



Flag gaffes wake-up call for responsible AI use

Expert says human oversight critical as relying solely on artificial intelligence without verifying output could result in serious slip-ups.

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With thousands of candidates skipping SPM examinations each year, an educationist has called for urgent reforms to make the Malaysian education system more inclusive and responsive to diverse challenges faced by students.
— ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

Call for more inclusive education

Present system too rigid and exam-centric to accommodate students with different learning needs, personal struggles or socio-economic challenges: Educationist

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PM reiterates URA objective to uplift lives

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim says legal status of land involved in redevelopment projects will remain unchanged, be it privately owned, under state authority or categorised as Malay reserve land.

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Kg Sg Baru folk seek inquiry to determine land status

If result proves area classified as Malay agricultural settlement, plot should be returned to residents, says committee chairman.

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Foundation donates RM1m to underprivileged Perak schoolchildren

■ BY **ANDREW SAGAYAM**
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IPOH: The largest-ever single financial aid to schoolchildren in Perak was presented by Berjaya Cares Foundation (BCF) with a donation of RM1 million yesterday.

BCF contributed the aid to 2,000 underprivileged schoolchildren from 15 secondary schools in the state, as part of its commitment in supporting education and community well-being.

This initiative is part of Berjaya Corporation Berhad's (BCorp) ongoing corporate social responsibility efforts.

The donation was presented by BCF chairman Tan Sri Vincent Tan to Perak State Housing and Local Government Committee chairman Sandra Ng Shy Ching.

The handing over of the aid in the form of a mock cheque was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Housing and Local Government Minister Nga Kor Ming during the Santuni Kasih event held at SMJK Poi Lam.

The selected recipients were underprivileged schoolchildren in Ipoh, Chemor, Tambun, Ulu Kinta and Tanjung Rambutan.

Each student received RM500 in cash assistance to help ease the cost of essential school items such as uniforms, shoes, school bags and stationery.

"Education knows no boundaries. We believe that quality, accessible and inclusive education is a powerful force for positive change, one that can transform children's lives and help shape a prosperous future for Malaysia," said Tan, who is BCorp founder and adviser.

He added that BCorp, through BCF, is committed to uplifting underprivileged communities by investing in education and nurturing talent.

"Through Berjaya Cares Foundation, we aim to ease the financial burden of families, especially those in the lower-income bracket, while helping to reduce dropout rates and improve access to education."

Also present were Tan's wife Puan Sri Esther Tan, Perak State Assembly Deputy Speaker Jenny Choy Tsi Jen and Berjaya Group Berhad executive director Shashitharan Nair.

BCF is the charitable arm of BCorp, whose mission is focused on empowering individuals and communities through various initiatives.

Among its focus areas are education for underprivileged children and youth, outreach programmes for marginalised communities, health and well-being, community welfare and development, local arts and culture, humanitarian aid, animal welfare as well as environmental protection.



(From left) Tan Teik Keat, Choy, Ng, Anwar, Nga, Tan, Esther and Shashitharan at the aid presentation ceremony yesterday.
— PIC COURTESY OF BERJAYA CORPORATION BERHAD

Urban Renewal Act aims to uplift lives, says PM

► 'Land status to remain unchanged, whether privately owned, under state authority or Malay reserve land'

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim reiterated that the government's move to introduce an Urban Renewal Act is rooted in the need to provide better living conditions for Malaysians long trapped in dilapidated housing.

He said the legal status of land involved in urban renewal projects would remain unchanged, regardless of whether it is privately owned, under state authority or located on Malay reserve land.

"There are people living in public housing flats that are over 50 years old, in overcrowded, uncomfortable conditions, plagued by serious social and disciplinary issues, all due to prolonged pressure and neglect."

"That is why it is our responsibility to focus on these areas and rebuild the housing. Unfortunately, this initiative is being politicised and falsely portrayed as an attempt to steal Malay land or as part of a so-called Chinese agenda to displace Malays from the city," he said at the launch of the Warisan KL:

Warisan Ibu Kota Malaysia Madani project yesterday.

Present were Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Federal Territories) Datuk Seri Dr Zaliha Mustafa, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Shamsul Azri Abu Bakar and Kuala Lumpur Mayor Datuk Seri Dr Maimunah Mohd Sharif.

Anwar cited the Seri Perlis flats as an example of poor living conditions, describing them as "most suffocating."

"I wouldn't be proud as prime minister if I couldn't do something to rebuild and improve these homes."

He said Kuala Lumpur City Hall would ensure that temporary housing for residents during the urban renewal projects would prioritise comfort and essential amenities.

Anwar gave an assurance that the development projects would be implemented as soon as they are approved, emphasising the importance of quick action to alleviate the suffering of affected families.

"Delaying the project by three months means prolonging the hardship of these families for three more months. To those causing the delays, I would send them to live in those temporary homes to experience firsthand the hardship and suffering of having to wait."

Anwar had previously said urban renewal is not a new agenda under the Madani government but it had already begun in 2012 with the formulation of the Urban Renewal Guidelines.

He said initial discussions for the creation of a specific Urban Renewal Act began in 2013 to streamline development around Kuala Lumpur, with the formal drafting of the Act being announced in 2015.

The Warisan KL project aspires to position Kuala Lumpur through 10 flagship pilot developments, as a globally recognised creative city that is inclusive, connected and reflective of Malaysia's identity.

The project also brings together key strategic partners, including Kuala Lumpur City Hall, Think City, Khazanah, government-linked companies, investment arms and players in the arts and culture scene to shape Kuala Lumpur as a city for all and a true reflection of the nation's identity. — Bernama

Govt takes proactive steps to deal with US tariffs

IPOH: Malaysia needs to strengthen its alliances, particularly within Asean and with other international partners, to be self-reliant despite the tariffs imposed by the United States (US), said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"With the tariff announcement by US President Donald Trump, should we simply complain or should we be proactive and do something about it?"

"The most important thing is to build our domestic capacity and instil confidence in the people that we can stand on our own, that we can grow with our strength, leveraging on the expanding networks within Asean, Asia, China, India, Australia, Japan, Korea and by opening new markets in Europe."

Anwar was speaking at the launch of the Sultan Azlan Shah Airport upgrading works yesterday, which was also attended by Transport Minister Anthony Loke, Housing and Local Government Minister Nga Kor Ming and Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Saarani Mohamad.

Anwar added that measures to boost trade were also discussed during consultations and negotiations with Asean leaders, as well as during the recent state visit to Malaysia by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

With Malaysia as Asean chair for 2025, he said he had also discussed strategies to expand markets and boost domestic tourism with key figures such as United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan via online meetings.

"One of the key discussions within Asean is how we can boost intra-Asean tourism. We must compete by improving our facilities, infrastructure and the efficiency of our officials."

On April 2, Trump announced a series of reciprocal tariffs on several countries, including a 24% tariff on imports from Malaysia, which has been postponed for 90 days.

Meanwhile, on the Sultan Azlan Shah Airport upgrading project, Anwar said it would significantly enhance its capacity and support a wide range of sectors, including commerce, industry and tourism. — Bernama

International Energy Agency to help M'sia tap nuclear power

LONDON: The Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA) has agreed to support and assist Malaysia on policies to explore and study the use of nuclear energy, said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof.

He said the matter was mentioned during his courtesy call on IEA executive director Dr

Fatih Birol on the sidelines of the Summit of the Future of Energy Security plenary session at Lancaster House on Tuesday.

Fadillah, who is also Energy Transition and Water Transformation minister, said many countries are starting to switch to nuclear energy because it is among clean energy

sources that are secure, stable and safer with current technology.

"During the meeting, I shared the view that we need IEA support in terms of technical advice."

He said he had also issued a commitment to secure domestic energy supply. — Bernama

D-Day for Ayer Kuning voters to cast ballots

TAPAH: A total of 31,281 registered voters in the Ayer Kuning state constituency will cast their ballots today to elect a new representative, after the 14-day campaign period.

Voting will take place at 19 polling centres across 63 channels, from 8am to 6pm except for the centre at Sekolah Kebangsaan Toh Tandewa Sakti, which will close at 4pm. Vote counting will be held at Dewan Merdeka.

According to the Malaysian Meteorological Department, clear weather is expected in the morning, with thunderstorms forecast for the afternoon.

The by-election features a three-way contest between Dr Mohamad Yusri Bakir (Barisan Nasional), Abd Muhaimin Malek (Perikatan Nasional) and Bawani KS (Parti Sosialis Malaysia).

Dr Mohamad Yusri will vote at SK Sungai Lesong, Abd Muhaimin at SK Ayer Kuning and Bawani at SJKC Pheng Lok.

Last Tuesday, 93.4% of 500 police personnel and their spouses cast their votes during early voting at two designated stations.

To ensure smooth proceedings, 601 Election Commission officers and 1,114 police personnel will be on duty.

The by-election was called following the death of incumbent assemblyman Ihsam Shahrudin on February 22 due to a heart attack. Ihsam, who was also Tapah Umno chief, won the Ayer Kuning seat in the 15th General Election (GE15) in November 2022 with a majority of 2,213 votes in a five-way contest.

Ayer Kuning is one of two state constituencies in Tapah. This marks the 11th by-election since GE15. — Bernama

KL Tower to reopen today

PUTRAJAYA: The Kuala Lumpur Tower (KL Tower) will reopen today at 9am for public visits.

In a statement, the Communications Ministry said the reopening of the tower is in line with the government's continued commitment to provide services with a conducive and safe environment for visitors.

"It is also in line with the government's commitment to ensuring the wellbeing of the workers involved," read the statement.

It also said KL Tower is under a new management — LSH Service Master Sdn Bhd.

The government is committed to ensuring efficient and customer-oriented service delivery as well as implementing continuous improvements for the safety and comfort of tourists to attract more visitors from home and abroad, said the ministry, Bernama reported.

On April 17, Communications Minister Datuk Fahmi Fadzil said KL Tower, which was temporarily closed for maintenance work and safety-related issues, would reopen as soon as possible.

The ministry had in a previous statement announced that the operation, management and maintenance of KL Tower would be taken over by the new company in April this year.

Students skipping SPM exams sparks call for reforms

■ BY QIRANA NABILLA
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PETALING JAYA: With thousands of students missing their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examinations each year, urgent reforms are needed to make the education system more inclusive and responsive to the diverse challenges faced by Malaysian youths, says an educationist.

National Association of Private Educational Institutions secretary-general Dr Teh Choon Jin said early and comprehensive support is key to helping at-risk students, with a focus on attendance, academic performance and behaviour to identify those needing intervention.

Speaking to *theSun*, he said the current system is overly rigid and exam-centric, and does not accommodate students facing learning difficulties, mental health struggles, family issues or financial pressures.

"Not all students learn the same way, and not everyone has a smooth journey in life. We need a more flexible and compassionate system —

► Current system rigid, test-centric and does not accommodate students with learning difficulties, mental health and family issues, says education group sec-gen

one that recognises diverse learning styles and life circumstances, rather than punishing students for things beyond their control.

Teh emphasised the need for well-resourced intervention programmes in underserved and rural schools, and for teachers to be trained in socio-emotional and trauma-informed approaches.

He said many students who skip SPM are not disinterested in education, but are driven by personal or socio-economic hardship. Financial pressure is a major factor, particularly for students from B40 families who feel compelled to enter the workforce early.

During the 2024 SPM results announcement, Education Director-General Datuk Azman

Adnan revealed that more than half of the 6,246 students who skipped the exam last year had already started working. Of the number, 57.8% were employed outside their school zones, 35.5% faced family-related issues and 4.7% were dealing with health problems.

"Instead of labelling them dropouts, we need to recognise that many are being pushed out by circumstances they can't control."

He added that some families and employers may not understand the long-term value of an SPM qualification, often prioritising on short-term income. As such, clearer and more relatable public awareness campaigns are needed to explain how the SPM certificate can open doors to better jobs, vocational training and further education.

"When more students leave school without completing their SPM, the impact goes beyond the individual. It affects society as a whole," he said, adding that without the basic qualification, many youths are trapped in low-paying and unstable jobs.

Teh warned that this deepens social inequality and limits Malaysia's potential in a fast-changing, knowledge-driven global economy.

"To bring dropouts back into the education system, the process must be flexible, accessible and non-intimidating. Not everyone can complete SPM at 17 — and that's okay."

He proposed the setting up of more community learning centres, options for blended and online learning, and recognition of prior learning. Free resits, waiving of exam fees and collaborating with NGOs and employers can also help ease the path back to education.

"Most importantly, we must change the mindset that SPM is only for teenagers. It should be seen as a second-chance opportunity for anyone, at any stage of life."



Teh proposed a more flexible and compassionate system that recognises diverse learning styles and life circumstances, as not all students learn the same way.
— AMIRUL SYAFIQ / THE SUN

Free flu jabs for high-risk senior citizens

KUALA LUMPUR: The Health Ministry is offering 57,093 free influenza vaccination slots for senior citizens with comorbidities under the Influenza Immunisation Programme for Senior Citizens. The programme is available at 649 selected health clinics nationwide and will run until the end of August.

In a statement, the ministry said as of April 20, 59.47% of high-risk

senior citizens had received their shots, based on vaccine supply to government healthcare facilities.

"Eligible individuals are encouraged to book appointments as soon as possible before all slots are filled. The vaccine, including equipment and healthcare services, is provided free of charge."

Appointments can be made via the *MySejahtera* app. Alternatively, the public may contact the nearest

district health office, visit the ministry website or social media pages, or walk into any participating clinic for more information.

Senior citizens without *MySejahtera* access may register directly at participating clinics, subject to availability.

The ministry also advised elderly patients attending follow-up appointments for chronic illnesses to inquire about their eligibility if

they have not yet been offered the vaccine.

It also urged all senior citizens with at least one comorbidity — such as diabetes, heart disease, chronic respiratory disease or hypertension — to take advantage of the programme to reduce the risk of complications and hospitalisation during the influenza season. The programme began on February 18. — Bernama

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Kg Sg Baru committee seeks govt inquiry into land status

➤ If proven to be Malay agricultural settlement, area should be returned to residents, says group chairman

■ BY IKHWAN ZULKAFLEE
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PETALING JAYA: The Kampung Sungai Baru Residents Right Action Committee has urged the government to carry out an inquiry to determine the land status of the area, and whether it should be recognised as a Malay agricultural settlement (MAS).

Group chairman Zainab Alias said the inquiry should be carried out in accordance with Chapter 4 of the National Land Code.

"This is because all documents and an official map indicate that this land is a Malay agricultural settlement," Zainab said at the Lawyers for Liberty office here yesterday.

Also present were lawyers for the group N. Surendran and Zaid Malik.

Zainab also called for all work being

carried out at Kampung Sungai Baru to be halted, pending the inquiry.

Should the result prove that the land is classified as MAS, the group demands that the developer return it to the residents.

"Any future development should involve the Kampung Sungai Baru residents.

"The government must initiate necessary negotiations with the developer on behalf of the residents.

"Failing to do so, we (the Kampung Sungai Baru residents) will hold a demonstration at the Federal Territory Ministry on May 7 to demand justice," she said.

The group also demands the government to outright repeal Section 3(1)(c) of the Land Acquisition Act 1960 in the Parliament session scheduled in June.

Surendran said the group learnt about the Kampung Sungai Baru MAS status last year.

"This is shocking as by then, the land had already been taken over," said Surendran, who is former Padang Serai MP.

Zaid said Section 3(1)(c) of the Land Acquisition Act 1960 is unconstitutional and should be abolished, adding that the existing law failed to protect the interests of landowners.

The Kampung Sungai Baru land acquisition, which was completed in August 2023, was done in accordance with the Land Acquisition Act 1960, involving 110 units that included 37 terrace house lots, 72 flat units and one TNB electricity substation lot.

The residents received compensation between February 2022 and January 2023 from the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur Land and Mines Office.

However, some of the residents held a demonstration opposing the low rate of compensation that was proposed by the developer Ritzy Gloss Sdn Bhd, which was RM450 per square foot.



Zainab with Surendran showing the map indicating the land to be a MAS area.

— ADIB RAWI
YAHYA/THESUN

Sarawak to boost Asean connectivity with AirBorneo

KUCHING: Sarawak's own airline, AirBorneo, which is scheduled to commence operations next year, carries the state's aspiration to enhance regional connectivity among Asean nations, said Premier Tan Sri Abang Johari Abang Openg.

He said the move to run its own airline is one of the state's efforts to strengthen regional collaboration with fellow Asean members, particularly to boost trade, investment and tourism by leveraging its strategic location, abundant resources and cultural ties to drive regional growth and uplift livelihoods.

"In line with our aspirations for regional connectivity, Sarawak is proud to announce the upcoming launch of our airline, AirBorneo, scheduled to commence operations in 2026," he said in his speech at the 33rd Asean Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council Meeting gala dinner on Thursday.

The text of the speech was read out by his

deputy Datuk Amar Awang Tengah Ali Hasan.

Abang Johari also said the commitment to enhance air connectivity would make travelling and doing business with major and capital cities across Asean faster and easier.

He said the development of a new international airport, and a deep-sea port in Tanjung Embang, Kota Samarahan, would transform Sarawak into a regional aviation and marine hub.

This will improve air and sea connectivity while increasing the state's appeal to the business community, investors and tourists, he added.

Abang Johari said Sarawak could also play a vital role in strengthening the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East Asean Growth Area, which is a subregional initiative to complement Asean's broader economic integration agenda.

"Our shared land borders with Brunei

Darussalam and Kalimantan, Indonesia, open doors for cross-border economic development through strategic initiatives.

"The relocation of Indonesia's capital city to Kalimantan will generate significant economic spillover effects for Borneo Island, creating new opportunities for investment, trade and infrastructure development," he said.

The dinner was also attended by Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing and Asean secretary-general Dr Kao Kim Houn.

The ongoing ASCC Council Meeting is a biannual ministerial-level gathering focused on addressing key socio-cultural issues across the Asean region.

This year's meeting, from April 22 to 26, welcomed representatives from all 11 Asean nations, namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and Timor-Leste. — Bernama

Probe into Sungai Bidor water pollution

IPOH: The Perak Veterinary Services Department and the Environment Department have launched a probe into alleged pollution of Sungai Bidor.

State Human Resources, Health, Indian Community Affairs and Integration Committee chairman A. Sivanesan said the agencies conducted an on-site check yesterday and collected water samples from strategic locations for laboratory analyses.

"Samples were collected from a pig farm and a duck farm at Batu 2 1/2, Jalan Bruseh, near Bidor. Inspections revealed that the pig farm is in compliance with the required regulations. Effluent samples were taken from both the discharge end of the farm and the discharge pipe in the river area, and the samples have been sent for Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) testing.

"A probe into the duck farm revealed that it does not use ponds for rearing ducks. Therefore, no pond wastewater is being discharged into the river," he said at a press conference with state Science, Environment, and Green Technology Committee chairman Teh Kok Lim at the Perak Darul Ridzuan Building on Thursday.

On Wednesday, PAS vice-president Datuk Idris Ahmad urged the state government to investigate a pig farm in Kampung Poh, which he claims contributes to pollution in Sungai Bidor.

Sivanesan said the analyses results are expected next week, as specified under the Pig Farming Control Enactment 1992.

"Based on sampling records conducted in 2024 and in January, the BOD readings for the farm in question complied with the minimum permitted level. Wastewater discharge should not exceed 50ppm. — Bernama

Terengganu to ban sale of vape products

KUALA TERENGGANU: The Terengganu government will ban the sale of electronic cigarette (vape) products at all premises throughout the state beginning Aug 1.

State Local Government, Housing and Health Committee chairman Datuk Wan Sukairi Wan Abdullah said the decision, made at the state executive councillors meeting on Wednesday, was a proactive measure to curb the sale and use of vape products, which may have negative health effects on the younger generation.

"Among the agreed decisions is that the state government will maintain its existing policy of not approving a business licence for any premises selling vape products, in line with the by-laws in effect across all local authority areas in Terengganu.

"Business licence conditions will also be refined to ensure the vape sales ban can be fully enforced," he said in a statement on Thursday.

Wan Sukairi added that any vape business operators who continue selling after the ban takes effect will face strict action under the Local Government Act 1976 bylaws, including fines, seizures and court action.

To demonstrate commitment and firmness, the state has also decided not to accept any form of sponsorship from vape manufacturers or distributors for any events involving the state government, he said.

"A three-month grace from May 1 to July 31 will be provided before full enforcement begins on Aug 1, including actions related to vape business advertisements.

"To support affected vape operators, the state, through the Entrepreneur Development Foundation, will offer participation in entrepreneurship courses as well as other business opportunities in more sustainable and safer sectors," he said. — Bernama

Daulat Tuanku

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Eight plead guilty to extorting, intimidating and confining man

JOHOR BAHRU: Seven men and a woman pleaded guilty in the Magistrate's Court here yesterday to charges of criminal intimidation, extortion and wrongful confinement of a man at a house in Plentong last week.

Muhammad Aqmal Hafifi Mustafa Kamal, 25, Ahmad Rushdi Jumadi, 23, Muhammad Nur Shafiq Abdullah, 25, Muhammad Haikal Zulkarnain, 19, Mohamad Amierul Hakim Shamsuri, 23, Mohamad Danish Hakim Kamaruddin, 20, Syamsul Hamiey Saiful Razali, 19, and Nuredrianna Balqisyyh Anabella Norazman, 22, made the plea before Magistrate Atifah Hazimah Wahab.

On one of the counts, they were charged under Section 506 of the Penal Code with criminally intimidating Muhammad Faris Syahmi Mohd Ridzwan, 22.

On two other counts, the eight individuals were charged under sections 384 and 342 of the Penal Code for extortion and wrongful confinement respectively.

On the extortion charge, they are alleged to have intentionally put fear into the victim by beating him, thereby dishonestly inducing him to hand over RM650 via an e-wallet account and the keys to a Yamaha Y16 motorcycle to Mohamad Amierul Hakim.

On the charge of wrongful confinement, the eight accused were charged with committing the offence together with two others still at large.

The seven men were also charged under Section 323 of the Penal Code with causing hurt to the victim.

All the offences were allegedly committed at an apartment at Plentong in Masai between 10am on April 18 and 4am the following day.

The magistrate allowed the seven accused men bail of RM16,000 each in one surety for all charges, while Nuredrianna Balqisyyh Anabella was allowed bail of RM14,000 in one surety. — Bernama

Data sought on rape, incest cases

PUTRAJAYA: The Women, Family and Community Development Ministry will cooperate with police to obtain accurate data on the sharp increase in rape and incest cases in Kelantan.

