to HK cinema

p26

Herriot to
perform in Ipoh

BY JOHN TAN

KELVIN Tan Khai Wen, publicly known as Kel Wen, has always been one who does not shy away from risks. As the man behind Behati, the 30-year-old Muar designer has made a name for himself with his fashion-forward interpretations of traditional wear.

From his 2019's Raya collection of oversized *baju melayu* to Datuk Seri Vida's telekung dress at 2023's Astro Most Gempak Awards, Wen has breathed new life into Malaysia's cultural styles. This Raya, he explores tradition further with his interpretations of *kebaya* in his Qaba collection. Inspired by the etymology of *kebaya*, the collection makes a bold move to introduce it as menswear, presenting a masculine influence to the traditionally female piece.

What prompted your interest in *kebaya*?

This collection's name is Qaba and it is a tribute to *kebaya*. I wanted to pay homage because *kebaya* is a Nusantara fashion icon, originating from Indonesia and Arab (states).

It started off as *Qaba* from the Arabs and then it evolved into *kebaya*, as we know it today. So, this collection details the transformation from *Qaba* to *kebaya*. That said, I wanted it to also have a Malaysian aspect to it. Since multiculturalism is one of the biggest points of Malaysian traditional wear, I wanted it to show that this *kebaya* is made in Malaysia – you cannot get (this) anywhere else.

Take, for instance, the *Kebaya Baba* in our collection, which pays tribute to our local Peranakan culture. It is more minimal and it fits a man's body. Normally, it is only made for women. But I have created a shirt-inspired, corporate and modern *kebaya*. To me, this is what Malaysian tradition is about. It is always about trying to innovate things.

Do you think your exploration of *kebaya* will invite criticism?

My purpose for having *Qaba* as the title is to celebrate *kebaya*. I really want people to learn about the history of the word and piece.

For those wondering why I am making *kebaya* for men, I am hoping to prove *kebaya* is not only for women. My purpose is to only expand the market. This is just the first step. Hopefully, we can all have more variations of traditional wear in the future to showcase our Malaysian identity.



Kebaya korset batik.



The *baju melayu* comes with a reversible *sampin*.

Redefining traditional wear

► Behati founder Kel Wen presents *kebaya* as menswear this Raya

Why did you decide to play with darker colours this time around?

There is a lot happening in the world right now. Hence, the world's mood has been quite dark. So, I wanted this campaign to convey hope through the darkness. You can say this is a metaphor for me trying to remind people to be fearless and not allow our inner demons to control us in this holy month.

This is the first time I have touched horror in my art because I am not a fan of horror films. I am actually scared of horror films. But, I enjoyed this as a new experience. To me, it is about fighting my personal fears. And, to be able to create something out of it is a positive message. So, that is what I hope to convey.

Could you elaborate on some of the materials you utilised?

Songket is the main material I used because I do not see enough *songket* items. So in this collection, I wanted to present more design variations on

how to wear one. For instance, I made a reversible *sampin* and a *baju melayu* with it. Normally, people would only use a *songket* for *sampin* but it is such a nice fabric. I would want to wear it as a top.

Also, we would only wear *sampin* with *baju melayu*. But these days, we want something easy. When I am attending a Raya event, sometimes I prefer not to dress too full with a *sampin* covering but I love *songket*.

How do I solve this issue then? I just make it into a top and I can wear my jeans. The idea is to appreciate the culture, but also make it easy to style with. That is my goal – to create new styles using traditional methods and fabric.

How would you say the *songket* contributes to the overall feel and aesthetic?

Although it is dark, it is very rich at the same time, which is what *songket* is to me. For me, *songket* has never been happy or joyful. Instead, I have always seen it as dark and sophisticated.

This is especially true with the *songket* I picked this time around. It has a black base with hints of metallic gold and silver, just to represent the golden and silver age that we are having at this point.

It is to showcase time in a way. This is because I feel it is the most classic and I want to achieve a new classic. For this collection, I hope to build this image of a traditional

songket. When people think of *songket*, I hope they think of gold, silver and bronze, which are the best colours in my opinion.

Any specific piece you are particularly fond of?

Other than the *songket*, we do also have *kain pelikat* this season. I love *kain pelikat* because it is very casual. You can style it with jeans. You can dress it down or up. It all depends on how you style it. It also has that cultural element, which I love. This is because *kain pelikat* is originally from India. So, there is that cultural exchange.

What was the hardest aspect about bringing this collection to life?

The biggest challenge was the timeline for this year. The time frame between Chinese New Year and Raya was short. I am still trying to get used to it.

This whole collection actually came out in a month. Although I only showcased 20 designs, I actually had 80 designs. So, that was the biggest challenge – to make it in time and to conceptualise everything.

Will we be seeing you at KL Fashion Week this year?

Yes, you will. You can expect similar vibes as with this collection.

It is still going to be dark but it is going to be a fun one. I have been planning it.



SEAMLESS JOURNEY WITH JOJO FLIGHT

SELETAR SINGAPORE ⇌ REDANG ISLAND ⇌ SUBANG SKYPARK
flight.berjayaahotel.com



The collection also features Kel Wen's signature oversize *baju melayu*.



The *Kebaya Baba* pays homage to local Peranakan culture.



Take fashion sips from *sirap bandung*

➤ Aidilfitri collection celebrates confidence, elegance, self-expression via modest wear

LYFE'S LOOKBOOK

BOUTIQUE MagLifestyle's Aidilfitri 2025 collection draws inspiration from one of Malaysia's most beloved festive beverages – *sirap bandung*. A staple during Ramadan and Hari Raya celebrations, this refreshing rose syrup and milk drink is cherished for its sweet, soothing taste and vibrant pink hue. Much like the drink, MagLifestyle's latest collection captures the essence of festivity, nostalgia and modern elegance, offering a stylish blend of tradition and contemporary fashion.

This 12-look collection features *baju kurung* modern, elegant dresses and chic blouse-and-skirt ensembles, designed for effortless styling throughout the festive season. Some of the pieces borrow the iconic pink shade of *sirap bandung*, while floral motifs and intricate embellishments enhance each outfit, making every look a standout masterpiece. Whether dressing up for Raya gatherings or opting for a more relaxed yet refined look, the collection offers something for everyone.

The campaign for this collection features talented singers and best friends Sissy Iman and Sarah Suhairi, who embody the brand's spirit of youthful vibrancy and versatility. Showcasing the adaptability of each design, the campaign highlights how fashion-forward modest wear can be styled in multiple ways, allowing wearers to express their unique personalities while celebrating together. Sissy and Sarah, twinning in their Raya outfits, bring to life the joy of festive dressing while staying true to their individual styles.

The brand aims to capture the spirit of Aidilfitri while delivering an inspiring message of confidence, elegance and self-expression.





SCAN ME



Blackpink's Jennie wears a ruby red Zuhair Murad dress with a plunging, sweetheart neckline.



South Korean girl group Aespa wins Group of the Year.

Girl power

► Women in music grace blue carpet



American singer-songwriter Megan Moroney sports an all-black look, keeping it classy and classic.



American singer-songwriter Gabi Sklar dons a black column maxi.

LYFE'S LOOKBOOK

THE 2025 Billboard Women in Music Awards on Saturday in Los Angeles, California, US celebrated the influence and contributions of women across the music industry. The evening honoured artists and industry leaders with performances, tributes and awards.

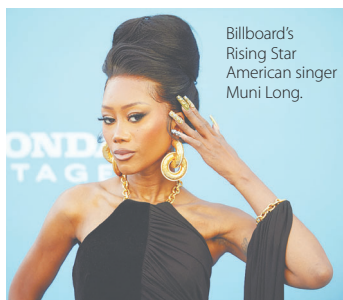
This year's honourees included Doechii as Woman of the Year, Erykah Badu received the Icon Award, Aespa as Group of the Year and Angela Aguilar with the Breakthrough Award, among others.



Billboard's Impact honouree and South African sensation Tyla.



I Love You, I'm Sorry hitmaker Gracie Abrams wins Songwriter of the Year Award.



Billboard's Rising Star American singer Muni Long.



American singer-actress Becky G.



Contrasting the blue carpet, actress Meg Donnelly opts for a lime green mini by Rachel Gilbert, paired Charles & Keith platforms in the same colour. — ALL PICS FROM REUTERS

Malaysians shop smarter for Raya 2025, prioritising budget, trust

MALAYSIAN consumers are shopping earlier than ever, with 98% of shoppers beginning their Raya purchases as early as the fourth quarter of 2024, according to Shopee Malaysia's Raya 2025 Buyer Trends Study.

This trend highlights a growing preference for early planning, allowing buyers to take advantage of year-end sales and promotions to maximise savings. The remaining 2% make last-minute purchases, typically for gifts and fresh festive or unexpected essentials right before the celebrations begin.

The study, conducted with 1,500 Shopee users, highlights a strong budget-conscious mindset, with seven in 10 (70%) shoppers keeping

their Raya expenses under RM500. Among them, about half, set a budget between RM300 and RM500. These higher-spending shoppers tend to prioritise bulk purchases for family gatherings, festive gifting and home upgrades, suggesting spending habits are influenced by family size, hosting responsibilities and cultural traditions.

When asked on the feature that gives the most confidence when shopping online for Raya, 75% of respondents chose Shopee's secure shopping ecosystem, citing flexible payment options, Shopee Guarantee and Shopee Mall, as key factors influencing their trust.

