



**Talks to be held
with Thailand
over Customs SOP**

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connecting Singapore to
China to begin once
procedures finalised,
says transport minister.

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Judge says statements by
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unquestionably false,
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and unwarranted.

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One of the durian trees that were felled by
authorities during enforcement operations
against illegal occupiers of state land in Pahang.
— FBPIC COURTESY OF RAUB MP CHOW YU HUI

SEAMLESS JOURNEY
WITH JOJO FLIGHTSELETAR SINGAPORE ⇌ REDANG ISLAND ⇌ SUBANG SKYPARK
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Al-Sultan Abdullah and Tunku Azizah being greeted by state assemblymen during the opening of the Pahang State Legislative Assembly at Wisma Sri Pahang in Kuantan yesterday. — BERNAMAPIC

End illegal encroachment of state land: Pahang Ruler

➤ Unlawful occupation of 14,495ha cultivated with oil palm, rubber, durian and other crops tantamount to blatant theft of public resources under guise of agriculture, says Sultan

KUANTAN: The Sultan of Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah has called for a definitive end to the longstanding crisis of illegal land encroachment in the state, describing it as a blatant theft of public resources under the guise of agriculture.

Al-Sultan Abdullah revealed that a total of 14,494.9ha of state government-owned land had been unlawfully occupied and cultivated with oil palm, rubber, durian and other crops.

He said more concerning is that 5,997.09ha of permanent forest reserve land had also been encroached upon, allegedly for agricultural purposes but in truth, it amounted to "a blatant robbery of the state's assets".

"This issue did not emerge overnight. It has been deeply rooted for more than four decades without my knowledge, but it is not my intention to dwell on the past or worsen the complexities.

"Instead, we must bring this chapter of illegal land encroachment to a close. Let the lessons of the past guide us forward," he said in his royal address at the opening of the First Meeting of

the Fourth Session of the 15th Pahang State Legislative Assembly at Wisma Sri Pahang yesterday.

The Tengku Ampuan of Pahang Tunku Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah was also in attendance.

In line with the state government's recent decision, Al-Sultan Abdullah firmly declared that no new approvals would be granted for any land application involving illegally occupied areas.

"This is a non-negotiable principle, to uphold the rule of law and safeguard the trust placed in us by the state and the people."

He expressed concern over rising attempts to manipulate public sentiment for sympathy, portraying land encroachment as a form of struggle.

"This is utterly shameful. Such actions not only tarnish the image of our institutions but also undermine the sovereignty of state governance. Let us not allow narrow political interests to override justice or glorify wrongful acts.

"I must stress that any so-called struggle rooted in the unlawful occupation of state-owned land will never receive my blessing."

He reminded all land administrators at every level to serve as the front line of defence, not puppets to be manipulated.

The Sultan said the state remains fully open to enforcement bodies, including the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission, police and the Pahang State Enforcement Unit, to act decisively and impartially, Bernama reported.

"I stand with all of you who fight to protect this land from being colonised, exploited and desecrated without remorse. Let not my administration be weak or complacent. Be my eyes and ears, not just voices that speak only to please.

"Let this 'dark chapter' serve as a lesson and a lasting reminder to all who hold power."

Al-Sultan Abdullah also voiced concern over Pahang's struggle not only against environmental degradation but also the leakage of state revenue through various forms of unauthorised resource extraction.

He pointed out that millions of ringgit have been lost through the illegal removal of minerals, including rocks, sand, ore, gold, bauxite and rare earth elements, carried out either overtly or under misused licences.

The Sultan urged the state administration to continue its efforts to eliminate all forms of resource leakages.

M'sia, China deepen ties with new panda conservation deal

PUTRAJAYA: The signing of a new agreement under the International Cooperation Project on Giant Panda Conservation will enable Malaysia to receive a new pair of giant pandas for 10 years, said Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad.

He said the collaborative project between China and Malaysia promotes conservation diplomacy, consistent with the Malaysia Madani values of global collaboration in sustainability initiatives.

"I hope the giant pandas, who are special envoys from China, can further promote understanding and close cooperation between the two countries.

"Malaysia will continue to be committed to working with China for the conservation and enhancement of scientific cooperation in the preservation of the iconic wildlife species, the giant panda," he said in a statement.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and China President Xi Jinping on Wednesday witnessed the exchange of 31 MoUs and documents covering various sectors of cooperation between the two countries.

Among them was the new agreement under the International Cooperation Project on Giant Panda Conservation, which was signed by the Wildlife and National Parks Department Director-General Datuk Abdul Kadir Abu Hashim and China Wildlife Conservation Association Secretary-General Yan Jian.

Malaysia, through a previous agreement signed on June 15, 2012, was granted a conservation cooperation project with a pair of giant pandas for 10 years, housed at the Giant Panda Conservation Centre in Zoo Negara.

During this period, Malaysia showed extraordinary achievements in the ex-situ conservation of giant pandas with the breeding and birth of three giant panda cubs, which have been returned to China in compliance with the terms of the agreement. — Bernama

Digital pact to be implemented soon

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia, as this year's Asean chair, is committed to ensuring that the Digital Economy Framework Agreement can be implemented in the near future, said Digital Minister Gobind Singh Deo.

He said the agreement brings great potential to the regional digital economy, which is estimated to reach US\$2 trillion (RM8.82 trillion) by 2030, Bernama reported.

"Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's close relationship with Asean leaders is a strength because when there is that friendship, discussions can be held to resolve initial problems so that the agreement can be implemented as soon as possible to have an economic impact, not only on Malaysia, but also on the region in the near future," he said as a guest on the Asean *Dari Kuala Lumpur* *Ke Dunia* programme on Bernama TV on Thursday.

PM holds talks with Myanmar leader on quake relief efforts

BANGKOK: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has met Myanmar's State Administration Council chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing in Bangkok to discuss efforts to restore normalcy in the country following the devastating earthquake on March 28.

"We held a frank and constructive discussion focused on the urgent humanitarian needs of the Myanmar people, including the immediate deployment of a field hospital, as well as the importance of returning the country to normalcy," said

Anwar, who is on a two-day working visit to Thailand.

Former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra also attended the meeting, which lasted for more than an hour.

Anwar also welcomed recent steps to ease tensions in Myanmar, including the release of 4,800 detainees on Wednesday.

"Such gestures are a meaningful signal. We continue to encourage all parties to engage seriously in the interest of Myanmar's stability and the well-being of its people," he said in a post on his official Facebook page.

Anwar also said he would meet representatives of Myanmar's National Unity Government.

It was reported that the head of Myanmar's military government granted amnesty to nearly 4,900 prisoners to mark the country's traditional New Year, state-run media reported on Thursday. An independent watchdog noted that at least 22 of those released were political detainees.

The Special Malaysia Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team departed for Naypyidaw, Myanmar on March 30, two days after the

earthquake struck the conflict-torn country.

Braving aftershocks, the Malaysian team conducted search and rescue operations for victims amid collapsed infrastructure and limited resources. Their mission led to the recovery of seven victims, including one survivor found alive under rubble.

The impoverished Southeast Asian nation is reeling from the destruction caused by the massive 7.7-magnitude quake that struck its central region, home to 17 million people. A total of 3,649 people were killed, 5,018 were injured while 145 remain missing. — Bernama

Use of plastic bags banned at parks and forest reserves

PUTRAJAYA: The use of single-use plastic bags at forest reserves, national/state parks, marine parks, geoheritage sites, geosites and certain business premises nationwide has been prohibited as a proactive measure to reduce plastic

pollution in Malaysia. Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad said the decision was made during the Meeting of Environment Ministers and State Executive Councillors

Responsible for the Environment No. 1/2025 held in Putrajaya yesterday.

"This ban on the use of single-use plastic carrier bags will also apply at fixed premises such as supermarkets, convenience stores, including at petrol stations, fast food restaurants,

chain stores, pharmacies and other retail premises," he said in a statement.

The federal and state governments will also strengthen cooperation to combat the growing number of illegal e-waste processing

activities in the country, driven by the influx of illegal e-waste imports.

Nik Nazmi said action will be taken against unlicensed premises involved in illegal e-waste processing in their respective states. — Bernama

Call to address teen sexual-related issues holistically

KUALA LUMPUR: Issues related to sexual behaviour among teenagers require urgent attention through an integrated and holistic approach involving parents, the community and authorities, said Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) Datuk Dr Mohd Na'im Mokhtar.

He said the rise in rape and incest cases involving minors was alarming and needed immediate action, as the cases reflect high-risk lifestyle behaviours that pose a serious threat to the well-being of the younger generation.

Mohd Na'im emphasised the need to strengthen the prevention strategy through Holistic Sexuality Education (HSE), which focused on five dimensions of sexuality, namely intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual and physical (biological).

"HSE must include three key elements, namely suitability with the maturity level of children, being in line with religious values, culture and customs, as well as being based on accurate data and scientific studies," he said in a Facebook post.

He added that parents and adults must be equipped with basic knowledge of HSE and the skills to discuss sexuality issues.

"Teenagers must also be equipped with basic HSE knowledge to help them make informed and responsible decisions regarding their sexuality."

For teenagers facing sexual-related issues, Mohd Na'im said the focus should be on harm reduction strategies to mitigate the risks of mental health disorders, pregnancy, abortion and sexually transmitted infections. — Bernama

Move to boost records system

IPOH: A total of 7,409 units of documents from various government departments and agencies have received "Klasifikasi Fail Fungsian" and have been registered in the National Archives of Malaysia's Electronic Records Management System (ERMS) this year.

National Archives director-general Datuk Jaafar Sidek Abdul Rahman said this is to strengthen the department's records management system, in line with the principles of efficiency, accountability and transparency in public service delivery.

"This record (Klasifikasi Fail Fungsian) will serve as a continuous reference for a government agency and department," he said in his speech at the signing ceremony of the functional record disposal schedule of the Perak Syariah Judiciary Department here on Thursday.

Perak Syariah Judiciary Department deputy chief syariah prosecutor Azman Saad said 436 functional documents have been entered into the ERMS, which has received certification from the National Archives. — Bernama

'Smart' hospital payment system to be rolled out

■ BY DEEPAKSHMI MANICKAM
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BANGI: Malaysia aims to kick off the first phase of its Diagnosis-Related Group (DRG) hospital payment system this year, starting with less complex diseases, said Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad.

Speaking at the Malaysia Genome and Vaccine Institute (MGVI), where the MyGenom national precision medicine initiative was also launched, Dzulkefly described the DRG model as a major shake-up in hospital funding and healthcare delivery.

➤ Uniquely M'sian model would be tailored to population needs and disease trends, with greater transparency in billing while promoting better use of resources: Minister

"We're moving towards a uniquely Malaysian DRG model – not a carbon copy of the version used in the US or anywhere else."

"We'll build our own grouper – a classification system tailored to our population needs, disease trends and economic context," he said.

Already adopted in many countries, the DRG system groups patients by diagnosis and treatment, streamlining payments and boosting hospital efficiency.

Dzulkefly said the Health Ministry is in discussions with the Finance Ministry, Bank Negara

Malaysia, private healthcare providers, insurers, IT firms and other key players to craft a workable model.

"We're running five intensive sessions involving Health Ministry, Finance Ministry, Bank Negara, the private sector, health insurers and tech partners. It's a massive, system-wide effort," he said.

The rollout will begin with low-complexity diseases – dubbed "international transNational diseases" – before scaling up to more challenging conditions.

"This phased approach lets us launch early, even before the entire system is in place. Start simple, learn fast, then scale," he added.

Serious talks on DRG began in March 2024, and the ministry is now racing to launch by year-end, spurred by growing momentum for healthcare reform.

"This DRG model must be co-developed by policymakers, clinicians, economists and both public and private sector stakeholders."

The system is expected to drive greater transparency in billing, promote smarter use of resources and ease pressure on public hospitals – key goals under the Madani government reform agenda.

"This is a structural shift. DRG moves us towards a smarter, fairer and more sustainable healthcare model," Dzulkefly said.

His comments came alongside an update on the MyGenom project, another ambitious step towards transforming healthcare through genomics and personalised medicine.



Dzulkefly (third from left) and Chang being briefed during the MyGenom Project and Blood Sample Collection Session at the institute yesterday. — ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THESUN

MyGenom project set to reshape healthcare system

BANGI: Malaysia's push to transform healthcare through precision medicine is gaining momentum, with 2,000 participants enrolled in Phase 1 of the national MyGenom project and 500 genomes already sequenced.

The initiative, jointly driven by the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry and the Health Ministry, aims to sequence 2,400 genomes by end-2025, before scaling up to 10,000 genomes in Phase 2.

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Chang Lih Kang said: "This project marks a major leap in reshaping our healthcare system."

"Genomics allows us to move past one-size-fits-all treatments and deliver care tailored to each

individual's unique genetic makeup."

Sample collection is led by the Health Ministry at selected clinics and community sites, while sequencing is carried out by the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry via the Malaysia Genome and Vaccine Institute (MGVI) and the National Institutes of Biotechnology Malaysia (NIBM).

At the heart of the project is the Illumina Novaseq X Plus, the country's first population-scale genome sequencing machine.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said genomics would boost treatment precision and speed, especially for chronic and rare diseases.

"The MyGenom project isn't just about science.

"It's about healthcare justice. By mapping our genetic diversity, we ensure that no community is excluded from cutting-edge treatments," he said.

Both ministers took part in a symbolic sampling at MGVI-NIBM yesterday, underscoring their commitment to building a national genomic reference.

The project supports the Madani government vision of a more resilient public healthcare system and lower long-term costs.

Dzulkefly said the data would help refine treatment protocols for major conditions such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

"We're shifting to a healthcare model that's predictive, preventive and precise. This is the future of medicine," he said.

As Malaysia builds its national reference genome, the data will guide not only treatments but also pharmaceutical innovation, diagnostics and health policy.

Phase 2, set to commence post-2025, will focus on inclusivity by sequencing genomes from Malaysia's many ethnic and sub-ethnic groups.

Chang also highlighted the project's role in nurturing local talent.

"MyGenom is building expertise in genomics, biotech and data science."

"It supports our wider mission under the National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy to position Malaysia as a regional high-tech hub," he said. — BY DEEPAKSHMI MANICKAM



Upgrades for Sabah town to be done by 2026

PENAMPANG: Work to upgrade and repair the 2,543ha Tamu Donggongan area is expected to be completed by April next year, said Entrepreneur and Cooperatives Development Minister Datuk Ewon Benedick.

He said the RM8.5 million Tamu market upgrading project, which began this month, would be completed on time, following delays since 2018.

"I view it as a significant step towards fulfilling my election manifesto by finally initiating long-delayed initiatives in Penampang. Regarding Tamu Donggongan, I am confident that the issue has been resolved," he said at the groundbreaking ceremony for the project on Thursday.

Ewon, who is also Penampang MP, said the design of the Tamu building would retain its traditional concept featuring various facilities, including 550 lots for dry market goods, 36 lots for wet market vendors, a police post, public restrooms, parking spaces, and offices for market and enforcement management.

"Tamu Donggongan traders can seek services from the National Entrepreneurial Group Economic Fund if they need assistance while operating at the temporary market site and after the project concludes.

"Another scheme is micro-financing for petty traders, which offers funds and working capital for them to sustain their business activities at Tamu." — Bernama

Perak to facilitate land matters for new complex

IPOH: The Perak government is prepared to facilitate land-related matters for the development of the new Immigration, Customs, Quarantine and Security Complex in Bukit Berapit, Pengkalan Hulu.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Saarani Mohamad said the state government must prioritise border security and state sovereignty before planning for economic and commercial development in the surrounding area.

"The state government will support and continue collaboration with various quarters to drive economic growth in Pengkalan Hulu.

"This is in line with development plans such as the State Structure Plan, District Local Plan and the Malaysia-Thailand International Border Study."

Saarani, who is also Kota Tampan assemblyman, said the upgrading works are scheduled to begin in the first quarter of this year and are expected to be completed by the third quarter of next year.

Upon completion, the area will be handed over to the Pengkalan Hulu District Council, he added.

The construction of the new complex was announced by the federal government during the tabling of Budget 2025 and is slated for implementation under the 13th Malaysia Plan. — Bernama

M'sia, Thailand to discuss railway network procedures

► Transport minister to meet counterpart on May 2 for talks on Customs clearance

■ BY IKHWAN ZULKAFLEE
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PUTRAJAYA: With the construction of the Pan-Asian Railway Network almost complete, the government will hold talks with Thailand to discuss the procedures between the

two countries.

Transport Minister Anthony Loke said he would be heading to Thailand on May 2 to meet his counterpart and discuss matters regarding Customs clearance.

He said the railway track connecting Malaysia to China could

begin operations once the procedures were finalised.

He also said only one section in Johor has yet to be completed in the Pan-Asian Railway Network project, that connects Southeast Asian countries and China.

The Pan-Asian Railway Network, also known as the Kunming-Singapore railway, links China, Singapore and all the countries of mainland Southeast Asia.

Loke had earlier attended the Railway Asset Corporation Customer Appreciation Ceremony and Open Day at the Double Tree Hotel here.

"For us (Malaysia), it would be very strategic but we do not want it to be used for domestic purposes only. At present, we are focusing only on passenger services, the Electric Train Service.

"We want to utilise it for cargo as well, which is already happening. However, we aim for more Asean trade and increased movement from Malaysia to China.

"Once you reach China, their network allows access to any part of the country. From China, you can connect to Eurasia and even reach Europe."

He said the project would be a game changer to the transport industry and a means to boost tourism.

Loke added that China President Xi Jinping had also highlighted the importance of the Pan-Asian Railway Network during his working visit here.



Loke said only one section of the project in Johor has yet to be completed. — BERNAMAPIC

Tender for new bridge project expected next month

KUCHING: The Public Works Department is expected to issue a tender for the construction of a new bridge across Sungai Sengayan in Long Jekitan, Baram next month.

Deputy Minister in the Sarawak Premier's Department (Labour, Immigration and Project Monitoring) Datuk Gerawat Gala said the request for a permanent bridge was made earlier as a safety measure for villagers needing to cross the river.

"We applied to build a bridge

because the area is a logging route, and the wooden bridge there has collapsed and can no longer be used.

"Villagers can still cross the river during low tide but we hope they will not take the risk during heavy rain or strong currents," he told reporters at the Recoda Rindok Raya event here on Thursday.

Gerawat was commenting on an incident involving Dawellies Luig, 46, and his child, who were swept away by currents while trying to

cross Sungai Sengayan on Sunday.

"I feel really sorry for the families. It is so unfortunate that we have lost two lives already. We are doing all that we can to help search for the missing victim."

Dawellies, a Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK) Jekitan staff member, was in a four-wheel drive vehicle with his wife Litun Ajip, their nine-year-old daughter Vallerie Mentie and a driver when they attempted to cross the river and were swept away.

Litun and the driver managed to save themselves but Vallerie was found drowned about 2km from the scene by villagers on Monday.

Her body was taken to the family's home in Long Tikan and laid to rest on Wednesday.

The search and rescue operation involves personnel from the Marudi Fire and Rescue station, police, the Civil Defence Force, SK Long Jekitan teachers and local villagers. — Bernama

#ShopSafe initiative addresses online scams

KUALA LUMPUR: TikTok Shop, a trusted e-commerce platform in Malaysia, has partnered with the Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry to raise awareness on safe online shopping through the #ShopSafe initiative.

Held in conjunction with World Consumer Rights Day, the campaign aims to address online scams.

Minister Datuk Armizan Mohd Ali said the ministry is pleased to work with TikTok Shop in educating the public on best practices when shopping online, equipping them

with the knowledge and tools to shop safely in the digital space.

"Most e-commerce scams occur outside official platforms when scammers direct users to complete transactions via phone numbers, suspicious links or direct transfers.

"TikTok Shop's commitment to safeguarding consumers is commendable and we look forward to continuing our collaboration to address online fraud."

TikTok Shop Malaysia director of strategic partnerships Nur Azre Abdul Aziz said user safety is the

platform's top priority.

"We invest in talent and technology to ensure a safe and worry-free shopping experience, backed by a robust return and refund policy.

"In the first half of 2024, we proactively rejected 20.4 million product listing attempts and two million seller account registrations that did not meet our standards."

She added that addressing online scams requires collective effort and expressed appreciation for the support of the Commercial

Crime Investigation Department in educating the public on #ShopSafe practices.

"Together, we can keep our community informed on emerging scam trends and the steps they can take to protect themselves."

#ShopSafe tips from TikTok Shop and the ministry include avoiding off-platform purchases, not sharing sensitive personal information and reporting suspicious behaviour through the app, Bernama reported.

For more information, visit www.tiktok.com/@tiktokshop_my.

Ex-health minister awarded RM2.5m in defamation suit

KUALA LUMPUR: Former health minister Khairy Jamaluddin was awarded RM2.5 million in damages in a defamation lawsuit that he filed against Mohd Rasyiq Mohd Alwi, also known as Ustaz Abu Syafiq, over social media posts related to the Covid-19 vaccine made three years ago.

High Court Judge Datuk Raja Ahmad Mohzanuddin Shah Raja Mohzan also awarded RM50,000 in costs to the former Rembau MP.

On Jan 25, 2022, Khairy sued Mohd Rasyiq for allegedly making several defamatory statements, including posting three videos and photos on the "Ustaz Abu Syafiq" Instagram on Oct 20, 2021, and Jan 6 and 10, 2022.

Khairy claimed that the statements suggested that he deceived the public by claiming that he had been given the Covid-19 vaccine and received the third dose, as well as falsifying information regarding his vaccination status.

Raja Ahmad Mohzanuddin said the court found that the impugned statements, in their natural and ordinary meaning, imputed dishonourable or discreditable conduct, and a lack of integrity to the plaintiff.

"These statements tend to lower the plaintiff's reputation in the eyes of right-thinking members of society, which has an adverse and direct effect on his reputation in government and exposes him to hatred, contempt, ridicule or avoidance by that society."

"These statements are inherently damaging to the plaintiff's ministerial and personal reputation. As a result, I agree with the plaintiff after reviewing the testimony and documents provided by him, indicating that such statements are unquestionably false, baseless, unsubstantiated and unwarranted."

He said the court accepted the plaintiff's evidence, including that the claim about the third vaccine dose requirement for Malaysian Muslims performing *umrah* is true as it matches Saudi Arabia's rule for those who received the Sinovac or Sinopharm vaccines.

"The plaintiff did not discuss specific vaccine brand requirements for *umrah* or *haji*. At the press conference on Dec 28, 2021, the plaintiff emphasised the Health Ministry's intention to cooperate with the tourism companies managing the *umrah* package to ensure Malaysians wishing to

► Statements by defendant imputed dishonourable conduct and lack of integrity to plaintiff: Judge



The judge said there was no evidence to show that Khairy (left) failed to manage and curtail the spread of Covid-19, as suggested by the defendant. — BERNAMAPIC

perform *umrah* would receive their booster doses.