Minister Datuk Seri Nancy Shukri said the collaboration is a key priority before issuing any statement or identifying suitable approaches to address the issue.

"We are working with police to obtain verified information. Our statements are based on police data and investigation outcomes," she said yesterday.

She was responding to media reports on April 9 citing Kelantan police chief Datuk Mohd Yusoff Mamat, who revealed a yearly increase of such cases.

According to Mohd Yusoff, 252 cases were recorded in 2024 compared with 206 in 2023, a 22.3% rise, with some perpetrators as young as 10 years old.

Nancy also highlighted the progress of the Anti-Sexual Harassment Tribunal (TAGS), which has resolved 27 out of 38 complaints within 60 days. TAGS was established to handle sexual harassment cases occurring on or after March 8, 2024, offering an alternative to civil courts. — Bernama

Spotlight on dangers of over-reliance on AI

■ BY DEEPALAKSHMI MANICKAM
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➤ Recent *Jalur Gemilang* gaffes highlight importance of human oversight in content generating process

PETALING JAYA: A string of slip-ups in images of the *Jalur Gemilang* involving a national paper, global expo and ministry report has shone a spotlight on the risks of unchecked AI use.

Universiti Malaysia Kelantan Institute for Artificial Intelligence and Big Data (Aibig) director Dr Muhammad Akmal Remli said such errors point to flaws in how global AI models are trained and deployed, especially when it comes to culturally specific content.

"Inaccuracies like a wrongly rendered *Jalur Gemilang* happen because the AI model may not have had sufficient exposure to correct representations of Malaysian symbols during training," he said, adding that while some AI tools perform impressively when generating generic content, they often falter with highly specific cultural or national elements such as flags.

"AI can generate a wide range of

content such as text, voice, images and videos based on prompts. But what many do not realise is when AI is asked to create an image of a classroom with a Malaysian flag, the outcome depends on how the AI interprets those prompts through numerical tokens and what it has learnt from its training data."

Muhammad Akmal said this reflects a broader issue — many generative AI models are built and trained within global frameworks that often under-represent countries like Malaysia.

"Global AI models frequently lack sufficient regional and cultural training data. There is an opportunity here for Malaysia to develop its own AI systems."

He said with government backing, local startups and tech companies could step up and train

models using Malaysian data involving cultural symbols, traditions and languages.

Muhammad Akmal also said using AI in government and media settings, especially for public content, requires greater caution.

"Incidents like these are a wake-up call. We must use AI responsibly, not just chase trends."

He emphasised the need for safeguards at several levels, including determining if AI-generated content is even necessary, and conducting rigorous reviews before publication.

"Human oversight is not optional. It is essential."

While some have called for new laws to regulate AI, Muhammad Akmal said Malaysia already has a framework in place.

The National Guidelines on AI

Governance and Ethics issued by the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry last year aim to encourage responsible AI use across all sectors.

"Instead of piling on new rules, the focus should be on tightening implementation through proper training and awareness, among government and media professionals," he said, adding that AI should complement and not replace human decision-making.

"AI is a tool. It can help spark ideas or automate tasks, but humans must still lead. Particularly with editorial or official content, relying solely on AI without verifying the output could result in serious slip-ups."

"Experts can spot errors AI might overlook. This collaboration delivers efficiency without compromising accuracy, which is critical when dealing with culturally or nationally sensitive content."

He also urged developers to improve the quality and diversity of training data.

"Biases or inaccuracies in datasets will inevitably surface in AI output. Developers must aim for high-quality, representative data, especially in culturally sensitive areas."

Despite the recent flag-related blunders, Muhammad Akmal believes public confidence in AI remains intact.

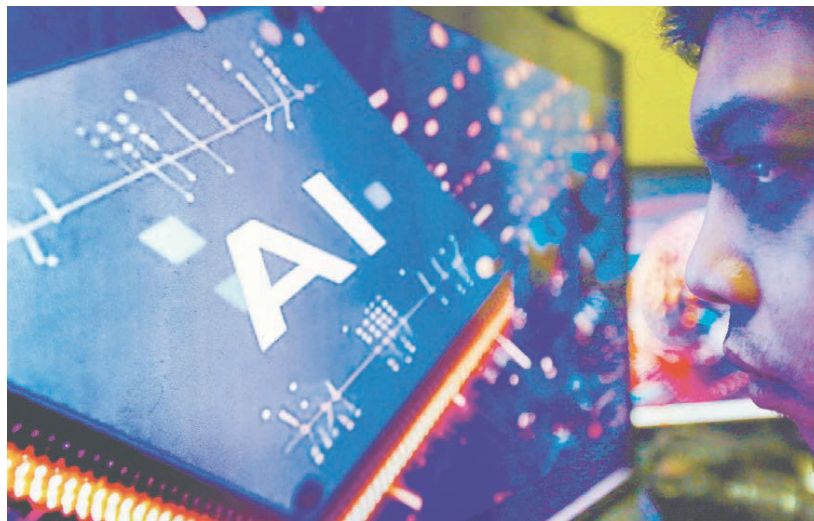
"I don't think trust in AI has been lost. Most people will likely see this as a human oversight. But it's a timely reminder that working with AI requires extra care, especially when national identity is involved."

To promote responsible AI use, he called for proactive public engagement.

"Institutions should hold dialogues, training sessions and awareness campaigns for the public on responsible AI practices."

"At Aibig, we run regular training programmes to equip participants with best practices in AI safety and ethics."

Muhammad Akmal said as Malaysia advances into the digital era, AI can be a powerful ally, but only when guided by human judgement, local insight and ethical responsibility.



Muhammad Akmal said although AI can help spark ideas or automate tasks, humans must lead the process, particularly with editorial or official content. — ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THESUN

Be wary of dubious QR codes, public cautioned

SINGAPORE: The usage of quick response (QR) codes has become the new normal, from banking services and exchanging contacts to ordering food.

However, with the rise in QR code usage, cybersecurity firm Kaspersky has cautioned Malaysians to remain vigilant against a growing threat — QR scams.

According to its lead security researcher Noushin Shabab, QR scams are a new form of cyber threat in which attackers generate malicious QR codes that compromise cyber safety.

"QR scams happen when a code

is turned into a malicious one, potentially stealing information or money, or causing other complications that jeopardise safety."

"With increased usage of QR codes in Malaysia, more attackers are seeing this as an opportunity to exploit," she said in an interview with Bernama at the GITEX Asia 2025 event here yesterday.

The Bukit Aman Commercial Crime Investigation Department reported 12,110 cases of online fraud or scams in the first quarter of 2025, with RM573.7 million in losses compared with 10,715 cases involving RM519.9 million from

October to December 2024.

According to the DataReportal Digital 2025 Global Overview Report, Malaysia ranks second after China in QR code usage, involving 66.1% of the population.

Noushin explained that QR scams often involve attackers replacing legitimate QR codes in public places with malicious ones, tricking users into scanning them.

These QR codes are usually placed over original ones on billboards or posters and redirect users to a malicious website.

Kaspersky security evangelist Oleg Gorobets said users can

protect themselves by installing certified security software on their phones that can detect suspicious activity.

Additionally, Noushin advised users to take extra precautions when scanning QR codes in public spaces and to always verify the source.

"For example, if there is a random QR sticker on a billboard or wall, that's not safe."

"Or if someone you just met offers a QR code to connect with them, that is also a red flag. Know the source. Ask where it came from, why it's there, and what it leads to before scanning," she said.

F&B carton recycling project takes off at Ipoh mall

■ BY P. CHANDRA SAGARAN
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

IPOH: A new concept in recycling that focuses on food and beverage outlets at shopping malls was launched at Aeon Mall Station 18 here recently.

The project known as 'Sort & Drop - Recycle the Cartons' is an initiative to separate and recycle used beverage cartons at malls. It is developed by Tetra Pak in collaboration with collection partner KPT Recycle.

The launch was officiated Ipoh City Council secretary Ahmad Munir Ishak.

The project is supported by the Housing and Local Government Ministry's Urban Sustainability Division, the management of Aeon Mall and the city council.

It introduces a digital collection mechanism that encompasses a collection kiosk for used beverage cartons and is connected to the RE: Connect app by KPT Recycle.

With this system, the 32 food and beverage outlets in the mall now have access to a user-friendly facility to recycle their cartons.

The system can track and monitor, collecting data for record purposes.

In his address, Ahmad Munir said the pilot project will be introduced to other malls in Ipoh, and is also expected to be implemented nationwide in phases.

"The project is to protect the environment and reduce disposal of waste at landfill sites," he said.

It will contribute to the nation's circular economy in line with the Circular Economy Roadmap for Solid Waste (2025-2030).

He added that the "CAREton" project to recycle drinks at events has collected 260kg of packets with the cooperation of Perak State Education Department and the North Kinta Education office.

The council has since 2023 signed MoUs with five companies on recycling of waste to convert to trash for cash.

It is also targeting to reduce carbon emission by 45 percent through circular economy activities by 2030.

Australian army chief joins Anzac Day memorials

KOTA KINABALU: Australia's Chief of Army Lieutenant General Simon Stuart participated in a series of deeply meaningful commemorative events to mark Anzac Day in Malaysia this week.

Stuart, who is on a visit to Malaysia till today, was accompanied by Australian high commissioner Danielle Heinecke to Labuan and Sabah to officiate at the ceremonies.

He first honoured the fallen at the Labuan War Cemetery where over 3,900 Australian, allied and local forces who died fighting for the recovery of Sabah and Sarawak between 1942 and 1945 are buried.

More than half of the

Service held for fallen Aussie, British soldiers, and locals who aided, died with them

headstones are unnamed. The Labuan memorial honours those who have no known grave.

On Thursday, Stuart joined senior government and Malaysian Armed Forces representatives at the Kota Kinabalu Anzac Day Service at the North Borneo War Monument in the city.

This was followed by a visit to the nearby Sabah, Australia, New Zealand Army Corps (Sanzac) School which was established by

veterans and their families in 1969.

Stuart also officiated at a dawn service at the Sandakan Memorial Park located on the site of the Second World War Sandakan prisoner of war (POW) camp yesterday.

The service remembered not only Australian and British soldiers held as POWs by imperial Japanese forces, but also the local communities who aided and died with them both in the war camp

and on the death marches to Ranau.

The event is remembered as one of the worst atrocities ever inflicted on Australians in war.

Of the more than 2,400 prisoners alive at the beginning of 1945, only six, who escaped into the jungle and were sheltered by local communities, survived.

Earlier, Stuart had attended a roundtable with strategic thinkers at Universiti Malaya on Wednesday.

He outlined how Australia is navigating its security and defence as an active middle power, and discussed non-traditional security threats and responses.



Stuart (5th left) and Heinecke (6th right) with dignitaries and officials at the North Borneo War Monument. Pic courtesy of Australian High Commission in Malaysia.

First internationally branded hotel in Seremban by year-end

PUTRAJAYA: Seremban will soon have its first internationally branded hotel as the Aloft Seremban, under Marriott International Inc., is expected to open in the city by the end of 2025.

This was announced at a ceremony to sign an agreement between Marriott International and Citta Worldwide Sdn Bhd to introduce Aloft Hotels to Seremban.

The event was held at Marriott Putrajaya on Wednesday.

Strategically located in the heart of the Negri Sembilan state capital, Aloft Seremban will be part of an integrated commercial development comprising retail and office spaces.

Ranked as a 4-star hotel, it will be directly linked to Terminal 1 Shopping Centre, one of the city's key retail destinations, and will offer connectivity to major transportation hubs, including the upcoming Seremban Sentral railway station.

"Aloft Seremban will redefine the hospitality landscape in Seremban, offering a dynamic and stylish stay experience that aligns with the city's evolving urban profile," said Datuk Seri

Dr Chai Kee Kan, chairman of Citta Worldwide.

"We are proud to collaborate with Marriott International to introduce a brand that embodies an upbeat and vibrant energy, reflecting the character of Seremban itself," added Chai, who is also the founder and CEO of KK Super Mart.

He said this after signing the agreement with Andree Susilo, Marriott International's vice-president (development) for Asia Pacific.

Witnessing them was Transport Minister Anthony Loke, who is also the MP for Seremban.

Also present were Citta Worldwide managing director Datuk Pardip Kumar Kukreja, and Marriott International vice-president and senior legal counsel Huilin Goh.

With its modern design and strategic location, Aloft Seremban is aimed as a hospitality landmark in Negri Sembilan, further strengthening Marriott's presence in Malaysia.

"Aloft Seremban represents a milestone in Marriott International's



Chai (3rd left) holding the signed agreement with Susilo, witnessed by Loke (centre). With them are Pardip (2nd left) and Goh (3rd right).

growth in Malaysia, and we are delighted to be working with Citta Worldwide to bring this vibrant and design-forward brand to Seremban," said Susilo.

"This hotel will introduce a fresh hospitality experience to the city, catering to modern travellers who seek style, innovation, and convenience."

Aloft Seremban is expected to feature 173 contemporary rooms and suites, designed with signature amenities.

Plans for dining and social venues include an all-day dining restaurant with a semi-open kitchen, ReFuel - a Grab & Go concept, and the brand's signature W XYZ Bar.

The hotel's meeting and event

spaces are anticipated to span 300 sqm, featuring a function room that can be divided into three sections and two dedicated meeting rooms. Design plans also call for the hotel to feature a 25m outdoor swimming pool with a sun deck and a 75sq m Re:Charge fitness centre, providing guests with leisure and wellness facilities.

Singapore PM calls for unity

▷ PAP kicks off election rally

SINGAPORE: Prime Minister Lawrence Wong began the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) election rally with a call for unity, urging voters not to let external forces or differing views on global issues divide the nation during the heat of the campaign.

The PAP secretary-general cautioned that the election period often presents fertile ground for tensions to be stirred, which, if not managed carefully, could be exploited and turn Singaporeans against one another.

"Remember, above all, when the election is over, after all the excitement, the real contest is not the PAP versus the opposition. It is Singapore versus the world. It is our little red dot versus a dangerous and troubled world," he said during his one-hour address at the Woodlands Stadium.

This marks the first physical general election rally in Singapore since 2015, following a ban on such gatherings in 2020 due to public health concerns.

Wong also called on all political parties contesting in the general election to uphold the principles of multiracial politics and refrain from inflaming sensitive issues.

He emphasised that, despite political differences, all are Singaporeans "first and foremost".

"Make sure that politics stops at the water's edge, meaning when it comes to our national interests, our sovereignty, our security, our place in the world, don't use domestic politics to divide Singaporeans. There must be unity," he said.

Turning to economic issues, Wong urged voters to support the PAP to sustain the Singapore "miracle" amid a period of global turbulence, citing factors such as US tariffs and the trade war.

He said the PAP has chosen not to downplay the risks, even though it has been accused by the



Workers' Party supporters attending a rally on Thursday. – REUTERS/SPIC

opposition of fear-mongering and exaggerating challenges.

Wong said uncertainty from the tariffs has caused concern among businesses, which are already feeling the impact.

"But even those that are not directly exposed are very worried because the rules keep changing. The announcements by the US keep shifting," he said.

Wong said the PAP's top priority is addressing economic uncertainties – particularly issues related to the cost of living and employment –

adding that the party is closely monitoring the situation and is prepared to step up support if needed.

Wong is leading the PAP team contesting the Marsiling-Yew Tee Group Representation Constituency, where they are facing the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) in the four-member constituency.

Besides the PAP rally, there were four other rallies across the country on Thursday night held by the People's Power Party, Progress Singapore Party, Workers' Party and SDP. – Bernama

'Revive Our Ocean' initiative takes off

SINGAPORE: A new initiative backed by British naturalist David Attenborough was launched on Thursday to help communities profit from efforts to protect at least 30% of the world's oceans by the end of the decade.

The initiative, dubbed Revive Our Ocean, is led by the NGO Dynamic Planet together with the National Geographic Society's Pristine Seas programme and will assist local communities in their efforts to establish "marine protected areas" in coastal waters.

It will focus initially on tackling overfishing and ocean impacts in Britain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, Mexico, the Philippines and Indonesia.

"The worst enemy of fishing is overfishing," said Enric Sala, executive director of National Geographic Pristine Seas.

Organisers behind the initiative said that establishing marine protected areas would also

have economic benefits, noting a study showing that they improved fishing yields and also boosted tourism.

"Marine protected areas (MPAs) are good businesses," said Kristin Rechberger, the founder of Revive Our Ocean.

They also said MPA creation has been far too slow, noting that more than 190,000 protected areas would need to be established to meet the "30 by 30" target – to bring 30% of the oceans under formal protection by 2030.

"Reviving marine life revives local economies and communities. It's time for the world to recognise that MPAs are the building blocks of the blue economy," Rechberger said.

Countries are meeting in New York this week to discuss how to implement and finance a global treaty agreed in 2023 to protect ocean biodiversity. The treaty will go into effect once

it has been formally ratified by 60 governments.

Though more than 100 countries signed the treaty, only 21 have ratified it. More ratifications are expected ahead of the UN Ocean Conference in France in June.

"Countries are really pulling out all the stops to fast track ratification in a number of places," said Rebecca Hubbard, director of the High Seas Alliance, a coalition of environmental groups.

Environmental groups say the agreement needs to come into effect this year if the world is to meet its target. Currently, only about 8%, or 29 million sq km, is protected.

Though the United States was involved in setting up the treaty, it has been absent from this week's negotiations, and is now not expected to ratify it. – Reuters

Bribery indictment political, says former South Korea president

SEOUL: South Korea's former president Moon Jae-in said yesterday that prosecutors were becoming political and abusing their power and that his indictment on bribery charges was a good example.

Prosecutors indicted Moon for alleged bribery on Thursday, making him the latest former leader of the country to face legal troubles in a case linked to the employment of his then son-in-law at a Thai airline between 2018 and 2020.

Moon said the indictment against him was unfair and accused the prosecutors of pursuing the case in a predetermined direction.

"Beyond revealing my personal innocence, I plan to focus on properly uncovering and

informing the public about the abuse and politicisation of the prosecution's power," he said during a meeting with National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-sik.

Prosecutors had been investigating whether former lawmaker Lee Sang-jik's appointment as the head of the SMEs and Startups Agency was in exchange for Moon's former son-in-law getting a job and receiving a salary plus living expenses at the Thai-based corporation that Lee controlled, Jeonju District Prosecutors' Office said in a statement.

Lee was indicted for bribery and breach of trust in the case, according to the statement.

In a statement, Moon's lawyers denied the accusations and said what his former son-in-law received were salaries for his work.

They also accused prosecutors of politically targeting Moon ahead of a snap presidential election officially set for June 3 following the impeachment and removal from office of president Yoon Suk Yeol over his short-lived martial law declaration.

Lee Jae-myung, the ex-leader of the liberal Democratic Party (DP), is leading opinion polls with a double-digit gap with candidates from the conservative People Power Party (PPP).

Moon is from the DP, while Yoon is from the PPP.

Prosecutors referenced previous bribery cases involving former presidents Park Geun-hye and Lee Myung-bak, both of whom were convicted and jailed, as precedents for Moon's indictment. – Reuters

BRIEFS

FIVE COPS KILLED IN PLANE CRASH

BANGKOK: Five police officers were killed when a small plane crashed into the sea during a parachute training drill yesterday. The crash occurred around 8am (9am in Kuala Lumpur) off the coast of Prachuap Khiri Khan province south of Bangkok. Police spokesman Archayon Kraithong said five of the six officers on board were killed, while the sixth is in hospital. Authorities are examining black box data to determine the cause of crash. Media reported the aircraft went down about 100m from the shore in Cha-am district, a popular weekend getaway around 130km southwest of the capital. Social media footage showed the plane spiralling before plunging into the sea, with people wading through chest-deep water to reach the site. – AFP

THAI AVIATION SAFETY RATING UPGRADED

WASHINGTON: The Federal Aviation Administration said it had upgraded Thailand's air safety rating to "Category 1" a decade after a downgrade, paving the way for direct US-Thailand flights to resume. Thai airlines could not launch or expand services to the United States, either directly or as a code-share partner, under the International Aviation Safety Assessment "Category 2" rating the FAA had assigned in 2015 due to a shortage of technical officers and certification problems in transporting hazardous goods. The top rating shows compliance with International Civil Aviation Organisation standards. In 2017, Thailand resolved a significant safety concern. – Reuters

Paetongtarn hospitalised

BANGKOK: Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra was admitted to hospital with a high fever shortly after returning from an official visit to Cambodia, a government spokesperson said yesterday.

Paetongtarn travelled to Cambodia this week for a two-day visit, during which she met Prime Minister Hun Manet to discuss cooperation on issues such as online scams and air pollution.

The two leaders also discussed leveraging Asean as a platform to negotiate with US President Donald Trump on trade tariffs.

"After the prime minister returned home, she had a high fever and went to see a doctor. The doctor advised that she be admitted for a check-up," said government spokesperson Jirayu Huangsap.

He said the prime minister's schedule would be postponed or delegated to a deputy including meetings with e-commerce CEO Chris Feng and former British prime minister Tony Blair.

Paetongtarn's husband Pidok Sooksawas posted an Instagram story showing the Thai leader resting in a hospital bed.

"You didn't listen to anyone. Your body has warned you that you couldn't take it," he wrote in the caption.

The Thai PM's visit to Cambodia marked the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two neighbours. – AFP

Australia, New Zealand honour military

SYDNEY: Thousands gathered across Australia and New Zealand yesterday for Anzac Day, a public holiday commemorating military service members who fought and died during wartime.

Anzac Day originally marked the nations' role in an unsuccessful campaign to capture the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey during World War I, which resulted in 130,000 deaths on both sides of the conflict.

In a key episode on April 25, 1915, thousands of troops from the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (Anzac) took part in an amphibious invasion by British Empire forces on the area's narrow beaches.

Today, Anzac Day honours all Australian and New Zealand troops who have served in conflict. One of the largest services marking the day, a public holiday in both nations, was held at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra where more than 26,000 attended. Services in state capitals Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane, Adelaide and Hobart also drew crowds.

The Melbourne event was marred by booing from some in the crowd during an indigenous Welcome To Country ceremony, behaviour that Albanese labelled as an act of 'cowardice on a day when we honour courage and sacrifice'.

A prominent neo-Nazi was escorted from the event by police.

Overseas, memorials were held at Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey, which has long drawn visitors from Australia and New Zealand, as well as at sites of wartime significance in France, Thailand, Papua New Guinea and Malaysia.