This suggests consumers increasingly prioritise risk-free

transactions and platform reliability when making purchases. The remaining 25% of consumers emphasise product variety, convenience and community-driven insights, often relying on seller ratings, peer recommendations and Shopee's affiliate marketing programs to guide their purchasing decisions.

The study also highlights a strong buyer preference for interactive, real-time content when discovering Shopee's Raya deals, with a majority relying on affiliate recommendations. Notably, four in five Malaysians tune to Shopee Live and Shopee Video content, drawn to the ability to see products in action, access exclusive deals and get instant answers to their questions. This trend highlights how

buyers value authenticity, social proof and real-time engagement over static posts, making live commerce a preferred way to explore and secure the best deals during peak shopping seasons such as Raya.

The findings further reveal 70% of Raya shoppers purchase fashion and beauty products, reinforcing the cultural significance of dressing up and self-care during the festive period. This category includes traditional attire, modest wear, footwear, accessories, makeup and skincare essentials.

Beyond fashion, 20% of shoppers prioritise household items, festive food and gift hampers, reflecting preparations for hosting family and friends as well as cultural gifting

traditions. The remaining 10% focus on travel essentials, gadgets and automotive products, indicating a segment of shoppers are gearing up for their *balik kampung* journeys or family holidays.

As Malaysians adopt earlier, more strategic and value-driven shopping habits, secure and seamless e-commerce experiences have become increasingly essential.

Reliable sellers, flexible payment options and platform-wide savings play a key role in helping consumers make informed purchases while maximising value.

As digital retail continues to evolve, e-commerce platforms are shaping a more convenient and trusted shopping environment.

BY R.BALA

AWARD-WINNING actress Fala Chen has made a long-awaited return to Hong Kong cinema with the mind-blending psychological thriller *Peg O' My Heart*.

She had been missing from the Hong Kong industry since taking time to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in Drama at the Juilliard School in New York City in 2014.

Post-graduation, Chen made the successful leap to big-budget Hollywood productions, gaining international recognition for her roles in *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (2021) as well as *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* (2024).

Peg O' My Heart has already made waves on the international festival circuit. The film had its world premiere at the Udine Far East Film Festival in Italy, followed by screenings at the Bucheon International Fantastic Film Festival in South Korea.

Most notably, it was selected as the closing film of the 7th Malaysia International Film Festival (MIFFest).

The film is a labour of love for Nick Cheung, who directed, starred in and co-wrote the movie as well as performed the theme song. He revealed the story is inspired by real events he personally witnessed.

Cheung's directorial excellence in *Peg O' My Heart* earned him the Best Director award at the Grimmfest Film Festival in Manchester, UK, as well as the Outstanding Contribution to Film Award at MIFFest. The film also received two special jury mentions at Grimmfest – Best Scare Feature as well as Best Visual and Special Effects.

The movie opened last Thursday in local cinemas. Chen answered some questions in an online interview. Without giving away potential spoilers, Chen gave a brief synopsis of *Peg O' My Heart*.

Dr Man (Terrance Lau), a brilliant but unorthodox psychiatrist, thrives on unlocking his patients' deepest secrets. During a chance taxi ride, he encounters a troubled driver named Choi (Cheung).

Though unable to intervene then, Man finds himself deeply disturbed by Choi's condition. Fate brings them together again when Choi is assigned to Man for a mandatory psychiatric evaluation. Haunted by nightmares and struggling to discern reality from dreams, Choi



Clutter was used to create an unsettling sense of claustrophobia in many of the scenes.

Dream doctor

► Fala Chen answers questions about return to Hong Kong cinema via dark psychological thriller

appears on the brink of collapse.

Determined to help, Man delves into Choi's past and his wife (Chen), a decision that unleashes a torrent of unsettling dreams of his own.

As the lines between reality and dreams blur, Man confronts a haunting question – are these nightmares a manifestation of his own buried memories or are they a chilling consequence of unearthing the dark secrets locked within Choi's mind?

Chen was asked how she felt about acting in a psychological thriller, a genre that is not often associated with Hong Kong cinema. She said it was a privilege to work with such a talented cast and director, as well as such an interesting and complex script that explored many themes that are not normally touched upon in Hong

Kong cinema.

She also praised the special effects team for doing a remarkable job in creating the right atmosphere, befitting the film's dark and eerie tone.

As a self-confessed neat freak, she pointed out the clever use of clutter and mess in various sets to create a sense of imbalance and chaos that is reflective of a mental breakdown.

When asked about her pursuit of higher education in 2014, Chen replied: "No one improves by sitting at home. No one is born with natural acting skills. You have to constantly work to improve your art."

Chen said the film is unorthodox for Hong Kong cinema as it deals with subjects such as bipolar characters and mental health, shining a light on



Chen says the film's complex nature has allowed her to stretch her acting chops.

less-discussed topics.

The 43-year-old actress was also asked if the disturbing film had any effect on her sleep, as it dealt with nightmares and deep psychological traumas. Chen said she was not bothered in the slightest as she can fall asleep easily.

"You only have a few hours of sleep in between takes, you quickly learn to grab shut-eye whenever and wherever possible," she revealed.

The star, who has appeared in HBO's *Irma Veeep*, was also asked about juggling parenthood with the demands of an international film career. She said she and her husband, French entrepreneur Emmanuel Straschnov, do their best

for her young kids, making sure they spend the maximum amount of time possible with them.

Chen was asked if her eldest daughter, who is four years old, realises her mother is a famous actress.

"She loves watching the Oscars and red carpet events with all its attendant glamour. She has seen me at such red carpet events all dressed up but she has not quite figured out yet that I am in the entertainment industry," Chen said.

With a career trajectory that seems to be only going upwards, it may be only a matter of time before Chen's offspring catch onto the fact that mummy is a massive star!



The movie has earned critical praise for its use of lighting effects to create an eerie atmosphere.



BLISSFUL
ESCAPE AMIDST NATURE
berjyahotel.com

BERJAYA
LANGKAWI RESORT
MALAYSIA

Herriot to perform in Ipoh

➤ Local death metal outfit opens for Swedish band Dark Tranquility in Bangkok

MALAYSIAN melodic death metal band Herriot is set to headline the show Fourth Ceremony in Ipoh on April 12 before completing work on its upcoming release *Black Day Massacre*.

The group kicked off a promising start to 2025 by opening for Swedish melodic death metal band Dark Tranquility's Endtimes Signal tour in Bangkok last month.

According to the band's frontman Chen, when Herriot was first invited, the band was sceptical whether it could pull off playing an opening show for a band as big as Dark Tranquility.

"Herriot has not played live shows seriously in a long time. As a band, we chase after fun and self-fulfilment. Despite being given a chance like this, which was a dream come true, it was still admittedly scary," said Chen.

To prepare for its opening spot, he said Herriot rehearsed a couple of times, with the sessions lasting four to five hours. Based on what Chen wrote, holding the practice sessions seemed trickier than playing the gig itself, as band members had to travel from Penang and Kuala Lumpur to get to Ipoh for rehearsals.

During the Bangkok gig, Herriot played five new songs – three of which they had not played before for shows.

The event saw the group in impressive company with the presence of metal bands Conan from the UK as well as Ethereal Sin and Gotsu Totsu Kotsu from Japan, making Herriot the sole representative for Malaysia and Southeast Asia.

Herriot's set during the Endtime Signals tour in Bangkok can be streamed on YouTube.



Founded in the late 90s, Herriot is said to be a pioneer of melodic death metal in Malaysia.
– PIC COURTESY OF DISSECTING THE EUPHONY

Slot Machine releases English single *Skyline*

THAI rock band Slot Machine has released its latest English-language single *Skyline*.

A high blend of anthemic rock and powerful melodies, the song captures the rush of being on the edge of something new and electrifying.

The band worked with award-winning producers Ryan Tedder, Andrew DeRobertis and Irish singer Robert Grace on *Skyline*.

"Music is a universal language and we love seeing how our songs resonate differently in each country."

"With *Skyline*, we are taking our sound to new heights and exploring even more collaborations across the region," said the band in a statement.

From its early days competing in high school music contests to headlining sold-out shows, Slot Machine has committed itself to evolving its sound.

Its journey first kicked off in 2004 with its eponymous debut album. The band followed it up with its breakthrough album *Cell*.



From left: Janevit Chanpanyawong, Karinyawat Durongjirakan and Atirath Pintong.

Keina Suda unveils track *Mirage*

KEINA Suda has unveiled his latest single *Mirage*, a captivating and emotionally charged track that blends longing with a sense of hope.

The song serves as the tie-up track for the new d'Anime Store commercial, further establishing Suda's unique position in the music world with his heartfelt songwriting and signature sound.

Mirage delves into the complex emotions of love, loneliness and self-acceptance, reflecting the internal battles many of us face. The song captures a personal journey of growth and introspection, with Suda masterfully expressing the struggles of communication and understanding through his beautifully written lyrics. A standout lyric "We are always alone, unable to understand each other, but we still exchange words", underscores the challenges of connecting with others despite shared experiences.

Suda's voice and production create a rich, intimate atmosphere, blending moments of vulnerability with a quiet sense of strength.



Suda's latest single *Mirage* delves into love, loneliness and self-acceptance.