"There were no restrictions on vaccine brands or requirements by the Saudi Arabian government mentioned by the plaintiff."

Regarding the second, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth defamatory statements, he said the court found that the plaintiff was vaccinated twice and received his booster dose, as confirmed by Prosecution Witness Two (PW2) former health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah.

Raja Ahmad Mohzanuddin said Khairy had volunteered to take part in an informal study to measure his antibody levels after receiving a third dose as he was first vaccinated with Sinovac on March 18, 2021 and then vaccinated with Pfizer (Comirnaty) on Sept 4 the same year as his third dose.

"When the then prime minister and PW2 took Pfizer vaccine doses as the first and

second Malaysians to do so, the plaintiff purposely chose not to take this vaccine as his first dose.

"The plaintiff waited and took the CoronaVac vaccine (Sinovac) as his first and second doses after sensing that public perception was somewhat doubtful at the early stage of the vaccine implementation period, to ensure public trust in other vaccines, apart from Pfizer."

He said there was not a shred of evidence to show that Khairy failed to manage and curtail the spread of Covid-19, as suggested by the defendant, Bernama reported.

"Malaysia's ability to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic under the plaintiff's leadership has been recognised worldwide."

"According to PW2, Malaysia has been hailed as one of the successful nations when it comes to managing, dealing with and addressing the deadly disease."

Increase in cases of online fraud

KUALA LUMPUR: Online fraud involving e-finance crimes, love scams, e-commerce, telecommunications, loans and non-existent investments increased by between 1.6% and 19.8% for the first quarter of the year, compared with the last quarter of last year.

Bukit Aman Commercial Crime Investigation Department acting director Datuk Rohaimi Md Isa said losses amounting to RM573.7 million, involving 12,110 cases, were recorded between January and March this year.

"E-commerce crime cases recorded the highest increase of 19.8% with 2,535 cases, followed by telecommunications crime at 17.1% with 5,214 cases."

"The highest increase recorded in the e-commerce crime category is closely linked to the increase in online purchasing activities by consumers, especially in conjunction with the Aidilfitri celebration."

He said although the overall number of online fraud cases recorded an increase, the total losses involving e-finance crimes, love scams, e-commerce crimes and non-existent loans decreased by between 1.8% and 24.8%.

He also said losses for telecommunications fraud and non-existent investments increased by 2.1%, involving RM159.2 million, and 20.2%, involving RM357.7 million, respectively.

Rohaimi said the rapid advancement in technology and today's lifestyle are being exploited by criminals, who use fake digital identities, fake websites, automated conversations (chatbots) and deepfake technology to deceive victims.

"Generative artificial intelligence allows the creation of content that appears authentic and convincing, making it difficult for users to distinguish between genuine and fraudulent communications."

He advised the public to be vigilant when conducting business online by performing background checks on individuals or entities involved, and avoiding disclosing personal information arbitrarily.

Users are also encouraged to refer to official sources, such as the SemakMule portal, before making financial transactions digitally, he said. — Bernama

Cops probe post insulting King

KUALA LUMPUR: Police have launched an investigation into a widely spread social media post believed to contain elements insulting His Majesty the King of Malaysia Sultan Ibrahim.

IGP Tan Sri Razarudin Husain said a report on the matter was received on Thursday in Kota Samarahan, Sarawak.

Checks found that two Facebook accounts had been created using the same name and profile picture.

"An individual came forward to lodge a denial report after discovering an account created in his name and using his photo," said Razarudin.

"He denied ownership of the account and filed a police report out of concern that it might lead to future problems."

He said the investigation will proceed upon receiving a social media intelligence analysis report from the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission.

The case is being investigated under Section 4(1) of the Sedition Act 1948 and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998.

The post featured a screenshot of a photo showing Sultan Ibrahim with Chinese President Xi Jinping, accompanied by a caption allegedly insulting the King. — Bernama

468kg meth found in abandoned car on highway

KUANTAN: Police have found 468.3kg of crystal meth worth RM15 million in a four-wheel drive vehicle that was abandoned at Km211 of the East Coast Highway 1.

Pahang police chief Datuk Seri Yahaya Othman said the vehicle was parked in the direction heading towards Kuantan.

"The vehicle was found by the Bukit Aman Traffic Investigation and Enforcement Department during Op Utama Zon Timur, which was conducted between 10am and 1pm on Tuesday."

He said during the operation, the police highway patrol unit received information that a white vehicle was going against the flow of traffic.

"Acting on the information, the highway patrol unit scoured the highway and discovered the vehicle on a road shoulder with its doors locked, without a driver or passengers."

Yahaya was speaking at a press conference at the Pahang contingent police headquarters on Thursday.

He said an inspection of the rear and inside

of the vehicle led to the discovery of 22 black plastic bags containing 440 packages labelled "Chinese Pin Wei", which were filled with clear crystal chunks suspected to be methamphetamine.

"Efforts to track down the vehicle's owner are under way and we urge drivers who have dashboard camera recordings of the incident to come forward to assist in the investigation."

He added that the case is being investigated under Section 39B of the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952. — Bernama

Woman conned of over RM570,000 in investment scam

NILAI: An assistant human resource manager in Negeri Sembilan has lost RM579,110 to an online investment scheme.

Nilai district police chief Supt Abdul Malik Hasim said the victim, a woman in her 50s, lodged a report at the police station at 10.58am on Thursday after realising she had been conned.

He said she had dealt with an individual who offered an online investment scheme purportedly based in Taiwan.

"She was interested in the investment as it promised high returns and was instructed to download an app called 'TS PRO' onto her phone."

"She transferred RM207,110 into seven

provided accounts and handed over RM372,000 in cash to an individual claiming to be a company representative."

He said the complainant realised she had been duped when she could not access the app on Wednesday or withdraw the promised profits.

He said police are investigating the case under Section 420 of the Penal Code. — Bernama

Milestone kidney transplant from deceased donor

► Team of medical professionals complete first such procedure for this year at Miri Hospital

MIRI: Miri Hospital recently achieved a milestone with the successful retrieval and transplantation of a kidney from a deceased 43-year-old male donor.

The surgery, carried out on April 16, was the first of its kind in Sarawak this year, and marked the fifth such organ donation case at the hospital, a testament to the growing awareness and compassion within

the community.

A post on the Miri Hospital official Facebook page stated that the deceased had been a registered organ donor since 2014, Bernama reported.

The procedure was led by surgeons Dr Aaron Goh and Dr Kamal Raj from the Sarawak General Hospital, assisted by a National Transplant Resource Centre team comprising Dr Engku Emilia Engku

Awang, S.N. Mohammad Aliff Abdullah and urology nurses Siti Zulaikha Md Sidek and Liz Esteveira Gabin.

Also contributing to the success of the surgery were Dr Uma Devi Ramadass from the Organ Procurement Unit of Sarawak General Hospital, along with the top team from Miri Hospital.

Miri Hospital also extended its

deepest condolences and sincere gratitude to the wife and family of the late donor, whose selfless decision gave someone else a new lease on life.

"This courageous choice reflects a profound love and compassion, a desire to offer hope and a second chance to others."

The noble act has since touched many, with social media users

expressing admiration for the donor and his family.

"My highest salute and respect to him and his family. May his soul rest in peace, knowing that somebody's life is saved," wrote Catherine Paul Rosli.

"Highest respect in humankind. Giving new life to others. Salute and may your soul rest in peace," shared Iqbal Abdollah.

Public invited to view 'Sulalatus Salatin' exhibition

MALACCA: Visitors and art enthusiasts are invited to seize the opportunity to view works of art created by renowned local artists in interpreting the classic Malay text "Sulalatus Salatin" in visual form.

Chairman of the Melaka Artists Association Pardan Moslem said a total of 37 artworks are showcased at the Manifestation: From Text of Sulalatus Salatin to Visual Art exhibition, that began at the Malacca Art Gallery on Jan 1.

He said the artworks are in various forms, including paintings, sculptures, mixed media and installation art, created by 27 local artists, primarily

members of the association.

"Among the popular artworks exhibited is 'Waadat' by Dr Sharmiza Abu Hassan, interpreted as an installation art piece.

"This particular work has not only been displayed in several museums across the country but has also been showcased at the Singapore Art Museum," said Pardan.

"The exhibition also features pieces by renowned sculptor Dr Rosli Zakaria, themed around struggle, illustrating the legendary duel between Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat".

He added that *Sulalatus Salatin* was chosen as the theme since it is

known as "Sejarah Melayu" (The Malay Annals), which recounts the glory of the Malacca Sultanate.

Pardan said the exhibition is being held in line with the Madani government's encouragement to strengthen and elevate the fields of arts and culture.

Meanwhile, Malacca Museum Corporation assistant curator Fairuz Mamat said visitor response to the exhibition has been encouraging.

"About 500 to 600 visitors have been recorded visiting the Malacca Art Gallery per month to view the exhibition, with ticket prices ranging from RM3 to RM5 per person.

"The public still has the opportunity to view the exhibits until the end of the month to see various interesting artworks, while also gaining a better understanding of Malay history," Fairuz said. — Bernama



Rosli presenting a briefing on one of his creations featured at the exhibition. — BERNAMAPIC

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tara Foundation, a humanitarian NGO, recently held a fundraising gala dinner to support its "Mission Zero Dropouts" objective to nurture children from lower-income families to become university graduates.

The event attended by about a thousand well-wishers was sponsored by Berjaya Corporation Berhad (BCorp).

Tara chairman Datuk Pardip Kumar Kukreja reminisced that its first "after-school free tuition centre" was launched in the hardcore underprivileged B40 area of Desa Mentari in October 2019.

"Fast forward today, five years later, Mission Zero Dropouts is no more a project or a programme," he said. "What we have today is a solid plan for the transformation of the underprivileged B40 community in our country and, if I may say, globally."

To date, Tara has thirty centres operating in Malaysia, with affiliates opening seven centres in Nepal and two in South Africa following the model.

The charity event was graced by guest-of-honour Tan Sri Vincent Tan, founder and adviser of BCorp, and his wife Puan Sri Esther Tan.

Pardip expressed gratitude to Tan and his team for generously agreeing to underwrite the event.

The function at Berjaya Times Square Hotel also featured poetic recitations by children from Tara centres, as well as dance items and video presentations.

Several well-wishers from Nepal, South Africa, Indonesia, Mauritius and Australia were also present.

Pardip said that a centre is also being set up for the Orang Asli community.

"We have an enrolment of nearly 3,000 students now, and we serve almost 700 free

'Mission Zero Dropouts' to uplift needy schoolchildren

► Tara Foundation strives to bolster early education as means to eradicate poverty

lunches," he said.

He stressed that the answer to eradicating poverty is in early education.

"The few of us who pioneered the Mission Zero Dropouts concept realised that there is no quick fix to a deep-rooted problem called 'poverty'.

"The reality is that it is not just education, but early education that makes a difference. That's the 'bullseye' we missed all these years," he said.

He explained that all the centres are located at B40 areas to reach out to children who are getting into primary education.

"We take them on a long journey to transform them from 'potential dropouts' to 'potential graduates'.

"We are here not to build an NGO; we are here to build the community," he added. "The NGO is just a vehicle and we will invest all your money on the community, not on buildings and/or land."



Tan and Esther light a ceremonial lamp as Pardip (left) and event organising chairman Datuk Mohandass S. Nair (right) look on. – PIC COURTESY OF A. KOGULAN



Vanitha receiving the charter for the Lions Club of Sendayan from District Governor Frankie Lim. – R. ANBALAGAN / THE SUN

New Lions team celebrates charter with eye on serving community

■ BY R. ANBALAGAN
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

SEREMBAN: Dr. S. Vanitha became the first president to spearhead the newly formed Lions Club of Sendayan in Negri Sembilan.

Speaking at the club's Charter Night held recently, she said that she understands fully the responsibility to lead the club to serve those who are in need.

"I hope to inspire our new charter members with the value of Lionism, and the importance of developing strong leadership to ensure the sustainability of our new club.

"I'm privileged to lead an amazing team of professionals with a shared vision," said Vanitha, who is the fifth woman to head a Lions club in the state.

She said although the Lions Club of Sendayan was just given official recognition its activities had been taking place since January this year.

The first project was the "Back to School" initiative in collaboration with Ronald McDonald House Charities Malaysia. The programme was part of a global cause of Lions International for youths and schoolgoing children.

"One hundred students entering standard 1 and those in standard 4 from the B40 families received school items such as school bags, uniforms, shoes, water bottles, stationery and colour pencils," she said.

Four schools were selected for the project – Sekolah Kebangsaan Bandar Sri Sendayan, SJKT Shanghai Estate, Sekolah Kebangsaan Mambau and Sekolah Kebangsaan Nyatoh.

The second project was Family Day 2025 with medical screening in collaboration with the Malaysian Medical Association's Negri Sembilan branch.

This was held at SJKT Labu 4th Division where parents and schoolchildren were able to get free screening for hypertension, diabetes and vision issues.

Dr. S. Gunenthira Rao, the president of Lions Club of Seremban Central, which is the mother club of the Lions Club of Sendayan, said: "There are twelve Lions clubs in Negri Sembilan actively serving the community in various community activities."

Also in attendance at the Charter Night was Datuk Yeow Wah Chin, the international director of Lions International.

Next-gen fashion designs set runway on fire

KUALA LUMPUR: The ESMOD Kuala Lumpur Graduation Fashion Show delivered a runway experience filled with fresh artistry, narratives and boundary-pushing craftsmanship. Held on April 12 at The Grey Box here, it featured eight rising talents who unveiled their unique collections in front of an audience of couture enthusiasts.

The students of batch FD2203-1 exhibited an array of designs around the theme of "MIRAGE", in a reflection of their distinctive aesthetics.

The theme emphasised the bold, vibrant and technically challenging qualities put into each collection.

From neo-retro garments to classy, ethereal and playfully curated looks, the runway became a display of artistic brilliance. Each collection, featuring five to seven ensembles, brought the designers' visions to life.

The talents were Natalie Hor, Ling Yi Chien, Wong Hui Yu, Ananda Paramitha Saputra, Sam Shu Yi, Jeff Lee Terk Chwen, Teoh Jing Xuen and Lee Yoo Ning.

During Jury Week leading up to the fashion show, the aspiring designers had prepared their showcase booths to impress the jury panel consisting of renowned names in the industry – Ray Yong, country stylist at Louis Vuitton Malaysia; Khoon Hooi, founder of Khoon Hooi; and Faizal Hamid, a professional

academic in fashion and arts.

After three years of hard work, the talents' collections were evaluated by the professionals. They received constructive criticism and praise based on technique, execution, concept, creativity and quality.

The one-on-one interaction with seasoned experts allowed the students to gain industry insights beyond the four walls of their classroom, deepening their understanding of market trends and professional standards.

The fashion show will serve as a prelude to their foray into the industry. Organising an entire successful fashion show from scratch equipped them with invaluable experience, from coordinating hair and makeup to managing collaborations and executing final looks.

The show was sponsored by One Hair Academy, Backstage Academy, GMBB KL, EK's Collection, Mary Chan, Muzi Boutique Hotel & Muzi Matcha Cafe, Iconic Suites & Pods Hotel, Platt9rm Coffee, Pony & Tail Bubble Lab, Mummy Design and KICG Models.

ESMOD Kuala Lumpur is under the umbrella of the world's first and oldest fashion school with over 180 years of history. Its students are nurtured with the best Parisian fashion design education in line with The One Academy's commitment to the "Masters Train Masters" coaching philosophy.



Participating students and faculty members at the event. – PIC COURTESY OF THE ONE ACADEMY OF COMMUNICATION DESIGN

Sri Lankans throng temple to view tooth relic

KANDY: Thousands of pilgrims camped overnight outside Sri Lanka's holiest Buddhist temple to view a prized relic that will be shown to the public for the first time in 16 years.

Around 10,000 police personnel have been deployed to safeguard the Temple of the Tooth as it launches a 10-day exhibition of what Buddhists believe to be Buddha's left canine.

Police said armed troops will reinforce security at the 16th century temple in Kandy, which was targeted in a 1998 suicide attack that killed 16 people.

"We expect about two million devotees to visit Kandy during the 10-day exhibition," said a police officer.

"There will be airport-style security at the entrance," he said, warning that bags and cameras would be prohibited.

Classes in Kandy have been cancelled as the schools have all been repurposed to house the large number of security forces sent to the city.

Queues to enter the temple stretched over 2km before the exhibition was due to open yesterday afternoon, according to a live map updated by police.

Over a million people were estimated to have visited the Unesco-designated temple when the tooth relic was last displayed in March 2009.

The 1998 bombing of the temple destroyed walls and windows, and in the process revealed 18th century murals that had been plastered over several times in the course of the site's history.

A section of the exposed murals is displayed in the temple's tightly guarded museum, which says they date back to between 1707 and 1739, a period when Kandy was the seat of the monarchy that ruled over the island. — AFP

S'pore defence minister to retire

SINGAPORE: Defence Minister Dr Ng Eng Hen will retire from politics after over two decades in the Cabinet.

Ng, 66, said yesterday that he will not contest the general election.

The Member of Parliament for Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC since 2001 said he had informed Prime Minister Lawrence Wong of his decision several months ago.

Wong, who is also the People's Action Party (PAP) secretary-general, thanked the MPs who will be stepping down during the launch of its manifesto on Thursday.

The PAP will field 32 new candidates next month — the largest number in the party's recent history.

A surgical oncologist by training, Ng has held various positions in the Cabinet, beginning as minister of state for education and manpower in 2002. He became a full minister in 2004, taking on the role of manpower minister.

His involvement in the defence portfolio began in 2005 when he was appointed its second minister. He became full minister for defence in May 2011, a position he has held since.

Ng in a Facebook post reflected on his 24 years in politics, describing his decision to enter the field as taking "a road less travelled" and departing with precious memories. — Bernama

India plans to ease nuclear liability laws

Amendments to allay supplier fears

NEW DELHI: India is planning to ease its nuclear liability laws to cap accident-related penalties on equipment suppliers, three government sources said, in a move mainly to attract US firms that have been holding back due to the risk of unlimited exposure.

The proposal is the latest step to expand nuclear power production capacity by 12 times to 100 gigawatts by 2047 as well as provide a fillip to India in negotiations with the US.

A draft law prepared by the department of atomic energy removes a key clause in the Civil Nuclear Liability Damage Act of 2010 that exposes suppliers to unlimited liability for accidents.

India's atomic energy department, the prime minister's office and the Finance Ministry did not respond to requests seeking comment.

"India needs nuclear power, which is clean and essential," said Debasish Mishra, chief growth officer at Deloitte South Asia.

"A liability cap will allay the major concern of the suppliers of nuclear reactors."

The amendments are in line with international norms that put the onus on the operator to maintain safety instead of the supplier of nuclear reactors.

New Delhi is hoping the changes will ease concerns of firms like General Electric Co and Westinghouse Electric Co that have been sitting on the sidelines for years due to unlimited risks in case of accidents.

Analysts say passage of the amended law is crucial to

negotiations between India and the US for a trade deal this year that aims to raise bilateral trade to US\$500 billion (RM2.2 trillion) by 2030 from US\$191 billion last year.

Modi's administration is confident of getting approval for the amendments in the monsoon session of parliament, set to begin in July.

Under the proposed amendments, the right of the operator to compensation from the supplier in case of an accident will be capped at the value of the contract. It will also be subject to a period to be specified in the contract.

Currently, the law does not define a limit to the amount of compensation an operator can seek from suppliers and the period for which the vendor can be held accountable.

India's 2010 nuclear liability law grew out of the 1984 Bhopal gas

disaster, the world's deadliest industrial accident, at a factory owned by Union Carbide Corp in which more than 5,000 people were killed.

Union Carbide agreed to pay an out-of-court settlement of US\$470 million in damages in 1989.

The current liability law effectively shut out Western companies from a huge market, and also strained US-Indian relations since they reached a deal on nuclear cooperation in 2008.

It also left US firms at a disadvantage to Russian and French companies whose accident liability is underwritten by their governments.

The draft law also proposes a lower liability cap on small reactor operators at US\$58 million, but is unlikely to alter the cap for large reactor operators from the current level of US\$175 million, the three sources said.

India is betting big on nuclear power to meet its rising energy demand without compromising on net-zero commitments, for which it proposes to allow private Indian companies to build such plants.

Conglomerates like Reliance Industries, Tata Power, Adani Power and Vedanta Ltd have held discussions with the government to invest around US\$5.14 billion each in the sector. — Reuters

Bangladesh demands apology from Pakistan

DHAKA: Bangladesh has demanded a formal apology from Pakistan for atrocities committed by its military during the 1971 war of independence.

The demand was made during a high-level diplomatic meeting held on Thursday, the first such engagement between the two countries in 15 years.

In addition to the apology, Dhaka has also sought US\$4.52 billion

(RM19.91 billion) in reparations from Islamabad, covering Bangladesh's share of pre-independence Pakistan's foreign reserves, unpaid provident funds for public servants and foreign aid that remained unsettled after independence.

"We raised the historical unsettled issues with Pakistan, including a formal public apology for the atrocities committed during the 1971 liberation war and the

pending financial claims," Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin told reporters after meeting his Pakistani counterpart, Amna Baloch.

"Pakistan has assured us of continued engagement on these matters. Resolving them is essential to laying a strong foundation for our bilateral relations."

Baloch, who arrived in Dhaka on Wednesday on an official visit, did

not issue any public statement.

During the meeting, Dhaka also raised the issue of the repatriation of more than 324,000 stranded Pakistanis, mostly known as "Biharis" — who remain in refugee camps in Bangladesh over five decades after the war.

Bangladesh estimates that the nine-month conflict resulted in the deaths of 3 million people. — Bernama



GUARDS WITH BITE ... Military police officers patrol on their motorcycles with their K9 dogs near the Huu Nghi border gate of Vietnam-China in Lang Son province, Vietnam. — REUTERS/SPIC



A student placing flowers at a makeshift memorial near the scene of the shooting on Thursday. — AFP/PICTA

Two men shot dead at Florida State University

Deputy sheriff's son held

MIAMI: Two men were killed on Thursday in a mass shooting at a university in Florida allegedly carried out by the son of a local deputy sheriff with her old service weapon.

Five people were wounded when the gunman, identified as Phoenix Ikner, rampaged through Florida State University, shooting at students, before he was shot by police.

A sixth person was hurt trying to run away from the shooting, said Chief Lawrence Revell of the Tallahassee Police Department.

The campus was locked down as gunfire erupted, with students ordered to shelter in place as first responders swarmed the site moments after the lunchtime shootings.

Ikner, 20, has been hospitalised with "serious but non-life-threatening injuries", Revell said.