Peter Dutton, leader of the National-Liberal coalition, Albanese's main opponent in Australia's May 3 general election, said the services "pay tribute to Australians who made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation".

In New Zealand, which contributed about one in six troops to the Gallipoli campaign, memorials also took place, including a large service at the country's war memorial in Wellington. — Reuters

WTO rejects EU claims in dispute with China

GENEVA: A World Trade Organisation panel rejected on Thursday the European Union's claims that China had violated the global watchdog's rules on intellectual property.

The WTO panel concluded that the EU had not demonstrated inconsistencies with WTO rules. However, it did say that China had failed to comply with all WTO transparency obligations.

The European Union filed the complaint against China in 2022, alleging that Chinese courts were preventing European companies from protecting their telecom technology patents.

It had alleged violations of the WTO's agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights.

The EU successfully proved to the panel that China had an unwritten policy allowing courts to issue Anti-Suit injunctions (ASI) orders that stopped parties from pursuing related cases in foreign courts.

However, the EU did not prove that this policy violated specific parts of the WTO's intellectual property rules.

The panel also did not find evidence that Chinese courts were unfair or inconsistent in applying the law.

China did, however, violate its transparency obligations by not publishing a final judicial decision involving a Chinese smartphone maker and a US-based company that owns patents for mobile technology, a Geneva-based trade source confirmed. The panel said China also should have responded to some of the EU's requests for information.

The findings were already shared with the parties in February, but have not been made public until now. The EU has publicly said it will appeal against the result.

The appeal will go to the Multi-Party Appeal Arbitration Arrangement. — Reuters

Indian, Pakistani troops exchange fire in Kashmir

UN urges maximum restraint, negotiations

NEW DELHI: Troops from Pakistan and India exchanged fire across the Line of Control in disputed Kashmir, officials said yesterday, after the United Nations urged the nuclear-armed rivals to show "maximum restraint" following a deadly shooting in the region.

Relations have plunged to their lowest level in years, with India accusing Pakistan of supporting "cross-border terrorism" after gunmen carried out the worst attack on civilians in Kashmir for a quarter of a century.

Syed Ashfaq Gilani, a government official in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, said troops exchanged fire along the Line of Control (LOC) that separates the two countries.

"There was no firing on the civilian population," he said.

India's army confirmed there had been limited firing of small arms that it said had been "initiated by Pakistan", adding it had been "effectively responded to".

On Thursday, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters in New York that issues between the countries "can be and should be

resolved peacefully through meaningful mutual engagement".

"We very much appeal to both the governments ... to exercise maximum restraint, and to ensure that the situation and the developments we've seen do not deteriorate any further," he said.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has vowed to hunt down the gunmen responsible for killing 26 civilians at the popular tourist site of Pahalgam, after Indian police identified two of the three fugitive gunmen as Pakistani.

Denying any involvement, Islamabad called attempts to link Pakistan to the attack "frivolous" and vowed to respond to any action.

"Any threat to Pakistan's sovereignty and to the security of its people will be met with firm reciprocal measures," a statement said, after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held a rare national security meeting with military chiefs.

Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since their independence in 1947, with both claiming the territory in full but governing separate portions of it.

Rebels have waged an insurgency in Indian-controlled Kashmir since 1989, demanding independence or a merger with Pakistan.

India's air force and navy both carried out military exercises on Thursday.

Indian police say the three gunmen are

members of the Lashkar-e-Taiba group, a UN-designated terrorist organisation.

They offered a US\$23,500 (RM102,871)) bounty for information leading to each man's arrest.

A day after the attack, New Delhi suspended a water-sharing treaty, announced the closure of the main border crossing with Pakistan, downgraded diplomatic ties and withdrew visas for Pakistanis.

In response, Islamabad ordered the expulsion of Indian diplomats and military advisers, cancelling visas for Indian nationals — with the exception of Sikh pilgrims — and closing the main border crossing from its side.

Pakistan also warned any attempt by India to stop the supply of water from the Indus River would be an "act of war".

Pahalgam marks a dramatic shift in recent rebel attacks, which typically target security forces.

Experts say that a military response may still be in the pipeline.

Indian security forces have launched a vast manhunt for the attackers, with large numbers of people detained.

The attack has enraged nationalist groups, and students from Kashmir at institutions across India have reported experiencing harassment and intimidation. — AFP



Police holding back protesters marching towards the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi on Thursday. — AFP/IC

US Attorney's Office apologises for filing error

NEW YORK: The US Attorney's Office in Manhattan apologised on Thursday for accidentally filing an internal government letter that cast significant doubt on the Transportation Department's effort to kill New York's congestion pricing programme.

Lawyers for the office on Wednesday erroneously filed an April 11 letter that said it was very unlikely that Judge Lewis Liman or further courts would uphold Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy's decision.

A spokesperson for Duffy blasted the Attorney's Office suggesting they were either incompetent or attempting to intentionally obstruct the effort.

"At the very least, it's legal malpractice. It's sad to see a premier legal organisation continue to fall into such disgrace," the spokesperson said.

A spokesperson for the Attorney's Office said the filing was "an honest error and was not intentional in any way. Upon realising the error, we took steps to have the document removed. We look forward to vigorously advocate in the best interest of our clients, the DOT and (Federal Highway Administration)."

The office apologised for the error in a letter to Liman on Thursday and asked him to seal the filing. New York in early January launched its programme that charges most passenger vehicles a US\$9 (RM39) toll during peak periods

to enter Manhattan south of 60th Street to reduce congestion and raise money for mass transit improvements. Duffy on Monday told New York Governor Kathy Hochul USDOT may withhold environmental approvals or project funding if the state does not end congestion pricing.

This week, Hochul ignored a deadline set by Duffy to end the programme. Hochul's office said on Thursday the government's filing "doesn't change the facts: congestion pricing is legal, it's working and the cameras are staying on".

Opponents, including Duffy, say the scheme takes money from working people and leaves drivers without a free highway option. — Reuters



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SCAN ME

BRIEFS

SPAIN SCRAPS ISRAEL ARMS DEAL

MADRID: Spain on Thursday cancelled a contract to buy bullets from an Israeli company following pressure from the government's far-left coalition partner. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez halted weapons transactions with Israel after the outbreak of the war in 2023. The Interior Ministry sought to terminate the US\$7.8 million (RM34 million) contract with Israeli firm IMI Systems, which was to supply bullets to the Spanish Civil Guard. But on Wednesday the ministry said it had abandoned its attempt to cancel the deal after state legal services advised against it. On Thursday sources said the contract would be "unilaterally" terminated. – AFP

BRAZIL COURT REJECTS EX-PRESIDENT'S APPEAL

BRASILIA: A Brazil Supreme Court judge rejected former president Fernando Collor de Mello's appeal on Thursday, reimposing his nearly nine-year prison sentence on corruption and money laundering charges. De Mello was forced to resign in 1992 after congress began impeachment proceedings. Alexandre de Moraes, of the Federal Supreme Court, rejected the second appeal and determined the arrest of Fernando Collor de Mello, the court said. The decision is "immediately" enforceable but will be put to a vote by the full Supreme Court. In 2023, the 75-year-old former president was sentenced to eight years and 10 months for receiving US\$3.5 million (RM15.3 million) in bribes. – AFP

TRUMP TO SIGN DEEP-SEA MINING ORDER

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump is expected to sign an executive order on Thursday to boost the deep-sea mining industry, the latest attempt to tap international deposits of critical minerals. The order will ease permits for mining in international waters and let companies bypass a review process. The International Seabed Authority has for years been considering standards for deep-sea mining in international waters, although it has yet to formalise them due to unresolved differences over acceptable levels of dust, noise and other factors from the practice. – Reuters

PLO creates vice-president post

Move paves way for succession

RAMALLAH: The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) voted on Thursday to establish the position of vice-president, paving the way for a successor to Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas.

The move follows years of foreign calls to reform the organisation, and comes as Arab and Western powers envision an expanded role for Abbas' Palestinian Authority in the governance of the Gaza Strip.

"A vote was held to create the position of vice-president," said Rizq Namoura, a member of the PLO's central council. He said the outcome was "almost unanimous"

in favour of establishing a number two role for the first time in the organisation's history.

The Palestinian news agency Wafa confirmed the vote.

Palestinian analyst Aref Jaffal said the new role was created to pave the way for someone to take the reins from Abbas, now 89, "as there are many things the Palestinian situation requires".

"The Palestinian political system

is already miserable, so I believe that all these arrangements are a prelude to creating a successor to Abbas," said Jaffal, the director of the Al-Marsad Election Monitoring Centre.

In March, at a summit in Cairo about Gaza's post-war future, Abbas had announced he would create a vice-presidency within the PLO, of which he is chairman.

Foreign backers of the Palestinian Authority (PA) – which exercises limited administrative control in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, and is also headed by Abbas as president – have long asked that both it and the PLO be reformed.

Abbas has been head of the PA since 2005 following the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

The following year he was elected to a four-year term, with no presidential vote since.

Founded in 1964, the PLO is empowered to negotiate and sign international treaties on behalf of the Palestinian people, while the PA is responsible for governance in parts of the Palestinian territories.

The PLO is an umbrella organisation comprising several Palestinian factions, but not Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which are at war with Israeli forces in Gaza.

In the event of Abbas' death or resignation, the vice-president would be expected to become the acting head of the PLO and of the State of Palestine, which is recognised by nearly 150 countries, according to Palestinian officials.

The PLO has been holding a convention in Ramallah since Wednesday to thrash out various political issues.

Hamas criticised the convention, saying it "deepens division, reinforces unilateralism, and disappoints our people's hopes for unity".

Several Palestinian factions in the West Bank walked out of the meet on Thursday after the proposal to create a vice-presidency came up. – AFP



A woman pulls up a bucket of water to the upper storey of a damaged building in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip. – AFP

Military strikes kill 44 in Gaza

CAIRO: An Israeli airstrike hit a police station in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip on Thursday, killing at least 10 people, local health authorities said, and Israel's military said it had struck a command centre of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Medics said two Israeli missiles hit the police station near a market, which led to the wounding of dozens of people in addition to the 10 deaths. The identities of those killed were not immediately clear.

The Israeli military said in a statement apparently referring to the incident, that it attacked a

command and control centre operated by Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Jabalia.

It accused groups of exploiting civilians and civil properties for military purposes, an allegation Hamas and other factions deny.

Local health authorities said Israeli airstrikes have killed at least 34 other people across the enclave, bringing Thursday's death toll to 44.

The Gaza Health Ministry said the Durra Children's Hospital in Gaza City had become non-operational, a day after an Israeli strike hit the upper part of the building,

damaging the intensive care unit and destroying the facility's solar power panel system.

No one was killed. There was no Israeli comment on the incident.

Israel's military said on Thursday that one soldier was killed during combat in the northern Gaza Strip, while an officer and a reservist were severely injured.

Gaza's health system has been devastated by Israel's 18-month-old military campaign putting many of the territory's hospitals out of action, killing medics, and reducing crucial supplies. – Reuters

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BY AIMIE SHAZRIE
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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia stands to be the future global hub for clean aviation fuel as there is a growing global urgency for decarbonisation and Malaysia's untapped potential.

Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad said with global aviation shifting towards green solutions, Malaysia is seizing the opportunity to lead by building on its strengths in logistics, infrastructure and policy.

"I urge Malaysian entities to step up and explore synergistic collaborations that will strengthen Malaysia's position in the global green energy landscape," he said at a signing ceremony between Bin Zayed International (M) Bhd (BZI) and Malaysia-based FatHopes Energy (FHE) yesterday.

BZI and FHE affirmed their commitment to invest RM2.19 billion to develop the world's first integrated sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) refinery in Port Klang.

According to Nik Nazmi, the strategic partnership between BZI and FHE signals Malaysia's emergence as a significant player in the global clean energy and low-carbon economy. "The development of a world-scale SAF refinery in Malaysia is of immense strategic importance. This investment will serve as a catalyst for far-reaching transformation across our energy and aviation sectors."

Nik Nazmi said that by reducing reliance on imported SAF and unlocking Malaysia's potential as a regional producer and exporter, the country is paving the way for a more self-reliant and competitive green economy.

This project addresses one of the most pressing challenges - decarbonising the aviation sector, he added.

"The development of the SAF refinery will contribute meaningfully to decarbonise the aviation sector, enabling the aviation company to meet their emissions reduction target, supporting energy transition and contributing towards Malaysia's net-zero aspiration," Nik Nazmi said.

BZI managing director and Bin Zayed (S) Pte Ltd executive director Datuk Seri Shamir Kumar Nandy said the partnership with FHE is more than a business venture.

"It is a statement of our long-term commitment to Malaysia and the region. We believe this project can anchor Malaysia's leadership in the global SAF economy while supporting regional decarbonisation goals and ESG-aligned industrial growth," he said.

M'sia can be global hub for clean aviation fuel: Nik Nazmi

Bin Zayed International and FatHopes Energy affirm commitment to invest RM2b to build world's first integrated SAF refinery in Port Klang



Nik Nazmi (centre) with Bin Zayed International Group of Companies chairman Sheikh Khaled Zayed Saquer Zayed Alnahyan (third, right) witnessing the exchange of documents between Shamir Kumar (third, left) and Vinesh (second, right) at the Tun Razak Exchange in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. - BERNAMAPIC

Although the percentage of equity BZI will hold in FHE is still being finalised, Shamir Kumar confirmed that the company will be underwriting the full RM2.19 billion cost of the refinery.

"We are fully committed to getting this refinery up and running - whatever it takes. With solid financial backing, we are moving forward confidently, driven by our belief in the project's long-term sustainability and commercial potential," he said.

Construction is expected to begin within the

next 12 months, pending regulatory approvals and environmental clearances. The project targets a final investment decision by mid-2026, with commercial operations set to begin by 2029.

According to FHE CEO Vinesh Sinha, the refinery, which is currently in the feasibility stage, could produce up to 300,000 tons of SAF annually. This will require an estimated 330,000 tonnes of feedstock, predominantly waste-based oils such as used cooking oil and other residual fats, sourced through FHE's extensive network across Southeast Asia and India.

The refinery will adopt a multi-feedstock approach, supported by FHE's proprietary digital traceability platform that ensures supply chain integrity and emissions transparency from collection to production.

"This is not just about building a plant. It is about creating an ecosystem that transforms waste into value, enables industrial decarbonisation, and propels Malaysia into the next era of clean aviation," Vinesh said.

Malaysia's domestic feedstock alone would not be sufficient to sustain the plant's operations, he added, hence the importance of regional sourcing.

"Malaysia is a small country in terms of population, and we do not generate the required volume of waste oils locally. Our supply chain has grown over the last 15 years to cover most of Southeast Asia and parts of India," he said.

Vinesh acknowledged the project will face technical and regulatory challenges, including major infrastructure upgrades at Port Klang and securing key inputs such as hydrogen and nitrogen.

"As the first facility of its kind in Malaysia and the region, we're working closely with authorities to chart the way forward," he said.

While the long-term vision is for SAF to be produced in Port Klang to serve Malaysia's domestic aviation sector, he said the refinery is being designed with flexibility in mind to accommodate both local and export markets.

"We are hopeful that Malaysia will adopt stronger SAF mandates, which would allow all the fuel to be consumed locally. But initially, we will balance domestic supply with export demand, depending on policy frameworks and offtake agreements."

While the long-term goal is to serve Malaysia's domestic SAF demand, contingent on future government mandates, Vinesh said the facility will initially balance both local and export markets, adjusting as the regulatory environment evolves. "If the 47% mandate comes into play, we could see all of it used domestically."

Oasis Home prices IPO shares at 28 sen each, expects to raise RM28m

BY HAYATUN RAZAK
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KUALA LUMPUR: Consumer lifestyle products marketer and distributor Oasis Home Holding Bhd expects to raise RM28 million from its initial public offering (IPO) on the ACE Market of Bursa Malaysia.

Out of the RM28 million, RM13.7 million (48.93%) is for the expansion of its live commerce sales channels, RM3.6 million (12.86%) for setting up its fulfilment centre and RM4.3 million (15.36%) for working capital.

Additionally, the company will use RM2 million (7.14%) to establish a new headquarters and allocate the remaining RM4.4 million (15.71%) for listing expenses.

The group leverages a mix of online and offline platforms to drive sales and consumer engagement. Its primary digital sales channels include live commerce platforms, its proprietary mobile application, and its website - Oasis Home - which together serve as the group's core e-commerce hubs.

Additionally, Oasis Home extends its digital footprint through e-commerce marketplaces such

as Lazada, Shopee and TikTok Shop.

As part of its digital marketing initiatives, the group employs targeted advertising across social media platforms to boost visibility and connect with a broader audience.

To complement its online presence, the group integrates an online-to-offline strategy by offering in-person experiences through its product experience centres located in Bukit Jalil, Kuala Lumpur, and Johor Bahru, Johor.

At the launch of the prospectus yesterday, CEO Datuk Teoh Yee Seang said it signals a new chapter of growth for Oasis Home. "The proceeds from our IPO will play a key role in accelerating our expansion plans, particularly in strengthening our live commerce presence."

Teoh said it plans to introduce five new live commerce channels across Facebook and TikTok to connect with more customers through real-time experiences. "In parallel, we will be setting up our fulfillment center to support this growth. This will reduce costs and enhance profit margins as our live commerce footprint expands."

Looking ahead, Teoh said the live commerce space continues to gain momentum, especially in

Southeast Asia, where the market is projected to see strong growth over the next two years.

"Malaysian consumers are among the top three globally in terms of livestream viewership and purchasing activity, with more than half of viewers making purchases during sessions. Our strategic focus on live commerce is aligned with these evolving consumer behaviours, and we are confident in our ability to seize the opportunities ahead and further grow our market presence."

Teoh said Oasis Home targets to pay at least 30% of its consolidated profit after tax as a dividend, subject to the group's financial position and other financing requirements.

The group's IPO involves the public issuance of 100 million new ordinary shares, representing 20% of the group's enlarged number of issued shares, as well as an offer for sale of 50 million existing shares, or 10% of the enlarged issued share capital.

Of the public issue of 100 million shares, 25 million will be made available to the Malaysian public via balloting and 10 million issue shares to its directors and employees who are eligible to participate in the IPO.

The remaining 62.5 million issue shares and 2.5

million issue shares will be made by way of private placement to Bumiputera investors approved by the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry and to selected investors, respectively.

Select investors will have access to 50 million offer shares through a private placement.

Based on the IPO price of 28 sen per share and its enlarged share capital of 500 million shares, Oasis Home will have a market capitalisation of RM140 million upon listing.

For the financial year ended June 30, 2024, Oasis Home's revenue grew to RM54.82 million from RM40.88 million recorded in the financial year ended June 30, 2022, reflecting a two-year compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15.8%.

Notably, the live commerce segment contributed 75.65% of total revenue for FY24.

Over the same period, net profit saw a CAGR of 22.93%, rising from RM5.34 million to RM8.07 million in FY24.

The group is scheduled to be listed on the ACE Market of Bursa Malaysia on May 28.

MIDF Amanah Investment Bank Bhd is the principal adviser, sponsor, underwriter and placement agent for the IPO.

Most online sellers aware of e-invoicing seek exemption

➤ Survey shows many are confused, concerned and feeling unprepared: DARE

PETALING JAYA: About 94.7% of Malaysia's online business owners who are aware of mandatory e-invoicing are seeking exemption, with 87.3% citing the process as too tedious and the remaining 12.7% finding it too confusing.

A recent survey conducted by think tank Datametrics Research and Information Centre (DARE), which polled 516 micro online entrepreneurs earning less than RM150,000 a year over a two-week period through online and on-ground channels, also found that only 40.1% of respondents were aware of e-invoicing.

The situation points to a significant gap in outreach and readiness as the government plans to enforce mandatory e-invoicing for all businesses, including low-revenue online sellers, starting Jan 1, 2026.

DARE managing director Pankaj Kumar said the government's push for e-invoicing is part of a broader effort to digitalise the economy but imposing this uniformly across all business types, without exception, risks overwhelming the smallest players.

"This poll was a two-week pulse check to capture the sentiment of micro online entrepreneurs, particularly in light of the growing number of news reports and public attention on e-invoicing. And the sentiment is clear – many are confused, concerned and feeling unprepared,"

he said in a statement.

The findings, according to Pankaj, indicate a pressing need for the government to undertake a comprehensive investigation into the impact of these policies on the micro-digital economy.

"Simultaneously, small online sellers must be educated and supported to understand and comply with requirements.

"Without this, we risk making compliance unnecessarily difficult for the very group we should be supporting," he said.

The survey found that overall awareness and understanding of e-invoicing requirements are low. More than half of the respondents (59.9%) had never heard of e-invoicing, and 78.1% expressed concern over how the new mandate would affect their day-to-day operations.

As for likely actions in response to the requirement, the poll found that 22.7% of respondents would attempt to comply, while a larger portion, 31.6%, said they would stop selling online altogether.

Another 21.1% planned to adopt a "wait and see" approach, and 24.6% said they would not comply at all, signalling significant potential for non-compliance and disruption to the micro-digital economy.

Pankaj said these results point to a pressing need for policymakers to revisit the current approach, especially for micro



Pankaj says the government must rethink its one-size-fits-all approach and instead consider a phased, tiered or exempted model that protects and supports Malaysia's smallest online sellers.

online sellers operating at the margins of the digital economy.

"These are not large-scale enterprises with teams of accountants or digital infrastructure. Many of these online sellers are individuals trying to earn supplementary income through informal digital channels. For them, implementing an unfamiliar, often technical system like e-invoicing is not just a procedural adjustment – it is a significant operational disruption.

"We risk pushing this group out of the digital economy entirely if we force them to comply without adequate support or exemptions. It contradicts

the very spirit of empowering micro-entrepreneurs and broadening economic participation through digital platforms.

"The government must rethink its one-size-fits-all approach and instead consider a phased, tiered or exempted model that protects and supports Malaysia's smallest online sellers," he said.

Pankaj said DARE is ready to engage with the government through consultation sessions and policy discussions to ensure that the implementation of e-invoicing supports national digitalisation goals without disproportionately burdening micro online entrepreneurs.

Desaru Coast partners Singapore company to boost marine tourism

KUALA LUMPUR: Desaru Coast has formalised a partnership with Singapore's ONE*15 Marina, a subsidiary of SUTL Enterprise, a leading developer, operator and consultant of integrated marinas.

The collaboration aims to enhance Desaru Coast's tourism offerings by optimising key infrastructure assets, including the ferry terminal.