Grentperez drops album *Backflips in a Restaurant*

LAST Friday, Australian artist Grentperez released his debut album *Backflips in a Restaurant* across all streaming platforms and YouTube. The album follows a streak of singles including *Fuzzy Feeling*, *2DK*, *Dandelion* featuring Ruel, and *Movie Scene*, which have been met with praise from media outlets including Billboard, Flaunt, The Face, Triple J and Buzzfeed. In addition to the record

release, Grentperez surprised fans with a music video for his single *Need You Around*.

The Filipino-Australian singer-songwriter, known for his melodic love songs, captures a genre-bending evolution of his roots as a bedroom-pop sensation, mixing elements of R&B, indie-folk, pop-punk, symphonic pop, 70s soft rock and more in his most boldly original body of work to date. The 13-track LP

embodies a sonic playground – from tracks that will please his day-one fans to those that explore new territory.

At just 23 years old, Grentperez has charmed audiences across the globe with sweetly crooned love songs, striking a balance between dreamy sincerity and lighthearted fun. He posted his first video to his YouTube channel when he was 12 and over time, he amassed over 100 million views and 750,000 subscribers.

Since first bursting onto the scene with his gold-certified debut single *Cherry Wine* (a 2021 release that hit number one on Spotify's Viral 50 chart in several countries), the Sydney-born musician has brought his magnetic live show to stages all over the world as support for acts such as Rex Orange County, Wallows, Laufey and Cavetown, in addition to drawing sold-out crowds on his own headline tours and earning acclaim from the likes of NPR (which hailed him as an "artist who makes music you can fall in love to and fall in love with").

The young songwriter has now captured a tremendous following and catapulted into the ranks of the musical elite – over 500 million listens on streaming platforms, a multi-continental touring resume and notable support from tastemakers including NPR Music, MTV and Teen Vogue.

Grentperez commands a strong fan base in Asia, with his top 10 streaming markets globally including Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Taiwan.



Grentperez's love songs strike a balance between dreamy sincerity and lighthearted fun.

– PIC BY BABAK KHOSHNOUD

INSIDE EDGE

Brathwaite quits as Windies Test skipper

KRAIGG BRATHWAITE quit as West Indies Test captain yesterday after four years in charge while ODI skipper Shai Hope was handed leadership of the T20 team, officials said. The 32-year-old Brathwaite, who is two matches shy of reaching the 100-Test mark, led the team to a first Test victory in Australia in 27 years with an eight-run win in Brisbane last year. Earlier this season, he was in charge when the West Indies won a Test match in Pakistan for the first time in nearly 35 years. "Kraig Brathwaite has been an outstanding leader for our Test team, guiding the squad with discipline, resilience, and a deep understanding of the game," said West Indies director of cricket, Miles Bascombe. "His contributions have been invaluable, and under his leadership, we have witnessed historic moments that will be remembered for years to come." Meanwhile, Hope replaces Rovman Powell, in charge since 2023, as T20 captain.

Aussies hail 'box office' fixtures

CRICKET AUSTRALIA has touted India's "box office appeal" after confirming the schedule for a string of white-ball fixtures at home ahead of the Ashes later this year. Australia's men will host India for three one-day internationals and a

five-match Twenty20 series in October-November. The women's teams play in February and March next year in three T20s, three ODIs and a sole Test match. Cricket Australia chief executive Todd Greenberg welcomed "the fantastic box office appeal of the India men's and women's teams". New South Wales cricket boss Lee Germon said he expected a "massive groundswell of support from Indian fans within our community".

Teen opener Konstas gets contract

EXPLOSIVE young opening batsman Sam Konstas was yesterday awarded his first central contract by Cricket Australia for the 2025-26 season, which includes the World Test Championship final and the Ashes against England. The 19-year-old Konstas made headlines against India in the Melbourne Boxing Day Test when he took on fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah to make a memorable debut 60 off 65 balls, with six fours and two sixes. Konstas is one of 23 men's players on the Cricket Australia contracted list issued yesterday. "In Sam we see promising upside in a young player who will continue to develop at first-class level and in the international environment," said Australia's chair of selectors George Bailey. Also new to the list is left-arm spinner Matthew Kuhnemann, who was player of the series in the 2-0 Test win in Sri Lanka earlier this year with 16 wickets.

Dream debut for Ashwani

Medium pacer powers Mumbai to first IPL win of season over KKR

A SPARKLING debut performance by medium pacer Ashwani Kumar, powered up by a single banana, helped Mumbai Indians register their first win of the IPL season yesterday, downing Kolkata Knight Riders by eight wickets.

Ashwani's 4-24 - and an overall disciplined bowling performance - restricted champions Kolkata to a modest total of 116, which Mumbai chased down with more than seven overs to spare.

The 23-year-old accounted for Kolkata captain Ajinkya Rahane, Rinku Singh, Manish Pandey and the powerful Andre Russell.

"I didn't have anything for lunch, I just had a banana. There was a little pressure. I wasn't feeling hungry," said Ashwani. "But still, I played well, so it's good."

"(Captain) Hardik Pandya said that since it's your debut match, enjoy yourself. Just keep bowling the way you have been," he added.

Hardik said the credit for his bowler's impressive debut should go to the extensive Mumbai scouting network.

"We thought Ashwani can come in on this pitch and bowl the way he bowled. It is all the scouts - they picked him," said Hardik.

"They have gone to all

the places and picked these young kids. We played a practice game, he had that zip, that late swing, something off the wicket, a different action and he was a leftie."

South African wicketkeeper-batsman Ryan Rickelton spearheaded Mumbai's chase, scoring a busy 62 off 41 balls, an innings laced with five sixes.

Playing their first

home match of the year, Mumbai dominated from the word go with New Zealand pacer Trent Boult claiming opener Sunil Narine's stumps in the very first over of the match.

Narine's in-form batting partner Quinton de Kock was next to go, out caught trying to loft Deepak Chahar.

Rahane followed soon after, slicing a wide and full ball from Ashwani to the deep backward point fielder after scoring 11 off seven deliveries.

Aggressive middle-order batter Venkatesh Iyer struggled to get off the blocks, falling for three from nine balls.

The left-handed Angkrish Raghuvanshi batted fluently for his 26 runs but failed to carry on, leaving the visitors reeling at 45-5 in seven overs.

Despite some resistance by impact substitute Pandey (19 off 14) and the attacking Rinku Singh (17 off 14), Kolkata never recovered.

A late flurry by Ramandeep Singh (22 off 12) helped Kolkata reach the three-figure mark but it was too little too late, with the innings folding in the 17th over.

"Collective batting failure, it was a good wicket to bat on and 180-190 would have been a good total on this pitch," said Kolkata skipper Rahane. - AFP



Mumbai Indians' Ashwani Kumar celebrates after taking the wicket of Kolkata Knight Riders' Ajinkya Rahane (not pictured) during the IPL Twenty20 cricket match. - AFP/ICC

Dhoni faces balancing act, says CSK's Fleming

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS veteran Mahendra Singh Dhoni has raised eyebrows by dropping down their batting order in this year's Indian Premier League but coach Stephen Fleming said the 43-year-old is carefully managing his body.

Dhoni, renowned for his ability to help chase down totals, left fans stunned when he batted at No. 9 in Chennai's 50-run loss to Royal Challengers Bengaluru last week and at No. 7 in Sunday's six-run defeat by Rajasthan Royals.

While Dhoni has dazzled with his wicket-keeping skills so far this season, Fleming said batting for long periods in the middle overs may not be on the menu anymore for the seasoned campaigner who underwent knee surgery in 2023.

"Yeah, it's a time thing," Fleming told reporters. "MS judges it. His body is, his knees aren't what they used to be and he's moving okay but there's still an attrition aspect to it."

"So he'll gauge on the day what he can give us. If the game's in the balance, he'll go a little bit earlier, and he backs other players when other opportunities are up. So he's balancing that."

Dhoni scored an unbeaten 30

off 16 balls against Bengaluru before making 16 off 11 balls against Rajasthan and Fleming said the former Chennai skipper had plenty to offer the five-times IPL champions even if he bats for just a few overs.

"I said it last year, he's too valuable to us - leadership and wicket-keeping - to throw him in at nine, 10 overs," added the New Zealander.

"He's actually never done that. So look, from around 13-14 overs, he's looking to go depending on who's in."

Just before the start of this season, in a press conference in Mumbai, Dhoni had mulled the idea of playing on for a while more.

"I want to enjoy it how I did as a child, when I was in school, when I lived in a colony."

"I want to play with the same kind of innocence. Easier said than done, but that's what I have been trying to do," he had said.

To do all of that, he would've needed to play with abandon. But so far, he is playing like a man weighed down by the past and that is far from how CSK would like to remember their talisman skipper. - Reuters/Agencies

Stokes to miss early county games in fitness battle

BEN STOKES is not expected to play in the early rounds of the County Championship as he battles to be fit to lead England, his Durham coach Ryan Campbell said yesterday.

The 33-year-old Test captain is recovering from hamstring surgery after breaking down in New Zealand in December, his second hamstring tear in five months.

But the all-rounder is not yet ready for action in the four-day domestic championship, which starts on Friday.

England host Zimbabwe in May, with a five-Test series against India to follow. Later in the year they head to Australia for a five-match Ashes series.

Durham have six matches in the top tier of the County Championship before the Zimbabwe Test.

Campbell, who is also without England quicks Brydon Carse (toe) and Mark Wood (knee), made it clear no risks would be taken.

"When you look at Carse, Stokes and Wood, at this stage they're probably not likely to play for us. My expectation is that it'll be zero - anything else is an added bonus," he said.