Leon County Sheriff Walt McNeil told reporters Ikner was a student at the university and the son of an "exceptional" 18-year member of his staff.

"Unfortunately, her son had access to one of her weapons, and that was one of the weapons that was found at the scene."

He added that the suspect was part of Sheriff's Office training programmes, meaning "it's not a surprise to us that he had access to weapons."

Bystander footage aired by CNN appeared to show a young man walking on a lawn and shooting at people who were trying to get away.

Witnesses spoke of chaos as people began running through the sprawling campus as shots rang out near the student union.

"Everyone just started running out of the student union," said a witness named Wayne.

"About a minute later, we heard about eight to 10 gunshots."

The witness said he saw one man who appeared to have been shot in the midsection.

The two people who died were "adult males" who were not students, police said.

The university, a public institution with more than 40,000 students, cancelled all classes and told students who did not live on campus to leave.

Student Sam Swartz told the *Tallahassee*

Democrat he had been in the basement of the student union when shooting started.

"Everyone started freaking out," Swartz said, adding he had heard around 10 shots.

A group of eight people huddled in a hallway and barricaded themselves with trash cans and plywood.

"I remember learning to do the best you can to make them take time," Swartz said, adding that mass shooters are "just trying to get as many people" as they can.

Footage on social media showed a stream of young adults walking through corridors with their hands in the air as they evacuated the building.

President Donald Trump called the shooting "a shame, a horrible thing", but insisted that Americans should retain unfettered access to guns.

"I'm a big advocate of the Second Amendment. I have been from the beginning. I protected it," he said, referring to the part of the US Constitution gun advocates say protects firearm ownership.

"These things are terrible, but the gun doesn't do the shooting - the people do." — AFP

Bus driver steals US\$7, loses pension

TOKYO: A Japanese bus driver with 29 years of service lost his retirement package worth US\$84,000 (RM370,284) after being fired for stealing US\$7 from passengers' fares.

Kyoto City sacked the man, who was not named, after he was filmed by the security camera of his bus pilfering ¥1,000 (RM30.85) in 2022.

After he was denied his retirement money of more than ¥12 million (RM370,284), the driver sued the city but lost the case.

The verdict was overturned in his favour, with a court ruling that the punishment was excessive.

But on Thursday the Supreme Court delivered a final ruling in the city's favour, reinstating the original penalty.

It ruled that the man's conduct could undermine public trust in the system and the sound operation of the bus service.

In the original incident a group of five passengers entered the bus and paid him ¥1,150, according to the ruling.

The driver instructed the group to drop ¥150 worth of coins into a fare collection box, and accepted a ¥1,000 bill by hand and didn't report it properly.

Despite being caught on camera, he tried to deny it during a meeting with his superior.

The driver had been reprimanded several times during his career over various incidents, according to the ruling.

This included repeatedly smoking an electronic cigarette while on duty, albeit when there were no passengers on board.

Kyoto City hailed the decision.

"Each bus driver works alone and handles public money. We took it very seriously that embezzlement took place," said Shinichi Hirai, an official at Kyoto's public transport bureau.

"If strict measures were not accepted, then our organisation could become careless and it could result in eroding the public's trust." — AFP

Japan allows shooting of dangerous animals

TOKYO: Japan enacted yesterday a revised law to allow municipalities to authorise "emergency shootings" by hunters when dangerous animals enter populated areas amid a rising number of bear attacks.

The revision to the law on wildlife protection and management will enable a quicker and more effective response compared with current measures, which only allow dangerous animals to be shot when people are in immediate danger.

The government aims to enforce the law by fall when bears start to become active, with ordinance designating brown bears, Asian black bears and wild boars as dangerous animals subject to emergency shooting.

Brown bears live in Hokkaido, northern Japan, while black bears live in 34 of the country's 47 prefectures, according to the Environment Ministry.

Sightings of bears coming down to populated areas in search of food have been on the rise amid a decline in human activity in mountainous areas and an increase in abandoned farms as a result of the ageing and shrinking rural population.

Under the revamped law, which cleared the House of Councillors, local governments will be able to ask hunters or officials to shoot a bear when it is feared it will enter a residential area or it is deemed an urgent response is necessary to prevent a human being harmed.

The law also states certain conditions must be met before an emergency shooting is authorised — for example, it is deemed the animal cannot be captured quickly without the use of a firearm and there is no risk of people being caught in the line of fire.

Municipal chiefs will be able to restrict traffic and issue evacuation orders to secure the safety of residents when an emergency shooting is carried out. — Bernama

Carney uses 'Trump woes' as shield

MONTREAL: Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney faced sustained attacks from his Conservative rival at an election debate on Thursday, but the Liberal leader sought to focus attention on what he calls Canada's top threat, President Donald Trump.

Most opinion polls show Pierre Poilievre's Conservative Party is trailing Carney's Liberals ahead of the April 28 vote.

But the race remains tight and Poilievre worked hard at the debate to stem Liberal momentum that has picked up since Carney replaced Justin Trudeau as prime minister last month.

Trump's trade war and annexation threats have caused broad outrage across Canada and the Tory leader has faced criticism for directing his ire entirely at the Liberals instead of attacking Washington.

As the campaign has evolved, Poilievre has increasingly sought to do both: condemning Trump while accusing the Liberals of weakening

the economy during Trudeau's decade in power and leaving Canada vulnerable to hostile US policies.

He continued that strategy at Thursday's debate, charging the Liberals had given "Donald Trump and the US a near monopoly over our energy" by refusing to build pipelines that could allow Canadian oil to be exported abroad.

Poilievre, a 45-year-old who has served in parliament for two decades, consistently tried to brand Carney as an extension of Trudeau, who became deeply unpopular towards the end of his tenure.

"The question you have to ask is, after a decade of Liberal promises, can you afford food? Is your housing more affordable than it used to be?" Poilievre asked.

"How can we possibly believe that you (Carney) are any different than the previous 10 years of Liberal government?" Poilievre further said, repeatedly reminding that Carney had served as "Trudeau's economic adviser."

Carney tried to refocus attention on Trump.

"The biggest risk we have to this economy is Trump," said the 60-year-old former central banker, who has never served in parliament or held a publicly elected office.

Trump, he added, "is trying to break us so he can own us."

Carney also took fire from the two other party leaders on stage, the head of the left-wing New Democratic Party Jagmeet Singh, and the leader of the Quebec separatist Bloc Quebecois, Yves-Francois Blanchet.

Both hit Carney over his years in the private sector, questioning whether the Liberal leader would advocate for workers.

Carney spent the early part of his career as an investment banker with Goldman Sachs.

Carney countered that his private sector experience would help him in government but rejected suggestions that his loyalties were divided.

"I'm on the side of Canadians." — AFP



Trump threatens to ditch Ukraine peace push

PARIS: President Donald Trump will walk away from trying to broker a Russia-Ukraine peace deal within days unless there are clear signs that a deal can be done, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said yesterday.

"We're not going to continue with this endeavour for weeks and months. So we need to determine quickly now, and I'm talking about a matter of days, whether or not this is doable in the next few weeks," Rubio said in Paris after meeting European and Ukrainian leaders.

"The president feels very strongly about that. He has dedicated a lot of time and energy to this ... this is important, but there are a lot of other really important things that deserve just as much, if not more attention."

There was no immediate comment from Paris, London, Berlin, Kyiv or Moscow on Rubio's statement, which coincided with signs of some progress in US talks with Ukraine.

Trump said on Thursday he expected to sign a deal with Kyiv next week that would give the US access to Ukraine's minerals. An attempt to sign a minerals pact in February fell apart after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy clashed with Trump and Vice-President JD Vance.

After the talks in Paris on Thursday – the first substantive, high level and in-person talks on Trump's peace push that have included European powers – Rubio said a US peace framework received an "encouraging reception". Zelenskyy's office called the talks constructive and positive.

Rubio's comments underline mounting frustrations in the White House over a lack of progress in pushes to settle a growing list of geopolitical challenges.

Trump promised during his election campaign to end the war in Ukraine within his first 24 hours in the White House. He moderated that claim on taking office, suggesting a deal by April or May as obstacles mounted.

He has pressured both sides to come to the negotiating table, threatening tougher sanctions on Russia or an end to US military support for Kyiv.

Both Ukraine and Russia showed up for US-brokered talks in Saudi Arabia, which resulted in a partial ceasefire, but nothing more. – Reuters

US attacks Yemen fuel port

TV channel reports
38 dead, 108 injured

SANAA: US strikes on a Yemeni fuel port killed at least 38 people, Houthi rebels said yesterday, in one of the deadliest attacks of Washington's renewed campaign against the group.

The strikes also injured more than 100 people, according to a Houthi-run television station that broadcast footage of large blazes.

The US military said its attack on the Ras Issa fuel port aimed to cut off a source of supplies and funds for the Houthis, who control large swathes of the Arabian Peninsula's poorest country.

"Thirty-eight workers and employees killed and 102 others injured in a preliminary toll of the

US aggression on the Ras Issa oil facility," Al-Masirah TV said, quoting health authorities in rebel-held Hodeida.

AFP could not independently verify the casualty toll.

The US military has hammered the Houthis with near-daily air strikes since March 15 in a bid to end their attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

Claiming solidarity with Palestinians, the rebels began attacking the key maritime routes and Israel after the Gaza war began in October 2023, later pausing their attacks during a recent two-month ceasefire.

In a statement, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said: "US forces took action to eliminate this source of fuel for the Houthis and deprive them of illegal revenue."

"The objective of these strikes

was to degrade the economic source of power of the Houthis."

Ships "have continued to supply fuel via the port of Ras Issa" despite Washington this year designating the rebels a terrorist organisation, CENTCOM added.

In images broadcast early yesterday by Al-Masirah, a fireball was seen igniting off the coast as thick columns of smoke rose above what appeared to be a blaze.

The Houthi TV station later broadcast interviews with survivors of the attack lying on stretchers.

"The strikes came one after the other, then everything was on fire," said one port worker.

US strikes on the Houthis began under former president Joe Biden but have resumed and intensified under President Donald Trump.

The new wave of attacks follows Houthi threats to resume drone and

missile launches against international shipping in protest at Israel's blockade on the Gaza Strip.

Israel cut off all supplies to Gaza at the beginning of March and resumed its offensive in the Palestinian territory on March 18, leaving a ceasefire in tatters.

Separately, US State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said Chinese satellite firm Chang Guang Satellite Technology Company was "directly supporting Houthi attacks on US interests".

"Their actions – and Beijing's support of the company, even after our private engagements with them – is yet another example of China's empty claims to support peace," she told journalists.

Bruce did not initially provide details but later referred to "a Chinese company providing satellite imagery to Houthis". – AFP

15 killed in Israeli strikes

GAZA CITY: Gaza's civil defence agency said yesterday that 15 people, including 10 from one family, had been killed in two strikes.

Civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal said on Telegram that "our crews recovered the bodies of 10 martyrs and a large number of wounded from the house of one family and the neighbouring houses targeted by Israeli occupation forces in the Bani Suhaila area east of Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip."

Bassal later announced that a separate strike hit two houses in northern Gaza's Tal al-Zaatar, where crews had "recovered the bodies of five people".

The Israeli military, which did not immediately comment, has intensified its aerial bombardments and expanded its ground operations in the Gaza Strip since it resumed its



A boy scooping up flour from the ground in the aftermath of an Israeli strike on a tent shelter in Khan Younis.

– AFP/IC

offensive in the besieged Palestinian territory on March 18.

On Thursday, the civil defence agency reported the deaths of at least 40 residents in Israeli strikes, most of them in camps for displaced civilians, as Israel pressed its offensive.

Meanwhile, police have arrested

scores of people in Pakistan in recent weeks after more than 10 mob attacks on outlets of fast-food chain KFC, sparked by anti-United States sentiment and opposition to its ally Israel's war in Gaza.

Police in major cities, including the southern port city of Karachi, the eastern city of Lahore and the capital

Islamabad, confirmed at least 11 incidents in which KFC outlets were attacked by protesters.

At least 178 people were arrested, officials said.

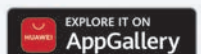
KFC and its parent Yum Brands, both US-based, did not respond to requests for comment. – AFP/Reuters

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Business Digitalisation Initiative portal now 'live'

BY HAYATUN RAZAK
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KUALA LUMPUR: The Business Digitalisation Initiative (BDI) portal is now "live", enabling users to explore a list of potential partners offering support, including access to micro-financing facilities.

"MDEC (Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation) officially launched this platform on April 15, and it is in the process of accepting applications and so on," Digital Minister Gobind Singh Deo told reporters at the EmpowerHER Digital 2025 programme yesterday.

He said his ministry will provide quarterly updates on the progress of the BDI, which is a RM1.5 billion fund to accelerate digital transformation among micro, small and medium enterprises nationwide.

"We will report how many applications have been received and how many approved, and for those rejected, we will examine the reasons and explore how we can assist those applicants. Even if they don't initially succeed, we aim to guide them through reapplying or improving their submissions."

Gobind outlined three key goals behind the initiative.

"First, we want to ensure that everyone understands the potential and power of digital technology. Second, we want to

➤ MSMEs can explore a list of potential partners offering support, including access to micro-financing facilities

encourage them to use existing platforms to strengthen their businesses. And third, we want to ensure that government and private sector initiatives can be fully optimised to empower entrepreneurs," he said.

Gobind noted that Malaysia already has the infrastructure, and it has a large number of entrepreneurs who are ready to make use of it.

"So now the question is, how do we spark a movement, a real shift, so that more people run their businesses using digital tools? That's what really matters."

"Although he acknowledged that the transition will take time, he is confident that a shift is under way and that more businesses will succeed by embracing digital technology."

"Every business faces different challenges. But I believe digitalisation is something that can support all businesses, regardless of their unique needs."

Last month, the government launched the BDI to accelerate digital transformation among MSMEs nationwide.

MDEC, under the Digital Ministry, spearheads the initiative and establishes it

through strategic public-private partnerships. It involves collaborations with financial institutions, digital banks, peer-to-peer lending platforms and local service providers, aimed at boosting MSMEs' output and cost-effectiveness.

Gobind said the initiative launched last month is part of efforts to consolidate all existing initiatives. "Many have raised concerns that while they are aware of certain government incentives, they are unsure how to access the available funds and assistance."

Gobind said, from what it observes today, even payment methods have changed, as most are now digital, using QR codes and similar tools.

"This indicates that many are ready to shift the way they run their businesses."

"When they are given the right explanation and the right support, they understand how digitalisation can truly help them – especially when they are aware of existing funding options – and the result changes their mindset around how business can be done. And that's what we want to achieve."

M'sia ready to adjust palm oil export strategy amid new US tariffs

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia remains optimistic and stands ready to adjust its palm oil export strategy in response to new tariff measures imposed by the United States said Plantation and Commodities Minister Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani.

He noted that Malaysia's export tariff to the US is now set at 10% for a 90-day pause period, aligning with the rate imposed on Indonesia, a significant reduction from the previous rates of 24% for Malaysia and 32% for Indonesia.

"The US market is not our only focus. What's important is that we continue to produce high-quality products. International companies such as Nestlé are not merely seeking low prices, they prioritise quality to safeguard their brand reputation," he told the media after a memorandum of understanding signing ceremony between Malaysian Sustainable Palm Oil (MSPO) and Nestlé Malaysia here yesterday.

Johari said Malaysia's exports to the US are projected to reach RM21 billion this year, with palm oil products contributing RM4.9 billion.

"We must remember that the US is not Malaysia's only market, and we cannot rely solely on one destination. Any excess export capacity can be redirected to other markets."

In a related development, the minister highlighted the government's commitment to sustainability and inclusivity within the country's palm oil value chain.

He emphasised that about 450,000 smallholders are the backbone of the sector and they must not be excluded from sustainability initiatives. – Bernama

Malaysia Airlines to restart Brisbane service in Australia push

BY AIMIE SHAZRIE
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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia Airlines is expanding its presence in Australia with the resumption of direct flights to Brisbane and increased capacity to Sydney and Melbourne, a move that reaffirms the national carrier's commitment to the high-growth Australia-Asia corridor.

Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG) group managing director Datuk Captain Izham Ismail said the carrier will restart its Kuala Lumpur-Brisbane route in November this year, operating five times weekly, marking a strategic return to Queensland after years of absence.

"This announcement coincides with an increase in flight frequencies to Sydney and Melbourne, which will reach 21 weekly flights each by October – a significant uplift from current levels."

"Our expansion in Australia isn't just about connectivity; it is about offering greater flexibility and comfort for both leisure and business travellers across the region," he said in a press conference at MAG Network Announcement and Manchester United Collaboration held at Matta Fair 2025 yesterday.

He noted that the Australian market is crucial to the airline's growth. "Our performance over the last two and a half years has recorded very healthy growth, averaging 85%. During peak seasons, that number surpasses 90%."

Izham highlighted the importance of network flow in this growth, noting that Malaysia Airlines' traffic to Australia is not just point-to-point but is also a key part of a broader network that feeds Europe and the



Izham (centre) at Malaysia Aviation Group's announcement on collaboration with Manchester United during Matta Fair 2025 in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

wider Asia-Pacific, particularly the Asean region.

"To meet this demand, Malaysia Airlines will be gradually increasing flight frequency to Sydney and Melbourne from August to October, with flights to both cities operating up to three times per day. This expansion is expected to further cater to the growing demand for travel between Australia and Malaysia," he added.

Izham said the airline is also deploying its Airbus A330neo on selected Australia-New Zealand routes, featuring enhanced passenger comfort, fuel efficiency, and upgraded cabin features.

Izham remarked that Australia remains one of Malaysia Airlines' most important international markets, and the expanded capacity is aimed at serving growing demand from both inbound and outbound travellers.

"The airline's presence at the Matta Fair 2025 will further reinforce its focus on the Australian market, with strategic partnerships with Australian tourism boards set to be formalised," he added.

Malaysia Airlines also previewed its new lie-flat business class seats on the Boeing 737-10, marking the first such feature for its narrow-body fleet.

Passengers can enjoy seamless travel experiences, such as connecting from Trivandrum to Kuala Lumpur on the 737-10 and onward to Melbourne on the A330neo, all with a consistent premium cabin offering.

Meanwhile, Malaysia Airlines unveiled a striking new aircraft livery in partnership with Manchester United, strengthening its global brand presence through sports marketing.

Izham said the co-branded A330-300, blending Malaysia's national identity with Manchester United's iconic red, is not just symbolic, but marks a bold commercial partnership designed to tap into the club's 577 million-strong fan base.

"The collaboration focuses on database-driven marketing and fan engagement, with the potential to generate significant return on investment. Leadership also drew parallels between both brands' journeys of transformation and resurgence, aiming to leverage Manchester United's popularity to reinvigorate Malaysia Airlines' brand presence across international markets."

"This is not just a livery; it is a long-term commercial play. We are tapping into one of the world's most recognisable sports brands to elevate our own global appeal, particularly in high-value tourism and long-haul travel segments," he said.



PD can become regional yachting hub

➤ Port Dickson's strategic location and lower costs ideal for developing international-standard marina but it needs govt support, says Platinum Charters director

BY JOHN GILBERT
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KUALA LUMPUR: Port Dickson, a popular beach attraction in Negeri Sembilan, has the ecosystem and potential to rival Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand as a regional yachting destination.

Furthermore, given its strategic location near Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), this popular tourist spot – fondly known as “PD” – presents an ideal setting for developing a full-service marina built to international standards.

Such a facility would be well-positioned to attract megayachts and superyachts from around the world, enhancing Port Dickson's appeal as a premier maritime hub.

Platinum Charters Sdn Bhd director Patrick Theseira said Port Dickson is also the right destination to host international yachting and boating events.

“If we create a well-rounded ecosystem, Port Dickson could thrive as a hub for marine activities. If you look at places like Phuket, for example, each marina accommodates between 100 and 150 yachts or boats, many of which are parked long-term and full.

“That is the kind of vision I have for Port Dickson. I want to establish it as a reliable stopover point for yachters and sailing enthusiasts – a place where owners can leave their boats securely for years, knowing they are well taken care of.

“The convenience is unmatched. Yacht owners can store their boats in Port Dickson and fly out via KLIA, and when they return, it is just a short 45-minute drive back to their boats. From there, they are immediately on the water, free to chart their course north or south, whether to Indonesia, Thailand or the Andaman Sea.

“It is a strategic location that opens up countless sailing routes, and with the right ecosystem in place, Port Dickson can position itself as a premier destination for the international yachting community,” he told *SunBiz*.

Patrick said Port Dickson is strategically positioned at the heart of regional maritime routes, offering both convenience and exceptional value.

Unlike established hubs such as Phuket, where marina rates can reach as much as US\$2 per foot per day – meaning a 100-foot yacht would incur a daily cost of US\$200 (RM900) – Port Dickson provides a far more affordable alternative.

Patrick said, “Here in Malaysia, rates are around RM3 per foot, translating to just RM300 per day for a vessel of similar size. This significant cost advantage presents a clear opportunity for Port Dickson to emerge as a competitive player in the marine industry.

“While Phuket has successfully capitalised on its high rates and robust infrastructure, generating substantial revenue from yacht parking and marine services, Port Dickson remains relatively untapped. With its central location and lower operating costs, there is tremendous potential to attract long-term boat storage, yachters, and marine-related businesses seeking more cost-effective solutions.

“By developing a world-class marina ecosystem that meets international standards, Port Dickson could transform into a thriving maritime hub. This would stimulate local economic growth and position the area as a serious contender in the regional marine tourism and logistics sectors.”

Patrick said the issue with the existing domestic marina is that it was built solely as a marina without focusing on crucial support systems, particularly engineering and hardstand berthing.

“What we lack is proper MRO (maintenance, repair, and overhaul) facilities – a concept common in aviation but equally vital for boats. We are trying to develop this in Port Dickson, but building a specialised engineering team is extremely costly.

“Port Dickson has its advantages: proximity to KLIA means parts are easily imported, and logistics are more affordable. However, Phuket boasts a well-developed yacht repair ecosystem, complete with lifting cranes, chandlery services and modern shipyards.

“Port Dickson lacks the infrastructure and knowledge. Locally, these specialists and tradesmen are in short supply and typically require importation from Thailand or Singapore. If the operation is in places like Lumut, it adds further complexity and cost. Ultimately, Port Dickson remains the best location if we can establish a proper ecosystem to support the marine industry,” he said.

Patrick highlighted the two types of marina berthing – water berthing and land berthing, which is known as the hardstand.

The hardstand is crucial for long-term storage, as keeping boats in water accelerates wear and tear due to constant exposure to saltwater.

Currently, hardstand facilities are only available at Rebak Marina in Langkawi and in Pangkor.

Patrick noted that certain policymakers, particularly at state level, are not aware of the true economic potential of developing Port Dickson into a premier marine hub.