Director of Business Services, Destination Resorts and Hotels Sdn Bhd, the parent company of Desaru Coast Ferry Terminal, Karina Ridzuan, said the partnership reflects the strong bilateral cooperation between Singapore and Johor with the impending Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone and demonstrates investor confidence in Desaru Coast.

"As a premier coastal destination in Johor, we are delighted to partner with the esteemed ONE*15 Marina to introduce premium marina facilities and curated sailing experiences at the Desaru Coast Ferry Terminal.

"ONE*15 Marina Desaru Coast Malaysia catalyses the marine and leisure economy by placing our destination on the global yachting map, welcoming an international community of yacht owners, club members, and seasoned boaters in search of new and vibrant destinations.

"The collaboration will see ONE*15 Marina Desaru Coast operate wet and dry berths at the Desaru Coast Ferry Terminal and the introduction of a suite of sailing experiences for guests at the destination," Karina said in a statement.

She added that by enabling seamless maritime access and offering new experiences, Desaru Coast aims to reinforce its position as a vibrant lifestyle destination for both leisure travellers as well as the yachting community in the region.

Executive director and CEO of SUTL Enterprise Arthur Tay said, "We are excited about the partnership with Desaru Coast – they welcome a new marina personality into the growing ONE*15 network of marinas across Asia." – Bernama

Malaysia Airlines, Melbourne Airport sign pact to enhance connectivity

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia Airlines Bhd and Melbourne Airport have formalised a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to support the carrier's strategic expansion into Victoria, representing a key milestone in enhancing air connectivity and ties between Malaysia and Australia.

The collaboration signifies the commencement of an enhanced strategic partnership aimed at expanding Malaysia Airlines' network and strengthening its position as a pivotal transit hub in Kuala Lumpur for travellers from Victoria to Malaysia and other international destinations.

As part of its expansion strategy, Malaysia Airlines will introduce a third daily service to Melbourne starting October, increasing its total frequency to 21 weekly flights from 14 currently.

This enhanced connectivity underscores the airline's commitment to the Australian market and solidifies its position as the preferred carrier between Malaysia and Victoria.

Malaysia Aviation Group chief commercial officer of airlines Dersenshi Aresandiran said this collaboration marks an exciting new chapter for Malaysia Airlines as the carrier expands its network with the introduction of a third daily service to Melbourne.

"Through our collaboration with Melbourne Airport, we aim to enhance connectivity, drive demand, and reinforce our position as the gateway to Asia and beyond. This initiative will strengthen ties between Malaysia and Australia, supporting cultural, business, and tourism exchanges, and creating new opportunities for both regions," he said in a statement.

To support this growth, Malaysia Airlines will progressively deploy its brand-new A330neo aircraft on the Kuala Lumpur-Melbourne route, aiming to operate all 21 weekly flights using the new fleet by the end of the year. Travellers can look forward to

greater flexibility and improved connections via Kuala Lumpur to key destinations across Southeast Asia, India, and Europe.

Melbourne Airport CEO Lorie Argus said the increase in Malaysia Airlines services would be welcomed by travellers and exporters.

"Malaysia Airlines has been serving Victoria for decades, and this capacity increase underscores the airline's ongoing commitment to our city and state. It speaks to the importance of the Victorian market that Malaysia Airlines plans Malaysia Airlines plans to use its newest aircraft, featuring the latest onboard product, for its enhanced Melbourne services."

The MoU also sets the stage for joint promotional campaigns aimed at increasing travel demand and boosting passenger numbers between Malaysia and Victoria. Through targeted marketing efforts, both parties aim to raise awareness, drive revenue, and further strengthen the



Melbourne Airport head of commercial and senior vice-president airline business development Michael Cullen (third from left) and Dersenshi at the signing of the MoU during Matta Fair in Kuala Lumpur recently.

partnership.

The collaboration is aligned with Malaysia Airlines' strategy to expand its international presence and deliver

a seamless, premium travel experience, promoting tourism, business, and cultural exchange between Malaysia and Australia.



As trade tensions rise, China faces weak spending and a slow recovery from pandemic-era lows. — UNSPLASH PIX

China mulls exempting some US goods from tariffs

► Businesses invited to submit lists of items for potential exclusion from import levies

SHANGHAI: China is considering exempting some US imports from its 125% tariffs and is asking businesses to identify goods that could be eligible in the biggest sign yet that Beijing is worried about the economic fallout from its trade war with Washington.

A Ministry of Commerce taskforce is collecting lists of items that could be exempted from tariffs and is asking companies to submit their own requests, according to a source who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Financial news magazine *Caijing* reported yesterday citing sources that Beijing was preparing to include eight semiconductor-related items, although not memory chips.

"The Chinese government, for example, has been asking our companies what sort of things are you importing to China from the US that you cannot find anywhere else and so would shut down your supply chain," American Chamber of Commerce in China president Michael Hart

said yesterday.

Some chamber members say they have imported goods in the past week without the new tariffs being applied, Hart added.

A list of 131 categories of products eligible for exemptions was circulating widely on social media and among businesses and trade groups yesterday. Reuters could not verify the list, whose items ranged from vaccines and chemicals to jet engines.

While Beijing's ultimate course of action remains unknown, Huatai Securities analysed the list circulating in trade groups and said it corresponded to US\$45 billion (RM197 billion) worth of imports last year.

Repeated phone calls to China's customs department were not answered. Customs and the Ministry of Commerce did not respond to faxed questions.

While Washington has said the current status quo is economically untenable and already

offered tariff exemptions to some electronic goods, China has repeatedly said it is willing to fight to the end unless the US lifts its tariffs.

But beneath the bombast, China's economy is entering the trade war flirting with deflation. Demand is weak and consumer spending and sentiment have never properly recovered from the pandemic levels.

The government is pushing tariff-hit exporters to pivot to local markets, but companies say profits are lower, demand weaker and customers less reliable.

Exemptions are a bigger gesture of support, although by allowing some trade to resume, they also reduce the pain for the US economy and take some pressure off the White House.

Many imports, ranging from petrochemical ethane to pharmaceuticals have few easy alternatives or could take years to manufacture outside the US.

Big pharmaceutical companies including AstraZeneca and GSK have at least one manufacturing site in the US for drugs sold in China, according to Chinese government data.

Major ethane processors have already sought tariff waivers from Beijing because the US is the only supplier. — Reuters

Air India keen on Boeing jets rejected by Chinese airlines

NEW DELHI: Air India is in talks with US planemaker Boeing to acquire around 10 737 MAX jets after Chinese customers started rejecting deliveries amid a trade war with the US, two people familiar with the discussions told Reuters.

Boeing CEO Kelly Ortberg said on Wednesday that "due to the tariffs, many of our customers in China have indicated that they will not take delivery", and the company could redirect jets to other customers in need.

The US and China, the globe's two largest economies, have each imposed duties exceeding 100% on the other.

Two sources, who declined to be named as the discussions are private, said Air India was seeking around 10 narrowbody planes from Boeing for its budget carrier Air India Express, which has a fleet of more than 100 aircraft.

Air India, Air India Express and Boeing did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

"Air India is very interested. If the deal goes through, the planes are expected to be added to the fleet by end of the year," the first person said, adding the talks were in early stages.

Air India Express has previously taken white tail aircraft — or jets manufactured for one customer but acquired by another.

A third source familiar with talks between Air India and Boeing said any difference in jet configuration between its fleet and the incoming planes meant for Chinese customers may be factored into price negotiations.

The move could be a boost to Air India's expansion plans as the group's growth has been constrained by a lack of new aircraft.

Last month, Air India CEO Campbell Wilson said the airline was a "victim of circumstance", referring to delivery delays plaguing Boeing and Airbus. — Reuters

UK economy gets lift from surprise spike in retail sales

LONDON: British retailers reported the best start to the year since 2021 in what may be a fleeting boost for the economy, with rising bills and the US trade war increasingly weighing on consumer morale.

Retail sales volumes rose by 0.4% in March alone, after downwardly revised growth of 0.7% in February, the Office for National Statistics said yesterday.

A Reuters poll of economists had pointed to a month-on-month fall of 0.4%.

For the first quarter as a whole, retail sales rose by 1.6% — the strongest reading in four years, and providing a 0.08 percentage point boost to overall economic output for the quarter.

That may prove to be a high watermark for Britain's consumer economy for the foreseeable future.

Earlier on Friday, a closely-watched gauge of British consumer confidence fell in April to its lowest level since late 2023. Market research firm GfK cited rising household energy bills and turbulent global financial markets as reasons for the drop.

"Retailers face an uphill battle to protect margins, sustain investment, and navigate an increasingly complex trading environment," said Nicholas Found, head of commercial content at consultancy Retail Economics.

"The outlook is clouded further by uncertainty around US trade tariffs, which has the potential to disrupt shipments if orders are cancelled and routes impacted."

On Thursday Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey said he was focused on an expected shock to growth from US President Donald Trump's import tariffs and retaliatory measures by other countries.

The rest of the year looks challenging due to rising energy bills and market turmoil caused by the trade war. — Reuters

Cars with mini kitchens, other gadgets on show in Shanghai

SHANGHAI: Car manufacturers looking to stand out in China's constantly innovating auto market unveiled cars at Shanghai's auto show this week featuring immersive entertainment, fragrance control, in-car refrigerators and even hot pot cooking equipment.

The world's largest and most electrified auto market is mired in a brutal price war, just as a trade spat with the US and electric vehicle tariffs in Europe heighten focus on the domestic market where gadgets are major selling points.

"Chinese customers are expecting a very high level of novelty and new technologies," said Li Xiang, a marketing expert at EV maker Nio, while demonstrating the "4D digital cockpit" of its 780,000 yuan (RM468,401) ET9 crossover coupe.

When watching movies or playing games while parked, the ET9 will move and shake in

conjunction with action on the screen. Massage seats and fragrance settings enhance the multi-sensory experience.

"The speed of product enhancement is very, very fast in the Chinese market. So our product launch cadence is actually two or three times faster than the legacy brands," Li said, adding that he demonstrated the ET9's features to many foreign auto executives throughout the first two days of the Shanghai show.

Over 100 models and concept vehicles have been unveiled at the show, with crowds flocking to see Xpeng's experimental "flying car" — a passenger-carrying drone.

In-car fragrance settings were a popular addition to several models, including those of Toyota Motor's premium Lexus brand. The Japanese marque's new ES includes a fragrance system featuring bamboo scent.

"With each breath, it feels as if one is in the depths of a bamboo forest on the outskirts of Kyoto," Toyota's China general manager Li Hui, said at a press briefing.

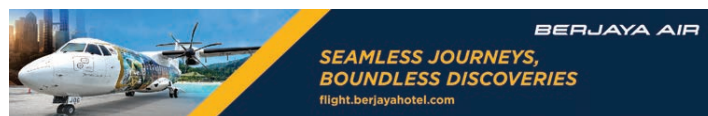
Perhaps the most unusual feature came from Rox Motor.

The Rox 01, an all-terrain luxury SUV priced from 299,900 yuan, aims to capitalise on a trend for camping and outdoor pursuits with a tailgate kitchen extension at 4,999 yuan.

The in-car kitchen on display included a refrigerator, a system for heating water in just three seconds and facilities for making tea, coffee and hot pot — a Chinese staple.

"In China, we like hot water, hot tea, and even a hot pot," Rox's chief strategy officer David Wu explained.

Chinese consumers are looking to experience the great outdoors without compromising comfort, Wu said. — Reuters



Cloud and AI operations lift Alphabet quarterly earnings

➤ But Google's money-making ad business may be hit hard if it loses a US antitrust case

SAN FRANCISCO: Google parent Alphabet on Thursday reported profit of US\$34.5 billion (RM151 billion) in the recently ended quarter, powered by its cloud computing and artificial intelligence (AI) operations.

Overall revenue at Alphabet grew 12% to US\$90.2 billion compared to the same period a year earlier, while revenue for the cloud unit grew 28% to US\$12.3 billion, according to the tech giant.

Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai said the strong quarterly results reflect healthy growth and momentum across the business.

"Underpinning this growth is our unique full stack approach to AI," Pichai said in an earnings release.

He touted the latest Gemini software as Alphabet's most intelligent AI model and an "extraordinary foundation" for the Silicon Valley company's innovation.

Alphabet shares were up more than 3% in after-market trades that followed the release of the earnings figures.

"Cloud grew rapidly with significant demand

for our solutions," Pichai said of Alphabet's services and tools hosted at data centres.

Investors have been watching closely to see whether the tech giant may be pouring too much money into artificial intelligence.

"Cloud's growth indicates that Google AI product mix continues to thrive despite heightened competition," said Emarketer principal analyst Vory Wurmer.

Google and rivals are spending billions of dollars on data centers and more for AI, while the rise of lower-cost model DeepSeek from China raises questions about how much needs to be spent.

Meanwhile the online ad business that churns out the cash Google invests in its future could be neutered due to a defeat in a US antitrust case.

US government attorneys are urging a federal judge to make Google spin off its Chrome browser, arguing artificial intelligence is poised to ramp up the company's online search dominance.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) is arguing its position before District Judge Amit Mehta, who is considering "remedies" after making a landmark decision last year that Google maintained an illegal monopoly in online search.

"Nothing less than the future of the internet is at stake here," assistant attorney-general Gail Slater said prior to the start of the hearings this

week in Washington.

"If Google's conduct is not remedied, it will control much of the internet for the next decade and not just in internet search, but in new technologies like artificial intelligence."

Google countered in the case that the US has gone way beyond the scope of the suit by recommending a spinoff of its widely used Chrome, and holding open the option to force a sale of its Android mobile operating system.

The legal case focused on Google's agreements with partners such as Apple and Samsung to distribute its search tools, noted Google president of global affairs Kent Walker. "The DOJ chose to push a radical interventionist agenda that would harm Americans and America's global technology leadership," Walker wrote in a blog post.

In another legal battle, a different US judge ruled this month that Google wielded monopoly power in the online ad technology market in a legal blow that could rattle the tech giant's revenue engine.

The US government and over a dozen states sued Google, claiming it broke the law to control key parts of digital advertising.

District Court Judge Leonie Brinkema ruled that Google built an illegal monopoly over ad software and tools used by publishers.

Online ads are the main source of Google's wealth and fund free services like Maps, Gmail, and Search. - AFP

Intel plots strategy to challenge Nvidia dominance

BENGALURU: One of Intel's biggest missteps over the past decade was the failure to challenge Nvidia's dominance in the fast-growing market for artificial intelligence (AI) chips.

During his first earnings conference call with analysts at Intel's new CEO, Lip-Bu Tan outlined how Intel hopes to change that, but warned, "This is not a quick fix." Tan said he would comb through Intel's existing products to sharpen them for emerging trends in the AI market such as robotics and agents that can carry out tasks for human users.

The undertaking will be challenging because Nvidia no longer sells just chips - it sells entire data centres, from chips to cables to software compilers. Tan on Thursday said Intel will take a similar approach.

Chief financial officer David Zinsner said that in the near term, Intel won't make many more acquisitions. "Our priority will need to be, at this point, getting the balance sheet to a better place," Zinsner told Reuters in an interview.

The implication is that Tan's efforts to at last put together a coherent AI strategy will be homegrown.

"We are taking a holistic approach to redefine our portfolio, to optimize our products for new and emerging AI workloads," Tan said. "Our goal is to become the platform of choice for our customers. This requires us to radically evolve our design and engineering mindset and anticipate the needs of our customer well in advance."

Historically, Intel's approach was to leave AI startups to do the work of developing new chips and then acquire them. Between 2016 and 2019, the company purchased a string of chip companies - Movidius, Mobileye, Nervana and Habana Labs - that it hoped would help it crack the AI market. While Mobileye retained a strong position in autonomous driving and Intel has retained a stake in the company after a spinout, the rest of the deals failed to help Intel gain traction against Nvidia.

"Intel has a long history of building important new silicon developments within its own walls, so I'm not shocked to see them focus on in-house developments for AI," Bob O'Donnell, chief analyst at Technalysis Research, told Reuters.

But other analysts said that Nvidia's dominant position, along with the efforts of major cloud-computing firms such as Amazon.com and Google to build their own AI chips, leaves little room for Intel to break into the market.

The company provided a glimpse of its overall AI strategy and will focus on chips and systems that run AI applications and edge devices, according to Hendi Susanto, a portfolio manager at Gabelli Funds, which holds Intel shares.

Google: Britain can gain £400b if it trains workforce in AI

LONDON: Britain could gain £400 billion (RM2.3 trillion) from AI-driven growth if it trained its workforce, Google said, after a pilot scheme in the UK showed workers could save more than 120 hours a year by using AI in administrative tasks.

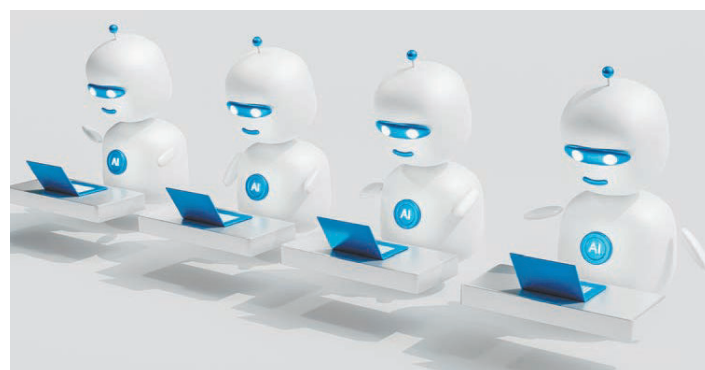
Simple steps such as giving workers permission to use AI and a few hours of training to get them started could help double the adoption of the new technology, and in turn boost economic growth, Google said in a report on its pilot scheme, published on Friday.

The US tech giant, which developed the Gemini AI chatbot, said that according to analysis by Public First, its partner in the scheme, two thirds of workers - particularly older women from lower socio-economic backgrounds - had never used generative AI at work.

Debbie Weinstein, Google's Europe, Middle East and Africa president, said the AI Works pilots - conducted in a small business network, educational trusts and a union - showed workers could save on average 122 hours a year by using AI in administrative tasks.

But one barrier stopping some from dipping a toe into the water was a concern that using AI in their job was not legitimate nor fair.

"People wanted 'permission to prompt'," Weinstein said in an interview. "Is it okay for me to be doing this? And so giving them that



Google notes that a key barrier preventing some from exploring AI at work is the perception that its use may be neither legitimate nor fair. - UNSPLASH PIX

reassurance was really important."

Once they started, a few hours of AI training to build their confidence resulted in them using the technology twice as much, she said, and they were still using it several months later.

These simple interventions helped to narrow the AI adoption gap amongst the participants in

the pilot studies, Google said in its AI Works report.

Before training, for example, only 17% of women aged above 55 in its cohorts used AI weekly and only 9% daily.

Three months later, 56% were using it weekly and 29% had made it a daily habit. - Reuters

Baidu: Kunlun cluster can handle DeepSeek-style models

BEIJING: China's Baidu has successfully "illuminated" a cluster comprising 30,000 of its self-developed, third generation P800 Kunlun chips, which can support the training of DeepSeek-like models, its CEO said yesterday.

Robin Li made the announcement at the company's annual developer conference where the Chinese search engine giant is giving updates on its artificial intelligence (AI) efforts. "Illuminated" means switching the

cluster on and preparing it for training tasks.

The P800 cluster can support the training of DeepSeek-like models with hundreds of billions parameters or a thousand customers fine-tuning models with billions of parameters at the same time, he said.

Baidu said Chinese banks and internet companies had adopted the P800 chips.

Li also unveiled Baidu's latest AI model - Ernie 4.5 Turbo - saying it matched the

industry's best in several benchmark tests, demonstrating abilities ranging from coding to linguistic comprehension. The company also launched a new reasoning model called Ernie X1 Turbo, and said it would incorporate its AI abilities across its apps from its cloud drive and content platform Baidu Wenku.

"There are many (AI) models, but it's apps that rule the world. The application is the king," Li said. "Without apps, models and chips

are worthless."

The product launch comes amid rising competition in China's AI market, as tech firms move from building models to finding practical uses beyond chatbots to engage users.

Baidu was among the first major Chinese companies to invest heavily in AI following the 2022 debut of OpenAI's ChatGPT. However, its Ernie Bot has struggled to gain traction amid fierce competition. - Reuters

TOP SHOTS OF THE WEEK



GREEK GLOW ... Greece's iconic beauty brand Fresh Line has officially landed on Malaysian shores. At the opening of Fresh Line Malaysia's first store, which is located in Sunway Pyramid, Subang Jaya, are (from left) Sunway Malls senior director of leasing Michael Poh, Fresh Line Malaysia director Raj Kumar, Fresh Line Greece marketing director Giota Ntarachani and Sunway Pyramid, Sunway Giza and Sunway Square senior general manager Jason Chin.



TALENT TIE-UP ... Automation solutions and engineering services provider 3REN Bhd's wholly owned subsidiary Sophic Automation Sdn Bhd on Wednesday signed a memorandum of understanding with Wawasan Open University (WOU) to facilitate collaborative opportunities through work-based learning education programmes to nurture future talent, equipping them with relevant industry experiences. From left are WOU School of Technology and Engineering Science dean Associate Professor Dr Sean Tan Koon Tatt, WOU associate vice-chancellor Professor Dr Yap Eng Hwa, 3REN executive director and chief executive officer Koh Dim Kuan and 3REN chief culture officer Loh Paik Hoe.



MEDICAL VENTURE ... Putrajaya Holdings Sdn Bhd (PJH) and Sunway Healthcare Holdings Sdn Bhd have inked a heads of agreement to jointly develop an integrated private medical centre in Precinct 7, Putrajaya. Seated, from left, Sunway Group chief executive officer, new and special projects, Angela Lee and Sunway Healthcare Group president Lau Beng Hong (both representing Sunway Healthcare Holdings), PJH chief executive officer Datuk Izwan Hasli Ibrahim and PJH legal and company secretarial senior manager Hanum Jamon at the HoA signing ceremony. – **BERNAMAPIC**



WOMEN TALK ... Self-service laundrette dobiQueen recently organised a panel discussion titled *Empathy Meets Innovation: How Women Entrepreneurs Utilise Purposeful Technology & Empathetic Leadership to Transform Businesses*, which brought together experts from the public and private sectors. Seen above are from left head of Wanita MyWira at TalentCorp Natasha Alias, dobiQueen co-founder and executive director Nini Tan, Khazanah Research Institute research associate Dr Teoh Ai Ni and Strive Malaysia programme officer Li Yang Lau.