"They're all coming back from serious injuries. The facts are that they need to get up and running by the time the Test matches start but Stokesy is here nearly every single day working his butt off." - AFP

302

Jobs

WE ARE HIRING

1 MEDIA SALES Executive/Specialist

Job Description

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

Requirements

- SPM level with at least two years of experience.
- Diploma or Bachelor's degree in business, marketing or other related fields.
- Fresh graduates are encouraged to apply, training will be provided.
- Good communication, presentation, problem-solving and organisational skills.
- Passionate in client servicing.
- Possess own transport and willing to travel.
- Able to start work immediately.

Office based in Petaling Jaya (Five-day week)

2 MEDIA SALES Representative/Agent (Freelance)

Requirement

- Minimum one year sales experience in classified ad, print and digital advertising.
- Those without sales experience but with media advertising knowledge may also apply.
- Attractive commission package and incentives.
- Able to start immediately.
- Central, Northern, Southern, East Coast and Sabah/Sarawak.

Send in your CV with your photo via email to : thesun.hr2@gmail.com



Be careful what you wish for

Tsunoda lands dream seat – but Red Bull driver warned of role as Verstappen's teammate

BY KIERAN JACKSON

WHEN Yuki Tsunoda was asked at the last race in China whether he would be comfortable stepping up to Red Bull in front of his adoring Japanese fans next week – as outlandish a proposition it seemed at the time – he did not flinch.

"Yeah, why not, 100%," he said, salivating at the prospect of a shot at the front of the grid. "The car is faster."

And so, in an unprecedented swap just two rounds into a 24-race season, the popular Japanese driver receives a shot at F1's poisoned chalice: a seat alongside Max Verstappen.

For Liam Lawson, it's a gut-wrenchingly brutal decision. This is Red Bull's stereotypical ruthlessness – the same team which axed the likes of Pierre Gasly, Alex Albon and Nyck de Vries in double-quick time – in an impatient, no-holds-barred overdrive.

For what it's worth, Verstappen is said to be unhappy with Red Bull's decision.

Unequivocally, it had been a torrid start for Kiwi racer Lawson: three-straight Q1 eliminations (the last two in dead-last), a DNF on debut in Australia and a best-finish of 12th overall.

Yet his sights were set optimistically on Suzuka; a track he knows well from a season in Japanese Super Formula in 2023. That would be his chance to flourish.

Astonishingly, he won't receive that opportunity. Instead, he humbly sets a new F1 driver record: the shortest stint in a full-time seat, beating Japan's Yuji Ide (who had his FIA super licence revoked due to "not understanding how to use the car") and his four races for Super Aguri in 2006.

Team principal Christian Horner, alongside Red Bull's leading decision-makers such as the uninhibited driver programme chief Helmut Marko and parent company managing director Oliver Mintzlauff, made the call in Dubai this week.

"It has been difficult to see Liam struggle with the RB21 at the first two races and as a result, we have collectively taken the decision to make an early switch," Horner said, in a Red Bull statement confirming the news last week.

In some ways, it is the right decision – just three months late. Eyebrows were raised when Lawson, with just 11 F1 races to his name spread over two seasons, was promoted to the mothership from junior team RB (now Racing Bulls) instead of Tsunoda, with four years and 87 grands prix in his

wing mirror, to replace the stricken Sergio Perez in December.

Food for thought for Perez, incidentally. The Mexican was much maligned for his poor record last year in a title-winning car.

Now, he'd be forgiven for slyly chuckling away on a beach in Guadalajara, seeing the mess unfold from afar.

Horner justified Lawson's promotion last year by emphasising his "racecraft" as a "key strength", alongside his "versatility".

This time, he has insisted it is about removing Lawson from the lion's den, as well as trying to extract the maximum from an undoubtedly temperamental RB21 car.

A car which is attuned to Verstappen's unique driving preference of a "pointy" front end, allowing a tendency to oversteer.

Yet Red Bull's management can frame it how they want – it remains an astonishing U-turn.

Lawson did not even have the chance to start a grand prix on the grid, having started both races in Australia and China from the pit lane. Two race weekends is an astoundingly short stint.

The swap has been accelerated by talks with engine partner Honda, who spend £10 million (RM55m) a year to have home icon Tsunoda on the F1 grid with Racing Bulls.

The Japanese automotive giant will now spend another £10 million to have the 24-year-old in

at Red Bull but gave Horner an ultimatum: you'll only receive your cash if Tsunoda is picked for Japan.

Clearly, for all parties, the promotional opportunities this week (starting with a four-driver show run in Tokyo today) are too good a prospect to pass up.

Is there a route back for Lawson? Perhaps.

Honda's deal with Red Bull comes to an end at the end of this season, with the engine manufacturer joining forces with the expansive new project at Aston Martin.

As such, the murmur in the paddock has long been that Tsunoda could end up in royal green, though more likely as a reserve driver if it was 2026.

Yet if Tsunoda does not meet expectations for the remaining 22 races – or maybe just until Saudi Arabia, in two races' time – there's no doubt Lawson could get another shot at the mothership.

A lot will hinge on Verstappen's future too; the Dutchman will be unimpressed by this early season furore, as he eyes a car capable of winning a fifth straight championship.

Speculation about a move to Mercedes or Aston Martin will linger so long as unrest permeates at his own team.

Yet history tells us that the role of Verstappen's teammate is the toughest spot in Formula One.

A string of top drivers, dating back to Daniel Ricciardo in 2018, have been unable to compete with the irrepressible Dutchman. Be careful what you wish for, Yuki. – The Independent



Hamilton, Ferrari need time to jell, says former champ

FORMER world champion Jacques Villeneuve has offered his sympathy to Lewis Hamilton, explaining that the Briton's relationship with Riccardo Adami will "take time" to come together.

His view comes after *Sky Sports F1* analysed the Ferrari driver's radio communications with his new race engineer at the season-opening Australian Grand Prix.

Hamilton formed an iconic partnership with Peter Bonnington at Mercedes after joining the Brackley-based team in 2013, but after swapping the Silver Arrows for Ferrari, he was forced to start anew with Adami.

The Italian engineer previously worked with Sebastian Vettel and Carlos Sainz and expects to have similar success with Hamilton.

However, during their first race together, there were some teething issues as the Brit requested a quieter stream of information from the pit wall.

Hamilton's radio frustrations were broadcast by *FOM* and heavily debated by *Sky F1* pundits, but according to Villeneuve, this was normal for new driver-engineer partnerships.

"It's been like that for every driver, every year," the 1997 world champion said yesterday.

"We only hear some of the radio messages without the context, and they do that on purpose obviously because, you know, it's TV ratings."

"I found Lewis to be very calm and polite with his engineer whenever there was an issue: 'Don't talk now' or 'I need this'. He's been very good, and they need to build a relationship."

"He had been with the same guy for many years and it's hard to beat that because there's a communication line that, at some point, is not even the language, in a way."

"It's just a level of understanding between each other that is immediate through the strength of the voice, not necessarily the words."

"That takes time to build, especially going from an English-speaking engineer who he had been with for many years to an Italian speaker for whom English is his second language."

"It takes time to build a new relationship. Some stuff will be lost in translation along the way. It just takes time to build, and they don't need people overreacting to the radio messages."

"I found it amazing. Listening to (Max) Verstappen's radio messages over the years. There was nothing in the one from Lewis. There's no comparison. He was calm, this is how it is, and there was a nice response from the other side." – Express Newspapers

Rory in a spot of bother ahead of Masters

RORY MCILROY acknowledged he is dealing with an elbow injury as he prepares to head to Augusta for next week's Masters.

The World No. 2 made a spirited run up the leaderboard at the Texas Children's Houston Open on Sunday, carding a 4-under 31 on the front nine that included an eagle. He made three more birdies before closing with a bogey to settle for a tie for fifth.

Despite shooting 65-64 over the weekend, McIlroy told *NBC Sports* that his right elbow has been bothering him. The Masters begins in nine days.

"Get some treatment on that and make sure that that's OK going into Augusta," he said.

McIlroy is not playing in this week's Texas Valero Open, giving him time to rest the elbow and work on a tweak he made to his driver following the third round in Houston.

"I just took a little bit of loft off it,"

he said. "I felt like it was getting a little bit spinny, especially if I wanted to hit cuts off the tee, so I took a little bit of loft off it. Definitely went through the wind better today and felt a little more comfortable."

Despite the elbow discomfort, McIlroy posted yet another strong result after scrambling a bit just to make the cut in Houston. The T5 adds to his pair of wins along with a T4 in Dubai among his first eight starts worldwide in 2025.

However, McIlroy said his game is not where he wants it to be as he chases an elusive green jacket next week.

"Still feel like I've got some stuff to work on. Still don't think like my game is absolutely 100% under the control I would want, but it's nice to have a week to work on some things," he said.

"I've got my coach, Michael

Bannon, coming in, so we'll be working at home and making sure my game feels good going into the Masters."

The Masters is the lone major missing from McIlroy's trophy case, although his overall major drought now stretches 11 years to the 2014 PGA Championship.

He finished T22 last year after missing the cut at Augusta in 2023. He was runner-up to Scottie Scheffler in 2022.

"This week, going forward, it's just about feeling as comfortable as I can be with the things I've been working on, which is sort of iron play, wedges," McIlroy said.