He said the marine industry offers a substantial and sustainable revenue stream for Malaysia, yet it remains underappreciated.

“When yachts and boats are brought into Port Dickson and the area evolves into a recognised mari-



Patrick says with its central location and lower operating costs, there is tremendous potential for Port Dickson to attract long-term boat storage, yachters and marine-related businesses.

time hub, it naturally attracts an increasing number of foreign visitors and investors. This influx would not only boost tourism but also stimulate rapid and widespread economic growth in the region.”

Patrick emphasised that the ripple effects of such development extend far beyond just the marine sector.

The real estate market, for instance, would experience increased demand as the area becomes more attractive for both residential and commercial investments. Similarly, he said, the engineering and marine services industries would see growth, with greater demand for maintenance, repair, and related technical expertise.

“Most importantly, this growth would create meaningful employment opportunities for the local community, fostering skills development and contributing to long-term socio-economic stability. In short, building Port Dickson into a thriving marine destination has the potential to transform the region into a dynamic economic engine for Malaysia,” Patrick said.

One of the major challenges facing the development of Port Dickson as a maritime hub is the lack of support from the government, Patrick said, adding that this remains a critical obstacle.

“There is hope, however, that the government will eventually recognise the marine sector as a viable and valuable industry – one that can contribute significantly to the national economy.

“Unfortunately, at present, the

government's attention appears to be largely confined to established destinations, with Langkawi perceived as the go-to location for cruising, while Malacca is favoured for its historical significance. These areas have been clearly earmarked in their tourism and development strategies, leaving little room for other promising locations like Port Dickson to emerge and thrive.

“This limited focus has inadvertently stifled growth opportunities elsewhere. If tourism planners and government bodies were to broaden their perspective and recognise Port Dickson's potential as a rising marine destination, it could unlock numerous possibilities.

“With the right support and strategic investment, Port Dickson could be transformed into a vibrant hub for marine activities, bringing with it a wave of economic benefits, job creation, and enhanced regional tourism appeal,” Patrick said.

Platinum Charters manages boats for owners and is now targeting younger high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) aged 40 and below, though many in this group are still unfamiliar with the industry.

Patrick noted that some local HNWIs dislike the sun and prefer to keep their yachts in Europe, where returns are better in euros or US dollars.

“Even Malaysian owners often base their yachts overseas. Locally, boat owners want regular access – at least monthly.

“Local HNWIs tend to spend on luxury cars and nightlife, easily

spending RM40,000–50,000 a night in clubs. Platinum is working to shift this mindset, showing that yachts offer similar entertainment, like private karaoke, but with privacy and the experience of sailing,” Patrick said.

Entry-level yachts cost around US\$500,000 (about RM2.2 million). Boats below this threshold are cruisers, suitable for about 12 people.

True yachts start at 60 feet, while superyachts, 100 feet and above, require significant upkeep – management alone can cost RM200,000–RM300,000 monthly, covering berthing, crew and maintenance.

Patrick said only a few can afford this level, and it remains disposable income, not investment. Platinum helps owners offset some costs, but earnings typically just cover maintenance, not full returns.

“Port Dickson's advantage lies not just in location but also in potential capacity. Most marinas typically cater to around 50 to 80 berthings a month, which is adequate for current industry needs. In fact, many marinas are underutilised, with the exceptions of Langkawi and Penang. Penang, in particular, relies solely on Straits Quay Marina to support its boating community.

“With the right infrastructure and ecosystem, Port Dickson can become a prime destination for the marine industry, supporting growth and providing much-needed capacity in the region,” he said.

SUCCESS:
THE INSIGHT STORYIt's about **impact** too, not just income

» SunBiz talks to KHPT Holdings Bhd group managing director Datin Eloise See (pix) about her leadership philosophy, career journey and vision for the future

HOW has your life experience made you the leader you are today?

My life experience has definitely been a bit of a roller coaster – some days feel like a smooth ride, and others are more like freefalling. Through it all, I've learned that leadership is about embracing both the highs and the lows with grace. It's not just about making decisions, but understanding people, listening actively, and fostering collaboration. Above all, I've embraced the mindset of never giving up – keep going until you've nailed it.

What traits do you look for in your talent or how do you decide who is right for a job?

I look for people who are curious, adaptable, and hungry for growth. While technical skills are important, emotional intelligence, communication, and a team-oriented mindset matter just as much. I value individuals who are humble yet confident, take ownership, and enjoy helping others succeed.

How do you think the industry you are in will evolve in the future?

Buckle up – change is coming fast. I foresee a strong drive toward technology and sustainability. Think robots, AI, and automation, but let's not forget the human touch. I believe businesses will balance tech with empathy, creating people-centered organisations driven by purpose.

What advice can you offer those looking to start their career or own business?

Build a strong foundation – develop key skills and relationships. Be bold, embrace failure, and take calculated risks. Surround yourself with mentors, stay curious, and remember that success isn't just about profit – it's about lifting others as you rise.

How has mentorship made a difference in your professional life?

Mentorship has been a game-changer. My Japanese mentor helped me face my weaknesses and guided me through complex decisions. His wisdom broadened my leadership perspective. I've adopted the Japanese mentorship approach – nurturing, guiding, and being open

with the next generation.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received in your career?

Don't take yourself too seriously. That advice helped me embrace imperfection and laugh through the messiness of life and business. The Japanese concept of *wabi-sabi* – beauty in imperfection – really resonates with me.

If you could have an hour with any thought leader in the world, who would it be and why?

Warren Buffett. Not just for investment tips – but for his long-term perspective, calm leadership, and fantastic sense of humour. I'd love to learn how he simplifies complex decisions and stays grounded.

What has been the biggest challenge you've faced and what did you learn from it?

Navigating a major restructuring in my organisation. It was emotionally challenging and uncertain for many employees. I learned that transparent communication, empathy, and unifying the team around a shared vision are crucial during times of change.

What man-made innovation confounds you and why?

Quantum computing. Its potential is massive – it could revolutionise



healthcare, finance, and cybersecurity. But it's also incredibly complex, and its implications for society and data privacy remain uncertain.

Malaysia's greatest brand?

Without a doubt – Ramli Burger. It's more than just a burger – it's Malaysian nostalgia. It resonates across generations and brings people together with its iconic flavour and humble roots.

A must-read for every business owner or manager is...

The Almanack of Naval Ravikant. It's not just about creating value, building relationships, and living a fulfilling life. It offers a holistic mindset for success and happiness.

How do you expect policies on climate change to impact businesses in the future?

Climate policies will reshape business – new regulations, green practices, and a focus on sustainability. But I see it as an opportunity. Businesses can innovate, become more efficient, and lead with purpose while protecting the planet.

How logistics fuels Asean 2025's sustainable and inclusive future

AS Malaysia strides into 2025 on a high note, it formally assumes its role at the Asean Chairmanship under the theme of "Inclusion and Sustainability", serving as a rallying call for regional peace, stability, and prosperity in an evolving global landscape.

Transport Minister Anthony Loke recently emphasised that seamless connectivity is vital for trade to flow effectively both within and beyond Asean, highlighting the logistics and transport sector's role as a cornerstone of economic cooperation. Often an unsung hero of development, the logistics sector drives growth, connecting businesses to broader markets, ensuring smooth cross-border trade and creating opportunities for all communities. As Asean aims for deeper regional integration under Malaysia's leadership, logistics serves as a vital conduit for trade by linking Southeast Asia's diverse markets and empowering businesses to thrive.

Leveraging technology to drive regional integration

Advancements in logistics technology have transformed how businesses manage inventory, track deliveries, and optimise supply chains. Real-time tracking, AI-driven route optimisation, and predictive analytics are no longer industry luxuries but necessities for SMEs looking to scale in an increasingly digital economy. These innovations offer greater agility, allowing businesses to respond quickly to demand fluctuations, avoid supply chain bottlenecks, and enhance customer experience. A



major challenge for many businesses, especially those in underserved areas, is the lack of access to streamlined logistics solutions. Without the ability to efficiently stock, distribute, and deliver products, businesses struggle to expand beyond local markets.

Multichannel management platforms have emerged as game-changers, offering businesses a single, integrated solution to manage inventory, fulfil orders, and coordinate logistics across multiple sales channels.

Recognising this, Ninja Van's Sellercraft provides SMEs with the tools to consolidate their sales, track inventory in real-time, and integrate logistics seamlessly, helping businesses reduce inefficiencies and improve overall productivity.

For many brands, expanding and distributing their products to rural markets remains a challenge due to logistical constraints and fragmented distribution networks.

Addressing these issues requires targeted solutions that help businesses reach new markets while reducing operational burdens. To bridge this gap, Ninja Mart provides brands with an efficient way to penetrate underserved areas, ensuring their products reach even the smallest mom-and-pop stores. At the same time, rural retailers are able to gain access to a wider network of suppliers, enabling them to source inventory more efficiently and stay competitive.

Meanwhile, Ninja Restock offers flexible, high-frequency delivery

options that enable businesses to better manage stock levels, reduce excess inventory, and improve cash flow. These solutions help small businesses scale effectively, ensuring they can compete on a level playing field with larger retailers.

Beyond technology adoption, businesses also need market insights and strategic knowledge to navigate evolving industry landscapes.

To support this, Ninja Van's annual e-guide provides SMEs with actionable insights, industry trends, and best practices – helping them overcome challenges and seize new growth opportunities in an increasingly competitive market.

Logistics' role in cold chain logistics and cross-border expansion

Ninja Van's strategic initiatives in cold chain logistics and cross-border services underscore our commitment to enabling businesses to thrive globally. With over 2,000 hubs and 100% coverage across Southeast Asia, Ninja Van's network serves as the backbone for businesses looking to scale, compete, and grow in an interconnected world.

By leveraging our extensive regional network, we seamlessly connect businesses and customers across Southeast Asia, ensuring efficient cross-border trade within the region. This strong intra-Asean connectivity is complemented by our partnership with UPS, which extends our reach beyond Southeast Asia, offering businesses and customers a gateway to global markets.

Moreover, our cold chain solutions cater to the growing demand for tem-

perature-sensitive goods. By ensuring the safe, efficient transport of pharmaceuticals, food, and chemicals – we help businesses expand their reach across Asean and beyond, tapping into new markets and fulfilling diverse customer needs.

Our services empower companies to overcome the complexities of cross-border logistics with real-time tracking, optimised route planning, and flexible delivery options. As Asean's logistics landscape evolves, Ninja Van is committed to driving inclusiveness and regional growth, helping businesses access new opportunities across borders.

Fostering sustainable growth in Asean

As Asean moves toward a more sustainable future, the logistics sector plays a crucial role in balancing economic growth with environmental responsibility. Beyond reducing emissions, sustainability in logistics includes the adoption of eco-friendly technologies, efficient resource management, and circular economy practices that benefit both businesses and communities. Many logistics companies are exploring green initiatives such as biodegradable packaging and waste reduction strategies to minimise environmental impact. As sustainability becomes a growing priority, industry players continue to evaluate and adapt their operations in line with evolving environmental standards and business needs.

This article is contributed by Ninja Van Malaysia CEO Lin Zheng (pix).



Judge rules Google holds illegal monopoly in ad tech

➤ Company vows to appeal against court's decision that could deal blow to its revenue engine

WASHINGTON: A US judge on Thursday ruled that Google illegally wielded monopoly power in the online ad technology market, in a legal blow that could rattle the tech giant's revenue engine.

The federal government and more than a dozen US states filed the antitrust suit against Alphabet-owned Google, accusing it of acting illegally to dominate three sectors of digital advertising – publisher ad servers, advertiser tools, and ad exchanges.

"Google's monopolies allow it to soak up excessive profits, leaving less for the workers and businesses whose livelihoods depend on online advertising," said New York attorney-general Letitia James, whose state took part in the suit.

"Everyone from major news organisations to small independent bloggers has taken a financial hit because of Google's conduct."

It is one of two federal suits targeting Google that could ultimately see the company split up and curb its influence – and part of a wider government push to rein in Big Tech.

The vast majority of websites use Google ad software products that, combined, leave no way for publishers to escape Google's advertising technology, the plaintiffs alleged.

District Court Judge Leonie Brinkema agreed with most of that reasoning, ruling that Google built an illegal monopoly over ad software and tools used by publishers, but partially dismissed the argument related to

tools used by advertisers.

"Google has willfully engaged in a series of anti-competitive acts to acquire and maintain monopoly power in the publisher ad server and ad exchange markets for open-web display advertising," Brinkema said in her ruling.

The judge concluded that Google further entrenched its monopoly power with anti-competitive customer policies and by eliminating desirable product features.

"In addition to depriving rivals of the ability to compete, this exclusionary conduct substantially harmed Google's publisher customers, the competitive process, and, ultimately, consumers of information on the open web," Brinkema wrote.

Google quickly vowed to appeal the ruling. "We won half of this case and we will appeal the other half," the company's vice-president of regulatory affairs Lee-Anne Mulholland said in a statement.

"The court found that our advertiser tools and our acquisitions such as DoubleClick, don't harm competition," Mulholland said.

For Emarketer senior analyst Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf, "the bigger picture is crystal clear: the antitrust tides have turned against Google and other digital advertising giants."

"The extent of the fallout will depend on the legal remedies employed," Mitchell-Wolf told AFP.

Launched under the presidential administrations of Donald Trump and Joe

Biden, five major antitrust cases from the Federal Trade Commission and the US Justice Department are proceeding against major US technology companies.

These cases represent an aggressive shift in antitrust enforcement, after a relatively quiet period in antitrust prosecution since the Microsoft case in the late 1990s.

In August last year, a US judge ruled that Google maintained a monopoly with its dominant search engine. The company has appealed that ruling as well.

Online advertising is the driving engine of Google's fortune and pays for widely used online services such as Maps, Gmail, and search offered free.

Money pouring into Google's coffers also allows the Silicon Valley company to spend billions of dollars on its artificial intelligence efforts, as it tries to keep up with rivals.

Brinkema gave attorneys on both sides of the online ad tech case seven days to submit a schedule for arguing their positions regarding what remedies should be imposed on Google.

Ordering Google to spin off its ad publisher and exchange operations is likely to be among the plaintiffs' proposals.

For Mitchell-Wolf, the ruling has "profound implications for the advertising industry."

"The open web is so deeply rooted in Google's advertising technology that any change to the status quo could crush vulnerable publishers," the analyst said.

Nicole Gill, co-founder of advocacy group Accountable Tech, called Brinkema's decision a "massive victory," while Amnesty International Secretary-General Agnes Callamard called for a "rights-respecting structural break-up of Google."

Vietnam aims for majority stake in internet firm

HANOI: Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security plans to take a majority stake in FPT Telecom, one of the country's largest internet providers, as part of its efforts to boost national cybersecurity, according to a document seen by Reuters.

The ministry, which oversees the police, has become increasingly involved in Vietnam's internet and telecoms sector. It took control of the country's third-largest telecoms operator MobiFone last year and also spearheaded a tightening of data protection rules that has caused concerns among foreign tech firms.

Under the plan, Vietnam's State Capital Investment Corporation (SCIC), a holding company for assets controlled by the state, will transfer its stake in FPT Telecom to the ministry, the document showed.

SCIC owns 50.17% of FPT Telecom, while FPT Corp, Vietnam's largest private tech company, has a 45.66% stake but retains control of the unit, according to FPT Telecom's financial statements for last year.

Reuters was not able to ascertain whether the transfer would lead to the ministry taking effective control of FPT Telecom.

In addition to providing internet services, FPT Telecom is involved in the development of undersea fibre-optic cables, which Communist-run Vietnam considers a national priority as most of its existing cables are ageing and prone to accidents.

The transfer "will contribute to the good performance of the functions and tasks of the Ministry of Public Security," the document dated April 14 said. It listed the protection of data and the monitoring and prevention of cyber risks as core functions of the ministry.

The document urges the finance ministry to seek the prime minister's approval for the plan. – Reuters

US eases port fees on China-built ships after industry backlash

LOS ANGELES: The Trump administration shielded on Thursday domestic exporters and vessel owners servicing the Great Lakes, the Caribbean and US territories from port fees to be levied on China-built vessels, aiming to revive US shipbuilding.

The Federal Register notice posted by the US Trade Representative (USTR) was watered down from a February proposal for fees on China-built ships of up to US\$1.5 million (RM6.6 million) per port call that sent a chill through the global shipping industry.

Ocean shipping transports about 80% of global trade – from food and furniture to cement and coal. Industry executives feared virtually every cargo carrier could face steep, stacking fees that would make US export prices unattractive and foist annual import costs of US\$30 billion on American consumers.

"Ships and shipping are vital to American economic security and the free flow of commerce," US Trade Representative Jamieon Greer said in a statement. "The Trump administration's actions will begin to reverse Chinese dominance, address threats to the US supply chain, and send a demand signal for US-built ships."

Still, the fees on Chinese-built ships add another irritant to swiftly rising trade tensions between the world's two largest economies as President Donald Trump seeks to draw China into talks on his new tariffs of 145% on

many of its goods.

The revisions tackle major concerns voiced in a tsunami of opposition from the global maritime industry, including domestic port and vessel operators as well as US shippers of everything from coal and corn to bananas and cement.

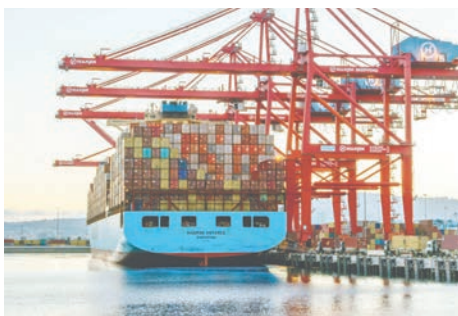
They grant some requested carve-outs, while phasing in fees that reflect the fact US shipbuilders, which turn out about five vessels annually, will need years to compete with China's output of more than 1,700 a year.

The USTR exempted ships that ferry goods between domestic ports as well as from those ports to Caribbean islands and US territories. Both American and Canadian vessels that call at Great Lakes ports have also won a reprieve.

As a result, companies such as US-based carriers Matson and Seaboard Marine would dodge the fees. Also exempt are empty ships arriving at US ports to load up with exports such as wheat and soybeans.

Foreign roll-on/roll-off auto carriers, known as ro-ros, are eligible for refunds of fees if they order or take delivery of a US-built vessel of equivalent capacity in the next three years.

The USTR set a long timeline for liquefied natural gas (LNG) carriers. They are required to move 1% of US LNG exports on US-built, operated and flagged vessels within four years. That percentage would rise to 4% by 2035 and to 15% by 2047.



Industry executives warn that proposed fees may drive up US export prices and increase the costs of imports. – PEXELS PIX

The agency, which will implement the levies in 180 days, also declined to impose fees based on the percentage of Chinese-built ships in a fleet or on prospective orders of Chinese ships, as originally proposed.

The fees will be applied once each voyage on affected ships a maximum of six times a year.

Executives of global container ship operators such as MSC and Maersk, which visit multiple ports during each sailing to the US, had warned the fees would quickly pile up.

Instead of a flat individual fee on large vessels, the USTR instead opted to levy fees based on net tonnage or each container unloaded, as was called for by operators of small ships and transporters of heavy commodities

such as iron ore.

From Oct 14, Chinese-built and owned ships will be charged US\$50 a net ton, a rate that will increase by US\$30 a year over the next three years.

That will apply if the fee is higher than an alternative calculation method that charges US\$120 for each container discharged, rising to US\$250 after three years.

Chinese-built ships owned by non-Chinese firms will be charged US\$18 a net ton, with annual fee increases of US\$5 over the same period.

It was not immediately clear how high the maximum fees would run for large container vessels, but the new rules give non-Chinese shipping firms a clear edge over operators such as China's Cosco.

The notice comes on the one-year anniversary of the launch of the USTR's probe into China's maritime activities.

In January, the agency concluded that China uses unfair policies and practices to dominate global shipping.

The actions by both the Biden and Trump administrations reflect rare bipartisan consensus on the need to revive US shipbuilding and strengthen naval readiness.

Leaders of the United Steelworkers and the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, two of five unions that called for the investigation that led to Thursday's announcement, applauded the plan and said they were ready to work with the USTR and Congress to reinvigorate domestic shipbuilding and create high-quality jobs.

The American Apparel & Footwear Association reiterated its opposition, saying port fees and proposed tariffs equipment will reduce trade and lead to higher prices for shoppers.

At a May 19 hearing, the USTR will discuss proposed tariffs on ship-to-shore cranes, chassis that carry containers and chassis parts. China dominates the manufacture of port cranes, which the USTR plans to hit with a tariff of 100%.

The Federal Register did not say if the funds raised by the fees and proposed crane and container tariffs would be dedicated to fund a revival of US shipbuilding. – Reuters

TOP SHOTS OF THE WEEK



CARGO TIE-UP ... Emirates SkyCargo signed a memorandum of understanding with Teleport, AirAsia's cargo partner, at the International Air Transport Association's World Cargo Symposium in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, on Wednesday. From left: Emirates vice-president pricing, airline partnerships and distribution Matthew Scott, Emirates SkyCargo divisional senior vice-president Badr Abbas, Teleport CEO Pete Chareonwongsak and Teleport chief business officer Jan Philipp Poter.



FAST MOVE ... DKSH Business Unit Consumer Goods, a leading partner for companies seeking to grow their consumer goods business in Asia and beyond, has entered into a strategic partnership with Eastroc Beverage (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, a global provider of high-quality and innovative beverages. Signing the agreement in Petaling Jaya on Wednesday are DKSH Malaysia vice-president, fast-moving consumer goods Daniel Schwalb (left) and Eastroc Beverage (Malaysia) CEO Leonard Tan.



NEW CENTRE ... Modec Inc, a company listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange and a leading solutions provider in the global oil and gas floating production, storage and offloading industry, officially opened its regional execution centre in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday. Japanese ambassador to Malaysia Noriyuki Shikata (front, second from left) was given a VIP tour of the new centre, led by Modec country manager Masataka Utsumi and Modec project manager for the FPSO Gato do Mato project Raghava Venkateshwara.



CROSS-BORDER LINK ... Maybank has become the strategic banking partner as well as the sponsoring and settlement bank in the second phase of the cross-border QR payment linkage between Malaysia and Cambodia. Maybank customers can now make QR payments through the MAE app in Cambodia. From left are Maybank president and group CEO Datuk Khairussaleh Ramli, Bank Negara Malaysia governor Datuk Seri Abdul Rasheed Ghaffour, National Bank of Cambodia governor Dr Chea Serey and Payments Network Malaysia chairman Datuk Izzaddin Idris.



CARD BENEFITS ... CIMB Bank Bhd and CIMB Islamic Bank Bhd have introduced Malaysia's first transport-related debit card benefits via the CIMB Visa Debit Card. Announcing this in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday are CIMB Malaysia and CIMB Bank CEO Gurdip Singh Sidhu (right) and CIMB head of consumer banking Malaysia Daniel Cheong.