OPEN HOUSE ... Kenanga Investment Bank Bhd (KIBB) recently hosted its Hari Raya Aidilfitri Open House 2025 at Shangri-La Kuala Lumpur, welcoming over 1,000 business partners, clients and stakeholders. Among the guests are, from left, RHB Bank Bhd chairman Tan Sri Ahmad Badri Mohd Zahir, KIBB director Steven Choy Khai Choon, Ancom Nylex Bhd executive vice-chairman Datuk Siew Ka Wei, Bank Muamalat Malaysia chairman Tan Sri Tajuddin Atan, Ernst & Young PLT financial services assurance leader and Malaysia deputy professional practice director Chan Hooi Lam, KIBB group managing director Datuk Chay Wai Leong, Securities Commission Malaysia executive director, Islamic capital market, Sharifatul Hanizah Said Ali and KIBB executive director and head of group investment banking and Islamic banking Datuk Roslan Tik.



WOONG INVESTORS ... From left: Ugandan Finance and Economic Development Minister Matia Kasajja, Energy and Mineral Development Minister Ruth Nankabirwa Ssentamu and High Commissioner to Malaysia Dr Betty Oyella Bigombe at the Uganda Pearl of Africa Business Forum and Expo 2025 in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday. Four Ugandan Cabinet ministers attended the event which was held on Wednesday and Thursday.



PRECIOUS PET ... A resident of Kubu Gajah in Sungai Buloh ensuring his cat is safe during flash floods that hit several districts in Selangor on Wednesday. — **ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN**



DOING THEIR DUTY ... (from left) Cpl Noorina Suzila Mayuda Mohamat Shukri, Const Nur Amelia Abdullah, Const Zaimah Bah Nan and Const Mita Mohd Azmi outside an early voting centre for the Ayer Kuning by-election at the General Operations Force officers recreational hall in Bidor, Perak. — **BERNAMAPIC**



SCRUMPTIOUS SERVING ... Trader Suriani Shaini drizzling her signature peanut gravy on a plate of 'mi sanggul', a house specialty prepared from an 80-year-old recipe at her eatery at Kampung Haji Hassan in Tapah, Perak. — **BERNAMAPIC**



DETERMINED EFFORT ... A resident making a desperate attempt to douse a blaze that eventually destroyed 21 houses on Wednesday in Kampung Batu Putih, Sandakan. — **BERNAMAPIC**



PATRIOTIC PALS ... Pupils of Sekolah Kebangsaan Jalan Peel in Kuala Lumpur flashing their new *Jalur Gemilang* tags after the recent launch of an initiative to instil patriotism among schoolchildren. — **ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THESUN**



DRY DAYS AHEAD ... Huge plastic water containers are displayed at a shop in Penang as residents brace for a scheduled supply disruption. — **BERNAMAPIC**



REDUCED TO RUINS ... A Palestinian child emerges from a hole with an item salvaged from among the rubble of what was once a home. — **REUTERSPIC**



TIMELESS SENTRIES ... Guards manning their station at the Jiayu Pass fortress in Jiayuguan, the first point of entry at the west end of The Great Wall in northwestern Gansu province, China. — **AFP/IC**



SOLEMN ASSEMBLY ... Swiss Guards stand at attention as the casket of Pope Francis arrives at Saint Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. — **REUTERSPIC**



FESTIVAL OF GRATITUDE ... Balinese Hindu devotees prepare offerings at a temple in Denpasar to celebrate Galungan Day, that is observed to thank God for the creation of Earth and all that is in it. — **AFP/IC**



NOT SORRY ... Police detain a cheerful protester on the Liberty Bridge during a march in Budapest on Tuesday in response to the Hungarian parliament adopting constitutional changes targeting the LGBTQ community and dual nationals. — **AFP/IC**

Hidden cost of normalised violence

THIS morning I watched a skit by Ronny Chieng, a Malaysian-born American comedian. He was joking about how the US needs an Asian president and along with that came anecdotes about how all Asian parents beat their children. It was narrated in jest.

I have heard this “joke” and the dismissive attitude countless times in comedies and conversations with friends and family.

If the topic got slightly serious, I would hear: “Aiyah, we all kena whack what! Rotan, slipper, belt, slap, hanger; you name it, we got it. No big deal-lah!” or “What didn’t kill you made you stronger”.

No, it didn’t physically kill us but it did kill our souls, shatter our psyche and erode our self-belief, self-worth and self-esteem.

As a somatic psychotherapist, I sit with clients of all genders, races and ages – and I listen to their stories of childhood violence.

A 40-year-old woman shared how she was slapped and repeatedly hit whenever she failed an exam. A 28-year-old man recalled being beaten with a snooker stick – so brutally that the stick broke. Another woman, now in her 30s, described how, as a child, she was pinched, had her ears and hair pulled, and her head violently shaken while

someone yanked at her hair.

Now they are adults and professional people. Some are parents, spouses, some single; yet here they are, sitting in front of me, crying. Some curled up, sobbing, weeping, their inner child unable to hold back their tears. I sit there, witness to their pain and suffering, and I simply hold space with compassion.

Many of them arrive in therapy not knowing that what they experienced was abuse. It’s just “how it was” or “what everyone went through”. And because it was normalised, the emotional consequences are often minimised or completely dismissed.

Here is what I want to say gently but firmly – just because something was common, does not mean it was okay.

Research in neuroscience and trauma studies now clearly shows the long-term impact of such experiences. Children who grow up in environments where love and violence are interwoven often develop insecure attachments, high levels of anxiety, difficulties with self-worth and challenges in forming healthy relationships.

I had my share of physical abuse up to the age of 16. From childhood to adulthood, I struggled with low self-worth and low self-esteem which negatively affected every area of my life. It took me decades of therapy and inner



“Children who grow up in environments where love and violence are interwoven often develop insecure attachments, high levels of anxiety, difficulties with self-worth and challenges in forming healthy relationships.”

work to finally reach a point of inner peace, self-love and self-acceptance.

I’ve seen these patterns play out over and over. High-achievers who cannot rest. Perfectionists gripped by fear at the thought of failure. Adults who struggle with guilt and shame simply for having needs or boundaries. People who don’t remember moments of love or kindness but vividly remember being hit or shouted at.

As you read this, do you feel triggered? Is there discomfort anywhere in your body? Some tightness, heaviness, a tug or a pull somewhere.

Maybe you want to close this page and move on to something else or you want to go to your favourite self-soothing activity – eating, drinking alcohol, smoking/vaping, mindlessly scrolling or anything that you are addicted to.

Have you gone into fight, flight or freeze as you read this?

Naming something as abuse does not mean we are vilifying our parents and caregivers. It means we are acknowledging our pain so that we can begin to heal. It means we stop gaslighting ourselves into silence and begin honouring our inner child who needed protection, not punishment.

Many of our parents did the best they could with what they knew. They did not have the tools or knowledge of gentle parenting or emotional attunement.

Many were just trying to survive, raising children in systems that were themselves unkind and unrelenting. Understanding this context can help us feel compassion – for them and for ourselves. However, compassion is not the same as justification.

This is not about blame. This is about truth-telling. About reclaiming the dignity of our emotional lives.

So, the next time someone makes a joke about being beaten as a child, I invite you to pause. Ask yourself: Is this truly funny or is it pain wrapped in laughter?

Humour can be a brilliant tool for survival but it should not be the only language we speak.

Sometimes, we need to move beyond the joke and into the truth. Sometimes, we need to say: “That wasn’t okay. That hurt me. And I’m allowed to say so.”

Healing is not about erasing the past. It is about making peace with it, learning to heal your wounds with tenderness and stepping forward with strength that is rooted not in fear but in compassion.

Let us speak the truth, even when it is uncomfortable. Let’s stop laughing at what broke us.

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

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COMMENT by Dr Asraf Mohamed Moubark, Dr Aqilah Baseri Huddin and Dr Fazida Hanim Hashim

AI and the future of vaccination

ARTIFICIAL intelligence (AI) is becoming a powerful force in modern healthcare, particularly in the field of immunisation.

One of its most promising roles is in personalising vaccine recommendations. By analysing a person’s medical history, age, lifestyle and overall health, AI can help doctors make smarter, safer and more effective decisions about vaccination.

Traditionally, vaccines have been administered based on broad population guidelines. However, this one-size-fits-all approach can carry risks, especially for people with underlying health conditions or unknown sensitivities. For some, a vaccine could trigger severe side effects or even death if not assessed properly.

For instance, during the Covid-19 vaccine rollout, Taiwan reported a number of deaths occurring shortly after vaccination, particularly among elderly individuals with preexisting conditions.

While authorities stated that most of these deaths were not definitively linked to the vaccines, the lack of transparent investigations and personalised assessments sparked public concern.

In Malaysia, Dr Roland Victor, who publicly questioned vaccine safety, was acquitted in 2023 after being charged with spreading misinformation. His case was viewed as a win for medical free speech, emphasising the right of healthcare professionals to voice evidence-based concerns without being dismissed as anti-vaccine.

These events highlight the limitations of mass vaccination strategies and the urgent need for more individualised approaches – ones that take into account a person’s health profile, immune status and potential risks.

Precision vaccinology, an emerging field, led by experts like Dr Gregory A. Poland of the Mayo Clinic is at the forefront of this movement. His research shows that factors such as age, sex, microbiome composition and even the time of day can



By analysing a person’s medical history, age, lifestyle and overall health, AI can help doctors make smarter, safer and more effective decisions about vaccination. – **ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN**

affect how someone responds to a vaccine.

Combined with AI, this knowledge allows for vaccine plans that are not only more effective but also safer for vulnerable individuals.

Top research institutions like Stanford and MIT have also developed AI tools that predict vaccine response using biological markers. These innovations help identify who will benefit most from certain vaccines, who may need boosters and who may require alternative strategies.

AI is also being used to analyse immune markers in those who have recovered from illnesses like Covid-19, determining whether additional shots are necessary or if natural immunity is sufficient.

Despite these advancements, experts stress that AI should complement, and not replace, clinical judgement. “Technology can guide us but it must be used in concert with clinical judgement,” Poland noted in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. “We

need responsible integration of AI into healthcare systems, always centered around the patient.”

As AI continues to advance, its role in preventive care will only expand. Personalised vaccine strategies will not only improve individual outcomes but also enhance the efficiency of public health systems.

With thoughtful oversight, AI has the potential to become a powerful ally in creating safer and smarter vaccination plans, one patient at a time.

Dr Asraf Mohamed Moubark, Dr Aqilah Baseri Huddin, Dr Fazida Hanim Hashim are from the Digital Signal Processing Research Group, Department of Electrical, Electronic and Systems Engineering, Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment, University Kebangsaan Malaysia.
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LETTERS
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Championing integrity and transparency

I WOULD like to extend my warmest congratulations to the Malaysian Institute of Integrity (IIM) on the occasion of its 21st anniversary.

Since its establishment in March 2004, IIM has played a pivotal role in promoting the values of integrity, accountability and good governance across all levels of Malaysian society.

Integrity is not just a concept – it must be a way of life. It must be embedded in our personal values, institutions, public services and corporate culture.

As we celebrate IIM’s contributions over the past two decades, I hope the institute will continue to be a beacon of integrity, inspiring present and future generations.

Looking ahead, I wish to offer a few suggestions that IIM may wish to consider as part of its ongoing mission:

➤ **Intensify integrity education at the grassroots level:** Expand integrity-based education programmes to reach more schools and community groups, fostering ethical values from a young age.

➤ **Collaborate more closely with civil society and NGOs:** Engage with grassroots organisations to bring the message of integrity closer to the people, especially in rural and underserved areas.

➤ **Strengthen monitoring and evaluation of integrity initiatives:** Ensure that integrity policies and codes of conduct across public and private sectors are monitored, evaluated and improved regularly.

➤ **Leverage digital platforms to promote a culture of integrity:** Use social media, mobile apps and online campaigns to engage younger generations and raise awareness about the importance of integrity in everyday life.

➤ **Train ethical leaders and frontliners:** Develop and deliver targeted training modules for public officials, enforcement personnel and community leaders to promote ethical decision-making and integrity-based leadership.

IIM’s journey over the last 21 years is commendable. Let us continue to work together to build a Malaysia that is honest, transparent and rooted in integrity. May IIM go from strength to strength in the years ahead.

Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye
Member of the Malaysian Institute of Integrity



Tea off to better health

Learn benefits of each type
- P20

WEEKLY FOCUS

MONDAY

Technology and social media

TUESDAY

Family and parenting

WEDNESDAY

Fashion and beauty

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Tapah kopitiam
symbol of harmony

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Savour five varieties
of bak chang

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Jason Statham
gets back to work



Today's teas go beyond taste as they are packed with vitamins and functional herbs that offer a variety of feel-good benefits.



Tea has a comforting aroma as well as a myriad of health benefits.

RICH in ceremony and steeped in tradition, drinking and serving tea is a daily ritual for Malaysians, enjoyed at any occasion, whether relaxing at home, entertaining guests or simply taking a break. In fact, according to the Tea Trade Association of Malaysia, the country is not only a tea producer, but also a deeply rooted tea-consuming nation.

It is a beloved habit for many, not just for its comforting preparation and aroma, but also for its health benefits. Green, black and herbal teas contain phytonutrients, compounds that not only give plants their colour, flavour and aroma, but can also support human health.

Some tea companies even infuse already good-for-you tea with vitamins and functional herbs. Consider them a different school of functional tea.

From fruit-infused green tea to "energy" and "bedtime" blends, there are dozens of functional teas to choose from. Here are a few time-tested functional teas to keep in your cabinet.

Green, black tea

To support antioxidant activity, prepare a cup of green tea. Made from the *Camellia sinensis* plant, green tea contains four components called catechins, which are part of a family of compounds known as flavonoids.

Want green tea's nutritional benefits with an energy boost? Choose black tea. It contains up to two to three times as much caffeine as green tea (depending on brew time), with similar health properties.

Black tea's "functional" compounds may also reduce stroke risk. University of California Los Angeles researchers conducted an evidence-based review of nine studies that involved 195,000 people in total, including 4,378 stroke cases. The data showed drinking three cups of black tea reduced stroke risk by 21%. Researchers speculated EGCG, the tea's main catechin, was a contributing factor. It is no wonder that black tea has become the most popular tea in the world since the Age of Sail and the same holds true in Malaysia. Today, it is estimated that over 80% of tea consumed in the country is black tea.

Green, black and white teas all

Benefits of functional tea

➤ Improve overall wellness with these healthy beverages



Malaysia is a major producer of tea and 80% of the tea consumed locally is of the black tea variety.

contain L-Theanine, which is the reason tea gives you an energy boost without the coffee jitters.

Chamomile

Chamomile promotes relaxation and restful sleep. Chamomile's sleep-inducing effects have to do with the flavonoid apigenin, which binds to certain receptors in the brain, causing sleepiness.

Chamomile also holds anti-inflammatory properties. Researchers from Universiti Putra Malaysia found that consuming chamomile can help reduce symptoms of dysmenorrhea or *senggugut*, as it is commonly known, as well as anxiety. The study highlighted that the greatest reduction in pain severity occurred when chamomile consumption was

combined with regular yoga practice.

Lavender

Just like lavender essential oils promote relaxation and sleep, drinking lavender tea has calming benefits. Inhaling lavender tea's steam may slow nervous system activity, prompting relaxation, according to the University of Maryland Medical Centre.

Aromatherapists use lavender to treat headaches, nervous disorders and exhaustion. Other natural health practitioners recommend it in a bath to treat muscle and joint pain. Try a spot of lavender tea before bed and feel your cares melt away.

Peppermint

For an overall digestive soother, drink a steaming cup of peppermint tea.

One of the best teas for digestion, peppermint is generally known to soothe stomachaches, cramps and heartburn.

Refreshing peppermint contains menthol, which can break up phlegm and thin mucus. The next time you have a cold, inhale the steam before you drink up.

Ginger

Ginger not only adds zip to baked goods and stir-fries, it also settles your stomach. Ginger contains at least 14 bioactive compounds that yield many health benefits.

Ginger contains a high level of antioxidants, which benefit heart health. It is also considered an anti-inflammatory herb. Data suggests it moderates pain-sensitivity receptors, which may help ease

arthritis stiffness.

Ginger's most common benefit, however, is to ease stomach woes. Of the many ginger studies, one study found pregnant women who used ginger supplements experienced less vomiting and nausea than the placebo group – without side effects.

Green, black and herbal tea compounds may have beneficial properties, but the ritual of preparing tea also has a place in a healthy lifestyle. Curling up with a warm cup of tea is a calorie-free way to relax at the end of the day and it is a great way to stay hydrated.

This article is contributed by
Herbalife senior director of worldwide
nutrition education and training
Susan Bowerman.



Patrons come to shoot the breeze at the kopitiam.

Harmony cafe

► Tapah *kopitiam* symbol of unity for generations of residents

XIN AUN NONG YONG, a nondescript coffee shop located at Tapah Road in Perak, may not boast the ambience of today's modern *kopitiam* but it is steeped in nearly a century of history.

Opened nearly 100 years ago, it has remained a spot where the local people of all races come together for a cup of coffee or tea, or to enjoy the breakfast fare, particularly the toast, which is generously spread with *kaya* (coconut jam) made using the original family recipe passed down by the coffee shop's founders.

But Xin Aun Nong Yong does not just serve delicious toast, *pau* (steamed buns), *cakoi* (deep-fried

dough sticks), soft-boiled eggs and beverages – it also fosters warm relationships among the locals that have stood the test of time.

Opening as early as 6am, the *kopitiam* – run by Phua Ah Ling, 65, a second-generation member of the founder's family, together with her husband Soo Kam Chow, 73, and their daughter Soo Hui San, 34 – is always bustling with customers.

Phua is grateful that although her shop may not be as modern as today's cafe chains, it remains a key gathering spot for the people of Tapah.

"About 70% of my customers are Malay. Perhaps it is because I was born and raised here. Here,

everyone knows each other," she said, adding that the coffee shop only serves *halal* food.

"Every morning, customers sit down to enjoy hot *kopi O* and *cakoi* while chatting about current issues."

When asked what makes the *kopitiam* special, Phua answered simply: "Harmony! This place is where everyone can sit at one table, regardless of race. Since long ago, Malays, Chinese and Indians (from and around Tapah) have been coming here to drink coffee together. I have been seeing this since I was a child."

She added that another factor for their shop's longevity is their steamed buns, which come with

chicken, *kaya* and red bean filling.

"Every day, I wake up as early as 4am and I start my routine by preparing the ingredients for the *pau*, which we make using the same methods my father used. For our *kaya*, the ingredients are cooked for 10 hours using a firewood stove," she said, adding they produce around 120 steamed buns a day.

According to Phua, her *kopitiam* is more than just a business – for her, it is a space where the older generation shares stories of the past and the younger generation learns the roots of unity.

"I hope my children will continue running this shop. When I am no longer around, let it remain a

place where the locals can come to eat and drink together. It is not about the money, it is about the heart," she said.

Gravedigger Abdul Rahman Mat Yassin, 69, said he loves starting his day at the *kopitiam* due to its harmonious atmosphere.

"Usually before heading to the cemetery, I will stop by here for breakfast. Every time I come, it reminds me of my youth with my friends," he said. He enjoys the delicious coffee and toast served but the soft-boiled eggs remain his all-time favourite.

For Ha Kin Chai, 77, the *kopitiam* holds memories of his childhood when he often came there with his family. At that time, the coffee shop was run by Phua's father.

"I used to look forward to eating the *cakoi* and *pau* because they were soft and tasty. The taste is still the same today," he said.

Another regular customer P. Janagee, 54, said she enjoys visiting the *kopitiam* because of its calm atmosphere and the warm hospitality of the owners, who make everyone feel welcome.

"To me, this place is not just for eating but also for chatting and reconnecting with old friends without feeling awkward. It feels like family here," she said.

– Bernama

More than just a place to grab a bite, the *kopitiam* is Tapah's unofficial gathering spot.Xin Aun Nong Yong specialises in home-made *pau*. – PICS FROM BERNAMA

Recipes passed down generations ensure the food remains authentic and delicious.

Santan embraces eco-friendly in-flight dining

SANTAN, the F&B business of Capital A, has transitioned from single-use plastics to biodegradable materials, marking a significant step in reducing its environmental impact.

All in-flight disposable items, including cups, lids and cutlery, are now made from polylactic acid (PLA) – a material derived from renewable sources such as corn and cassava.

Developed in collaboration with Rightway New Material, PLA offers a key advantage over traditional plastics by breaking down much faster. Studies show that PLA decomposes at a rate of over 90% in industrial composting, compared to conventional plastics that could take hundreds of years to break down. Santan's PLA-coated paper cups are certified for home composting, offering guests an easy and eco-conscious disposal option.

The initiative is currently being rolled out in Malaysia and Thailand, with plans to gradually expand across the entire AirAsia Group of seven airlines.

By adopting PLA, Santan could set a strong example for other companies in the aviation industry, showing that it is possible to combine high-quality service with eco-friendly solutions.

Recognising the challenges of waste management, where disposable packaging is essential for hygiene and operational efficiency, Santan is complementing its shift to compostable cutlery with artificial intelligence to optimise food resource management. By improving forecasting and reducing overproduction, this approach minimises food waste while enhancing supply chain efficiency, ultimately leading to more sustainable resource use and operations.



The new eco-friendly in-flight items are made from PLA, a biodegradable material derived from renewable sources such as corn and cassava.

BY GUO YIFAN

NOT long ago, while scrolling through Xiaohongshu, a popular Chinese lifestyle app also known as RedNote, I came across a post asking: "Which city in China has the best food?"

Among thousands of replies, one simple comment stood out, garnering more than 2,400 likes: "Nanning, a place where you do not have to rush to see landmarks. Just eat. Slowly."

I could not agree more. I gave it a thumbs-up and added my own reply: "If you come to Nanning, do not just try the local rice noodles. The Southeast Asian food here is unbelievably authentic!"

As the capital of south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, a key gateway to Asean, Nanning is not just influenced by Southeast Asia – it is infused with it. Thanks to growing connectivity, shared climate and close cultural ties, Southeast Asian flavours have become an inseparable part of daily life here.

At an international event, Nanning mayor Hou Gang once said: "With direct flights connecting us to all 10 Asean countries, you can have *laoyou* rice noodles in Nanning for breakfast, sip coffee in Hanoi by noon and enjoy durian in Kuala Lumpur by afternoon."