"Obviously, short game's really, really important around Augusta as well. You know, work on those things over the next few days and hopefully I'm feeling good going in there." – Field Level Media

BRIEFS

Trump 'happy' Tiger dating ex daughter-in-law

DONALD TRUMP said yesterday he hopes Tiger Woods and his former daughter-in-law will be happy together in their relationship, describing the golf superstar as "a fantastic guy." Woods last week confirmed tabloid rumors that he was dating Vanessa Trump, who split from Donald Trump Jr. during his father's first term in the Oval Office. The US president told reporters in Washington yesterday he was delighted that she had found love again. "Tiger actually called me a few months ago, and we have a very special, very good relationship with Tiger," he said. "I played golf with him a couple of times over the last month, and he's a fantastic guy and a fantastic athlete, and he told me about it, and I said 'Tiger, that's good,' Trump continued. "I'm very happy for both, I

just, let them both be happy. Let them both be happy. They're both great."

Aston Martin to sell stake in F1 team

LUXURY carmaker Aston Martin Lagonda said yesterday it planned to sell its minority stake in the Aston Martin Aramco Formula One team to help turn around its loss-making core business. At the same time, Aston Martin's main shareholder, the Yew Tree Consortium, plans to raise its stake in the group to 33%, a statement said. Aston Martin added that the combined action will increase the group's liquidity by more than £125 million (RM688m). The consortium is led by Canadian Lawrence Stroll, whose son Lance Stroll drives for the Formula One team. The company said its long-term Formula One sponsorship deal will not be affected.

Three talking points ahead of the clay-court season

CZECH teenager Jakub Mensik and Aryna Sabalenka emerged victorious at the Miami Open last weekend, but their attentions will now turn to the European clay-court swing with all eyes on Roland Garros.

Novak Djokovic will be bidding to finally clinch his 100th title before the French Open starts on May 25, after a narrow miss in Miami.

Iga Swiatek is hoping a return to her favourite surface can bring an up-tick in form, while several youngsters are looking to back up impressive starts to the year.

Here's a look at three talking points ahead of the European clay-court season:

Novak aiming to build on Miami run

The men's build-up to the French Open starts this weekend at the Monte Carlo Masters, where Djokovic is aiming to lift the title for the first time since 2015.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion has not won a tournament since the Paris Olympics and questions about his future were raised after successive shock defeats by Matteo Berrettini and Botic van de Zandschulp, following an injury-enforced retirement from his Australian Open semifinal against Alexander Zverev.

But Djokovic, who turns 38 in May, returned to form in Miami by cruising into the final without dropping a set, before being edged out by Mensik.

"Miami really brought me a lot of joy and really good sensations on and off the court," said the former world No. 1.

Djokovic, who has won three French Opens, could set an outright record of 25 Grand Slam titles in Paris this year.

Swiatek hoping for solace on clay

Swiatek has endured a difficult spell, punctuated by a doping ban, and has not reached a final since sealing her fourth Roland Garros crown last year.

The Pole has still been consistently reaching the latter stages of events, but has lost the aura she had when world No. 1.

Sabalenka has established herself at the top of the rankings, but Swiatek remains the "Queen of Clay".

The 23-year-old won a history-making hat-trick of Italian, Madrid and French Open titles last season so will have plenty of ranking points to defend in the coming months.

"I don't want to think about this too long," she said after a surprise quarterfinal loss to Filipina wildcard Alexandra Eala in Miami.

"It's nice to learn from losses but there are other things ahead and I am happy we are going to play on clay."

Teens looking to take over

Mensik, Eala, Mirra Andreeva and Joao Fonseca have all shown why they are among the most highly-rated young players in the sport this year and will be expecting to continue to challenge the best.

Mensik rose into the world's top 25 with his victory over Djokovic, while 17-year-old Andreeva has established herself in the women's top 10 off the back of WTA 1,000 triumphs in Dubai and Indian Wells.

Eala, a former US Open junior champion, defied her status as a wildcard by reaching the Miami semifinals, while 18-year-old Brazilian Fonseca has already won an ATP title and is closing on the top 50.

Fonseca, Mensik and Eala are set for their debuts at Roland Garros, while Andreeva has already made her mark on the Paris clay, having reached the semifinals in 2024.

American Learner Tien and Australia's Maya Joint, 19 and 18 respectively, have also broken into the top 100 this year.

AFP

Changing of the guard

Djokovic's Miami Open defeat unlocks new truth about future of men's tennis

BY FLO CLIFFORD

"FIRST of many," Jakub Mensik wrote on the camera lens after his victory at the Miami Open on Monday.

The Czech had never won a tournament at ATP level before this week. Now he is a Masters 1000 champion.

On the other side of the net on a swelteringly humid night was a man he had idolised since his childhood, who had inspired him to take up tennis, who won his first title on the tour when Mensik was only 10 months old.

As the 19-year-old collapsed on court, overwhelmed with emotion, it was hard not to think that the story had come full circle: the student had outgrown the master.

A tiring, ailing Novak Djokovic was overpowered in two tight tie-breaks, visibly struggling in the suffocating Florida heat and the worse off after a five-and-a-half-hour rain delay.

More than that, though, Djokovic was – and is – in a losing battle against the one opponent he has always been able to put off: time.

Djokovic had not played in Miami since 2019. Like Serena Williams before him, the Serb contests a pared-down calendar, eliminating those smaller tournaments he does not feel are worthwhile as he aims to peak for the right moments.

He had made the decision to play in

Miami – as he decides ahead of every tournament – because he felt it was worth it; felt he could win.

Enter Mensik. Part of a fleet of young talent breaking through in the men's ranks, the 54th-ranked Czech was part of December's NextGen Finals, a slightly gimmicky eight-player tournament that nonetheless has some significance because of its habit of producing stars of the future.

Recent winners include Stefanos Tsitsipas (2018), Jannik Sinner (2019), and Carlos Alcaraz (2021). Daniil Medvedev, Alex de Minaur, Denis Shapovalov, Taylor Fritz, and Holger Rune are among a litany of other major names to take part.

Mensik had a forgettable tournament in Jeddah, losing all of his round-robin matches, and much of the attention since then has been on other alumni, mostly 18-year-old champion Joao Fonseca.

The Czech broke through at roughly the same time as Fonseca – he reached the Qatar Open final last year in the same week as the Brazilian's memorable run to the quarterfinals in Rio – but has not been accompanied by the same barrage of hype.

That's unlikely to remain the case now that he has the advantage of a Masters title over Fonseca.

But it has meant that he has been afforded the luxury of steadily making his way up the rankings, honing his game, killing giants and so on, without scrutiny on his every move.

In Miami his huge serve, booming groundstrokes, and incredible movement and court coverage for a man of 1.93m were all on show, with the teenager bombing down aces and lasing his powerful backhand to immense effect.

His improving game saw him topple top 10 players Jack Draper and Taylor Fritz on his way to the final. Then he needed not just his game to hold up, but his mind.

The man on the other side of the net had other problems. One of Djokovic's several superpowers – an ability to coast through the early rounds of a tournament, then switch on his brilliant best when the going gets tougher – seems to be deserting him.

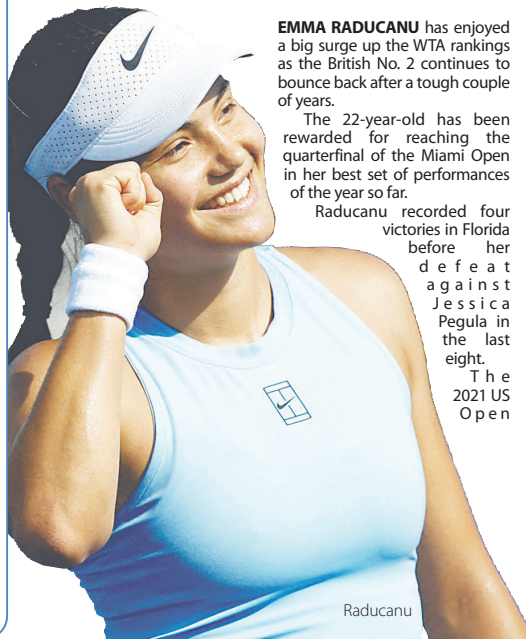
But most significantly, the psychological hold he has over the rest of the tour has gone. As he fell to the ground after his victory, another leaf turned over in the story of the sport. The likes of Mensik, Fonseca, Americans Learner Tien and Alex Michelsen, and more, have announced their arrival.

Djokovic remains a formidable athlete and a tough draw in any tournament. But he is beatable, and they all know it.

That elusive 100th ATP title, one of the few records he has left to chase, still eludes him. It now feels further out of reach. The tide is turning.

Mensik's triumph in Miami will not be the last instance of a young, dazzling talent beating the sport's colossus. As he wrote on the camera lens, it's the first of many. – The Independent

Raducanu reaps benefit of Miami performance



EMMA RADUCANU has enjoyed a big surge up the WTA rankings as the British No. 2 continues to bounce back after a tough couple of years.

The 22-year-old has been rewarded for reaching the quarterfinal of the Miami Open in her best set of performances of the year so far.

Raducanu recorded four victories in Florida before her defeat against Jessica Pegula in the last eight.

The 2021 US Open

champion had television commentator and her former coach Mark Petchey on her team, navigating the tournament without a full-time coach.

Raducanu has pledged to re-evaluate her plan going forward, having rinsed through eight coaches during her career.

Her success has seen her climb 12 places in the world rankings and into the top 50 at No. 48.