MARKET DEBUT ... MSB Global Group Bhd, a leading player in Malaysia's aftermarket automotive parts and component industry, made its on the ACE Market of Bursa Malaysia on Wednesday. The share price opened and closed at 17 sen. At the listing ceremony are, from left, M&A Securities Sdn Bhd co-head of corporate finance Danny Wong, MSB Global independent non-executive director Chia Gek Liang, executive directors Ow Chen Lun and Lai Swee Ping, managing director Datuk Ow Kee Foo, independent non-executive chairwoman Datuk Nonee Ashirin Mohd Radzi, M&A Securities managing director Datuk Bill Tan, head of corporate finance Gary Ting, MSB Global independent non-executive directors Law Lee Yen and Loh May Ann, and M&A Securities associate director Lee Yoke Wah.



CORDIAL CONVERSATION ... Anwar escorting Xi on the red carpet after the latter's arrival at the KL International Airport in Sepang, Selangor. – **PIC COURTESY OF PMO**



SLEEK RIDE ... Residents in Putrajaya waving *Jalur Gemilang* and the Chinese flag as Xi arrives in his special limousine, that was flown in for his state visit. – **PIC COURTESY OF PMO**



BLESSED BLOOMS ... A trader at Little India in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur preparing garlands for the Tamil New Year, that was celebrated on April 14. – **AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THESUN**



FESTIVE TREAT ... Children being served food during a Hari Raya Aidilfitri event at SJKC Simpang Pertang in Negeri Sembilan. – **BERNAMAPIC**



GRAND WELCOME ... His Majesty the King of Malaysia Sultan Ibrahim, accompanied by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, during his arrival at the Istana Negara.



HEAD AND FOOTWEAR ... A trader at the Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman Bazaar in Kuala Lumpur arranging her wares, comprising *chappal* and *songkok*. – **AMIRUL SYAFIQ THESUN**



Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, receiving China President Xi Jinping at Istana Negara in Kuala Lumpur. – PIC COURTESY OF PMO



TRADITIONAL CELEBRATION ... Devotees take part in a religious procession on the occasion of 'Mahavir Jayanti' to commemorate the birth anniversary of Lord Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, in Chennai, India. – AFP/PICTURE



TALL ORDER ... A worker on a skylift sprays the bronze statue of Admiral Yi Sun-shin, who won a major naval victory over Japan in the 16th century, during a street and park clean-up event for spring at Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul, Korea. – AFP/PICTURE



SOAKING UP THE FUN ... Residents and tourists splashing one another during the Songkran Festival in Bangkok, Thailand. – REUTERS/PICTURE



UNBREAKABLE METTLE ... A Palestinian child strikes a defiant pose amid rubble in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip in the aftermath of an Israeli bombing operation. – AFP/PICTURE



BEAUTY AMID BEAUTY ... Tourists taking photos among the flower beds during a visit to Victoria Embankment Gardens in London. – REUTERS/PICTURE

A simple 'hello' does matter

SOME years ago, when I was living in Singapore, I returned home one evening and noticed policemen gathered on the lower ground floor.

When I reached my flat, I saw my neighbour's Indonesian maid standing at her gate. I asked if she knew why the police were around. She said someone had jumped and that she had seen the body fall. I could feel the weight of her shock.

A few days later, after speaking to other neighbours in the block, it came to light that the person who had jumped was an elderly lady staying with her son. Her husband had recently passed away and she had been feeling lonely and sad.

I could not stop wondering if I could have done something – anything – to prevent that. What if I had met her and offered a listening ear? Was she someone I might have passed near the lift or at the letterboxes?

From then on, I made a small but intentional decision: everyone I came across in my building would get a greeting – “good morning,” “good afternoon” or “good evening.” Whenever I got into the lift, especially during the morning rush to work, I would greet everyone inside with a cheerful “good morning.”

At first I saw their startled looks – they probably thought, “Huh? Why is she greeting us?” Once, a child even asked his mother, “Mummy, do you know this

aunty? Why is she talking to you?” The polite mother smiled and said, “She’s just being friendly” – though I sometimes wonder if she really wanted to say, “She’s a little odd.”

Over time, things began to shift. The people I saw regularly started smiling back. Some even beat me to the greeting, which was nice.

Eventually, we moved into small talk – about the heavy rain, the blazing sun, dinner plans or how long the lift was taking.

These small moments were reminders that we are not just passing shadows to each other – we are neighbours, living side by side. A simple “hello” may not change someone’s world but it may remind them that they are not invisible.

Why have we become so inward, withdrawn and isolated?

Here are a few possible reasons:

➔ **Emotional fatigue and over-stimulation**

The constant influx of bad news, social comparison and information overload can make us become emotionally numb or guarded. Technology keeps us looking at screens rather than at each other.

➔ **Fear of rejection or awkwardness**
Many people fear that reaching out – even with something as simple as a greeting – might be met with coldness, confusion or judgement.

➔ **Racial and religious divisions**



“Social psychologist Dr Barbara Fredrickson’s research shows that positive micro-moments of connection can create an upward spiral of emotional well-being. Over time, they build our resilience and capacity for empathy.”

This was not always an issue. Where did it come from? How did we learn to fear what is different?

➔ **The aftershock of the pandemic**
Covid-19 has changed how people interact. Physical distancing became emotional distancing, too. Some are still relearning how to be around others again, how to make small talk and how to feel safe in closeness.

The science of connection

The University of Chicago studies show that chronic loneliness triggers a stress response in the body – increasing inflammation and compromising the immune system. This helps explain why socially isolated individuals face higher rates of cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline and even cancer.

Neurologically, social interaction activates our brain’s reward pathways. When someone acknowledges us with a greeting, our brains release oxytocin (the “bonding hormone”) along with dopamine and serotonin – neurotransmitters associated with pleasure and well-being. That chemical boost can subtly lift our mood for the whole day.

Even more compelling is how these moments add up. Social psychologist Dr Barbara Fredrickson’s research shows that positive micro-moments of connection can create an upward spiral of emotional well-being. Over time, they build our resilience and

capacity for empathy.

How can we change or improve?

Here are a few ways to start reconnecting with the people around us, and with the present moment:

➔ Put your phone away in places where casual connection is possible: on the bus, train, dining table or at the hairdresser while waiting in line. Look up. Say hello.

➔ Make small talk in the lift or the lobby while waiting. Compliment someone – their hairstyle, shoes or bag. Ask if they have tried the cafe nearby.

➔ Do not worry about saying something profound. Say something real. “Oh, the jam outside was so bad today” or “I came from KL and it was raining so heavily, but here, not a drop.”

➔ Ask for simple recommendations – “What is good around here for lunch?”

➔ If they are with children, ask about them – their age, school or hobbies.

➔ Comment on the shared moment – “So hot today!” or “Feels so fresh after the rain, doesn’t it?”

These tiny gestures of connection do matter. We may never know what someone is carrying but we can let them know, even in a passing moment, that “I see you. You matter”.

Nahlana T. Kreshnan is a somatic psychotherapist and life and executive coach.

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COMMENT by Sithira Devi Govindan

Words can bind or break society

THE power of words, whether spoken or written, is undeniable in today’s world of communication.

Language is a formidable force in uniting people, sparking movements and instigating transformative change. Words shape beliefs, actions and societal trajectory.

In today’s digital age, the potency of social narratives is magnified by social media. Any contentious rhetorics can lead to harmful consequences, including mental health struggles and societal discord.

Historically, political speeches were primarily aimed at persuading audiences of the orator’s beliefs and presenting their judgement as sound and reasonable.

In modern politics, the nature of oratory has significantly shifted, particularly in parliamentary democracies, with political communications increasingly prioritising electoral success over genuine dialogue.

This transformation risks reducing speeches to mere tools for garnering votes, often leading to careless or inflammatory rhetoric that could fracture the political fabric of the nations.

The usage of racial slurs and derogatory terms is an example of how language can promote a culture of animosity and separation.

Dr Emily Rodriguez, a sociolinguist, emphasises that “recognising the history and impact of racial slurs is crucial in fostering empathy and promoting respectful dialogue within our communities”. She further states that “words have power”.

While the pursuit of votes is undeniably a critical component of democratic engagement, the challenge remains: How can political discourse return to a place of genuine persuasion and constructive dialogue rather than devolving into a competition for superficial approval?

As society navigates this complex landscape, the question lingers: Should we allow the careless use of language in Malaysia?

From scholars to seasoned journalists,

Malaysian political pundits have become powerful voices, offering analysis and commentary that influence political narratives and public opinion. They are frequently compared to guardrails and have become essential to preserving the integrity of the country’s democratic processes and political discourse.

But are Malaysian political pundits keeping democratic practices running in the right direction?

Words, once powerful instruments for change and inspiration, are now frequently perceived as vehicles for manipulation, leaving the electorate questioning the authenticity of the messages being delivered.

As political speeches evolve in response to the demands of modern electoral politics, both politicians and voters need to consider the implications of this shift.

The responsibility tied to language has never been greater. Each word has the potential to either unite or divide, inspire or incite.

The question is the purpose; to seal or to break a society. The manner in which we select our words can either forge connections or erect barriers, leading to progress or discord.

Furthermore, research highlights a strong correlation between literacy, education and societal cohesion, suggesting that countries prioritising these elements often experience enhanced economic prosperity and cultural richness, showcasing the intrinsic connection between language and heritage preservation.

As we reflect on the lessons of history, it becomes apparent that the manner in which we utilise language will shape our immediate surroundings and the broader context of the nation.

By choosing our words thoughtfully and with intention, we can foster empathy, understanding and collaboration in our communities.

The intricate dance of language transcends mere communication; it embodies the essence



By harnessing the unparalleled power of our words, we can create a future that is inclusive, enlightened and harmonious. – **ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN**

of human expression and the foundation upon which societies are built.

Navigating the complexities of modern politics requires a conscious effort to remain cognisant of the enduring influence of language.

By harnessing the unparalleled power of our words, we can create a future that is inclusive, enlightened and harmonious.

In doing so, we can contribute to a society where dialogue bridges divides rather than deepens them, acknowledging that language is not merely a tool for communication but a

catalyst for change.

The impact of our language is profound. The words we utter hold the power to shape the world around us.

Let us wield this power wisely and with compassion, shaping a better world and a better Malaysia.

Sithira Devi Govindan is the acting director at the Centre for Languages and Cultural Diplomacy, Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations.
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Going *bananas*

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

South Indian gems to try
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Easy, tasty anchovy recipes

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Hunting for Easter buffets?

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Jazz spiced up with local flavour

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Shiha Zikir has old school dream



South Indian gourmet

➤ Spicy options at these banana leaf restaurants

■ BY THASHINE SELVAKUMARAN

BANANA leaf meals are a tradition deeply rooted in South Indian culture, where rice, curries and an array of vegetables are served on a fresh banana leaf. The beauty of this practice lies in its authenticity and the joy of eating with hands, which is believed to enhance the flavours of the meal. While banana leaf dining is widely enjoyed across Malaysia, here are three new spots that is garnering positive feedback.

Aachi Ayahdurai

For filmmaker-turned-restaurateur Kavi Nathan, food was always a family affair. With a stable income from filmmaking, he ventured into the food business to take advantage of his mother's exceptional cooking skills, especially her gift in creating home-style comfort food.

Aachi was born from this vision, offering banana leaf meals that bridge the gap between street authenticity of a stall and an upmarket setting of a restaurant. Aachi's innovation lies in its ever-changing vegetable selection, with new options introduced every two days to keep the menu fresh. Customers are treated to a fulfilling meal at just RM12.90, complete with ten condiments and free refills. The dinner menu takes inspiration from Penang's rich food culture, offering highly aromatic dishes that Kavi has had a hand in concocting.

With locations from Cheras to Petaling Jaya's bustling food hubs, Aachi's flagship branch in Seapark offers affordability but faces challenges such as limited parking and space constraints. Reservations are necessary for birthdays and private events, making it a sought-after venue for small gatherings.

Kavi advises aspiring restaurateurs to remain open to improvement and avoid the illusion of instant success. He emphasises the importance of securing at least a year's worth of funds to maintain cash flow, as visibility takes time, often requiring one to two years before seeing significant returns. He also highlights the crucial role of social media and key opinion leaders in marketing, helping to attract customers and build a loyal following.

Chennai Express restaurant

Located in Bukit Jalil, Chennai Express is where Indian authenticity meets Malaysian palates. Co-founded by Mohammad Raj, who hails from Goa, the restaurant offers a menu that fuses traditional recipes with flavours tailored to suit local tastes. The restaurant prides itself on its homely and friendly atmosphere, offering a dining experience that is comforting and familiar.

With a mix demographic of diners, the restaurant has fine-tuned its curries and spice levels to cater to Malaysian preferences while maintaining the heart of Indian flavours. The banana leaf set meal starts at RM11.90, featuring three vegetables, four rotating curry options and an extensive selection of North Indian side dishes.



Chennai Express's non-vegetarian dishes are a must-try when you visit.



MK's vegetarian dishes are refillable.

— PICS BY ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THESUN

Challenges such as unpredictable peak hours and the first-floor location have been hurdles, but the restaurant ensures quality is maintained by preparing fresh meals twice a day. Looking ahead, the owner remains committed to focusing on quality over quantity, ensuring high food standards while exploring

long-term expansion through franchising – all while staying true to its culinary roots. Raj advises those looking to start a restaurant, the key lies in understanding the local dining culture and habits, as well as building strong connections with the community to cater to their preferences. It is also essential to adapt

Chennai express specialises in serving banana leaf meals that fuse the flavours of South Indian cuisine with local Malaysian tastes.

MK has opened its doors to welcome banana leaf meal lovers.



Expect a delicious balance of sweet, spicy and aromatic tastes that keep every bite exciting at Achi Ayahdurai.

Achi's banana leaf side dishes are truly tasty, each one packed with bold, satisfying flavours.

— PICS BY ADIB RAWI/THESUN

Indian dishes to suit the Malaysian palate while maintaining authenticity, creating a balance between tradition and local taste preferences.

MK Banana Leaf

A new kid on the banana leaf block, MK Banana Leaf in SS15 is already creating buzz for its authentic flavours, solid culinary foundation and unbeatable value. Founded by Karthik Balakrishnan, who began his journey in catering before working at Kenny Rogers and later in hotels, MK is his first foray into banana leaf dining despite already owning ten restaurants.

Partnering with Muniyandi Kannan, also from a catering background, the two joined forces over a shared vision – offering true South Indian food with a modern twist. MK was born from the desire to go beyond the typical mamak-style fare, bringing in experienced chefs from India and elevating the banana leaf experience through real ingredients and consistent quality.

Why SS15? According to Karthik, it is all about the vibrant community, accessibility and the need for proper Indian cuisine in an area saturated with Western dining options. The restaurant's warm reception is built on trust, experience and confidence, reflected in glowing reviews and repeat customers. MK's banana leaf set is priced at a very reasonable RM9.90, featuring three vegetables, four curry choices, dessert and free refills. Bestsellers include their rich chicken varuvel and flavour-packed briyani, showcasing the team's mastery of spice and depth.

Sourcing reliable suppliers, managing food costs and hiring skilled staff has certainly been a challenge, but MK has a smart solution – limited batch cooking, done twice a day, to ensure freshness and minimise food wastage.

Karthik's advice for aspiring restaurateurs is simple yet profound: "Do not do it just because you have money. Learn the basics. You will not be a failure if you understand the business from the ground up. Trust yourself but always be guided by someone experienced."

Savouring tradition

Banana leaf dining brings people together through the love of food and tradition. Grab a seat, eat with your hands and enjoy the meal!



Quick and flavourful stir-fried rice dish with crispy anchovies, garlic and soy sauce.
– PIC FROM YOUTUBE @TOTIKKY TIKKY



Crunchy and sweet-savory side dish featuring stir-fried baby anchovies glazed with honey and sesame.
– PIC FROM YOUTUBE @MAANGCHI



Simple yet elegant Western dish where anchovies melt into a buttery, garlicky sauce for pasta.
– PIC FROM YOUTUBE @MILLIONAIREFISH



Puttanesca sauce comes together easily with a few pantry ingredients.
– PIC FROM YOUTUBE @COOKING WITH ALE

■ BY THASHINE SELVAKUMARAN

ANCHOVIES are small but packed with big flavours. If you love their bold taste, here are eight easy anchovy recipes.

Spicy anchovy sambal

A Malaysian favourite with crispy anchovies tossed in a fiery sambal sauce.

Ingredients

- 1 cup of dried anchovies, cleaned
- 2 tablespoons of oil
- 2 tablespoons of sambal paste (or blended chilies with garlic and onions)
- 1 tablespoon of sugar
- ½ tablespoon of tamarind paste
- ½ cup of water
- Salt to taste

Instructions

1. Fry anchovies in hot oil until crispy, then set aside.
2. In the same pan, saute sambal paste until fragrant.
3. Add sugar, tamarind paste, water and salt. Simmer for three to five minutes.
4. Toss in the crispy anchovies and mix well.
5. Serve with rice or as a side dish.

Anchovy fried rice

A quick, savoury stir-fry with crispy anchovies, garlic and soy sauce.

Ingredients

- 2 cups of cooked rice (preferably left to cool overnight)
- ½ cup of dried anchovies, fried until crispy
- 1 tablespoon of soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon of oyster sauce
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 tablespoon of oil
- Spring onions for garnish

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a pan and fry garlic until fragrant.
2. Push garlic aside and scramble the egg in the same pan.
3. Add rice, soy sauce and oyster sauce, stirring well.
4. Toss in the crispy anchovies and mix.
5. Garnish with spring onions and serve hot.

Korean glazed anchovies

A crunchy, sweet-savory Korean side dish (*myulchi bokkeum*) with sesame and honey.

Ingredients

- 1 cup of baby anchovies (*myulchi*)
- 1 tablespoon of oil
- 1 tablespoon of soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon of honey or corn syrup
- ½ tablespoon of sesame seeds
- ½ teaspoon of sesame oil
- 1 clove of garlic, minced

Anchovy delights

► Eight simple ways to enjoy this seafood delicacy



Malaysian favourite featuring crispy anchovies coated in a spicy, sweet and tangy sambal sauce.
– PIC FROM PINTEREST



Classic salad with a bold, umami-rich anchovy-based dressing.
– PIC FROM YOUTUBE @CUISINE WITH ME



Fried anchovy garlic rice is one of the most common rice dishes.
– PIC FROM YOUTUBE @MAANGCHI



Nam Prik Pla Too is a popular Thai chili sauce.
– PIC FROM YOUTUBE @HOT THAI KITCHEN

Instructions

1. Dry-roast the anchovies in a pan for two minutes. Remove and set aside.
2. Heat oil and saute garlic. Add soy sauce, honey and sesame seeds.
3. Toss in the anchovies and coat well.
4. Drizzle sesame oil, mix and remove from heat.
5. Serve as a side dish or snack.

Anchovy butter pasta

A rich, garlicky pasta where anchovies melt into a savoury butter sauce.

Ingredients

- 200g of spaghetti or linguine
- 3 of tablespoons butter
- 4 of anchovy fillets, chopped
- 3 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- ½ teaspoon of red pepper flakes (optional)
- Parmesan cheese and parsley for garnish

Instructions

1. Cook pasta according to package instructions. Reserve ½ cup pasta water.
2. In a pan, melt butter with olive oil. Add anchovies and mash until dissolved.
3. Stir in garlic and red pepper flakes, cooking until fragrant.
4. Add pasta and toss, adding

- reserved pasta water for a silky texture.
- 5. Serve with Parmesan and parsley.

Caesar salad with anchovy dressing

A classic Caesar salad with a bold, umami-rich anchovy dressing.

Ingredients

- 1 head of romaine lettuce, chopped
- ½ cup of croutons
- ½ cup of Parmesan cheese, grated
- 2 boiled eggs, sliced

Dressing

- 4 anchovy fillets, mashed
- 1 clove of garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon of Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons of lemon juice
- ¼ cup of olive oil
- 2 tablespoons of mayonnaise

Instructions

1. Blend all dressing ingredients until smooth.
2. Toss lettuce with dressing, croutons and Parmesan.
3. Top with boiled egg slices and serve immediately.

Thai anchovy chili dip

A bold, spicy and tangy Thai dip featuring anchovies, excellent for pairing with fresh vegetables or rice.

Ingredients

- ½ cup of dried anchovies, fried

- until crispy
- 2 red chilies, chopped
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 1 tablespoon of fish sauce
- 1 tablespoon of lime juice
- ½ teaspoon of sugar
- 1 tablespoon of water

Instructions

1. Pound chilies and garlic in a mortar and pestle until smooth.
2. Add fish sauce, lime juice, sugar and water. Mix well.
3. Stir in the crispy anchovies and mash slightly.
4. Serve as a dip with vegetables or steamed rice.

Italian puttanesca sauce

A classic Italian pasta sauce featuring anchovies, olives and tomatoes for a deep, umami-rich flavour.

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons of olive oil
- 4 anchovy fillets, chopped
- 3 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 can (400g) of diced tomatoes
- ½ cup of black olives, sliced
- 1 tablespoon of capers
- ½ teaspoon of red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon of dried oregano
- Pasta of choice (200g)

Instructions

1. Heat olive oil in a pan and saute garlic and anchovies until fragrant.

2. Add tomatoes, olives, capers, red pepper flakes and oregano. Simmer for 10 minutes.
3. Cook pasta and mix it into the sauce.
4. Serve hot with grated Parmesan.

Filipino garlic anchovy rice

A comforting Filipino-style fried rice infused with garlic and crispy anchovies.

Ingredients

- 2 cups of cooked rice (preferably overnight)
- ½ cup of dried anchovies, fried until crispy
- 4 cloves of garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons of oil
- 1 tablespoon of soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon of fish sauce
- 1 egg, fried (optional, for topping)

Instructions

1. Heat oil in a pan and saute garlic until golden.
2. Add rice and stir-fry until heated through.
3. Stir in soy sauce and fish sauce. Mix well.
4. Toss in the crispy anchovies.
5. Serve hot with a fried egg on top.

Anchovies brings good flavour to every dish. Try these easy recipes and discover new ways to love this humble yet flavourful ingredient!



Easter treasure

► Festive buffets available tomorrow in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor

■ BY THASHINE SELVAKUMARAN

EASTER is a celebration of renewal and good cheer. Rooted in Christian tradition, it marks the resurrection of Christ. Across the world, Easter is also embraced as a joyful occasion to gather with loved ones and indulge in good food – especially after fasting for Lent. In Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, some hotels are turning the celebration into a memorable culinary experience:

Sunway Resort Hotel

Sunway Resort Hotel is pulling out all the stops this Easter with indulgent feasts and festive cheer across its dining venues. Adding to the joy, the Wonderland Explorers kids' club is rolling out egg-cellent activities to make sure the little ones are just as delighted.