It might sound like a slogan, but in Nanning, it feels more like a way of life. You will find Thai papaya salad, Indonesian coconut rolls and Vietnamese *pho* served alongside local rice noodles at street stalls and tucked-away eateries.

Durian haven

If you are a durian fan, you are in luck. China remains the world's largest importer and biggest consumer of durians. According to customs data, the country imported a record 1.56 million tonnes of fresh durians last year, valued at US\$6.99 billion (RM30.6 billion).

Most of the fresh durians in the Chinese market come from Thailand and Vietnam, though imports from Malaysia and the Philippines are growing. Durian lovers like me can now enjoy fresh fruit year-round.

The city's humid subtropical climate closely mirrors that of Southeast Asian countries. Even the Zhuang language, spoken by one of the region's ethnic groups, carries traces of Thai. But what truly brings

Savouring Asean through *pho*, coconut rolls in Nanning

these flavours to life are the people who cook, savour and share them.

A colleague who has lived in Nanning for over 20 years told me the turning point was in 2004, when the city hosted the first China-Asean Expo.

"That is when the wave of Southeast Asian restaurants began. Since then, they have only multiplied," he said.

Made *pho* you

Today, Nanning is affectionately known as the "city of rice noodles". While locals remain loyal to famous *laoyou* and *luosi* noodle dishes, Vietnamese chicken *pho* has become just as beloved.

There are two *pho* shops near my office, small and unpretentious. But their homemade flavours and wallet-friendly prices draw regulars from nearby offices every day. It is also my go-to meal when I want something light and delicious after work.

One Spring Festival, I was invited to dinner by Hoang Thi Hue, a Vietnamese translator who has lived in Nanning for many years. She introduced me to her Chinese husband and their two children. Her apartment was bright with fresh flowers, a Vietnamese holiday tradition, and the table was filled with Vietnamese fried spring rolls she had made herself.

"Life in Nanning is just as cozy and fulfilling as in Hanoi. I can find almost every ingredient I need for Vietnamese dishes. And if I do not feel like cooking, it is easy to find Vietnamese-run restaurants that taste just like home," she told me.

Indonesian treats

Over the past seven years, I have met many people who have brought the



Southeast Asian flavours are strongly embedded in Nanning, China. – BERNAMAPIC

tastes of Southeast Asia to Nanning. Some are Chinese food lovers who turned their passion into a profession. Others are Southeast Asian friends who moved here with their families or international students who stayed after graduation to start their own businesses.

One of them is Wei Chaoxia, a descendant of Indonesian Chinese. I first discovered her snack shop through social media, where users praised her for healthy ingredients and nostalgic flavours.

When I visited, I was greeted by shelves of Indonesian treats like nine-layer cakes, sticky rice dumplings, sago pudding, coconut rolls and her signature turtle-shaped cakes, which are a symbol of health and longevity, warm from the oven.

"I learned to bake from my mother," Wei told me. She named the shop after her mother's surname. What started as a

neighbourhood bakery has grown steadily, earning a loyal following that now includes many Indonesian students longing for a taste of home.

Growing Malaysia-China ties

Another unforgettable individual is Tonny Tong, a Malaysian sommelier, who opened a restaurant in downtown Nanning. There, he serves not only Malaysian specialties, but also curates a wine list featuring bottles from across Southeast Asia.

Tong told me that the Chinese market is vast and dynamic, and that growing economic ties between China and Malaysia have made doing business much easier and more promising. More and more of his friends back home are starting to explore opportunities in China.

Indeed, the numbers tell a story, too. In the first quarter of this year, Asean remained China's largest trading partner, with total trade

reaching 1.71 trillion yuan (RM1.2 trillion), up 7.1% from a year earlier and accounting for 16.6% of China's overall trade value.

Tourism between China and Southeast Asia is also flourishing. For example, in the first 10 months of 2024, 1.08 million Malaysian tourists travelled to China.

Come with open heart, empty stomach

Through every steaming bowl, sizzling wok and sweet dessert, Nanning's connection with Southeast Asia is served not just in taste, but in friendship.

So if you ever find yourself in southern China, come to Nanning with an open heart and an empty stomach. Start with the rice noodles, sure. But keep going! Tucked into the city's alleys and night markets is an entire region waiting to be discovered, one bite at a time. – Bernama-Xinhua

Cookware maker Le Creuset marks 100th anniversary

SINCE its founding in 1925 in Fresnoy-le-Grand, France, Le Creuset has become a kitchen staple across the globe.

Well-regarded for its design, style and performance, Le Creuset is now celebrating a century of excellence and a longstanding legacy of forging culinary traditions – in the kitchen, at the dining table and beyond.

Hewn from cast-iron and crafted by skilled artisans, Le Creuset has become a celebrated culinary heirloom that helps nurture deep personal connections through the shared joy of food – meal after meal, year after year, generation

after generation.

Honouring its 100th anniversary, Le Creuset is embarking on a global celebration of culinary traditions past and present, all while looking ahead to the future and paying homage to the brand's heritage.

Le Creuset is launching three key initiatives in 2025 to commemorate its centennial year:

Stories of inspired tradition

Le Creuset's global celebration began with an inspiring short-form video featuring chefs, tastemakers and brand enthusiasts all of whom come together to honour the role Le Creuset has played in their lives

and traditions.

Icon, reimagined

In keeping with its design, Le Creuset is unveiling its latest advancement in colourful cookware: Flamme Doree.

Translated to "golden flame", the limited-edition, centenary colourway celebrates Flamme, the brand's iconic original hue, now coated with light-catching minerals and an innovative third layer of enamel coating for a golden shimmer finish.

100 years, one story

In collaboration with Assouline, Le Creuset will honour its 100th anniversary with the launch of *Le Creuset: A Century of Colourful Cookware*. Featuring a never-before-seen collection of photographs, this special-edition coffee table book celebrates Le Creuset's storied heritage, reputation and artistry.



Le Creuset unveils its latest advancement in colourful cookware.

Dragon dumplings

► Embrace festive spirit by indulging in authentic *bak chang*

THIS Dragon Boat Festival, immerse in the rich flavours of tradition with authentic *bak chang* (glutinous rice dumplings).

Also known as *Duan Wu Jie*, the Dragon Boat Festival is one of the most significant cultural celebrations in the Chinese calendar, observed on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month – falling on May 31 this year. A key highlight of the festival is the enjoyment of *bak chang*, traditionally wrapped in bamboo leaves and filled with savoury or sweet ingredients, symbolising prosperity and unity.

This year, Resorts World Genting offers five distinct flavours, each crafted with premium ingredients to

provide a unique take on the traditional delicacy.

The Mui Choy Bak Chang features a savoury blend of preserved mustard greens, peanuts, chestnuts, pork belly and black mushrooms, creating a rich and aromatic taste.

For a nuttier variation, the Black Eye Peas Bak Chang combines black eye peas, pork belly, chestnuts, black mushrooms and salted egg yolk, delivering a hearty and flavourful bite.

Among this year's highlights is the Tian Bah Bak Chang, a special creation that incorporates coconut milk into the glutinous rice, enhancing its fragrance and creaminess – an inspired addition that brings a delightful twist to

Enjoy *bak chang* with salted egg yolk in it.



traditional *bak chang* recipes.

Meanwhile, the Nyonya Bak Chang blends minced pork, winter melon cubes, black mushrooms, chili paste, Nyonya spices, turmeric powder and butterfly pea flower, offering a delightful mix of sweet,

savoury and mildly spicy flavours.

For those who prefer a simpler yet satisfying option, the Crystal Bak Chang presents a plain yet comforting variation that highlights the natural texture of glutinous rice.

These delicious *bak chang* will be

available at selected dining outlets across Resorts World Genting until May 31, including Lau Di Fang at Highlands Hotel, Hainan Kitchen Express, Malaysian Food Street at SkyAvenue and Grand Cha Chaan Teng.



Eating chocolate can help us fill up on antioxidants. – PEXELSPIC

Why you should not feel guilty about eating chocolate

CHOCOLATE can actually be good for our health and even daily consumption can make us feel better.

Tool to fight jetlag?

It is not always easy to cope with the fatigue that comes with a long-haul flight, during which the temptation is to rely on (many) glasses of wine to help you drop off. While it is not advisable to drink alcohol at altitude because it disrupts sleep, all is not lost, since munching on chocolate could be the answer. Apparently, it could help you cross time zones better. That is one of the surprising findings reported by the team of scientists Qantas worked with in the run-up to the launch of its ultra-long-haul flight between Sydney and New York. The research was carried out with a number of travellers to find out how they could be helped to manage their fatigue during such a long journey.

Is chocolate heart smart?

When it comes to chocolate, scientific studies come thick and fast but with little or no consistency. One study suggests that eating chocolate could be beneficial for heart rhythm, insofar as it prevents the heart from

beating irregularly. In other words, there may be less risk of being diagnosed with potentially fatal atrial fibrillation if you eat chocolate in moderation. This finding was published in the journal *Heart* based on research by scientists at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Centre, in collaboration with researchers at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, Aalborg University and the Institute of Cancer Epidemiology in Denmark. Dark chocolate is favoured especially, as it contains a higher cocoa content than milk chocolate. And it is in cocoa that flavanols are found, substances belonging to the flavonoid family that can display antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal activities.

Anti-depression remedy?

When nibbling on dark chocolate, the presence of cocoa can have a beneficial effect on our mood, it seems. In 2020, the American Psychiatric Association supported its positive impact on mental health, highlighting research carried out by University College London on over 13,000 US adults. The polyphenols contained in dark chocolate act as a mood booster. It can also help calm stress, unlike milk chocolate, which

contains less cocoa, and therefore fewer polyphenols. Last year, the University of Seoul in South Korea recommended a daily dose of chocolate containing 85% cocoa to help keep our spirits up! These results once again underline the importance of the link between the brain and the gut.

Boost to skin protection against sun exposure?

No one is suggesting slathering on melted dark chocolate instead of sunscreen to prevent sunburn. However, scientists at the Institute of Food Science, Technology and Nutrition in Madrid suggested in 2021 that eating chocolate can help us fill up on antioxidants, which have the capacity to increase blood flow. In this way, the flavanols contained in cocoa could increase skin density and hydration. While these revelations may come as a surprise, researchers have been investigating this positive aspect of chocolate for many years. Back in 2011, Quebec-based scientists at Laval University launched a large-scale study of fair-skinned women to understand the mechanisms of polyphenols in the body. – ETX Studio

Tragic promise drives world's first Michelin-starred woman sushi chef

CHIZUKO Kimura has become the first female sushi chef in the world to win a Michelin star, fulfilling a promise she made to her dying husband to continue his legacy.

The 54-year-old Japanese chef regained the Michelin star her late husband Shunei Kimura won three years ago for their Sushi Shunei restaurant in Paris.

For Shunei, the star was a dream come true. However, the joy was short-lived. He died from cancer just three months later in June 2022 aged 65. The following year, the restaurant in the heart of Montmartre lost its star.

Kimura insisted that the new star is still down to her husband.

"If Shunei had never received a star, I would not have been particularly attached to obtaining one myself. But he was proud that his restaurant was recognised. So this star has become very important to me," she said in her tiny traditional *sushiya*, which only seats nine.

The Michelin was glowing in its praise, saying a "sensorial journey is guaranteed thanks to the dexterity with which the *nigiri* are made, the use and working of superb fish and the subtle seasoning."

But Kimura never set out to be a top chef, only falling into the business when her husband, who had worked in France for decades, decided to open his own restaurant.

"He was already ill at that time, and

that is when I started helping him. I was working as a tour guide and lost my job due to Covid-19," she said.

She learned at his side how to cut the fish, cook the rice and how to run the restaurant while caring for him as he grew sicker.

"I got better day by day and I still train on my days off. I am always studying," she said, travelling back to Japan when she can to continue her training there.

After her husband's passing, Kimura took over the reins of the restaurant. She strengthened her team by hiring master sushi chef Takeshi Morooka, refined the dining experience by adding "tsumamis" (small appetisers typically served with sake) to the menu, modified the rice recipe and updated the cooking equipment.

Three years later, Sushi Shunei regained its Michelin star.

"My first goal is to maintain this star. And to keep it, we must strive to offer even better service and ensure impeccable quality," Kimura said.

Traditionally, becoming a master sushi chef requires at least a 10-year apprenticeship. Kimura got her star in just five.

"If this recognition can inspire or encourage other women, I will be happy," she said.

And she is not stopping there. Her goal now is to surpass her husband's achievements as a tribute to his work and his memory. – AFP

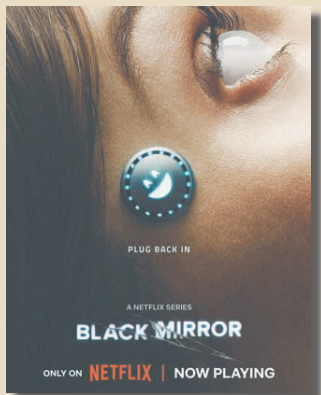


Kimura says her first goal is to maintain the Michelin star. – AFP



HYPE ZONE

Binge-worthy flicks

**Black Mirror** (Netflix)

Creator: Charlie Brooker

Cast: Cristin Milioti, Jimmi Simpson, Jesse Plemons

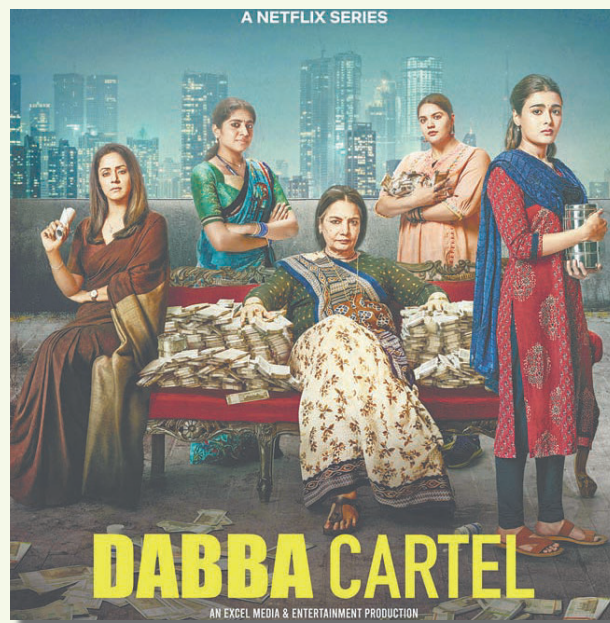
Tapping into the OG *Black Mirror*, Brooker brings season seven back to basics as it blends sci-fi and horror. A tale that explores techno-paranoia, this show taps into the collective unease about the modern world. *Black Mirror* is a contemporary reworking of *The Twilight Zone*. Unsettling, heartbreaking and mind-boggling, the anthology reveals humanity's worst traits and greatest innovations.

Dabba Cartel (Netflix)

Creators: Shibani Akhtar & Gaurav Kapoor

Cast: Jyotika, Shabana Azmi, Shalini Pandey

Five middle-class women in a Mumbai suburb who run a traditional *dabbawala* (lunchbox) service become involved in a high-stakes drug operation using lunchboxes to transfer illicit goods. However, they find themselves in a sitch after an investigation was launched against a pharmaceutical company. The ladies evade the law, navigate dangerous criminals, all while maintaining a "normal" life.

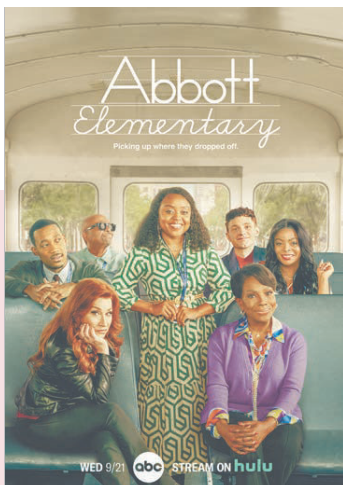
**Karma** (Netflix)

Creator: Lee Il-hyung

Cast: Park Hae-soon, Gong Seung-yeon, Shin Min-a

Based on the web-comic *Akyeon* by Choi Hee-Sun, *Karma* is about one man who makes an irreversible deal following a mysterious accident, a doctor with a traumatic past, a debt-ridden man who is knee deep with private lenders and a man who loses his job unfairly. Their stories are meant to intertwine in the cobweb of life as *Karma* unfolds their darkest fears.

- PICS FROM IMDB

**Abbott Elementary** (Disney+)

Creator: Quinta Brunson

Cast: Brunson, Tyler James Williams, Lisa Ann Walter, Janelle James

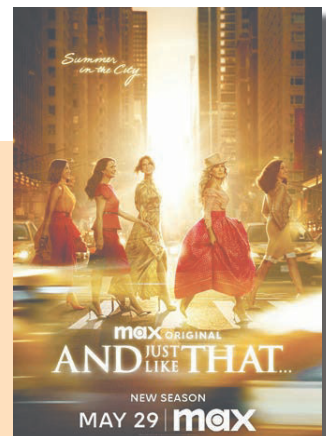
A group of teachers, a dedicated but questionable principal and a janitor come together to give elementary students the best education they can afford. In between life and teaching, *Abbott Elementary* is an offbeat show that tackles the real-life challenges public school educators face. Set in Philly, it is a social, comedic lens into the community that is often commercialised in mainstream media.

And Just Like That... (Max)

Creator: Michael Patrick King

Cast: Sarah Jessica Parker, Cynthia Nixon, Kristin Davis

Return to the 21st century New York City with Carrie Bradshaw for the second rodeo after *Sex and the City*. The dynamics may have changed but our girls are still figuring out life as they brunch and spill the tea. Strutting the streets of Manhattan in her Manolo Blahnik, Bradshaw is coming back to us with another whirlwind of romance, breakups and a couple of cosmopolitans. And just like that, Bradshaw and her girls are part of your hump-day-wind-down TV time.



Life's chartbusters

1 ALLAH BERSAMA KITA IDRIS ARUTHIR



Song: Allah Bersama Kita
 Artiste: Idris Aruthir
 Genre: Hip Hop



Song: Dan Lian De Meng
 Artiste: Cheang Shi Yin
 Genre: Pop



Song: All In
 Artiste: Rakin
 Genre: Hip Hop



Song: Bianglala
 Artiste: The Goodfellaz
 Genre: Pop



Song: Aftermath
 Artiste: Averis
 Genre: Rock

Cast:
Jason Statham,
Arianna Rivas,
Michael Peña,
Emmett J Scanlan,
Ricky Champ

Director:
David Ayer

E-VALUE

5

ACTING

4

PLOT

4



Statham is back in action mode, trading blueprints for bullets as a no-nonsense ex-commando.

A Working Man sets the tone: brooding hero, explosive stakes and just enough grit to sand down expectations.

BY YASMIN ZULRAEZ

Hit me baby one more time

► Not his best, Statham's latest feels too familiar

IN *A Working Man*, audiences are treated to what is essentially a Jason Statham genre piece with the soul of a Home Depot commercial and the moral core of a Liam Neeson phone call. Directed by David Ayer (yes, that *Suicide Squad* guy) and co-written by none other than Sylvester Stallone, the film attempts to channel gritty man-on-a-mission energy but ends up feeling like a reheated casserole of every action thriller from the past decade, with a touch more plaster dust.

Statham stars as Levon, a former military badass who has traded black ops for blueprints. Naturally, the peace does not last long. What follows is a one-man demolition derby of fists, gunfire and furrowed brows. And while it never truly rises above its predictable script or boilerplate direction, it also never fully crashes and burns either. It just idles there, flexing its muscles.

When in doubt, grunt it out

A Working Man does not pretend to be high cinema. It knows its audience. It was practically engineered in a lab for anyone who thought *The Mechanic* needed more drywall or *Safe* could use a construction site subplot. It is not here to change the game, it is here to play the same game in steel-toe boots.

Statham delivers, as always, a rock-solid performance of deadpan intensity. Whether he is drilling nails or drilling bad guys with equal efficiency, his charisma somehow pulls the film through the more uninspired stretches. He grunts, he growls and he walks away from explosions without looking back. Mission accomplished.

Unfortunately, everything around him seems to be a few screws loose. The villains are as one-dimensional as an Ikea instruction manual, the supporting cast ranges from "adequate" to "where have I seen them before?" and the script, while occasionally sharp, often stumbles on action clichés like a drunk uncle at a barbecue. Lines land with the grace of a thrown cinder block.

Gunfights, gut renovations

Where *A Working Man* shines is in its action sequences, which, to be fair, are the main reason anyone bought a ticket. The fight choreography is brutal, the gunplay loud and fast and the body count impressively stacked. Ayer knows how to direct carnage, even if the camera occasionally forgets that editing

is a thing.

There is also a weird, mildly amusing contrast in tone throughout the movie. One moment it is all blood, bullets and snarling mafiosos, the next it is back to scenes of Statham standing around in a hard hat, casually sipping from a thermos. There is even a warm dinner scene that feels pulled straight from a Hallmark film, sandwiched awkwardly between warehouse massacres.

It is that tonal inconsistency that keeps *A Working Man* from hitting the highs of Statham's better flicks. It is not *The Transporter* or *Wrath of Man*. Heck, it does not even match *Homefront*, which, coincidentally, was also written by Stallone. Instead, this one fits neatly into the "it's fine" tier of his filmography.

Stallone's pen, Ayer's lens, Statham's abs

With Stallone co-writing and producing, there is a very specific kind of machismo dripping from

every scene. Every line sounds like it was written for the Marlboro man. Every stare-off threatens to trigger a testosterone explosion. But for all its bluster, the movie never feels particularly original. Every twist feels telegraphed, every emotional beat hits like a sledgehammer to a soufflé.

Ayer's direction does not help either. While the film maintains a gritty, street-level aesthetic, it lacks the polish or pacing of his earlier work, such as *End of Watch* or *Fury*. Here, the camera often lingers too long or cuts too quickly, making some sequences more dizzying than dynamic. The score is thumping and moody, but ultimately forgettable.

And yet, something is charming about how earnestly the film tries to deliver a straightforward, meat-and-potatoes action tale. No frills, no flair, just Statham laying waste to every baddie within reach. It may not be smart, but it is committed.