Raducanu is now only nine places behind British No. 1 Katie Boulter, who has dropped four places.

Aryna Sabalenka continues to dominate the WTA and remains the world No. 1 after winning in Miami.

She has broken the 10,000-point threshold for the first time and looks set to stay ahead of her rivals heading into a busy summer. Iga Swiatek is at No. 2, while Coco Gauff is third.

For Raducanu, entering the top 50 marks a tremendous achievement after a tough couple of years.

In mid-2023, she underwent surgery on both wrists and her right ankle. A series of subsequent nagging injuries

ruined her attempts to climb the rankings last year.

Having climbed as high as 10th in 2022, Raducanu will be keen to go even higher than No. 48.

In positive news, she revealed that he had been feeling happier and more relaxed both professionally and personally.

"Despite losing, I can take some good positives from this week and look forward," Raducanu said.

"I think I just need to take a beat and kind of reevaluate what I'm doing. This week it was good but I need to kind of just figure things out and then I'll make a plan from there.

"Just feeling competitive, feeling happy, [and] relaxed on and off the court has been the biggest thing that I can take away and be happy about.

"I think just being able to switch off and have fun with them and play Spikeball before the match, and we just create certain routines.

"Yeah, they bring small doses of happiness that I guess just keep you going." – Express Newspapers

Paolini says *ciao* to coach Furlan after decade-long run

JASMINE PAOLINI has called game, set and match on a decade with Renzo Furlan, ending a glittering partnership that peaked last year with Grand Slam finals, Olympic gold, and a Coach of the Year crown for her long-time mentor.

"After 10 amazing years together, I want to say a huge thank you to Renzo Furlan for everything he's done for me," the 29-year-old Italian wrote, announcing the end of "an incredible journey" on *Instagram*.

Paolini's rise under compatriot Furlan had been remarkable.

In 2024 she was French Open and Wimbledon runner-up, won doubles gold at the Paris Olympics and helped Italy lift the Billie Jean King Cup en route to becoming world No. 4.

Furlan's efforts did not go unnoticed – he was crowned WTA Coach of the Year. And yet, the curtain falls.

This season has been solid but less sparkling

so far, with Paolini bowing out in the Australian Open third round and reaching the semifinals in Miami, where she lost to world No. 1 and eventual champion Aryna Sabalenka.

"Renzo has been such an important part of my growth, both as a player and as a person," Paolini said.

"Everything I've learned from him will stay with me and continue to guide me in this new chapter, he'll always be an important person in

my life."

Paolini praised 54-year-old Furlan's dedication – "often far from home and his family" – and signed off with "so much respect and appreciation".

The split comes with the French Open approaching on May 25, leaving questions over whether Paolini can repeat last year's success without the coach who helped guide her there. – Reuters

Alexander-Arnold transfer U-turn could happen: Rooney

WAYNE ROONEY believes Trent Alexander-Arnold could still ditch his apparent plans to join Real Madrid and sign a new contract with Liverpool.

The former England captain found himself in a similar situation when he found himself strongly linked with a move from Manchester United to the Spanish giants in 2010.

Wide-ranging reports claim that Alexander-Arnold is close to signing for Real when his Liverpool deal expires at the end of the season.

The 26-year-old's seemingly imminent switch has split opinion on Merseyside, with some fans upset that an academy graduate is set to depart

for free.

Rooney found himself in a similar predicament in 2010 before eventually deciding to remain at Old Trafford and believes Alexander-Arnold could yet stay.

Writing for the *BBC*, the former United striker said: "I get why Liverpool fans are upset and even angry at the thought of Alexander-Arnold leaving.

"All supporters like to see local lads coming through at their club, and they never like to see them being sold.

"Alexander-Arnold has been an excellent servant to the club, so you can't begrudge him wanting to try something new.

"It would not just be a shame for Liverpool fans if he left because you want to see the best players in the Premier League.

"Still, as I found out myself, just because there are talks over a transfer does not mean it will happen.

"It is well known that some United fans protested outside my house when they thought I was going to leave in 2010, but I'd agreed my new contract by then.

"Alexander-Arnold has not signed anything with Real yet and it would not surprise me if, even after all this speculation, he ends up staying at Anfield after all.

"A lot can happen before a contract is signed, as I know from experience. Alexander-Arnold has not signed anything with Real yet and it would not surprise me if, even after all this speculation, he ends up staying at Anfield after all. A lot can happen before a contract is signed, as I know from experience."

He continued: "In my head, I was ready to go and play in Spain and some talks did take place. A deal with Real looked more likely for a couple of days but it was Barcelona whom I thought about the most.

"In the end, I decided to stay at United." – The Independent

Levy slams critics of Tottenham's spending

■ BY GEORGE SESSIONS

TOTTENHAM chairman Daniel Levy has robustly defended the club's spending strategy just days before a planned fan protest.

The club released its financial results for the year ending June 30, 2024, revealing a 4% dip in revenue to £528.2 million (RM2.9b).

This decrease is partly attributed to the absence of European football, which saw match receipts fall from £117.6m (RM647m) to £105.8m (RM582m).

Despite this, Tottenham significantly reduced its losses, reporting a £26.2m (RM144m) loss compared to £86.8m (RM476m) the previous year.

Levy referenced the current "highly-challenging season" under Ange Postecoglou, with Spurs in 14th position in the Premier League after a difficult winter period with a plethora of injuries, but talked up the importance of a potential Europa League triumph with Tottenham through to the quarterfinals.

Poor domestic form coupled with a 17-year trophy drought and frustration over spending by owners Enic has increased disgruntlement among supporters, with another protest planned by fan group Change for Tottenham at Sunday's home fixture with Southampton.

Spurs chairman Levy said in a statement: "We currently find ourselves in 14th position in the Premier League, navigating what has been a highly-challenging season on the pitch.

"We are, however, in the quarterfinals of the Europa League. Winning this competition would see welcome silverware and mean qualification for the Champions League. We must do everything we can to support the team in these final key stages.

"Since opening our new stadium in April 2019, we have invested over £700m (RM3.85b) in player acquisitions.

"Recruitment remains a key focus, and we must ensure that we make smart purchases within our financial means.

"I often read calls for us to spend more, given that we are ranked as the ninth richest club in the world.

"However, a closer examination of today's financial figures reveals that such spending must be sustainable in the long term and within our operating revenues.

"Our capacity to generate recurring revenues determines our spending power.

"We cannot spend what we do not have, and we will not compromise the financial stability of this club – indeed, our off-pitch revenues have significantly supplemented the lower football revenues this year, testament to our diversified income strategy."

Spurs placed ninth in *Deloitte's* list of the world's richest clubs, but Tottenham's spend of 42% of their revenue on wages was the lowest of any team in the top 10.

It was also lower than all eight Premier League clubs in *Deloitte's* top 20. – The Independent

Haaland blow for City

Ankle problem could see striker spend indefinite period on sidelines

MANCHESTER CITY will be without Erling Haaland for an indefinite period and faces a fight to play again in the Premier League this season after further details of his new injury were released yesterday.

The striker sustained an ankle problem over the weekend in his side's 2-1 win over Bournemouth in the FA Cup.

Haaland has since undergone initial tests on the problem and, whilst the full extent of the problem is still unclear, he

faces a significant lay-off.

There is hope that he will feature before the campaign concludes but those minutes may come in the new format of the Club World Cup in the summer rather than in the League or FA Cup.

The former Borussia Dortmund No. 9 had attempted to continue after initially receiving treatment from the medical team at the Vitality Stadium. However, just a matter of seconds later, Haaland dropped to the ground and conceded that he would need to be substituted off in the 61st minute.

A statement from City read: "Manchester City FC can confirm that Erling Haaland has suffered an injury to his left ankle.

"The Norwegian striker sustained the injury during Sunday's FA Cup quarterfinal victory away at AFC Bournemouth.

"Erling underwent initial tests in Manchester on Monday morning and will now seek specialist consultation to confirm the full extent of the injury.

"Assessment remains ongoing to ascertain a full prognosis. The expectation is that Erling will be fit in time to play a further part in the remainder of this

season, including this year's Club World Cup.

"Everyone at the Club wishes Erling a speedy recovery and mancity.com will bring you regular updates regarding his rehabilitation."

Pep Guardiola will be relying on January signing Omar Marmoush to ensure that Haaland's absence does not derail City's campaign any further, having failed to challenge for the Premier League title, Carabao Cup or the Champions League this season.

Haaland has been one of City's few saving graces throughout the campaign, scoring 29 goals in 40 appearances in all competitions, despite lacking service at times and generally not playing the best football of his career.

Winning the FA Cup would ensure that Guardiola's side bow out of the campaign on a more positive note ahead of an expected summer spending spree.

They came from behind to beat Bournemouth on Sunday and book their spot in the semifinals, with Haaland missing a penalty before Evanilson opened the scoring in the first half.

Haaland then equalised in the 49th minute before Marmoush came off the bench to turn the tie on its head. City face Nottingham Forest in the final four at Wembley in April.

Guardiola's side face matches against Leicester City (tomorrow 2.45am Malaysian time) and Manchester United on Sunday (11.30pm).

They then have a visit from Crystal Palace and a trip to Everton before their FA Cup semifinal against Nottingham Forest, at Wembley on April 26. – Express Newspapers



Haaland

SHORTS

Wrexham reap rewards of Hollywood tie-up

HOLLYWOOD stars Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney have helped Welsh football club Wrexham secure record financial results.