Sunset Terrace

This Sunday, from 12pm to 4pm, Sunset Terrace transforms its well-loved weekend buffet into a festive affair with its Easter Splash & Brunch. Expect brunch favourites like Salmon & Egg Quesadillas, Chicken & Egg Tacos, Shakshuka and Chicken & Waffles, alongside a Latin American-inspired twist, vibrant salads, seafood on ice, international dishes and a creative dessert counter. A special Kids' Dining section caters to younger guests, while access to the hotel's swimming pool and playtime at the Wonderland Explorers kids' club

ensures a full day of family fun. The brunch also includes a surprise appearance by the Labubu mascot and a lively Easter egg hunt. **Price:** RM208++ per adult, RM104++ per child/senior citizen

Gordon Ramsay Bar & Grill Easter Sunday Roast

Launching on Easter Sunday, the Gordon Ramsay Bar & Grill will elevate its signature Sunday Roast, served from 12pm to 2.30pm and again from 5pm to 10.30pm. Diners can enjoy a live tableside carving of prime Wagyu Boneless Rib, Yorkshire Pudding and a medley of roasted vegetables, all in a refined setting. A bespoke chocolate egg basket is presented to every guest, and the evening is brought to life with live music by Yazmin Aziz. **Price:** RM290++ per person

Easter afternoon tea

Offered exclusively this Sunday, from 12pm to 6pm, the debut of the new Afternoon Tea experience showcases delicate savouries such as White Asparagus Tart with Black Truffle, Tuna Otoro with Caviar and the iconic Beef Wellington. Scones, sweet treats and classic sandwiches round out the indulgent tea spread, soon to become a weekday feature. **Price:** RM199++ (2 persons), RM369++ (4 persons), RM129++ per additional person

Easter cocktails

From April 20 to 30, guests can sip on playful Easter-themed cocktails,



Sunset Terrace's Splash & Brunch buffet is getting a fun-filled Easter makeover.

including a Carrot Mimosa made with fresh carrot juice and champagne, a Blackberry Basil Spritz with prosecco and a decadent Peep-Tini blending vanilla vodka, *crème de cacao*, cream and marshmallow. **Price:** RM75++ per cocktail

Grand Millennium Kuala Lumpur

At The Mill Cafe, Easter is a time for indulgence. This Sunday from 12.30pm to 3.30pm, guests are invited to enjoy a generous hi-tea buffet starting with fresh, vibrant salads from Cultivate, paired with artisanal breads and flavourful appetisers. The showstopper is a traditional Roasted Stuffed Leg of Lamb, accompanied by a dazzling seafood display, grilled meats, a medley of egg dishes and baked Truffle Cream Mac & Cheese. Desserts are a feast of their own. Desserts such as Easter Chocolate Bird Nest Cookies, Choux Puffs, Hot Cross Buns, Pavlova with Berries, Sticky Toffee Banana Cake, Carrot Cake and more, topped off by a chocolate fountain and ice cream station are all available. **Price:** RM138 nett per adult, RM69 nett per child (under 12).

Element Kuala Lumpur

Trace Restaurant & Bar on Level 40 becomes a vibrant Easter wonderland with panoramic views and a lively atmosphere. This Sunday, from 12.30pm to 3.30pm, families can look forward to a festive afternoon filled with fun and flavour. Kids will be entertained with

egg painting and an exciting Easter egg hunt, while adults indulge in Easter-themed dishes such as Deviled Eggs with Salmon Roe and Hoppity Hop Bunny Cake. Highlights include the Seafood on Ice bar featuring oysters, blue swimmer crabs, mussels, prawns and scallops as well as a grill station offering Harissa-Marinated Lamb Shoulder, Chimichurri Chicken, Roasted Beef Cube Roll and more. **Price:** RM188 nett per adult, RM94 nett per child (six to 12 years old). Children five and under dine free.

The RuMa Hotel and Residences - Atas

Atas presents a refined buffet experience blending European bistro flair with bold seasonal ingredients. From 12pm to 3.30pm on Easter Sunday, diners can savour

a luxurious spread that begins with a Seafood Barrel overflowing with tiger prawns, slipper lobster, mussels and Alaskan Queen crab. Signature mains such as Canadian Lobster Pappardelle and Borneo Lobster Thermidor add richness to the affair. The Atas Mibrasa Oven takes centre stage with Roasted Australian Lamb, Angus Beef Wellington and Honey Glazed Turkey Ham. A live BBQ station adds grilled scallops, BBQ lamb ribs and spiral sausages to the mix. Sweet endings await at the Souffle Pancake and Viennoiserie Patisserie station. Children aged five to 11 can also enjoy a complimentary chocolate egg painting workshop (registration required, limited to 30 participants). **Price:** RM228 per adult, RM114 per child (five to 11 years old).



Dishes on offer at the RuMa Hotel and Residences.



Element Kuala Lumpur will offer plenty of Easter-themed dishes.



Buffet stations at Grand Millennium Kuala Lumpur.



KFC has turned an April Fool's stunt into reality.
— PEXELSPIC

KFC brings fried chicken to toothpaste

IT might sound like an April Fool's gimmick, but this is no joke. Famous for its crispy fried chicken, KFC is now letting fans enjoy its taste while brushing their teeth. The fast food giant has joined forces with Hismile to release a fried chicken-flavoured toothpaste.

It is the kind of social media post you have to read twice to be sure that you have understood it correctly. Then, you will probably check the date to make sure it is not April 1. And so, it seems this is no joke. KFC has indeed decided to market a toothpaste in the US that does not taste like mint or strawberry, but rather like fried chicken – the kind on which its reputation is built.

The US fast food giant has joined forces with the Hismile brand, which specialises in oral hygiene products, to develop a toothpaste based on the same recipe as the famous mixture of 11 herbs and spices that goes into KFC creations.

Based on the fast food company's announcement, the toothpaste is not cheap, costing US\$13 (RM57). The product has been a hit, and stocks have already sold out via the online store. An electric toothbrush, emblazoned with the face of the famous colonel, even accompanies this rather well-crafted marketing stunt.

And that is exactly what it is: a great PR stunt. It was originally an April Fool's joke, as KFC and Hismile jointly point out. Then, in the end, the fast food giant claimed that consumers were so keen to see this bold idea come to life that it went ahead and brought its toothpaste to market.

While the concept may make you laugh (or vomit), it perfectly illustrates how food brands have infiltrated the personal care and beauty shelves. In the same way that Lidl scored a hit with its blue and yellow trainers, Dunkin' Donuts' doughnuts have inspired a range of makeup at E.l.f. Cosmetics, while Dove has worked with Crumbl Cookies on a line of shower gels inspired by the smell of its sweet treats. — ETX Studio

Faux gras?

» Scientists craft 'more ethical' version of French delicacy

THE fattened liver of ducks or geese, best known as *foie gras*, is a French delicacy prized for its rich, buttery flavour. But its production, which involves force-feeding the animals, has led to bans in several countries.

Recently, a team of scientists said they have developed a more ethical alternative: one that mimics the taste and texture of the dish, minus the controversy.

The results were published on April 1 in the journal *Physics of Fluids*.

"It was always a dream to make *foie gras* more accessible and better for animal welfare. It is good to stop these force-feeding practices – or at least reduce them," said lead author Thomas Vilgis, a professor of food science at the Max Planck Institute for Polymer Research in Mainz, Germany.

Vilgis and his colleagues from his own institute and the University of Southern Denmark were adamant about one thing: no outside additives.

They initially tried cooking collagen from the birds' skin and bones into the liver-fat emulsion, but the result lacked the signature silky texture.

Then came the breakthrough: treating the fat with the bird's own lipases: enzymes the body naturally uses to break down fats. This tweak replicated a key part of the *foie gras* formation process, without resorting to force-feeding.

"At the end of the process, it allows the fat to recrystallise into the large crystals which form aggregates such as the ones we see in the original *foie gras*," Vilgis said.

According to the authors, the elegance of the method lies in its simplicity: harvest the liver and fat, treat the fat with lipases, mix, sterilise – and voilà.

Laser microscopy gave the new product a thumbs-up: the emulsion structure, fat droplet



Foie gras, the fattened liver of ducks or geese, is a French delicacy prized for its rich, buttery flavour. — PEXELSPIC

size and shape closely matched traditional *foie gras*. Even the aroma passed the test.

To test texture, the team turned to industrial compression devices – machines that gently press on food samples to measure firmness. The new *foie gras* held

up well, offering a mouthfeel strikingly close to the original.

"We could really see the influence of these large fat particles, which we call in the paper 'percolating clusters'. At the beginning of the 'bite', these large clusters have a high resistance, creating a similar

mouthfeel of elasticity – without being too rubbery like after the collagen or gelatin addition," Vilgis said.

Vilgis has filed a patent for the process and now hopes to partner with companies to bring this kinder *foie gras* to market. — AFP

Wuhan's vibrant food culture

RECENTLY, the Wuhan International Communications Centre launched its new video series *Understand China, Discover Wuhan*, a six-part exploration of the city's vibrant culture, innovation, green living, youthful energy and unforgettable culinary scene.

The episodes – *This is Wuhan, Hello Future Wuhan, Wuhan, Home to Wildlife, Travel Around the World in Wuhan, Where to Dine in Wuhan* and *Look at the Youth* – blend visual storytelling and artificial intelligence-powered creativity to capture the city's dynamic spirit.

Among them, *Where to Dine in Wuhan* is a music video that celebrates the city's culinary essence. Through rhythmic narration and upbeat melodies, it presents Wuhan as a gastronomic capital – where each dish reflects a story, and every neighbourhood offers a new flavour to be explored. It invites travellers to find

comfort in familiar flavours and excitement in bold new discoveries – because the language of taste transcends borders.

Wuhan's food scene represents a harmonious blend of contrasts – where East and West intersect, tradition merges with innovation, and quiet alleyways reveal hidden culinary treasures.

Some of the city's most iconic food destinations include:

- ☞ Shanhua Road in Jiang'an District wakes up to the rhythm of morning vendors calling out and clouds of steam rising from sizzling pots. With nearly 30 breakfast stalls offering over 30 local delicacies, it is a living encyclopedia of Wuhan's breakfast culture.
- ☞ Liangdao Street, beloved by locals, bursts with neighbourhood flavours. From Zhao Shifu's crispy pancakes to Xiong Taipo's dumplings and Taiweiji's



Italian pasta (left) and Wuhan hot dry noodles.



Wuhan's food scene often blends East and West.

mango sticky rice, the street is a feast that demands repeat visits.

- ☞ Jiangnan Road, the pulse of downtown Hankou, is where the past meets the future. Here, traditional eateries coexist with trendy snack bars, Instagram-worthy cafes and even the first Chinese outlet of Italian brand Odium.
- ☞ Wansongyuan, a beloved local hub, proves that good food needs no fancy wrapping. Spanning several alleys, this

neighbourhood is a paradise of crayfish, crab noodles and time-honoured comfort food.

- ☞ Garden Avenue, adjacent to the Northwest Lake and Wuhan's CBD, is a stylish enclave of art and modernity. With global brands like Commune, Noi and O'eat opening their flagship restaurants here, it is the place to be for fans of sophisticated Western cuisine.

Through each frame, *Where to Dine in Wuhan* illustrates how cuisine

serves as a universal language, bringing people together across cultures. Whether drawn to familiar tastes or enticed by new discoveries, visitors are likely to find something that resonates deeply in this city's vibrant food scene.

This music video offers more than just a glimpse into Wuhan – it is an invitation to understand its soul through the stories told on every plate.

HYPE ZONE

Whispers of Tea
Venue: Penang Botanical Garden
Date: April 28
Time: 6pm
Price: RM80

A 90-minute Teochew Kung Fu tea gathering held in a tranquil garden setting. Limited to 15 participants, the event features a guided tea ceremony and cultural dialogue designed for an intimate, immersive experience.



— PIC FROM FACEBOOK @WHISPERSOFTEA

Events listing



He Called My Name - The Musical

Venue: Calvary Convention Centre

Date: April 18 - 20

Time: April 18 (8pm) | April 19 & 20 (5pm)

Price: Free admission (non-ticketed event)

Presented by Calvary Church, this Easter musical combines drama, music and dance to explore themes of calling and transformation. Open to all, the event offers free admission, with parking and shuttle service available from Awan Besar LRT station.

gicf GEORGETOWN
 INTERNATIONAL
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 FESTIVAL
 CONNECTION • FASHION • EDUCATION

George Town International Culture Fashion Festival (GICF) 2025

Venue: Padang Kota Lama, Penang

Date: May 2 - 4

Time: All-day programme

Price: Varies by event

The inaugural GICF 2025 will showcase fashion, culture and education through runway shows, cultural performances, workshops and a fun run. It aims to break records and foster creative exchange by featuring local and global designers.

Japan Expo Malaysia
Venue: Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre

Date: July 18 - 20

Showcasing Japanese culture, innovation and business. The expo spans across various thematic zones - Taste of Japan, Travel, Education, Lifestyle, Anime & Cosplay and Service Zone, offering an immersive experience of Japan's excellence in culture, technology, sustainability and creativity.



Bizet 150th: A Symphony of Celebration

Venue: Dewan Filharmonik Petronas

Date: May 17

Time: 8pm

Price: RM229 - RM499

A tribute concert by the Malaysian

Philharmonic Orchestra led by Rossen Gergov, featuring highlights from Bizet's Carmen and L'Arlesienne, along with works by Manuel de Falla. Guest vocalists include Sandy Cheng, Diego Torre, Sian Sharp and Shawn Liew.

Life's chartbusters

1



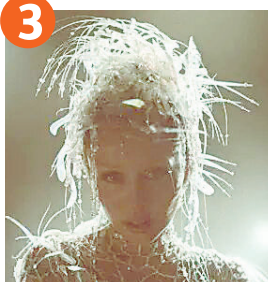
Song: Mahal
Album: Mahal
Artist: Glass Beams

2



Song: Sports car
Album: So Close To What
Artist: Tate McRae

3



Song: End of the World
Album: Something Beautiful
Artist: Miley Cyrus

4



Song: Mona Lisa
Album: Mona Lisa (Single)
Artist: J-Hope

5



Song: Azizam
Album: Azizam (Single)
Artist: Ed Sheeran

BY JOHN TAN

JAZZ is recognised as a bona fide American art form, growing organically from the unique sounds of New Orleans in the early 20th century. Taking influences from African rhythms, it has evolved over the decades into a multi-faceted beast. The music was spread far and wide through the works of giants of the genre such as Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis and John Coltrane, cementing America's status as the ground zero for jazz.

But over the years, many artists outside the US such as Malaysia have adopted the genre too. Local jazz ensemble WVC and The Shang Sisters are among the practitioners from the local music scene.

Since its formation in 2006, WVC has established itself as one of Southeast Asia's leading jazz bands, pushing musical boundaries with its transformation of pop, Chinese, Malay and mainstream music into jazz. The band has released seven albums, won numerous regional accolades and toured extensively around Southeast Asia. The Shang Sisters, on the other hand, are Asia's leading Chinese female jazz trio who are known for infusing Eastern and Western music together, while staying true to its Nanyang Jazz roots.

Together with the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO), the band are celebrating their love for jazz together for the first time at Dewan Filharmonik Petronas (DFP) on April 26 at 8pm.

Titled "All That Jazz With WVC Jazz Ensemble & The Shang Sisters", the concert will see them perform a collection of genre classic and jazz interpretations of modern songs with an Asian twist. In an interview with *theSun*, Tay Cher Siang of WVC and The Shang Sisters (TSS) shared their thoughts about the upcoming show.

How did the concert all come about?

Tay: I have had the opportunity to



This marks the group's first performance with MPO. – ALL PICS BY ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THE SUN

Localising jazz

► East meets west at Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra

perform on MPO's stage three times. So, back in 2008, I joined a multinational band called Unit Asia. This is because we have been working together with them over the years. We thought it was a good opportunity to share the love, so we can showcase different sides of our music.

We did not care how the whole collaboration was going to be as long as we got to play with the orchestra.

Upon saying yes, we texted The Shang Sisters asking them if they were interested to join us. This is because we have been working together with them over the years. We thought it was a good opportunity to share the love, so we can showcase different sides of our music.

What was the inspiration behind the show's song choices?

Tay: Being Malaysian, our culture is big on mixing things together. So, musically for us, we enjoy combining different elements such as Western and Asian music as well as ancient and contemporary music.

We take songs and we merge them. We make them tell a different narrative that has a Malaysian flavour. We called it Nanyang Jazz, jazz that centres around Southeast Asia.

Was it easy to combine those songs together?

Tay: Sometimes, it is difficult. There is a Hokkien song on the set list

called *One Little Umbrella* and we mix it with a Broadway song called *Singing in the Rain*.

We were initially thinking "How do we combine these two together – the famous scene in *Singing in the Rain*, where American actor Gene Kelly is singing with the umbrella and Chee Kee Siu Ho Suah (*One Little Umbrella*)?"

But, we thought of them as food. It is as if you have *nasi lemak* but you try to put cheese on top. It looks weird but it tastes good. So, it was that kind of creative process and we really enjoyed that.

TSS: That is the fun part about making music especially with the *One Little Umbrella* and *Singing in the Rain* rendition. We do not think you can find it anywhere else in the world.

How do you pick the songs to match?

TSS: Our Winnie Ho, The Shang Sisters's resident music producer has all these cheeky, funny and clever ideas to match the songs. For

instance, our classic match up *Fever* came from her.

It is Peggy Lee's *Fever* and *De Bu Dao De Ai Qing*. It is a Shanghai jazz classic. So, she applies the same logic as if she is cooking, turning whatever ingredients she has in the fridge into new dishes.

And, we are glad Tay shows excitement whenever we propose an idea. He will handle the production aspect before sending the recording to us for vocals. So, it is a group effort actually.

What do you hope for audiences to take away by the end of the night?

TSS: We hope for audiences to go home with a good memory. A good night spent with us, WVC and the orchestra at MPO. Hopefully, this will inspire them to come back for another afternoon or evening to enjoy beautiful art on stage. Additionally, we hope for them to take our music with them, bring a few copies of our album home if they are willing to.

Tay: This show is going to be an *omakase*, giving audiences a good mixture of different stuff and we serve them in order. Some of it will be on the serious side and some will be easy to swallow. So, we hope through the show, audiences know we also have homegrown flavours of jazz that we can be proud of.

How would you like the show to impact the local jazz and orchestra scene?

Tay: I hope it shows them that their dreams of playing music are reachable, that there are real people playing music for a living and they are Malaysians. It is not just reserved for Americans. Your dreams are possible as long as you keep working hard.

There is a possibility for your music to be heard and you can become an inspiration for the next generation as well. I believe in this continuity, to keep passing down this legacy.

TSS: We hope it shows that as female musicians, it is possible to work harmoniously together and that there is so much more to offer as female musicians.

Rather than the typical slinky, glittery, sexy and glamorous diva, we bring a jazzy, snazzy and refreshing look to the scene. Hopefully, by doing so, it opens up the imagination of people in the arts, especially youngsters.

This includes performers, producers and even fashion stylists to see that women can also be playful with their appearances.



Tay plays for one of Southeast Asia's leading jazz bands.



The Shang Sisters are known for its signature Nanyang Jazz sounds.

Shiha Zikir seeks to record song in Pak Ngah's style

➤ Songstress has eye on traditional music with live instrumentation

DESPITE being in the music industry for nearly 20 years, singer Shiha Zikir has yet to fulfil her dream of recording a traditional song that truly captures the soul of Malay music.

Better known for her work in the pop genre, Shiha – who idolises the works of the late composer Datuk Suhaimi Mohd Zain, also known as Pak Ngah – still hopes her dream can be realised in the near future.

Although she never had the opportunity to perform any of Pak Ngah's compositions during his lifetime, the singer from Bukit Mertajam, Penang shared that his musical style continues to inspire her search for authentic and soulful traditional music.

"I once posted ads on social media and even asked friends to help me find that pure traditional genre, but I still have not come across anything quite like the late Pak Ngah's touch – it is really hard to find a replacement," she said during a recent interview.

To this day, the *Makrifat Cinta* singer is still waiting for the opportunity to collaborate with a composer capable of producing original traditional songs complete with live instrumentation, similar to what the late Pak Ngah was known for.

"Pure traditional music means everything is played live – real traditional instruments. I have aimed to do this for years, but I still have not found a song that truly speaks to me.

"So please pray for me – this is something I really want to do. If there is anyone who can compose traditional music, let me know, send me a demo – I truly welcome it," she added.

Shiha also shared that she is set to release a new ballad single soon – one she describes as especially close to her heart. The song, written



Shiha wants to fulfil her longtime dream of recording a traditional song that truly captures the soul of Malay music. – PIC FROM FACEBOOK @SHIAZIKIRFANPAGE

and completed in under a week, draws heavily from her own life experiences.

"God willing, either this month or next, I will finish the music video for the new song. It is a bit more dramatic, and the storyline is based on my own experience of loss.

"I went through the grief of losing a loved one, and the idea for this song came after the passing of my late brother-in-law. So, I hope this song will also resonate with others... the music video will be more dramatic, with a storyline based on my personal journey," she said. – Bemama



IMP is a seven-member Japanese boy band. – PIC FROM TOBE

J-pop band IMP drops new single

J-POP group IMP has released its latest single *Cheek to Cheek*, now available on all major streaming platforms.

The accompanying music video is also live on the group's official YouTube channel, showcasing IMP's signature dynamic energy and engaging choreography.

Cheek to Cheek has been chosen as the theme song for TBS drama *Two Husbands One Wife (San-nin Fufu)*, starring IMP member Taiga Suzuki. The drama premiered on April 8, with some regional exceptions, while the first episode has already been made available for early streaming on Netflix since April 1.

A stylish and upbeat track, *Cheek to Cheek* delivers an infectious dance beat, with the titular phrase symbolising warmth and closeness. The song is a motivational anthem, encouraging listeners to embrace life's journey with positivity and support for one another. IMP has also incorporated playful and easy-to-follow dance moves into the choreography, inviting fans to join in and make it a trend.

Seven-member IMP highlighted how the song embodies their lively and powerful performance style.

"In the music video of *Cheek to Cheek*, there is a part in the chorus where we all dance in sync at the desk. We think everyone can easily copy it, so we would love for you to try it out," the group said.

IMP is a Japanese boy band that debuted in August 2023 with the digital single *Cruisin'*. The song quickly gained traction, reaching number two on the Billboard Japan Hot 100 (overall song category).

XG releases EDM version of single *In The Rain*

JAPANESE girl group XG has announced the release of its EDM version of single *In The Rain* from its second mini album *Awe*.

Available on all major streaming platforms, the arrival of the new version injects the emotional depth of the original with high-energy EDM elements, adding another entry to its XDM series.