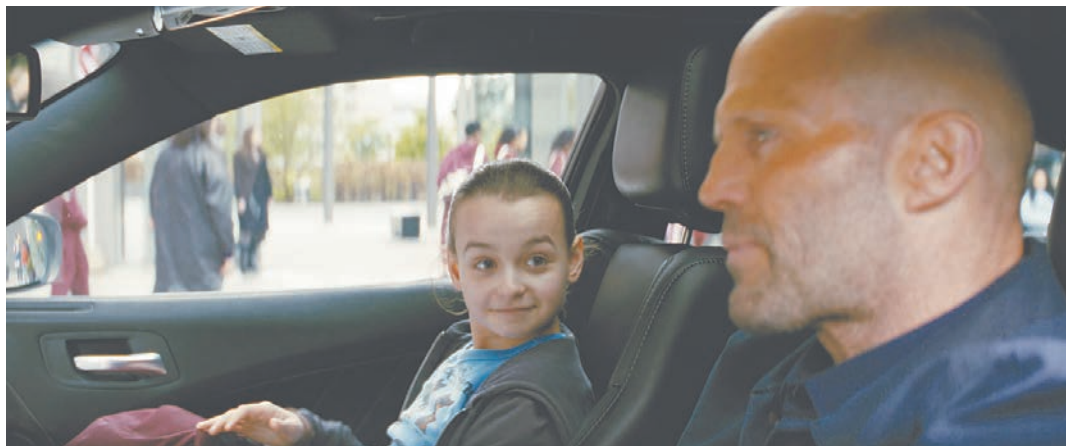
Watch it for Statham

Ultimately, *A Working Man* is just aggressively average. It does everything a Statham movie is expected to do, just with less style, less bite and less wit than his greatest hits. There is no reinventing the wheel here, just rotating the tires on a vehicle that has been driving down this road for far too long.

Still, for fans of no-nonsense, bicep-flexing, accent-gravelling action flicks, there is enough here to justify a late-night viewing with snacks and lowered expectations. Just remember: it is a Statham movie. That is the best reason to watch it. Do not take it too seriously.

Because if you do, you might just start wondering why half the cast looks like they were recruited from a warehouse clearance sale of Eastern European henchmen and why the plot twists are visible from orbit.

A Working Man is neither the best nor the worst Statham outing, it is just a workmanlike display of fists, firepower and familiar tropes. Sit back, turn off the brain and enjoy watching Statham do what he does best: look pissed off and hit things really, really hard.



Statham (right) shows his softer side as a fiercely protective father navigating a violent world.



BigBang's Daesung to perform live in Malaysia

➤ K-pop artiste to bring solo concert to Arena of Stars, Resorts World Genting

DAESUNG, the vocalist of K-pop group BigBang, is making his return to Malaysia with a solo concert D's Wave 2025 Asia Tour in Malaysia on June 7 at the Arena of Stars, Resorts World Genting.

This concert is Daesung's solo comeback to the Malaysian stage after several years.

Renowned for his soulful voice and dynamic stage presence, Daesung promises an unforgettable show filled with heartfelt music and high-energy performances.

Amid fan anticipation, Daesung's agencies R&D Company and D-Label have included Malaysia on the tour map.

The tour also coincides with the release of Daesung's first solo mini-album *D's Wave*, making this his first major performance featuring new tracks and a refreshed concept.

Aside from his musical talent, Daesung is beloved for his charming personality and sense of humour, having left a strong impression in the world of variety shows, YouTube and entertainment.

This concert is not only a musical celebration but also a heartwarming reunion between Daesung and his fans.

The D's Wave 2025 Asia Tour kicks off today in Seoul, followed by stops in Ho Chi Minh City, Taipei, Hong Kong, Kobe, Yokohama and more.

Tickets will go on sale next Friday, with prices ranging from RM388 to RM788.



Daesung's concert tour coincides with the release of his first solo mini-album *D's Wave*.



Chloe will embark on her first-ever UK and European tour in October. – LILLIE EIGERPIC

Chloe Qisha goes romantic

MALAYSIAN artiste Chloe Qisha has released her new single and music video *Modern Romance*, her third single taken from her upcoming EP *Modern Romance*, which is set for release on May 15.

On *Modern Romance*, Chloe creates another future pop hit that exudes vibrant, upbeat melodies and incorporates subtle hints of funk and disco – an intoxicating combination that has quickly become unmistakably Chloe. The video, directed by Bedroom, is a raunchy and playful visual that sees Chloe and a love interest at their most intimate.

"*Modern Romance* is my third single from my second EP, as well as the title track. This song is the final piece of the puzzle that cemented our gorgeous collection of songs for this new EP. It is about dating in the modern age and the craziness that comes with it – the expectations, the messiness and also the hunger that people encounter on their quests to find love. The conclusion is always that there is no right or wrong in modern romance, it is a minefield with no rules and it is incredibly confusing, but the hope is that you find a little passion and joy along the ride," Chloe said.

Following a string of sell-out shows in London, Manchester, Amsterdam and Paris – in October, Chloe will embark on her first-ever UK and European tour, including her biggest headline show to date at London's Village Underground. The tour will see Chloe play shows in Glasgow, Manchester, Bristol, London, Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam and Berlin.

Chloe's sophomore EP *Modern Romance* is set for release on May 15 and will include her new single as well as her two previously released singles this year *21st Century Cool Girl* and *Sex, Drugs & Existential Dread*.

"The *Modern Romance* EP is the project of my dreams. I am so proud of this body of work and so excited to play it to people when we tour in October. I love each and every song so much it is insane – you know you have done something pretty cool when you suddenly realise that all you can listen to right now is... well... you. She is the sister act to my first EP, the more rambunctious and daring younger sibling who is ready to make her mark. She is about love in the modern age, in all of her passionate and messy forms. We have only just scraped the surface, and I cannot wait for the world to see what we have in store."



Yung Kai is also known as Max Zhang.

Canadian Yung Kai to sing in TTDI

CANADIAN singer Yung Kai is bringing his debut Asia tour to Kuala Lumpur this August, performing at The Platform at Menara Ken TTDI.

As part of his Yung Kai: Flower, Moon and Star Tour, he will perform at the venue on Aug 27 at 8pm.

The concert promises a night filled with dreamy vocals and heartfelt lyrics. Fans can expect to see the indie musician perform fan favourites such as *Blue*, *Wildflower* and *Do You Think You Could Love Me?*

Since debuting in 2022, the 22-year-old Canadian musician has gained popularity for his single *Blue*, hitting number two on the Spotify Global Viral Chart and earning over 300 million streams on Spotify.

Yung Kai is inspired by artistes such as Laufey, Keshi and Wave to Earth. Making music in his bedroom studio, he has since become a rising artiste for his relatable lyrics and catchy melodies.

Ziana Zain, Anuar Zain, Ernie Zakri, Syamel to hold gala show in October

FOUR well-known artistes in the Malaysian music industry – Ziana Zain, Anuar Zain, Ernie Zakri and Syamel – are set to perform in the Empat Live In Kuala Lumpur 2025 concert, which will take place on Oct 18 at Mega Star Arena.

Organised by Anuar Zain Network in collaboration with Altus ProHouse, the concert brings together two generations of entertainers in one show, with all four artistes being family members.

This marks the first-ever collaboration between siblings Ziana and Anuar and their niece Ernie and her husband Syamel.

"This is a very exciting project... my sister Ziana, our niece Ernie, her husband Syamel and I will all be sharing the same stage as performers, entertaining the audience together," Anuar said in a statement.

He said the idea for the concert had been in the works for a long time but it could only be realised now after coordinating the schedules of all four artistes.

Ziana, meanwhile, described the concert as a special celebration for fans to enjoy the works of two generations in one night.

"I do not want to promise anything extraordinary but come and enjoy Empat Live In Kuala Lumpur 2025 to the fullest... this concert will also serve as proof that our fans do not just support a single favourite singer of theirs but always support the local music industry," she said.

Ernie said she is feeling nervous and excited to be given the chance to perform

alongside her long-time idols – her uncle and aunt.

"I cried after being invited to make this concert a reality... Empat Live In Kuala Lumpur 2025 is a dream I have had for a long time," she said.

Syamel described his participation in the concert as an extraordinary opportunity that would elevate his singing career.

"Ziana, Anuar, Ernie, each of them is a legend... our collaboration can result in an interesting concert concept," he said.

The concert will be directed by Jennifer Thompson, with Sze Wan as the music director alongside experienced local musicians.

Tickets prices range from RM288 to RM2,088. – Bernama



The show will take place at Mega Star Arena.

– TICKET2UPIC

Royals fall again

Australia's Hazlewood steers Bengaluru win over Rajasthan

AUSTRALIAN pacer Josh Hazlewood starred with 4-33 in Royal Challengers Bengaluru's 11 run IPL win at home against Rajasthan Royals, who won the toss and chose to field first Thursday.

Chasing 206 to win after Bengaluru's 205-5, Rajasthan looked comfortable before Dhruv Jurel was dismissed by Hazlewood in the 19th over of the chase.

Jurel scored a 34-ball 47 and was removed with 17 needed off 9 balls for the win.

Hazlewood removed England's Jofra Archer on the next ball, leaving Royals reeling with 17 needed off the final over.

Earlier, Indian batting superstar Virat Kohli hit a 42-ball 70 to steer Bengaluru to a par score on a batting friendly Bengaluru wicket.

Openers Kohli and Phil Salt raced to 59-0 in the powerplay before Salt was removed on 26 in the seventh over with the team on 61-1.

Kohli then built an important 95 run partnership with Devdutt Padikkal before finally falling in the 16th over to Archer.

Padikkal, who was batting very well, fell soon after a 27-ball 50, with Bengaluru on 161-3.

Quick wickets towards the end took away the momentum before key cameos by Tim David (23) and Jitesh Sharma, who remained unbeaten on 20.

Archer was Rajasthan's standout bowler and finished with 33-1. Sandeep Sharma took 2-45 and Sri Lanka's Wanindu Hasaranga finished with 1-30.

Rajasthan's young top-order batters started really well and stayed ahead of the required run rate for the first half of the chase.

Indian Test opener Yashasvi Jaiswal hit 19-ball 49 before he was

removed by Hazlewood.

His opening partner, Vaibhav Suryavanshi fell early on 16 to India veteran Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who finished with 1-50 in his four-over spell.

Spinner Krunal Pandya bowled an important spell and removed both Nitish Rana (28) and Rajasthan skipper Riyan Parag (22) who looked dangerous after the fall of initial wickets.

"I think we did really well with the ball... We held them back really well," Parag said after the game.

"With the batting, I thought at the halfway mark we were in the driving seat," he added.

But "we have ourselves to blame... (The team was) in the driving seat and we let it slip".
- AFP



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Virat Kohli in action. - REUTERS/SPIC

Eubank Jr speaks of family pain ahead of Benn fight

CHRIS EUBANK JR changed his approach yesterday, talking about his feelings not his opponent in the highly-anticipated press conference ahead of the grudge bout against British rival Conor Benn.

The pair's long feud escalated in February when Eubank Jr. slapped Benn with an egg at an event to promote the bout at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

Benn had blamed his two failed drugs tests, which resulted in their 2022 bout being cancelled, on the over-consumption of eggs.

Chris Eubank Sr. fought Benn's father Nigel twice in the 1990s and their tetchy relationship has fuelled the animosity between their sons.

After the egg incident, Eubank Sr., no stranger to pre-fight needling in his prime, labelled his son "a disgrace".

The two fighters sat at opposite ends of the stage as they met the media ahead of Saturday's fight (Sunday morning in Malaysia).

After heckling Benn's manager Eddie Hearn off stage, Eubank Jr., sounding like his father, struck a philosophical note asking "what is pain?"

"My own father, a man I idolised for my entire life, doesn't speak to me. We haven't spoken for years and he thinks I'm a disgrace," he said.

"I have a 31-year-old brother who is buried in the desert in Dubai, that is pain. I have his son, three years old, he asks why can't I see my daddy? Why can't he take me to school? That is pain."

"These things are what pain is to me," Eubank Jr. said. "The weight cut, the rehydration clause, these are all things that are not an issue, that are not important."

When he turned to the fight, Eubank Jr. took another shot at Benn.

"I know what's coming. I've prepared my whole life for these moments. I've put in the time, I've dedicated decades to this sport and I've done it all without cheating, without cutting any corners and I'm proud of that," he said.

Benn was less talkative.

"This is what I do. I love this game. This is what I live for. This is every fighter's dream when they turn professional," he said. "I'm more prepared and I'm more than ready."

"I'm coming here to take his head off!"
- AFP

Moutet smashes racket in front of jeering crowd

CORENTIN MOUTET was booed off the court after smashing his racket and retiring midway through the second set of his first-round match against fellow Frenchman Harold Mayot at the Madrid Open.

Trailing 3-6, 2-3, Moutet smashed his racket in frustration after losing a point. He walked to his chair to get a new one but, after what seemed like an exchange of words with the jeering crowd, headed to the umpire to signal his retirement.

The 26-year-old later said on X that he had been struggling with a lingering back injury throughout the match.

"I went to do an MRI directly after my match I'm still waiting for the result," Moutet wrote on X after the match.

"I wanted to try today but I didn't know that it would be that bad."

"My back didn't allow me to do much. I hope to be back soon on the court. All the best to my opponent for the rest of the tournament." - Reuters

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Jobs

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Malaysian Paper

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Job Description

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- 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.
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Djokovic flying the flag for the 'older guys'

NOVAK DJOKOVIC acknowledges the generational shift in tennis that has brought a new crop of players into the limelight but the 24-time Grand Slam champion says he has no intention of quietly fading into the background.

The 37-year-old won three out of the four major titles in 2023 but has not been able to reproduce that kind of form since, being shut out of the game's biggest tournaments last year as Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz took two apiece.

With the retirements of Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Andy Murray, Djokovic is the last member of the "Big Four" still standing and the Serb said he wanted to continue giving to the sport.

"The last 20 years were dominated mostly by the four of us and when three of my biggest rivals retired you can feel there's a shift," Djokovic said at the Madrid Open.

"Not only in terms of the generations of players (who now have) the main focus and attention on them, but it takes a bit of time for people to accept the fact that Roger and Rafa are not playing, and Murray, and one day myself.

"But I'm still trying to stay and represent the older guys, the older generation. Hopefully that brings the positive effect to the tournaments and to the tour itself," he added.

"That's also one of the reasons why I keep on playing, because I feel like it also helps tennis still thrive on the attention and crowd coming in and watching tournaments and getting interested."

Djokovic, who is eyeing his 100th tour-level title before the French Open starts on May 25, said no player would ever be bigger than tennis.

"The sport should outlive everyone, the sport will outlive everyone, and it's more important than anybody individually," he added. "We're all here in the service of the sport." — Reuters

Swiatek survives Eala scare

World No. 2 avoided shock defeat against Filipina teenager at Madrid Open

DEFENDING Madrid Open champion Iga Swiatek survived a scare to beat rising teenage star Alexandra Eala 4-6, 6-4, 6-2 yesterday and reach the third round in the Spanish capital.

The 19-year-old Filipina, who beat Swiatek in straight sets on a shock run to the Miami Open semi-finals in March, claimed the first set as the world No. 2 struggled.

Swiatek, who has been below her best so far this season, found her rhythm in the second set and eventually downed Eala, ranked 72nd, with ease in the third.

"It wasn't easy to get into the rhythm and the right timing and I'm happy that I was just patient," Swiatek told Spanish broadcaster TVE.

"I always love playing here, for sure I'm proud of my performances in the last two years.

"I felt like I was making too many errors from everything, so there wasn't like one specific adjustment (I had to make)," Swiatek told reporters.

"For sure I wanted to keep my margins and play a

little bit more safe, to just play more balls in because I was making some unforced errors that weren't really necessary."

In other matches, Anastasija Sevastova

ousted 2017 French Open

winner and Latvian

compatriot Jelena Ostapenko

7-6 (7-2), 6-2.

Ostapenko beat Swiatek in

the

Stuttgart quarterfinals last week.

Australian Open champion Madison Keys, seeded fifth, beat Lucia Bronzetti 6-4, 6-3 to reach the third round, where she will face Anna Kalinskaya.

Fourth seed Coco Gauff scraped her way past Dayana Yastremska 0-6, 6-2, 7-5.

Gauff spurned three match points at 5-4 up in the third set and then conceded a break while serving for the set.

Yastremska failed to capitalise on her serve as Gauff broke for 6-5 and at the fourth time of asking the 21-year-old clinched victory on her serve. — AFP



Iga Swiatek in action during her round of 64 match against Alexandra Eala (not pictured). — REUTERS/PICT



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Kane hopes to 'silence' doubters as Bayern title looms

AFTER a career of individual awards but no team honours, Bayern Munich striker Harry Kane's title breakthrough could come as early as fulltime of today's (9.30pm Malaysian time) home match against Mainz.

If they beat sixth-placed Mainz and second-placed Bayer Leverkusen fail to beat Augsburg at home (9.30pm), Bayern and Kane will be crowned Bundesliga winners.

Bayern are eight points clear with four games remaining, so a first title for Kane is a mere formality.

But after losing six finals – three with Tottenham, two with England and one with Bayern – a debut title win would be a long-awaited reward for the 31-year-old forward.

After two decades at boyhood club Tottenham, Kane moved to Bayern in 2023, motivated by a desire for team honours.

While Bayern's dreams of winning the Champions League in their own stadium this season flamed out with a quarterfinal loss to Inter Milan, lifting the Bundesliga shield would soothe frustrations after a trophyless 2023-24.

Kane has rarely spoken about the title, preferring to focus on the task at hand, but in February he revealed how much the pursuit of a team honour drove him.

"There are many people who, throughout my career, only talk about the fact I haven't won a title yet. It would be nice to silence a few of them," Kane said.

Kane would also join Kevin Keegan and Owen Hargreaves as Englishmen who won the Bundesliga.

Speaking with *Sky Germany*, Bayern powerbroker Uli Hoeness said "nobody deserves the title more" than the England captain.

Calling Kane "a real Bayern player", Hoeness lavished praise on the striker, saying "he fights, he works, he scores an incredible number of goals, but he also works hard for the team."

"You can feel that he absolutely wants to win this title."

Eintracht Frankfurt can take a step in qualifying for the Champions League through a top-four finish for the first time tomorrow, when they host RB Leipzig (12.30am).

Frankfurt, whose only other participation in the modern Champions League came through winning the Europa League, sit three points clear of fourth-placed Leipzig.

Leipzig could fall as low as sixth with a loss, while seventh-placed Borussia Dortmund – who have taken 10 of a possible 12 points in their past four matches – are also within striking distance. – AFP

Real, Barca duel in Cup final

Imperious Catalans face struggling Los Blancos in Copa del Rey showdown

HANSI FLICK'S Barcelona are closing in on a potential quadruple this season but blocking their path are eternal rivals Real Madrid.

Although the Catalan giants, also in the Champions League semifinals, are widely considered the best team in Spain at the moment, Carlo Ancelotti's faltering *Los Blancos* could claim both domestic titles still on the line.

Madrid trail leaders Barca by four points in La Liga, with another *Clasico* to come in May, but first the Spanish giants butt heads in Seville tomorrow (4am Malaysian time) in the Copa del Rey final.

Flick's Barcelona have emphatically bested Madrid on the two prior occasions they have met this season, first winning 4-0 in La Liga at the Santiago Bernabeu in October.

Then Barca dismantled Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup final in Saudi Arabia in January, roaring to a 5-2 victory to claim the first trophy of the Flick era.

Barcelona outplayed Madrid in both games but their German coach had nothing but praise for his Italian counterpart.

"Real Madrid has an incredible team and one of the best coaches in the world... He (Ancelotti) has won everything," said Flick.

"He's a gentleman... I have the highest respect. On Saturday, we play the final against Real Madrid and of course against Carlo."

Ancelotti will need to find ways to shut down Pedri in midfield as well as dynamic wingers Lamine Yamal and Raphinha.

Madrid have lost 12 matches this season, compared to just two across all competitions in the previous campaign.

Barcelona breezed past Real Betis and edged Atletico Madrid on the way to the final at La Cartuja stadium, their first since 2021, when they beat Athletic Bilbao.

Real Madrid, who last won the trophy in 2023, needed an extra-time goal from Antonio Rudiger to beat Real Sociedad 5-4 on aggregate in the semifinals.

After Madrid's Champions League elimination by Arsenal

earlier this month they are desperate to beat Barcelona and claim some silverware as well as restoring their pride.

Both sides have lost important players in the run-up to the game.

Barcelona are without top goalscorer Robert Lewandowski and left-back Alejandro Balde, while Madrid's Eduardo Camavinga was ruled out for the rest of the season on Thursday with a groin injury.

French superstar Kylian Mbappe missed Madrid's nervy 1-0 win at Getafe on Wednesday as he recovers from an ankle problem, but Ancelotti said he is expected to be fit to face Barca.

Mbappe was whistled by Madrid fans during their win over Athletic Bilbao last weekend when his face appeared on the screens at the Bernabeu and he will hoping to lift his first major trophy with the club, following European Super Cup and Intercontinental Cup wins.

When Madrid have lined up with Mbappe alongside Vinicius Junior, Jude Bellingham and Rodrygo sometimes the team suffers at the back.

"Maybe they are the favourites, but a final is a final and anything can happen," said Ancelotti.

"We have to defend well and I am convinced that we will defend well and have opportunities in attack."

Barcelona will likely line up with Gerard Martin at leftback replacing Balde, which is an area Madrid can exploit, perhaps through Rodrygo, although the Brazilian has not scored in his last 11 matches.

"On a statistical level he has to play because if he's not scored in all that time, well he has to sooner or later," joked Ancelotti.

"In these type of matches he always scores and I believe in him completely." – AFP

Atletico thump Rayo, Valladolid relegated

ATLETICO MADRID cruised to a 3-0 La Liga win over Rayo Vallecano yesterday as they bounced back from defeat at Las Palmas last weekend.

Real Betis bolstered their Champions League ambitions with a 5-1 win over Real Valladolid, confirming the visitors' long-expected relegation.

Atletico have little to play for in the rest of the season with leaders Barcelona 10 points clear with five matches remaining, but produced a solid derby display.

Real Betis bolstered their hopes of finishing in the top five as they hammered Valladolid at the Benito Villamarin stadium with playmaker Isco on the scoresheet.

Former Brazil great Ronaldo is the majority shareholder at Valladolid, who were promoted last season but immediately return to the second tier after losing 25 of their 33 games so far.

Betis moved fifth, two points above Villarreal who have a game in hand which they will play on Sunday against Espanyol.

Earlier, Osasuna beat Sevilla 1-0 and Leganes grabbed a late 1-1 draw at home against Girona, leaving the Madrid side 19th and four points from safety. – AFP



Atletico Madrid's Alexander Sorloth (right) in action with Rayo Vallecano's Florian Lejeune. – REUTERS/PIC

THE warning signs have been flashing for weeks but Inter Milan are now truly feeling the weight of their marathon season as they prepare to host in-form AS Roma on Sunday (9pm Malaysian time) having gone three matches without a win in all competitions.