The club's increasing popularity in the United States with their two A-list co-owners at the helm, helped push revenue to £26.7 million (RM147m) in their latest accounts, up 155% on the previous year.

The club, who play in the third tier of the English game, said they generated more than half (52.1%) of their record turnover from outside Europe, primarily North America, for the year ending June 30, 2024.

That compared to 24.6% generated outside Europe in the previous year's figures.

The club said that the spectacular rise highlighted the impact of the "Welcome to

Wrexham" documentary series on *Disney Plus*, with the fourth instalment currently being filmed.

"While the documentary does not contribute any direct financial return for the club, it delivers incredible global exposure for the Wrexham brand and provides the club with a unique marketing platform that can be monetised through the delivery of TV exposure for our partners," a statement about the 2023/24 results published on the club's website yesterday said.

Everton report seventh year of losses

EVERTON made a loss of £53m (RM292m) in the 2023-24 season, marking a seventh consecutive year in deficit, the Premier League club said yesterday, but they will avoid breaches of the league's profit & sustainability rules.

Despite Everton reporting an improvement from the £89.1m (RM490m) deficit recorded the

previous year, the club's losses over the last seven years total £570m (RM3.13b).

Chelsea saved by women's team

CHELSEA recorded a pre-tax profit before taxation of £128.4m (RM706m) for the year ending in June despite a fall in revenue thanks to the repositioning of their women's team, the Premier League club said yesterday.

The profit, which was also helped by the disposal of player registrations, comes after a loss of £90.1m (RM496m) in the previous year to June, which was the first under the ownership of the consortium led by Todd Boehly.

The women's team passed from Chelsea FC Holdings Limited to BlueCo, Boehly's consortium, last June, removing any losses associated with Chelsea Women from the club accounts and Chelsea Holdings benefiting from the sum that BlueCo paid.

The profit on disposal of subsidiaries was

£198.7m (RM1.09b) while the profit on disposal of player registrations came to £152.5m (RM839m).

Chelsea's overall revenue fell from £512.5m (RM2.81b) in 2023 to £468.5m (RM2.58b), which the club said was due to the men's team not competing in the Champions League.

Last season Everton were deducted eight points for two separate PSR breaches for the rolling three-year periods including the 2021-22 and 2022-23 campaigns.

In January, the League confirmed that all clubs, including Everton, were financially compliant for the 2023-24 season, and no additional charges would be imposed. Under PSR regulations, clubs are allowed a maximum loss of £105m (RM578m) over three years.

Everton's reported three-year losses stand at £187m (RM1.03b) but exemptions for investment in infrastructure, youth development and women's football helped them remain compliant.

SIDENETTING

Silver lining for shuttlers

THE country's men's singles player Jacky Kok picked up the silver medal in the Vietnam International Challenge 2025 after losing to Thailand's Puritat Arree in a fierce final battle that lasted 83 minutes.

The world No. 86, playing at the Tay Ho District Stadium in Hanoi, put up a fierce fight before succumbing 21-23, 21-17, 15-21 in a match that went into the deciding set. The defeat ended Jacky's winning record over his opponent after having recorded two wins in their previous meetings.

Also following in his footsteps was the country's professional mixed doubles pair Jimmy Wong-Lai

Pei Jing who lost to Hong Kong's Tang Chun Man-Ng Tsz Yau, 19-21, 19-21 in straight sets.

Despite being runners-up, Jimmy-Pei Jing deserve praise after making it to the final in their first tournament as a team.

Pei Jing is now trying to adjust to a new pair after "losing" his teammate, Tan Kian Meng, who announced his retirement earlier this year. Kian Meng-Pei Jing's pairing wrapped up their competitive careers on the All England 2025 stage in early March.

Sudirman Cup squad named on Friday

THE list of players who will represent the country in

the 2025 Sudirman Cup Badminton Championship is set to be announced on Friday. National doubles coach Nova Widianto said this was because the coaching team had yet to finalise the squad for the April 27-May 4 tournament in Xiamen, China.

"The long list is still there, nothing is finalised yet. Maybe we will announce it on April 3, maybe on Friday," he told reporters after the

national squad's training session at Akademi Badminton Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Malaysia have been drawn in Group C with three-time runners-up Japan, Australia and rising European force France.

For the record, Malaysia have never won the mixed team championship since its inception in 1989, with their best achievements being semifinal appearances in 2009, 2021 and 2023.

Meanwhile, host and defending champions China are in Group A with Thailand, Hong Kong and African champions Algeria.

Up close and personal with Sivasangari

Squash ace eyes LA28, reveals passion for painting, exploring nature

FOR most top athletes, their lives revolve around training and competing at the highest levels, leaving very little time for personal pursuits. Malaysian squash ace S. Sivasangari is no exception.

As she chases her dream of competing in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics (LA28), her days are packed with rigorous training sessions and top-flight tournaments.

But beyond the squash court, the 26-year-old Sungai Petani-born athlete has a creative side that many may not know about. She has a passion for painting and exploring nature. "I love to colour or paint. I also love to go on hikes because I love nature," she shared with Bernama when asked about her hidden talents and hobbies.

Had life taken a different turn, Sivasangari might have been holding a brush instead of a squash racket.

Asked what career she would have pursued if not sports, she revealed: "I wanted to be a doctor."

Fondly known as Siva, she graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Mass Communication and Media Studies from Cornell University, New York in 2023, and is now pursuing her squash dream as a full-time professional.

As squash prepares to make its long-awaited debut at LA28, Sivasangari knows

the competition will be fiercer than ever, especially with more countries strengthening their efforts for the historic medals.

The Asian Games champion said the road to LA28 will be a long and arduous journey that requires unwavering consistency and dedication.

"All the players have set their sights on the Olympics, but it's a process. We still have three more years to improve and work towards it."

"In that time, my competitors and I will be competing in various professional tournaments."

"These events are crucial, not just for experience, but also for improving our rankings."

"Ultimately, all of us are working hard, step by step, to eventually get to play in the Olympics," she said.

When asked she would rate her 2024-25 season so far, Sivasangari said: "It's been going well so far, I've reached my career-best ranking of No. 7. I am happy with the way I am progressing."

"My mission is to keep improving my game and to improve my ranking. I just need to trust the process rather than doubting myself too much or overthinking about unnecessary things that add more pressure to myself and my game." - Bernama



RAPID-FIRE Q&A WITH SIVASANGARI

What's your go-to meal before or after a match?

Before a match, I would eat something heavy. Maybe something simple like grilled chicken with vegetables and rice. After a match, I would maybe have some pasta.

Any memorable moments from your time on the Professional Squash Association (PSA) Tour?

Winning the London Classic last year was unforgettable. I managed to beat the world No. 1, 2 and 4 all in the same tournament.

If you could give some advice to your younger self, what would it be?

To enjoy the moment because life is too short to be stressed out about too many things.

If you could play a match against any athlete (past or present from any sport), who would it be?

I would love to play against tennis maestro Roger Federer.

Can you give us an insight into your daily training routine?

I go to the gym at about 7.30am and have squash training sessions at 10am and 3pm. But it varies depending on the day.

Do you have any specific rituals or habits before a big match?

I have a certain type of warmup that I do in sequence before a match. So, I think that's just a habit now.

RESULTS & STANDINGS

LA LIGA: Celta Vigo 1 (Alfonso Gonzalez 45+2) **Las Palmas 1** (Moleiro 48).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	29	21	3	5	82	28	66
Real Madrid	29	19	6	4	62	29	63
A. Madrid	29	16	9	4	47	23	57
A. Bilbao	29	14	11	4	46	24	53
Villarreal	28	13	8	7	51	39	47
Real Betis	29	13	8	8	40	36	47
R. Vallecano	29	10	10	9	33	31	40
Celta Vigo	29	11	7	11	42	42	40
Mallorca	29	11	7	11	28	35	40
R. Sociedad	29	11	5	13	27	31	38
Sevilla	29	9	9	11	33	39	36
Getafe	29	9	9	11	26	25	36
Girona	29	9	7	13	37	45	34
Osasuna	29	7	13	9	33	42	34
Valencia	29	7	10	12	32	46	31
Espanyol	28	7	8	13	27	40	29
Alaves	29	6	9	14	32	44	27
Leganes	29	6	9	14	28	46	27
Las Palmas	29	6	8	15	33	48	26
Valladolid	29	4	4	21	19	65	16

SERIE A: Lazio 1 (Marusic 57) **Torino 1** (Gineitis 82), **Verona 0** Parma 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter Milan	30	20	7	3	67	28	67
Napoli	30	19	7	4	47	24	64
Atalanta	30	17	7	6	63	29	58
Bologna	30	15	11	4	50	34	56
Juventus	30	14	13	3	46	28	55
Roma	30	15	7	8	45	30	52
Lazio	30	15	7	8	51	42	52
Fiorentina	30	15	6	9	47	30	51
AC Milan	30	13	8	9	45	35	47
Udinese	30	11	7	12	36	41	40
Torino	30	9	12	9	35	35	39
Genoa	30	8	11	11	28	38	35
Como	30	7	9	14	36	47	30
Verona	30	9	3	18	29	58	30
Cagliari	30	7	8	15	31	44	29
Parma	30	5	11	14	35	49	26
Lecce	30	6	7	17	21	49	25
Empoli	30	4	11	15	24	47	23
Venezia	30	3	11	16	23	43	20
Monza	30	2	9	19	24	52	15

New partnership will boost confidence: Bing Kun

SHUTTLE Loo Bing Kun (pic) believes that his mixed doubles partnership with Toh Ee Wei will boost his confidence when competing in international tournaments.