Along with the remix, the release comes with a powerful visual featuring the members dressed in sleek suits.

The original version is an R&B-inspired track that fuses the delicate sound of falling rain with gentle guitar melodies, speaking of the emotional aftermath of a break-up.

XG has been performing the track in its ongoing world tour XG 1st World Tour The First Howl, where it has received praise for its captivating stage choreography.

The tour is across Latin America with stops in Sao Paulo and Mexico City in April and Seattle shortly after. The concert will conclude at the Tokyo Dome on May 14.

Comprising members Jurin, Chisa, Hinata, Harvey, Jura, Maya and Cocona, the group is known for its genre-defying music and boundary-pushing visuals.

Since its debut in 2022, the group has made history as the first Japanese act to reach the summit of US Billboard's Hot Trending Songs Powered by Twitter.

Additionally, the girls hold the title of the first Japanese girl group to grace the cover of Billboard magazine.



XG consists of (from left) Juria, Harvey, Chisa, Cocona, Maya, Jurin and Hinata.

Andreeva knocked out in Stuttgart last 16

IN-FORM teenager Mirra Andreeva crashed out of the WTA event in Stuttgart yesterday after going down in straight sets to fellow Russian Ekaterina Alexandrova in the last 16.

World No. 7 Andreeva, who already has two titles under her belt this season, lost 6-3, 6-2 against the 22nd-ranked Alexandrova in just over an hour.

The 17-year-old Andreeva had defeated her elder sister Erika in the previous round on Wednesday but Alexandrova quickly took control as she claimed her fourth win over a top-10 player this season.

In February, the 17-year-old Andreeva became the youngest winner of a WTA 1000 event in Dubai, beating Iga Swiatek and Elena Rybakina on her way to the crown.

She backed it up by winning at Indian Wells in March, coming from a set down to defeat world No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka in the final.

Meanwhile, American world No. 4 Coco Gauff made short work of German Ella Seidel, winning 6-1, 6-1 in 57 minutes.

Gauff rebounded from her straight sets exit in the last 16 at the Miami Open, hitting two aces and breaking her opponent five times en route to a dominant victory.

Gauff will meet Italian fifth seed Jasmine Paolini, who beat German Jule Niemeier 6-1, 7-5 to reach the Stuttgart quarters for the second straight year.

"I'm doing what I love, I think just be happy about it, try your best and enjoy," said Paolini.

"That's the key for me to play better. When I'm sad and complaining, I'm not that good."

Alexandrova will face third-ranked American Jessica Pegula, who beat Poland's Magdalena Frech 6-1, 6-1. Pegula won five from five break points and fought off one against her.

Sabalenka has already qualified for the quarterfinals after her opponent Anastasia Potapova pulled out of their last 16 clash with injury.

World No. 2 Swiatek, a two-time winner in Stuttgart, has also reached the last eight. — AFP

Sensational Thomas

Thomas three clear at RBC Heritage after sizzling 61



Justin Thomas.
© AFP/IC

JUSTIN THOMAS fired a sensational 10-under 61 to open up a three-shot lead after the first round of the PGA Tour's RBC Heritage at Hilton Head in South Carolina yesterday.

The 31-year-old two-time major champion rattled off 11 birdies with only one bogey on the Harbour Town Golf Links to make a dream start to the US\$20 million (RM88 million) signature event.

Thomas, who finished tied for 36th place at last weekend's Masters, revelled in the tight fairways and firm conditions of the links course.

"I just played really solid," Thomas said. "I feel like I didn't do anything crazy; I just drove the ball well and put the ball in a spot that I had a lot of good numbers."

"I didn't play well last week. Put some really good work in leading into the start today and I felt prepared – it was just about going out and doing it, and it was nice to do so."

A star-studded field is lurking on Thomas's shoulder, with defending champion and world No. 1 Scottie Scheffler tied for second alongside Russell Henley on seven under.

Scheffler, who finished

fourth at the Masters on Sunday, three shots adrift of winner Rory McIlroy, reeled off seven birdies in a bogey-free 64.

"I felt like if you compared my four rounds last week to today, today would be a much less stressful round of golf in terms of scrambling for a par," Scheffler said.

"A lot of the stuff I had to do last week I felt like I didn't have to do today to shoot a good score... I was in position most of the day today."

Wyndham Clark is four shots off the lead after carding a 6-under 65, while five players including England's Matt Fitzpatrick and in-form Brian Harman, the recently crowned Texas Open champion, are a further shot back on five under.

"I've been waiting on some good golf," Harman said after his 66. "I've been playing a lot better than I've been scoring, so just going to try and advantage of some good form and see what I can make out of it."

Another Englishman, Justin Rose, is in a cluster of 11 players tied for 10th on 4-under.

Rose, who lost to McIlroy in a thrilling playoff finale at the Masters on Sunday, closed with back-to-back birdies on the 17th and 18th holes to stay in touch. — AFP

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Jobs



WE ARE HIRING!

- 1) EXECUTIVE / SENIOR - HR & Admin
- 2) ASST MANAGER / MANAGER - HR & Admin

Job Description

- Maintain HR records, including employee files, salaries and benefits information.
- Handle employee attendance records, payroll and claims.
- Handle employee relations and resolve any workplace conflicts or issues.
- Provide HR support and guidance to managers and employees.
- Ensure compliance with all employment laws and regulations.
- Stay updated on changes in work legislation and industry standards.
- Handle employee training and development programmes.
- Manage employee benefits programmes and ensure compliance with regulations.
- Stay updated on current industry trends and best practices in HR management.
- For Senior/Assistant Manager – with supervisor skills.
- Handle staff training and recruitment matters.
- Experience in payroll system would be advantageous.
- Handle General Admin and other HR duties.

Requirements

- Diploma/Bachelor's degree in Human Resources Management or related field.
- Executive: 1+ years of experience in HR & Admin or related field.
- Senior: 3+ years of experience in HR & Admin or related field.
- Asst Manager: 5+ years of experience in HR & Admin or related field.
- Fresh graduates are encouraged to apply for Assistant Executive post.
- Basic HR knowledge and proficiency in Microsoft Office.
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills.

3) EXECUTIVE - Safety & Building Maintenance

Job Description

- Perform routine and preventive maintenance on factory & office building systems, including HVAC, electrical, plumbing and mechanical systems.
- Conduct regular inspections of the factory & office building to identify and address maintenance issues.
- Respond promptly to maintenance requests and ensure timely resolution.
- Maintain accurate records of maintenance activities, including work orders, inspections and repairs.
- Ensure all maintenance activities comply with relevant health, safety and environmental regulations.
- Coordinate with external contractors and vendors for specialised maintenance and repair works.
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- Assist in preparation and management of maintenance budget.
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Jacks helps Mumbai beat Hyderabad

THE Mumbai Indians batters and bowlers starred in a comfortable four-wicket victory over Sunrisers Hyderabad in the Indian Premier League yesterday.

England all-rounder Will Jacks shone with both bat and ball, picking up two wickets to help restrict Hyderabad to 162 for five and then hitting a 26-ball 36 to help bolster his team's chase.

Decent knocks from openers Rohit Sharma and Ryan Rickleton helped set up the chase, while skipper Hardik Pandya smacked a quick 21 runs off nine balls towards the end to seal the game.

The match helps restore a bit of Mumbai's mojo, pushing them into a crowded mid table. They have three victories in seven matches.

Hardik said the way his team bowled was "very smart and spot on".

"We stuck to simple, basic plans," the Mumbai skipper said, adding that once the pressure to get boundaries eased in the second innings, they "pushed the pedal at the end".

Hyderabad openers Abhishek Sharma and Travis Head kicked off the first innings with a 59-run partnership before Rohit, who hit 40 runs off 28 balls, departed in the eighth over.

The team then struggled for momentum with Ishan Kishan (2) and Head (28) falling to leave Hyderabad at 83-3 after the 12th over.

Disciplined bowling from Jasprit Bumrah and Jacks continued to restrict Hyderabad's batsmen but a valiant late-innings knock from Heinrich Klaasen (37) infused a glimmer of hope.

In reply, Mumbai's openers made a solid start as Rohit hit 26 and Rickleton 31. They were 70-2 at the end of the 10th over.

Jacks helped anchor the chase with his 26-ball 36 before departing in the 15th over.

Suryakumar Yadav hit 26 and the final touches were added by Hardik and Tilak Varma, who hit an unbeaten 21, as Mumbai won with 11 balls to spare. — AFP



LEWIS HAMILTON has declared that Ferrari will undoubtedly experience the success that they are chasing, and that in the meantime, he and his teammates have a duty to "protect the team" from the external speculation and noise.

The seven-time world champion's move to Maranello generated hype and anticipation unrivalled in F1's modern age, but the on-track performances from the *Scuderia* have offered fans little to get excited about.

Aside from a breakthrough sprint race victory at the Chinese Grand Prix, Hamilton has struggled to extract performance from the SF-25 and has generally been second-best to teammate Charles Leclerc throughout all stages of the race weekends.

However, the Brit believes that he has found information that will help bridge the gap.

"Yes, I mean, on one side it's to be expected,"

Alonso sets retirement limit, but 'not at 50'

SPAIN'S Formula One "golden oldie" Fernando Alonso set a date on his retirement yesterday, saying he won't be behind the wheel "at 50".

The 43-year-old leads Aston Martin into their 100th F1 race on Sunday at the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix with the verve and enthusiasm of a driver half his years.

The veteran, older than the age of rookies Kimi Antonelli and Oliver Bearman combined, has an open-ended contract at the ambitious team bankrolled by Lawrence Stroll, father of Alonso's teammate Lance.

And while recent results may not have been much to right home about, Aston's project proved appealing enough to lure design guru Adrian Newey over from Red Bull.

Given their recent lack of form – Alonso's last podium dates back to 2023 – Aston could do with Newey imbuing some of his magic onto this season's car.

But the man whose car design helped Red Bull to 13 titles – six drivers and seven constructors – is purely focusing on 2026 and the next big change in F1's technical landscape.

"He's working only on '26, and I totally support that," said Alonso.

"I want to drive an Adrian-designed car," he added, when asked how long his familiar grizzled features would be part of the grid.

"Not at fifty for sure. After 2026, I don't know – I will go season by season, see how motivated I am."

"Right now, I am very motivated. Let's do it until the 2026 and then we'll sit and talk, and check what is the best for the team."

Alonso, preparing for his 51st race with the team he joined in 2023 from Alpine, reflected on "an incredible journey so far".

Despite yet to score a point this term he said: "We are a much better team, a much more prepared team to fight for world championships than we were two years ago."

"Then we had a very small factory, we were using Mercedes' wind tunnel, and maybe we didn't have the right people and partners together in the project."

"So, yeah, the results on track on Sunday are not the same as they were before. But I feel very relaxed, very motivated. And this is just a transition time." – AFP

Hamilton comes out fighting in Jeddah

he said ahead of the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix when asked whether the situation at Ferrari is being blown out of proportion.

"It's the greatest team in Formula One history, and it's that special and, of course, there's more clicks, there's more stories that are written about it."

"And people have opinions, and it's not always been smooth sailing. So I think just from my perspective, you can't work with a team and change things overnight. And we've spent this time to really get to know each other."

"There are changes that are short-term that we will do together – keep all the greatness and keep building the areas that we could be

stronger in."

"And some of those could be short-term and some of them are longer-term."

There's so many great things within this team, and so we want to harness the energy and the passion that's within the team.

"We also have to protect the team, as well, because the spotlight is more on this team than any other team. Everyone in this team really, their heart is so in it."

"We're riding the rollercoaster ride up and down together. And I have no doubts that we will get to where we plan to be. It's just going to take time."

If Hamilton and Leclerc still plan on

delivering a World Championship to the *Tifosi* in 2025, then performances will need to turn around fast.

The double disqualification in Shanghai has left the Italian constructor on the back foot, 94 points behind McLaren at the top of the Constructors' Championship standings.

In the Drivers' Championship, the situation is even more concerning. Leclerc is 45 points behind Lando Norris at the top of the standings, while Hamilton is 52 points off the pace.

With Oscar Piastri now joining the fight at the sharp end of the order, the Ferrari duo can expect the heat to increase over the coming weeks. – The Independent

'A lot of people are talking'

Four-time world champion Verstappen dismisses Red Bull exit fears

MAX VERSTAPPEN has brushed aside fears of a possible Red Bull exit, saying yesterday "I'm just focusing on driving".

The notion of the four-time world champion walking away from Red Bull was raised by the team's advisor Helmut Marko.

Marko told *Sky Germany* that he had "great concern" Verstappen could find another team unless Red Bull upped their game.

He was speaking in the aftermath of a disappointing weekend in Bahrain where Verstappen could only finish sixth, three places ahead of his new teammate Yuki Tsunoda, behind a dominant show by McLaren's Oscar Piastri.

Asked specifically to comment on Marko's fears Verstappen replied: "I'm just focusing on driving and don't think about any other scenarios."

"I just keep working, keep trying to improve the car. Naturally, Bahrain wasn't a great weekend for us."

"I think we were all pretty disappointed with that. We just keep on trying to improve the car, come up with new ideas to try on the car."

"That's how I go about my weeks,"

trying to improve the situation."

The Dutchman's name has previously been linked with the likes of Mercedes, Ferrari and Aston Martin, now that Red Bull's former legendary designer Adrian Newey has joined forces with Fernando Alonso's ambitious team.

But Verstappen wasn't rising to the bait, saying: "A lot of people are talking about it, except me."

"Like I said before, I just want to focus on my car, work with the people in the team."

"That's the only thing that I'm thinking about in Formula One at the moment."

"I am happy, I am not very happy with my car. But we all want to be better, there is no secret in that. We all want to improve, I'm very relaxed."

Verstappen and the team are looking for a change of fortune at Jeddah's high speed street circuit where he has won in 2022 and last year.

"We're still trying things with the car," he said. Are there things that we can improve?

We're constantly trying to improve the car,

I guess.

"And that's what we'll try to do again this weekend. How much we can fix it here, I don't know."

Alonso, appearing alongside Verstappen at the press conference, said the rumours linking the F1 star with Aston were "very good for the team."

"This says a lot about the project that we at Aston have and the future that this team has."

"Would I welcome Max as a teammate? Yes, but it's unlikely to happen. Very unlikely!"

Verstappen and Red Bull will be counting on upcoming improvements down the road to their 2025 car to bring it closer in pace to McLaren, who have won three of the four races so far this season to take a healthy lead in the early season team standings.

Verstappen's one bright spot so far in 2025 came in Japan when he produced a superb qualifying performance to take pole and the win in Suzuka.

"It was enough to be competitive (there). It is a very narrow window."

"I just go race by race. I think it will be better than Bahrain. The rest is out of my hands."

"At the moment, we are not the quickest so it is tough to fight for a championship, but it is a long road."

"Last year it all looked great and we know how the season ended up," he added, referring to how Red Bull hit a mid-season wall before turning things around to clinch his fourth title. – AFP



Max Verstappen.
– AFP/PIIC

PITLANE

Tsunoda: I can beat Max

YUKI TSUNODA believes that he can beat Max Verstappen in the near future if he can extract maximum performance from the RB21.

"It's my first time driving a completely different car – I only drove with VCARB for the last four years, so it's the first time I drove a completely different team's car," the Japanese racer explained ahead of the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix.

"I'm trying to use that, and I know that if I unlock that area, I would be able to probably beat him (Verstappen)."

"I know myself that I can't beat him straight away, so I'm just trying to build a good baseline and wait for the moment that I can be in the shape, yeah."

Going into greater detail about his current struggles, Tsunoda explained: "I'm just trying to understand how this car operates, how this car performs well... think I'm not really understanding even half of it."

"These things are the key that I'm trying to work really hard on to understand as soon as possible, so I can work on different sort of stuff – all sorts of development and whatever."

"So far, I'm able to kind of put it all together in the qualifying and the race, but also at the same time it's quite up and down."

"There's a bit of up and down from FP1 to FP3. So I just want to be more consistent throughout."

Spanish GP will be the gamechanger, says Russell

GEORGE RUSSELL believes that the current pecking order will remain stable until the Spanish Grand Prix, tipping round nine of the 2025 season as a potential turning point for McLaren.

"Barcelona is going to be a really interesting race for everyone, because that's when we have the clamp-down on the flexi-wings, and that's obviously where McLaren have excelled," Russell said in Jeddah.

"Until that race, I don't really see the pecking order shifting, but that will be sort of a decisive weekend to see whether or not they take a step backwards as the pack closes up, but clearly they're doing something very spectacular with the tyres."

"We saw it in FP3 last week; they were a second quicker than everybody else. That's unheard of. And I expect tracks like Bahrain – maybe Barcelona (with) high tyre degradation, Budapest, Singapore, Zandvoort, these types of circuits we can imagine they're going to be the best."

"Maybe when we go to Vegas, it won't be the case for them and we can sneak in a victory."

Lyon left to regroup after painful exit

LYON must somehow pick themselves up to try to qualify for next season's Champions League after their agonising exit from Europe to Manchester United in an epic tie.

Yesterday's painful exit denied Lyon a first European semifinal since they got to the last four of the Champions League in 2020, and they have to now hope the manner of their elimination does not have a knock-on effect for the remainder of their domestic campaign.

"At 4-2, with 10 minutes left, I think we thought it was done. It hurts," Corentin Tolisso, who was sent off for a second booking, told broadcaster *Canal Plus*.

"It is one of the worst matches in my career. It is really, really tough. I think we deserved better."

"Now we need to pick ourselves up and digest this because we have a match on Sunday that we absolutely have to win."

Lyon were once Champions League regulars but have not graced Europe's elite club competition since 2020, when they lost to Bayern Munich in the last four behind closed doors in Lisbon.

Their precarious financial position makes playing in the highly lucrative Champions League all the more important for the seven-time French champions.

Lyon have five games left, starting with Sunday's (Mon 2.45am) trip to fierce derby rivals Saint-Etienne, who are fighting relegation.

Only the top three qualify directly for the Champions League, with the team in fourth entering in the preliminary rounds.

Lyon are a point behind Marseille in third, but also lie just three points clear of Nice in seventh, which may not be enough to qualify for Europe at all. The pressure is therefore on.

"We did magnificent things, showed the quality of our players, but we need to learn from this," Fonseca said after the defeat at Old Trafford.

"It is not easy to come here. I think we proved that we are ready to have an end to the season which matches our ambitions and our quality." – AFP

Napoli, Inter in Serie A Easter bonanza

NAPOLI are hot on Inter Milan's heels as the Serie A title race heads into a packed Easter weekend with Antonio Conte's team at rock-bottom Monza today (midnight) and ready to pounce.

Three points separate Napoli from reigning champions Inter and a second *Scudetto* in three seasons is a real possibility with a straightforward run-in and no commitments beyond the league.

Inter are on a high and gunning for the treble after reaching the Champion League semifinals but have a crammed schedule with the second leg of their Italian Cup semifinal with AC Milan coming up after tomorrow's (midnight) tough fixture at Bologna.

Conte has a great chance to snatch the title from

the club he and in-form striker Romelu Lukaku took to the *Scudetto* in 2021, after beginning the season with the team in complete disarray.

The 55-year-old took charge last year with Napoli reeling from the worst Serie A title defence in history and the stars of that triumph – Victor Osimhen and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia – looking for a way out.

Conte has moulded Napoli in his image, with Lukaku and Scotland midfielder Scott McTominay his stand-out players after arriving from Chelsea and Manchester United in August.

"We're there, three points behind Inter which was unthinkable (at the start of the season). Our aim was to create a disturbance, and that's what we're

doing," said Conte after Monday's 3-0 win over Empoli.

"Napoli should be thanked for keeping this title race alive."

Napoli have already swept aside one relegation-threatened team this week and Monza should be even easier pickings with the drop a near certainty for the team owned by the Berlusconi family.

Inter's short trip to Bologna could also have an impact on the battle for a top-four finish, with Atalanta at Milan trying to consolidate third place.

Bologna are fifth, two points behind Juventus who sit fourth and complete the Easter fixtures at Parma on Monday. They are four behind Atalanta after losing 2-0 in Bergamo last weekend. – AFP

Real looking to bounce back

Unravelling Madrid face Bilbao test at the Bernabeu

REAL MADRID are still reeling from their Champions League destruction by Arsenal but must immediately refocus when they face Athletic Bilbao on Sunday (Mon 3am Malaysian time) lest the La Liga title escape them too.

The high-flying Basque side visit a Santiago Bernabeu where the crowd is expected to unleash their anger after the Spanish champions' bitter end to their European title defence.

Fans who fully believed in Madrid's capacity for a comeback against Arsenal in the quarterfinals on Wednesday were left stunned as the English side won 2-1 on the night to progress 5-1 on aggregate.

Once the shock wears off it usually turns to fury, with Real Madrid's stars braced for whistles and jeers at the weekend.

French superstar Kylian Mbappe will not have to face the noise after his red card last weekend left him suspended for the Athletic clash, and he also sustained an ankle issue against Arsenal.

On the other hand Vinicius Junior may come under fire despite scoring Madrid's only goal in 180 minutes against Mikel Arteta's side.

The Brazilian has been far below his best this season as coach Carlo

Ancelotti, whose future is far from certain at Madrid, has struggled to accommodate both him and Mbappe in the same side

while maintaining any semblance of structure.

Despite Madrid's disarray, they are only four points behind La Liga leaders Barcelona, who host Celta Vigo today (10.15pm).

Hansi Flick's

side suffered their first defeat of the year in midweek but still reached the Champions League semifinals.

"There are three competitions that we have to be focussed on now, in La Liga, the final of the Copa del Rey and the Club World Cup," said Ancelotti after the Arsenal defeat.

"I think we have to analyse what we can do better, La Liga is in play... so we have to move forward," added goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

That might be easier said than done, though, although Mbappe's absence gives Ancelotti the chance to revert to the set-up which worked for him last season, with Bellingham potentially playing in a central attacking role.

Energetic midfielder Eduardo Camavinga is also available after missing the Arsenal defeat through suspension.

Athletic, fourth, always enjoy the chance to put Madrid under the cosh, and could take advantage of Ancelotti's side given their brittle state this season.

Los Blancos have lost 12 games across all competitions and are particularly vulnerable on the flanks, where dynamic winger Nico Williams can profit.

The Spain international netted as Athletic beat Rangers 2-0 on Thursday to reach the Europa League semifinals.

Valverde's side will be high on confidence for their visit to the capital and will try to keep their momentum going by piling on the misery for Madrid. – AFP

Dortmund chase consistency with Europe at stake

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE finalists less than a year ago, Borussia Dortmund host Borussia Moenchengladbach in the Bundesliga tomorrow (11.30pm) hoping to keep their chances of European qualification alive.

Dortmund sit eighth in the league, six points off fourth spot with five games remaining.