With Inter and Napoli locked together on 71 points with five rounds remaining, Simone Inzaghi's side can ill afford another stumble. Yet they face a seventh-placed Roma outfit riding a remarkable 17-match unbeaten league streak.

Thursday's Italian Cup semifinal exit at the hands of city rivals AC Milan has only intensified the pressure on Inter, who still harbour Champions League ambitions with a two-legged semifinal against Barcelona looming.

"We've had a more packed schedule than

Weary Inter face resurgent Roma

others but, again, it's not an excuse," Inzaghi said after the loss that saw them go out 4-1 on aggregate.

The absence of key figures Denzel Dumfries, Piotr Zielinski and Marcus Thuram due to injuries in the final stretch could prove decisive as the champions' legs grow heavier and their grip on the *Scudetto* looser with each passing week.

While Inter stumble, Napoli find themselves in a vastly more enviable position, with Monday's (2.45am) home clash against 10th-placed Torino representing perhaps their

toughest remaining hurdle on the road to potential glory.

The Neapolitans are eyeing a fourth consecutive home victory to clear their toughest obstacle. After Torino, their run-in reads like a dream sequence for title contenders: Lecce, who are currently 17th, Genoa (13th) and Parma (15th) before concluding at home to Cagliari (16th).

Juventus, who are still pursuing a top-four finish after a season of wildly fluctuating fortunes, should encounter few obstacles when they host rock-bottom Monza on

Monday (12.01am).

With relegation a virtual certainty for the visitors – who sit 11 points from the safety zone with 15 points available – Juve have a prime opportunity to bounce back from Igor Tudor's first defeat as manager, a lacklustre 1-0 loss to Parma.

The race for fourth has developed into a five-team dogfight, with Juventus fifth on 59 points, a point behind fourth-placed Bologna, with Lazio, Roma and Fiorentina within striking distance – the latter three points behind Juve in eighth.

Third-placed Atalanta are well-positioned five points clear of Juve with 64 points although they have yet to guarantee a top-four finish. – Reuters

Liverpool braced for Premier League title party

LIVERPOOL have one hand on the Premier League trophy as they seek the solitary point they need against struggling Tottenham on Sunday (11.30pm Malaysian time) that would guarantee a record-equalling 20th English title.

A draw at an expectant Anfield would take Arne Slot's men 13 points clear of Arsenal with just four games remaining, meaning they could not be caught. Below are three talking points ahead of this weekend's action:

Liverpool on the brink

It is tough to see struggling Tottenham delaying Liverpool's title party at Anfield.

Out-of-form Tottenham are 16th in the league table and have a miserable record at Anfield – not winning there since 2011.

Captain Virgil van Dijk said it had been an "outstanding season" but that there was still work to do after Liverpool's 1-0 at Leicester last week.

Champions League shootout

Just four points separate third-placed Manchester City from Aston Villa in seventh in the race for Champions League spots next season.

For the first time the Premier League's top five will all qualify for Europe's top club competition, due to strong performances in continental competition.

Liverpool are already guaranteed a spot and Arsenal, 10 points clear of Chelsea in sixth, are practically there, leaving three places open.

Villa play Crystal Palace in the FA Cup semifinals on Saturday, with Forest taking on City the following day at Wembley.

It means Newcastle would leapfrog City if they beat lowly Ipswich.

Chelsea badly need to beat Everton at home with a tough run of games to come against Liverpool, Newcastle, Manchester United and Forest.

Southampton playing for pride, Ipswich on brink

Southampton's 1-1 draw at West Ham last week meant they drew level with Derby's record-low points tally of 11 from the 2007/08 season, with five games to go to better the Rams' total.

Leicester are already down and Ipswich appear certain to follow them barring a miracle – a draw for West Ham at Brighton on Saturday would seal their fate.

It would be the second successive season in which all three promoted clubs had been relegated straight back to the Championship.

AFP



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Foxes 'greatest-ever'

Vardy to leave Leicester at end of season

JAMIE VARDY will leave former Premier League champions Leicester at the end of the season, the relegated club announced on Thursday, describing the lightning-quick forward as their "greatest-ever player".

The talismanic striker, a key member of the side that lifted the English league title against seemingly impossible odds in 2016, vowed to continue playing even at the age of 38.

The former England international joined the Foxes in 2012 from non-league side Fleetwood for just £1 million (RM5.8m) and has scored 198 goals in nearly 500 appearances.

The club captain is Leicester's record Premier League goalscorer with 143 goals.

He scored 24 times in the 2015/16 Premier League campaign, helping the Foxes to their first top-flight title in one of the greatest shocks in football history.

Vardy was also part of Leicester's 2021 FA Cup-winning side, who beat Chelsea 1-0 at Wembley.

"We can confirm legendary striker Jamie Vardy will leave Leicester City this summer after 13 seasons that have seen him become our greatest-ever player," the club said in a statement.

"Jamie is unique," said chairman Aiyawatt Srivaddhanaprabha. "He is a special player and an even more special person."

Vardy said he was "devastated" to be leaving the Foxes but the timing was right.

"To the fans of Leicester, I'm gutted that this day is coming, but I knew it was going to come eventually,"

he said in a video message to fans.

"I've spent 13 unbelievable years at this club, with lots of success, and some downs, but the majority have all been highs."

Vardy, who has scored seven goals in 31 league appearances this season, gave a scathing assessment of Leicester's campaign after relegation

was confirmed on Sunday following a 1-0 defeat by Liverpool.

"This season has been nothing but miserable and for me personally, a total embarrassment," he said in a social media post. "It hurts."

Ruud van Nistelrooy's side are 19th in the table, having collected just 18 points from their 33 matches and are heading back to the Championship after just one season back in the top division.

Vardy, the last remaining player from Leicester's 2016 title success still at the King Power Stadium, enjoyed a fairytale rise from the fifth tier of English football to the very top.

He played his part in the club's astonishing escape in the 2014/15 season, when they won seven of their last nine games to escape relegation.

The following season his goals were a major factor in the club's 5,000-1 title charge under Claudio Ranieri – he scored in a record 11 consecutive Premier League fixtures.

His time at the King Power was also marked by tragedy when five people, including chairman Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha, were killed in a helicopter crash just outside the stadium in October 2018.

"Nine years ago, we did the impossible, we won the Premier League," Vardy said in a video on his social media channels. "We then went on to win the FA Cup – that was for you, Vichai."

"We reached the Champions League quarterfinals. Before that, we pulled off the great escape."

He added: "My one regret – and I'm devastated about this – is that I'm not saying farewell to you on the back of a much better season. This isn't the way I wanted my career here to finish. Finally, this isn't retirement. I want to keep playing and doing what I enjoy most, scoring goals."

Leicester, who play Wolves today (10pm Malaysian time), have five games left this season. – AFP



Jamie Vardy

BY RICHARD JOLLY

OLLIE WATKINS believes Unai Emery has no problem with his decision to go public with his frustration about being benched for Aston Villa's Champions League quarterfinal against Paris Saint-Germain and thinks his manager would be more concerned if he was happy with life on the bench.

The England striker said he was "fuming" and let Emery know how he disappointed he was to only get 20 minutes in the tie against the French champions.

Watkins returned to the Villa team to score in the first minute, hit the woodwork twice and set up a goal in Saturday's 4-1 win over Newcastle before giving a post-match interview when he did not hide his irritation at his bit-part role.

Watkins wants to start FA Cup semifinal

Emery said then that they had "a good conversation" and that it was "fantastic to be angry" but picked Marcus Rashford ahead of Watkins for Wednesday's 2-1 defeat to Manchester City.

But Watkins feels the Spaniard wants that type of attitude at Villa. He said: "I was just saying, from my point of view, every player wants to play and that's it."

"I think there'll probably be a worry if I said, 'I'm happy to just sit on the bench and don't want to play'. I think I'd be getting a bit of backlash, so I just say it as it is."

Watkins is hoping to start tomorrow's (12.15am Malaysian time) FA Cup semifinal

against Crystal Palace but said it is hard to know who the unpredictable Emery will choose.

"We never know who's going to play," he explained. "Sometimes the manager will tell us 30 minutes before we leave the hotel to head towards the stadium."

"He tells us the team then, so everyone just has to be prepared and you never know what's going to happen."

Villa are in their first FA Cup semifinal for a decade as they look to end a wait for a trophy that dates back to 1996.

"This is the furthest since I've been at the club we've got in the FA Cup," Watkins added. "We've always gone out quite early doors

and it's disappointing. I've been saying to the boys one thing I set my eyes on when I joined the club was winning a trophy."

"It's been so long since the club has done that and that's the main aim, so Saturday is massive, and we will be doing all we can to get to the final."

Villa were knocked out of the Carabao Cup by Palace and then lost 4-1 to Oliver Glasner's team in the Premier League in February, while they were thrashed 5-0 at Selhurst Park last May.

And Watkins said: "Palace have been a bit of a bogey team for us, but on our day we're capable of beating anyone. Just bring on the weekend, really." – The Independent

RESULTS & STANDINGS

LA LIGA: Leganes 1 (Munir 90+2)
Girona 1 (Stuani 54), **Osasuna** 1
 (Garcia 25) **Sevilla** 0, **Atletico Madrid**
 3 (Sorloth 3, Gallagher 45, Alvarez 77)
Rayo Vallecano 0, **Real Betis** 5
 (Rodriguez 17, Hernandez 64, Isco 66,
 Perraud 84, Abde 90) **Valladolid** 1
 (Chuki 41).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	33	24	4	5	89	32	76
Real Madrid	33	22	6	5	66	31	72
Atletico	33	19	9	5	56	27	66
Bilbao	33	16	12	5	50	26	60
Real Betis	33	15	9	9	50	41	54
Villarreal	32	14	10	8	55	45	52
Celta Vigo	33	13	7	13	50	49	46
Osasuna	33	10	14	9	40	46	44
Mallorca	33	12	8	13	31	38	44
Sociedad	33	12	6	15	32	37	42
Vallecano	33	10	11	12	35	42	41
Getafe	33	10	9	14	31	30	39
Espanyol	32	10	9	13	35	41	39
Valencia	33	9	12	12	37	49	39
Sevilla	33	9	10	14	35	44	37
Girona	33	9	8	16	40	52	35
Alaves	33	8	10	15	35	46	34
Las Palmas	33	8	8	17	38	53	32
Leganes	33	6	12	15	30	49	30
Valladolid	33	4	4	25	24	81	16

RELEGATED

Note: Top five qualify for the 2025/26 UEFA Champions League, bottom three relegated to second division.

ITALIAN CUP (semifinals, 2nd leg):
Bologna 2 (Fabbian 7, Dall'Agna 86)
Empoli 1 (Kovalenko 33) – Bologna
 win 5-1 on aggregate.

Expand SIPR promotions for more foreign race competitors

TOURISM, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing said the promotions of the Sibiu International Powerboat Race 2025, which kicked off yesterday at the Pulau Li Hua waterfront, need to be expanded further as an international-class competition to attract more racers from abroad.

He described the race as one with great potential to strengthen Sarawak's tourism sector, especially in Sibiu.

"This is a very good programme. It can have a big impact on the local tourism industry if expanded with international-scale organising," he said when met after officiating the event today.

He stressed that close cooperation from all parties is needed, especially in terms of financing and providing more lucrative cash prizes to attract international racers.

"All parties need to work together to promote this race not only locally but also internationally. My ministry is ready to assist in terms of promotion and organisation," he said.

Commenting on the possibility of organising a Formula One speedboat race, Tiong described the proposal as a good step to provide opportunities for locals to delve into the organising aspects and experience world-class sports.

"If there are any interested parties, we welcome discussions with the Sarawak Ministry of Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts and then take this proposal to the federal government level," he said.

He also announced an allocation of RM200,000 from his ministry for the organisation of the prestigious water sports championship. – Bernama

'Self-belief key for Malaysia's game against France'

NATIONAL singles coaching director Kenneth Jonassen believes that a humble approach and strong self-belief are essential as Malaysia gear up to face France in their opening tie of the 2025 Sudirman Cup which will kick off tomorrow in Xiamen, China.

Speaking ahead of the mixed team event, Jonassen emphasised the importance of mental focus, especially in a team setting where anything can happen.

"Whenever you're playing a team event, it's about being humble, regardless of the occasion. At the same time, you need to have strong belief in yourself," he said in an audio recording shared to the media yesterday.

With a few days remaining before the event,

Jonassen said the coaching team is now turning its attention towards more individualised preparation for key players.

"We're in a good place, and now we will start tailoring training more specifically for our core players so they're ready to perform," he added.

Malaysia are looking to make a strong start in their Group D campaign when they take on France, with the tie expected to set the tone for their quest in the prestigious biennial tournament.

Malaysia will be strengthened by the presence of senior and experienced players namely world number two Goh Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin Rumsani, 2025 Asian Badminton Championships champions Aaron Chia-Soh Wooi Yik and Man Wei Chong-Tee Kai Wun (men's doubles); Goh Soon

Huat-Shevon Lai Jemie and Chen Tang Jie-Toh Ee Wei (mixed doubles) as well as Pearly Tan with M. Thinaah (women's doubles).

Other players include Justin Hoh (men's singles); K. Letshanaa (women's singles); Go Pei Kee-Carmen Ting (women's doubles); as well as Hoo Pang Ron-Cheng Su Yin (mixed doubles).

Malaysia, drawn in Group C, will open their campaign against France (April 28) followed by Australia (April 29) and third seed Japan (May 1).

Only the top two teams from each group will qualify for the quarterfinals.

Malaysia's best achievement in the Sudirman Cup is reaching the semifinals three times, namely in 2009, 2021 and 2023 editions. – Bernama



Southern Tigers to square off against Sri Pahang for Malaysia Cup title

SUPER LEAGUE and FA Cup champions Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) are aiming to cap their season by winning their fifth Malaysia Cup title when they square off against Sri Pahang FC in tonight's final (9pm Local time) at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil.

JDT head coach Hector Bidoglio said tomorrow's final is a crucial match and that his team must maintain the positive momentum they have built since the start of the season.

"It's very important game, my players have been working very well all the season. We have very long season, the players have been working all the time and in a great form."

"So, we need to keep our moment and tomorrow we have the last game. A very important game for the club. We need to finish this season in the best way possible," the 57-year-old Argentine said at a pre-match press conference yesterday.

While he was pleased with the team's progress throughout the season, he pointed out that the final presented a unique challenge that demanded full commitment from every player.

"I am happy to follow the JDT idea, philosophy and our boss' idea. I am sure that we

are in a good moment. The players are in a good moment but tomorrow is a final."

"A final is a difficult game. We need to put focus and we need to put our 100 per cent because Sri Pahang is a very good team."

"I don't like to speak about the rival. I don't like to speak about the players of another team."

"Obviously, I analyse the rival. I analyse the individual skill of the player's rival but only I want to speak about my team and my players," he added.

JDT captain Natxo Insa meanwhile described tomorrow's final as a completely different kind of challenge, stressing that the team must rise to the occasion and stay true to their identity.

"The final is a totally different game. We know Sri Pahang have experience in this competition. It's the big teams in the country. So even that, we know we have the responsibility to defend JDT, defend the records, defend our style, defend everything."

"We are in a long season, doing very well. So, we want to finish in the way we are doing. That's all I know," said the player, who has won four Malaysia Cup titles with JDT since 2017 including consecutive wins in 2022 and 2023.

The last time JDT and Sri Pahang met in the Malaysia Cup final was in 2014, when JDT lost 3-5 in a penalty shootout after a 2-2 draw.

Meanwhile, Sri Pahang head coach, Fandi Ahmad, has acknowledged that his team will be considered the underdogs when they face JDT tonight.

However, Fandi remains optimistic, stressing that the Tok Gajah squad still has a chance to pull off an upset through their determination and strong will to prove their worth in challenging the Super League champions.

"What we have is the team's commitment to work hard, stay disciplined, and remain determined to seize success in the final."

"Spirit and motivation like this are crucial. For me, Sri Pahang's progress this season is already a bonus, as we've made history by reaching the final after 11 years," he told Bernama.

Fandi also said that the second crucial aspect for his players is mutual support and constant communication during the game.

"The players need to help one another, maintain communication, stay calm and not waste any opportunity in front of them," he said. – Bernama

Nations Cup ideal platform to gauge Speedy Tigers' progress: Minarwan

NATIONAL hockey legend Datuk Mirnawan Nawawi has described the upcoming FIH Nations Cup in Kuala Lumpur from June 15-21 as the ideal platform to gauge the current level of the national hockey squad, now under the guidance of head coach Sarjit Singh.

He said the tournament provides a valuable opportunity to evaluate the national squad against seven other participating countries, including France, South Africa, New Zealand, and South Korea.

"The Nations Cup is a very good platform for the national hockey team, especially to assess their progress since last year when they were competing

in the National Hockey League. Now is the right time to evaluate them," he said.

"This is also a time to share moments and experiences with other top hockey nations – that's what truly matters," he told Bernama.

Commenting on expectations for the national squad, nicknamed the Speedy Tigers, Mirnawan said he preferred not to place any pressure by setting personal targets.

However, he said the national squad should be given time to build a strong and competitive team for the future.

"In team sports like hockey, progress takes time. We want to observe how the national team

develops, but patience is key. For me, we need to give them the space and time to grow, and only then can we identify areas for improvement," he said.

"But we definitely want to see a positive result," he added.

The national team is currently in Australia, playing six friendly matches as part of their preparations for the Nations Cup.

The Speedy Tigers have several major tournaments lined up this year, including the Asian Cup in India from Aug 27 to Sept 7, which offers automatic World Cup qualification spots; the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup from Nov 22 to 29, and the SEA Games in Thailand from Dec 9 to 20. – Bernama



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SCAN ME

Pep's creativity saving City

Guardiola teaching a lesson other managers should take note of

BY RICHARD JOLLY

PEP GUARDIOLA has devised many a winning strategy, some much admired, some much imitated. Yet this was not the plan, or even close to being the plan.

"If you tell me at the beginning of the season that at the end of the season you are fighting for the FA Cup final or to qualify for the Champions League with Nico (O'Reilly) and Matheus (Nunes) at fullback I'd say, 'What are you talking about?'" he said.

The plan was Josko Gvardiol and Kyle Walker, one among the most expensive defenders in history, the other one of the defining rightbacks of his generation.

Not an attacking midfielder from the youth system who had not made a senior appearance before this season and a £50 million (RM275m) misfit of a midfielder.

At the start of the campaign, neither ranked in Guardiola's top four options for the positions they now occupy.

But then the plan in attack was to build around a No. 9 with the potential to break goalscoring records.

Instead, Guardiola, the manager who did more than anyone else to revive the tactic of the false nine, arguably isn't even using one of those as much as two No. 10s and two wingers.

Erling Haaland is injured, Walker is on loan at AC Milan and Gvardiol is playing at centreback. If many a Guardiola team evolves over a season, this one feels more like revolution. This, however, is a reflection of this being no normal year.

Guardiola is open that it has been, in his words, a "bad season", and still will be even if City win the FA Cup and finish in the top five.

His original plans were faulty: he underestimated the rebuild needed, overestimated the staying power of some of his ageing powers, leaving his squad strangely short-staffed at defensive midfielder and centre-forward, beyond a talisman in each position.

Guardiola came to his current strategy more by accident than design, yet should it succeed on two fronts, it will be a triumph of improvisation and adaptability as well as a failure of his initial blueprint for the campaign.

Since the start of March, O'Reilly, with four, is City's top scorer. Nunes's 94th-minute winner against Aston Villa on Wednesday may prove the most significant goal of their Premier League campaign.

If fullbacks have taken up the goalscoring responsibilities, there is a void in the centre of the attack, where Haaland would have been.

Guardiola's rejig has entailed using the man who seemed to be Haaland's deputy, the January signing Omar Marmoush, on the left, and benching Phil Foden, who had seemed Plan B in attack, while Kevin De Bruyne and Ilkay Gundogan operate as No. 10s in a 4-2-2-2 formation in which the most advanced players are the wide men.

There is a short-termism to it: with De Bruyne in the final few games of his glorious City career, with a box midfield of four thirty-somethings.

A policy of safety in numbers, including Bernardo Silva and Mateo Kovacic, may be a way of compensating for physical decline or simply underlining Guardiola's love of midfielders.

His relationship with full-backs is odder. Some of the men he has selected there for City have been

midfielders by trade, such as Fabian Delph and Oleksandr Zinchenko.

There was a shift towards those, like Gvardiol, Nathan Ake, John Stones and Manuel Akanji, who were more centrebacks; in some cases exclusively, until Guardiola reimaged them.

There was a case that Walker was the only specialist fullback in the City squad, until he decamped to Italy.

Rico Lewis was the closest thing to another but Nunes and O'Reilly have a running power he lacks, enabling them to power past the pensionable midfield. De Bruyne can create - and, rewinding the years, he is - while they run.

City's last 10 goals have come from eight different players, a model Guardiola probably likes even though his greatest feats have been built on the back of remarkable numbers from Lionel Messi and Haaland.

This setup won't last, not least because De Bruyne will go and Haaland and Rodri will return. It doesn't need to, though.

In a season when many of Guardiola's attempts to find a way to win have looked flawed after a few games, when players have veered in and out of the team as his strategies have shifted, he only needs it to work for six more domestic matches.

This is not the all-conquering formula of the treble, with John Stones in his hybrid role, or the devastating brilliance of the false-No. 9 formation at its best, or his first great City side, with its twin free eights and flying wingers.

It is a mix of young and old, the men who have struggled in other positions and those not trusted to play in their preferred role.

It is an attempt to make the most out of a bad situation that lesser managers than Guardiola will understand.

It could bring an FA Cup win and a top-five finish with a lineup that, in years to come, may require a little research to ascertain precisely who was playing where and why.

But it has been testament to the creativity of Guardiola, a manager who sometimes seems to have too many ideas but who saw his supposed masterplan break down.

But he may be offering a lesson too. This season has been a failure for management's inflexible ideologues. Yet Guardiola has never been one of them.

The plan wasn't for a 4-2-2-2 with O'Reilly and Nunes as fullbacks. Come August, it might not be again. For now, Guardiola is just trying to find a way to win with what he has got. - The Independent

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola (left) with Nico O'Reilly. - REUTERS/SPIC