The 21-year-old Bing Kun said he would make good use of the opportunity to partner Ee Wei and learn as much as he can from her since she has vast experience on the international stage.

"When I was with my previous partner, I had to guide her. But now with Ee Wei, she is more senior and has more experience, so I am more confident about the upcoming tournaments."

"I will combine with Ee Wei for four or five tournaments to assess our compatibility. So, this short period is a chance for me to learn as much as I

can from Ee Wei.

"Hopefully, I can move up to the next level," he said after a training session at Akademi Badminton Malaysia (ABM) in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The Penangite, however, admitted that he still had a lot to learn and improve on if he is to make his partnership with Ee Wei work.

He was also quick to admit that he would be under intense pressure when paired up with Ee Wei, who



is ranked fourth in the world, as expectations will be higher from the coaches.

"But I have discussed with

the coaches and Ee Wei about this pressure and they will help me to overcome it," he said.

On Friday, the Badminton Association of Malaysia (BAM) confirmed that the Chen Tang Jie-Ee Wei partnership would be split for upcoming tournaments based on the recommendation of the coaching panel, including doubles coaching director Rexy Mainaky and mixed doubles head coach Nova Widianto.

The time-out between Tang Jie and Ee Wei is due to tensions between them and to give them space to resolve whatever issues that have cropped up between them.

"A mixed doubles pair is like a husband-wife relationship. There will be quarrels but as coaches we have to discuss with them

to know what transpired between them," said Rexy.

"Ee Wei is outgoing and typically, doesn't like to lose while Tang Jie is quite a reserved type. These differences sometimes escalate in tournaments where it affects their performance."

"This added to their frustration, and splitting them and giving them new partners have become inevitable."

"This will give them a cooling off period and also see the potential with their new partners."

Rexy later announced that Tang Jie would combine with Chan Wen Tse in mixed doubles and with Wong Vin Sean in men's doubles.

Meanwhile, Ee Wei will partner Bing Kun in five tournaments starting in May. - Bernama



Read **theSun** iPaper at
www.thesun.my

Free access to iPaper PDF Download

or download **theSun** app from
the App Store or Google Play™.

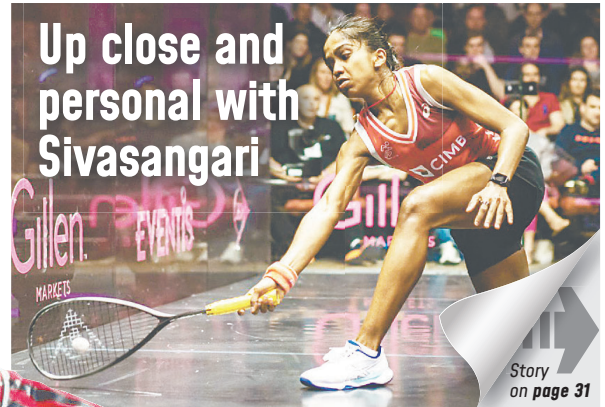
Download on the App Store | GET IT ON Google Play | DOWNLOAD ON AppGallery

SCAN ME



Dream debut for Ashwani

Story on page 27



Up close and personal with Sivasangari

Story on page 31

RUBEN AMORIM has told Bruno Fernandes he is "not going anywhere" amid fresh speculation over the Manchester United captain's future.

The 30-year-old has arguably been the best signing of the post-Sir Alex Ferguson era, scoring 95 goals in 277 appearances since joining from Portuguese giants Sporting in 2020.

Fernandes was handed the captaincy 20 months ago and, having spoken to the club after receiving an offer to leave, signed a new deal until at least 2027 last year.

The Portugal international has been linked with a £90 million (RM495m) move to Real Madrid in recent days, but Amorim said "no, it's not going to happen" when that report was put to him.

The United boss revealed he has said as much to the player but knows they must strive to meet the skipper's ambitions to win the biggest prizes.

"That is the challenge," Amorim said. "I want Bruno here because maybe in the lowest moments of our season (he impressed)."

"We want to win the Premier League again, so we want the best players to continue with us."

"He's 29, I think, but he's still so young because he plays 55 games every season."

"Between assists and goals, he's there for 30 at least so he's the type of player we want here so he's not going anywhere."

Asked how he could speak about Fernandes with such certainty, Amorim said: "We are in control of the situation and I feel that he is really happy here."

"Especially because he understands what we want to do and then I think he is one more supporter of Manchester United. He really feels it."

"Sometimes the frustration that you see, everybody sees, and says maybe it's not a good thing in a captain, it's a sign that he wants this so bad."

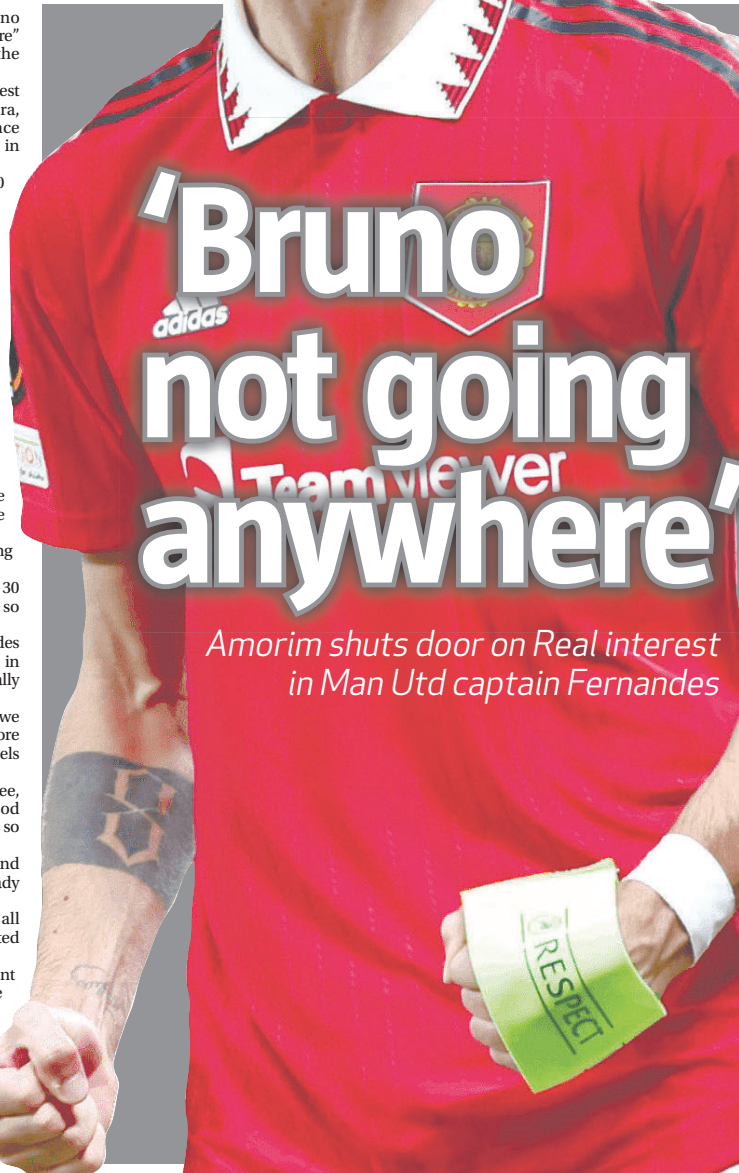
"This is the kind of player that we want and he's not going anywhere because I've already told him!"

Fernandes has scored 16 times in all competitions this season while no other United player has reached double figures.

In the final week before the most recent international break, Fernandes scored five goals, including a hatrick in the Europa League last-16 victory over Real Sociedad.

Only Mohammed Salah (54) and Erling Haaland (33) have more than Fernandes' combination of 31 goals and assists in the Premier League this term.

Fernandes' future is certainly clearer than the likes of Marcus



'Bruno not going anywhere'

Amorim shuts door on Real interest in Man Utd captain Fernandes

Rashford, who has made an encouraging start to a loan stint with Aston Villa that runs until the summer.

The 27-year-old scored his first goals since the move in Sunday's FA Cup quarterfinal win at Preston, which came hot on the heels of his England return.

Amorim omitted Rashford for 13 games before his loan move to Villa, only putting the forward on the bench for one of them, after criticising his performances in training.

"I know Rashford really well and everybody knows the talent that he has, so I already spoke about that," Amorim said of Rashford.

"He's a top player, if he wants, so I'm not surprised and it's the same with Antony (at Real Betis)."

"Rashford is not my player at the moment but every player that performs well on loan is good news for my club so I am happy with that."

The United manager's "if he wants" remark once again called into question the player's application.

He had previously said in January: "He has to change. In this moment we have to set some standards. We are waiting for Rashford, if he wants it really bad."

"I have nothing against Marcus, but I have to make the same rules for everybody. I will not put (in) any player that doesn't give the maximum."

Villa manager Unai Emery, when asked if a decision has been made to sign Rashford after the win at Preston, said: "Not yet."

Rashford himself explained of his return to form: "I think I can get fitter, I missed a lot of football before joining up with Villa."

"My body feels good, injury free and just enjoying my football for now. It's a great feeling, I feel like I've been slowly getting better and playing better football since I've been here."

— The Independent/Express Newspapers