Having endured their worst domestic season in a decade, Dortmund's sudden drop-off becomes even more perplexing against the backdrop of their stellar showing against Barcelona on Tuesday.

Dortmund ran Barcelona ragged, beating the Catalonians 3-1, with Serhou Guirassy scoring a hattrick. Two further goals were chalked off for offside.

Dortmund's fate was however sealed after a poor showing in the first leg, when they lost 4-0.

Just like last year when they stumbled to fifth in the league while beating Paris Saint-Germain, Atletico Madrid, AC Milan, Newcastle and PSV Eindhoven on the way to Wembley, Dortmund's ambitions are frustrated by their inconsistency.

Missing the Champions League would have huge repercussions for Dortmund, a club heavily reliant on European income.

Only once since winning back-to-back Bundesliga titles under Jurgen Klopp in 2010 and 2011 have Dortmund missed out on the Champions League.

A symbol of the club's inconsistency is centreback Niklas Suele. A 2020 Champions League winner with Bayern, Suele was signed to anchor Dortmund's defence but has only periodically reproduced his top form.

Speaking after the Barcelona match, Suele was at a loss to explain Dortmund's unpredictability.

"The question we face is why don't we play like that in a Bundesliga match? That's something we need to ask ourselves again before we play Gladbach, so we can put in a similar showing."

"We definitely have to accept the criticism about our inconsistency. But we're searching for solutions, we talk about it every day."

At the top of the table, Bayern Munich can soothe the disappointment after Wednesday's Champions League exit by taking a step closer to the title with a win at Heidenheim today (9.30pm).

Bayern sit six points clear of second-placed Bayer Leverkusen, with five games remaining.

For Leverkusen, nothing short of a Bayern collapse will keep their dreams alive of defending their title.

While such a collapse is unlikely, it is not unprecedented – although it does not make for happy reading for Leverkusen fans. In 2001-02, Leverkusen were five points ahead with three games remaining but lost two of their last three to finish second. – AFP



Jude Bellingham (left), Vinicius Junior (centre), Kylian Mbappe. – AFP/IC/REUTERS/SPIC



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LIVERPOOL can wrap up a record-equalling 20th English title tomorrow (11.30pm) when Leicester City and Ipswich Town are both likely to have their relegation from the Premier League confirmed.

After several nail-biting Premier League title races that went down to the wire, Arne Slot's Liverpool have turned this one into a procession as rivals fell by the wayside.

Despite trailing champions Manchester City and Arsenal early in the campaign, Liverpool have been top for all but one week since Sept. 28 and three points at 19th-placed Leicester could see them join Manchester United as England's most-crowned club.

For that to happen, second-placed Arsenal would also have to lose away to third-from-bottom Ipswich.

But whatever the outcome of this weekend's games, Slot looks certain to become only the fifth manager to win the Premier League in his debut season in English football – the others being Jose Mourinho (Chelsea), Carlo Ancelotti (Chelsea), Manuel Pellegrini (Manchester City) and Antonio Conte (Chelsea).

Early finale on ther cards

Liverpool on brink of title, Leicester and Ipswich prepare for the drop

While Liverpool's second Premier League title in six seasons has looked inevitable, so has Leicester's return to the Championship after a woeful campaign.

Leicester snapped an eight-game losing run in the League to draw at Brighton last week but are 17 points behind 17th-placed West Ham United with six games remaining and anything other than a shock win over Liverpool will put them down alongside bottom club Southampton who visit West Ham today (10pm).

Ipswich, who are 14 points behind West Ham, may hope that Arsenal are still celebrating beating Real Madrid to reach the Champions League semifinals when they host Mikel Arteta's team at Portman Road tomorrow (9pm).

The Suffolk club have at least shown some fight this season but defeat by Arsenal, along with wins for West Ham United and Wolverhampton Wanderers, would mean that for the second season in a row the three promoted clubs go straight back down.

With the issues at the top and the bottom all but decided, the battle for Champions League qualification is at least providing some tension in the closing weeks.

Arsenal look set to qualify, but the five clubs below them are battling for the three other places.

Third-placed Newcastle United (59 points) visit seventh-placed Aston Villa (54) tomorrow (12.30am) while fourth-placed Nottingham Forest (57) are away at Tottenham Hotspur on Tuesday (3am).

Outgoing champions Manchester City (55) are currently hanging on to fifth place but can ill-afford any slip-ups at a rejuvenated Everton today (10pm).

Chelsea (54) have slipped down to sixth place after successive draws and, with a tough-looking run-in, will be desperate for a victory at Fulham tomorrow (9pm).

Bournemouth, Fulham and Brighton and Hove Albion are all still harbouring hopes of qualifying for Europe. Bournemouth are at Crystal Palace today while Brighton visit Brentford.

Fourteenth-placed Manchester United are on course for their worst finish since 1990 and Ruben Amorim's side will seek to snap a three-match winless run in the Premier League as they host Wolves tomorrow (9pm). – AFP

Gunners can get hands on Old Big Ears: Raya

■ BY PHILIP DUNCAN

DAVID RAYA said Arsenal can now afford to dream of European glory and insisted his teammates will do everything in their power to deliver the club's first Champions League title.

Arsenal are now just one tie away from the final following their historic 2-1 win against Real Madrid in the Bernabeu which completed a historic 5-1 quarterfinal aggregate triumph.

Arsenal will now face Paris St Germain in the last four with the first leg at the Emirates on April 30 before the return rubber at the Parc des Princes eight days later.

It marks the first time Arsenal have reached this stage of the competition in 16 years. Their sole appearance in a final was their 2-1 defeat to Barcelona in Paris three years earlier.

"We said 'we are here to create our own history', and that's what we did," said goalkeeper Raya in the wake of Arsenal's brilliant win in Spain.

"The way we came to the Bernabeu and the way we played, the way we defended, the way we created chances, we kept them quiet and in the second half, they created chances and they took one and we took our chances and we won the game and credit to us.

"It is a real statement, it was a very complete match, and it's been very long (since Arsenal reached a semifinal) but we are here to create our own history and hopefully we can dream.

"We are going to try everything in our hands to do it but the main thing is going step by step and staying in the present."

Mikel Arteta's players will draw confidence from a comfortable 2-0 win over PSG at the Emirates earlier this season as they bid to overhaul the French champions for a spot in the showpiece in Munich on May 31 against either Barcelona or Inter Milan.

"Yes, we beat PSG at home but they are a different team now, and they look even better than they did back in the group stage and that's credit to them," Raya added. – The Independent



Chelsea's Reece James (left) vies with Legia Warszawa's Tomas Pekhart during their Conference League quarterfinal match. – AFP/PIIC

Chelsea not taking easy chances, says Maresca

CHELSEA head coach Enzo Maresca expressed concern at the "easy chances" his team are missing after they limped into the Conference League semifinal despite a second leg defeat to Legia Warsaw at Stamford Bridge.

The 2-1 loss to the team currently fifth in the Polish Ekstraklasa drew boos from supporters at fulltime and was the second home game in a row in which fans had loudly voiced their growing discontent.

Things could have been different had Cole Palmer taken a straightforward chance to end his three-month goal drought inside the opening five minutes, skewing his shot wide when through on goal, whilst Christopher Nkunku also spurned a good opening.

The inclusion of Palmer and striker Nicolas Jackson was a surprise given the first-leg score and that Chelsea are locked in a tight battle to qualify for the Champions League and face a London derby away at Fulham tomorrow.

"The (chances) that we are missing unfortunately are very easy goals," said Maresca.

"Tonight the first five minutes we had two chances, but it can happen. Hopefully very soon Nico and Cole can start to score goals because they are very important for us.

"The idea was just for them, especially for Nico after more than two months out, the idea was to continue to build the physical condition for him. To give them a bit of tempo to be better for Sunday.

"If they are able to score it could be a good boost for them. But we managed in the wrong way the first leg result, but the good thing is we have six Premier League games that are important for us. Fortunately we can rotate players

"We're not happy with the defeat, but probably after the first leg we tried to manage the result, rotate players and try to avoid injury because have an important game on Sunday. Not happy with the result but we're in the semifinal."

Maresca added that he saw no reason for alarm regarding the supporters' reaction.

"For me tonight the environment was good, I didn't see any bad moments from the fans. We need to engage them." – The Independent

You'll have to put up with me for a bit longer: Ange

■ BY GEORGE SESSIONS

ANGE POSTECOGLOU declared he would be around "for a little bit longer" after Tottenham clinched a Europa League semifinal spot with a superb 1-0 win at Eintracht Frankfurt.

Spurs were back in the last-chance saloon and up against it at Deutsche Bank Park after a 1-1 draw in the first leg last Thursday, but produced one of their best displays under the Australian.

Dominic Solanke's spotkick two minutes before halftime settled the tie and was won after vice-captains Cristian Romero and James Maddison combined.

It was Solanke's first goal in 12 matches and even though Tottenham missed opportunities after the break, they admirably held on to earn a first last-four spot in this competition since 1984.

Postecoglou had admitted to having "no idea" if he would still be in a job after yesterday's tie with Spurs down in 15th in the Premier League, but can now focus on a two-legged semifinal with Bodo/Glimt in May with the club on course to win its first trophy in 17 years.

"I said yesterday, I am the same manager today that I was yesterday so if people think us winning tonight makes me a better manager or whoever thinks I wasn't doing a good job yesterday, (they) should be feeling the same way," Postecoglou explained.

"I don't care, it doesn't bother me, it doesn't affect what I do. For me, it's always about the dressing room.

"Do the players believe? Do the staff believe? That's much more important than what others may make of me.

"So, unfortunately for a lot of you, you're going to have to put up with me for a little bit longer, mate, so let's see how that goes."

With no second goal forthcoming, Spurs had to withstand a barrage of late Frankfurt pressure, but goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario remained untroubled before the full-time whistle was met with big celebrations on the touchline and from the 2,800 away fans.

"Super proud of the lads. Going away from home, a quarterfinal against a very good side, you know you're going to have to work really hard, be really disciplined and we needed to score," Postecoglou said. "I just thought they were outstanding.

"Not at any stage have I felt they lost any belief in me or what we're doing. That is crucial when you're having a difficult season, but there is also a season of opportunity there." – The Independent

RESULTS

EUROPA LEAGUE (QUARTER-FINALS, 2ND LEG): Athletic Bilbao 2 (Sancet 45+4-pen, Nico Williams 80) **Rangers 0** - Athletic win 2-0 on agg, **Eintracht Frankfurt 0** **Tottenham Hotspur 1** (Solanke 43-pen) - Tottenham win 2-1 on agg, **Lazio 3** (Castellanos 21, Noslin 90+3, Dia 100) **Bodo/Glimt 1** (Helmersen 109) - 3-3 aet, **Bodo/Glimt win 3-2** on pen, **Manchester United 5** (Ugarte 10, Dalot 45+1, Fernandes 114-pen, Manoo 120, Maguire 120+1) **Lyon 4** (Tolisso 78, Tagliacof 78, Cherki 105, Lacazette 110-pen) - Man Utd win 7-6 on agg after aet.

CONFERENCE LEAGUE (QUARTER-FINALS, 2ND LEG): Fiorentina 2 (Mandragora 37, Kean 67) **CM Celje 2** (Matko 54, Nemanic 65) - Fiorentina win 4-3 on agg, **Jagiellonia Bialystok 1** (Churlinov) **Real Betis 1** (Bakumbu 78) - Real Betis win 3-1 on agg, **Chelsea 1** (Cucurella 42) **Legia Warsaw 2** (Pekhart 10 pen, Kapuadi 53) - Chelsea win 4-2 on agg, **Rapid Vienna 1** (Une 45+10) **Djurgarden 4** (Danielson 42 pen, Kosugi 77, Gulliksen 93, Gulliksen 105) - Djurgarden win 4-2 on agg aet.

Bold policy to spark quantum leap: Nazifuddin

MALAYSIA must craft and implement a bold, holistic national sports policy to trigger a quantum leap in athletic performance on the international stage, said outgoing Olympic Council of Malaysia (OCM) secretary-general Datuk Mohd Nazifuddin Mohd Najib.

He said the existing sports development ecosystem is no longer sufficient to sustain or elevate Malaysia's sporting achievements, particularly in producing a new generation of top-tier athletes.

"I believe we must have the courage to introduce a serious and comprehensive sports policy if we truly expect better results than what we're seeing now. Without that, our sports scene will remain stagnant - or worse, decline."

"Right now, our talent pool is far too limited. There could be many potential athletes out there, but we won't know because they've not been nurtured or given the right platforms to grow," he said at the OCM secretary-general's office in Wisma OCM yesterday.

Nazifuddin pointed out that the 2026 Malaysia Games (Sukma) and 2027 SEA Games offer ideal opportunities to scout and develop new talent among the country's youth.

"This is our window to produce new champions. If they shine at the 2027 SEA Games, they could be our fresh faces at future editions of the Asian Games and Olympics," he said.

Nazifuddin will step down as OCM secretary-general today, having held the post since 2018. He previously served as an OCM vice-president for the 2015-2017 term. - Bernama

'Keep up the good work'

Tang Jie hopes Wen Tse stays motivated after partnership ends

THOUGH this is only an experimental partnership for three tournaments, national mixed doubles player Chen Tang Jie hopes his interim partner Chan Wen Tse will stay on track with commitment regardless of whom she will be paired up with in the long run.

This is because Tang Jie is slated to be reunited with long-time partner Toh Ee Wei at the Singapore Open from May 27 to June 1, while this three-tourney break is for the estranged pair to make amends for a fresh start.

"I hope she (Wen Tse) can continue what she has been doing during the past month with me. If we don't continue training, we won't achieve anything," said Tang Jie on the interim partnership.

"No matter who her partner is (in the future), I will support her. I will certainly assist," he said after a training session at the Academy Badminton Malaysia in Bukit Kiara yesterday.

Tang Jie rated Wen Tse as a professional player with great potential to become a top player in future.

Tang Jie also acknowledged that it is normal for Wen Tse to have the jitters as they prepare to compete together in the Taiwan Open (May 6-11), Thailand Open II (May 13-18) and Malaysia Masters (May 20-25).

Previously, Tang Jie was the regular partner of Ee Wei, but on March 28, BAM announced their split to allow the coaching team to experiment with new pairings following strained ties since the 2024 Paris Olympic Games.

However, in a sudden U-turn on Wednesday, BAM confirmed that Tang Jie and Ee Wei would be reunited after both players made a mutual request following comprehensive discussions between the coaching staff and the shuttlers.

Tang Jie and Ee Wei are also in the national team set to compete in the 2025 Sudirman Cup in Xiamen, China, from April 27 to May 4.

Meanwhile, singles coaching director Kenneth Jonassen has emphasised the importance of mental toughness and a strong team mindset for Leong Jun Hao and Justin Hoh as they gear up for the Sudirman Cup.

Jonassen said the team's group fixtures against France on April 28, Australia (April 29) and Japan (May 1) in Group C will provide a clear direction in terms of strategising and identifying strengths to capitalise on.

"Practice is going well. I like a practice that also challenges the players because in any match, at a high level or high exposure, you have to overcome your struggles throughout the match."

"Being in a team match, I think it is very important to adopt a team match mindset, which means no matter what I am facing, what I can give back is my fighting ability," he told reporters yesterday.

When asked about the absence of Malaysia's top men's singles player, Lee Zii Jia, who is recovering from a right ankle injury, Jonassen admitted it is a challenge but remained positive.

"Of course, when you do not have your highest-ranked player, the player being in the top 10 in the world, it's a challenge."

"But that is the fact this time, and we will do our very best," he said. - Bernama

Focus on track for Asian Games

TWO national track cyclists - Muhammad Shah Firdaus Sahrom and Nurul Izzah Izzati Mohd Asri - have been identified as the country's best bets at the 2026 Asian Games in Japan.

Malaysian National Cycling Federation (MNCF) president Datuk Amarjit Singh Gill said this puts the national track cycling squad as their focal point at the quadrennial multi-sports games.

"We will make a selection (of cyclists) for the road event, but our main focus is on the track," he told reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The 2026 Asiad will be held from Sept 19 to Oct 4 in Aichi-Nagoya.

Muhammad Shah Firdaus, nicknamed "The Terminator", had bagged three medals at previous Asian Games, including a silver in the team sprint in 2018, followed by two bronzes in men's sprint and keirin at the 2022 edition.

The 29-year-old is enjoying the best phase of his career as



Muhammad Shah Firdaus Sahrom. - BERNAMAPIC

he is now third in the world ranking for men's elite sprint and won the gold medal in the men's keirin at the International Cycling Union (UCI) Nations Cup in Konya, Turkey, last month.

The win by the Johorean in Turkey marked his first gold medal at a UCI championship and is the biggest accomplishment of his career to date.

Nurul Izzah Izzati, also known as "The Pocket Rocketwoman", on the other hand, did exceptionally well at the Asian Track Cycling

Championships (ATC) 2025 in Nila, Negeri Sembilan.

The 21-year-old Kedahan bagged two golds, one silver and one bronze, while setting both national and Asian records in the individual sprint, team sprint and one kilometre time trial at the ATC 2025.

Amarjit also said MNCF was pleased to see that both Muhammad Shah Firdaus and Nurul Izzah Izzati were among 16 athletes listed in the Road to Gold (RTG) Programme in preparation for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games.

"We hope they will get all the full support from the RTG programme. I think the decision is right," he said. - Bernama



Nurul Izzah Izzati. - BERNAMAPIC

AJBC ready for a smashing start

GOING into its fourth year, this year's edition of the Allianz Junior Badminton Championship (AJBC) 2025 will continue to play its role in producing more players who may one day don national colours and win honours.

Allianz Malaysia Berhad (Allianz Malaysia) chief executive officer Sean Wang said that Allianz Malaysia is honoured to play its part in producing quality badminton players who can contribute to the nation in the future.

"For us, badminton is more than just pushing to be the best, it is also about enjoying the game, having fun with friends and a good way to learn about discipline and teamwork," Wang said

"At this age, some talents may appear now while some players will take time for their game to mature and progress eventually."

"We are cognizant of this fact (different levels of improvements), hence our focus is more on mass participation so that we have a larger pool of players to step up in the future."

For the record, World Junior Championship 2024 finalist Low Zi Yu clinched her third AJBC title in the Girls' U-15 title last year. AJBC alumni Dania Sofea was her doubles partner at the World Junior Championship.

Last year, over 3,000 players participated in AJBC and the number of entries are expected to remain the same this year for the 10

Qualifying Rounds.

The opening round will take place in Klang from May 16-18. Qualifying Rounds will be staged in various venues around the country such as Alor Setar, Taiping, Kuching, Kota Kinabalu, Gelang Patah, Kota Bharu, Bukit Beruang, Bukit Mertajam and Kuantan.

The AJBC Grand Finals, featuring U-13 and U-15 finalists from all the Qualifying Rounds, will take place in Kuala Lumpur from Nov 5-9. Each round will see 24 players qualifying for the finals. The U-11 players will not advance to the AJBC Grand Finals.

As in previous years, players participating in the AJBC Qualifying Rounds do not have to pay any entrance fees. The top three winners

in the Qualifying Rounds, for all age categories, will earn RM500, RM300 and RM150 (singles) and RM600, RM400 and RM200 (doubles).

Players finishing in the top three at the Grand Finals will pocket RM1,000, RM600 and RM300 (singles) and RM1,200, RM800 and RM400 (doubles).

Registration for Qualifying Round 1 in Klang will commence from April 23 and, the AJBC tournament is also supported by the Sports, Co-curricular and Arts Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia and the Badminton Association of Malaysia.

For more information and those who are keen to participate in AJBC, please visit www.allianz.com.my/ajbc.



Old Trafford erupts

RUBEN AMORIM vowed to go all out for Europa League glory after Manchester United progressed to the semifinals with a show-stopping 5-4 extra-time win against 10-man Lyon.

The Red Devils looked to have blown yesterday's make-or-break quarterfinal second leg at Old Trafford, where the visitors responded to Manuel Ugarte and Diogo Dalot's first-half efforts by scoring four without reply.

Corentin Tolisso and Nicolas Tagliafico goals in quick succession took the match to extra-time, when Lyon kicked on despite Tolisso's sending off for two bookable offences as Rayan Cherki and Alexandre Lacazette rocked United.

But Amorim's men dug deep and went on to secure a scarcely believable victory as Bruno Fernandes' penalty was followed by Kobbie Mainoo's excellent 120th-minute leveller and Harry Maguire's match-winning header moments later took the roof off Old Trafford.

"The sound of the two last goals were amazing and that is something we can keep for the future," the United boss said after an unforgettable 7-6 aggregate triumph that secured a semifinal against Athletic Bilbao.

"Some people collect shirts, scarves, but I want to keep that sound, it's the best sound in the world.

"In the end you go to the semifinals but you need to win it. If you go the semifinals and don't win it, it's the same feeling. We just need to focus on the next stage and try to win the competition.

"I think that (ending is) why we like this sport so much and all the frustration that the coach has in this kind of season, the frustration, the bad moments, when you had a moment like this it's all worth it.

"But then you finish, you calm down and then you start thinking we have a game on Sunday (9pm against Wolves).

"Then we have to see all the players if they are fit to play because we have to focus on the Europa League."

The competition offers United's only route to silverware and European qualification given the side sit a lowly 14th in a campaign that is guaranteed to be their worst of the Premier League era.

Asked how big this moment can be, Amorim said: "I think these kind of moments can help a lot players in this kind of season, in this kind of context.

"They can create some connection between the fans and the players, and we can forget for a

Amorim says will go all out to secure Europa League glory for Utd

few minutes what kind of season we are having.

"Today is a good feeling but tomorrow we need to start everything again. So we need to focus on the next game, to focus on the players, if they are fit to play.

"We have to take the risk in to save some players because if you look at the our season, the most important thing is clear for everybody. It's the Europa League.

"We started well but we are not consistent enough to maintain the game for a long time. When I feel the team is a little bit tired we drop a lot.

"We should do better with the two goals of Lyon. When we play against European teams, we can cope better with that, but in the Premier League we suffer a lot."

Lyon head coach Paulo Fonseca was proud of his team's efforts across the two legs but felt his players paid for prematurely over celebrating Lacazette's spot-kick making it 4-2.

"I've got mixed emotions," he said. "Up until now it's hard to take in exactly what happened.

"I think we've done some magnificent work out there. In the second half, starting two down and then scoring four goals with one player down as well I think was fantastic. It showed the quality of our players, our team.

"But I also think that we celebrated a lot when we put in our fourth goal, but the match doesn't end until the very last second as we know.

"Maybe we thought that we had it in the bag at that point. Maybe we lacked a little bit of emotional calm at that moment." - AFP



Manchester United's Alejandro Garnacho in action with Lyon's Jordan Veretout. - REUTERS/PIC

