



Don't lie to avoid penalties for lost MyKad: Police

Those found guilty of filing false reports can be jailed up to six months or fined maximum of RM2,000, says Bukit Aman CCID chief.

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Trips paid for by govt: PM

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim says delegation did not use private firm funds to cover cost of flights for recent official visits to four countries, and non-official company representatives who tagged along bore own expenses.

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PRECARIOUSLY PERCHED ... A couple inspecting the damage caused by coastal erosion behind their shop in Kampung Pengkalan Maras, Kuala Terengganu. —BERNAMAPIC



Spike in cyberbullying cases prompts call for intervention

Tougher legislation, stronger enforcement, stricter penalties and promotion of empathy needed to ensure social media remains safe for positive interaction: Expert

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Double joy as mother, daughter graduate together

Forty-six-year-old's decision to pursue bachelor's degree in business administration presented opportunities for duo to support each other mentally and physically.

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Ensure Islamic preachers are accredited: Selangor Sultan

SHAH ALAM: The Selangor Islamic Religious Department has been instructed to ensure that all Islamic preachers invited to the state, especially to talk on matters related to *aqidah* (faith), *syariah* (Islamic law), the teachings of *tasawwuf* (Sufism), and the practice of *tariqa* (spiritual paths), are accredited by the Selangor Islamic Religious Council Accreditation Committee.

The Sultan of Selangor Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah said this is to prevent individuals who do not fully understand the subject matter or have learned from unqualified or unaccredited teachers from spreading incorrect knowledge and interpretations to the public.

"I see that the solution to this issue is to provide proper understanding through efforts by religious agencies

or institutions involved in the true teaching of Islam.

"I also wish to propose the creation of guidelines or a special curriculum or specific regulations regarding the practice of Sufism and *tariqa* in Selangor. I am confident that with true understanding and practice, this will certainly have a positive impact on the character development of the *ummah* in Malaysia."

The Sultan was speaking at the *Multaqa Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah Alhaj* event titled *Ilmu Tasawuf Merungkai Masalah Ummah*.

Sultan Sharafuddin also expressed his deep regret that some Muslims, lacking expertise in Islamic jurisprudence, have questioned and disputed the *fatwas* issued by the Selangor State *Fatwa* Committee.

He said the process of issuing a

fatwa is conducted with great care, considering opinions from many parties, particularly from the Selangor State *Fatwa* Committee and experts in Islamic law, before it is presented for approval and subsequently gazetted.

"As such, I urge those who frequently question *fatwa* to first understand them and refer to the religious authorities if they have any confusion or questions." - Bernama

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has reiterated that his delegation has not, in any way, used private company funds to cover the cost of flights for the recent official visits to four countries.

He said yesterday the expenses, amounting to RM1.6 million, were fully borne by the government.

Anwar said unused seats on the chartered Malaysia Airlines flight were offered to private companies that had legitimate business purposes in the countries involved, such as investment or joint ventures, and these companies paid their respective costs, totalling RM4.5 million.

"If we had used the government's executive jet, the cost to the government would have been RM2.5 million for the visit to the four countries. However, with this (flight) sharing approach, the cost to the government was only RM1.6 million.

"I repeat, the government did not use private company funds. There is no conflict of interest. Do not get caught up in slander in this age of

No private company funds utilised for recent trips: PM

► 'Flight sharing on chartered MAS plane cost only RM1.6 million instead of RM2.5 million if govt executive jet was used'

madness," he said in his latest post on his Facebook page.

He was responding to *Sinar Harian*'s report quoting C4 Centre CEO Pushpan Murugiah as saying that Anwar's use of private company funds for overseas trips could lead to pressure from the companies involved for favours.

Pushpan reportedly said while

financial considerations may be the primary factor in the decision, the government should also take into account the potential for conflict of interest between public and private sectors.

Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil had previously reported that the government managed to save nearly RM1 million on flight costs for

Anwar's recent official visits overseas.

Fahmi, who is also the unity government spokesman, said the government only incurred RM1.662 million for the chartered flight using Malaysia Airlines' Airbus A350, compared with the RM2.5 million for using the government's official aircraft.

In another Facebook post, Anwar said the *Madani* government had implemented various reforms to protect the people's welfare and elevate the country to the highest level during its two years of governance.

"However, we still have a long way to go to truly realise the *Madani*

vision. Therefore, this government will continue to work and formulate more initiatives and policies that favour the people as much as possible, God willing."

Anwar also uploaded an infographic of several initiatives implemented during the second year of the *Madani* government's administration, Bernama reported.

Among them are the *Rahmah* Cash Contribution that benefits nine million B40 recipients, the *Rahmah* Basic Contribution to purchase basic necessities at 600 retail stores and supermarkets, and the People's Income Initiative for the B40, poor and hardcore poor groups.

Special digital pass to be introduced for foreigners

PUTRAJAYA: The Immigration Department will introduce an online special pass application facility from January 2025, one of the initiatives to transform service delivery in line with digitalisation and speed up government transactions, said Home Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail.

A special pass is a document issued to foreigners to grant the holder the right to enter and stay in Malaysia for no more than 30 days based on regulation 14 of Immigration Regulations 1963.

Saifuddin said currently, the application and issuance of special passes is carried out manually, meaning applicants need to be present physically at the counter to submit documents.

"On an average, 50% of the total transactions at the Social and Professional Visit Pass counter at the Visa, Pass and Permit division of the Immigration Department are related to special pass applications, and this has caused congestion.

He said the implementation of the online special pass facility would help

reduce congestion and instil a new work culture.

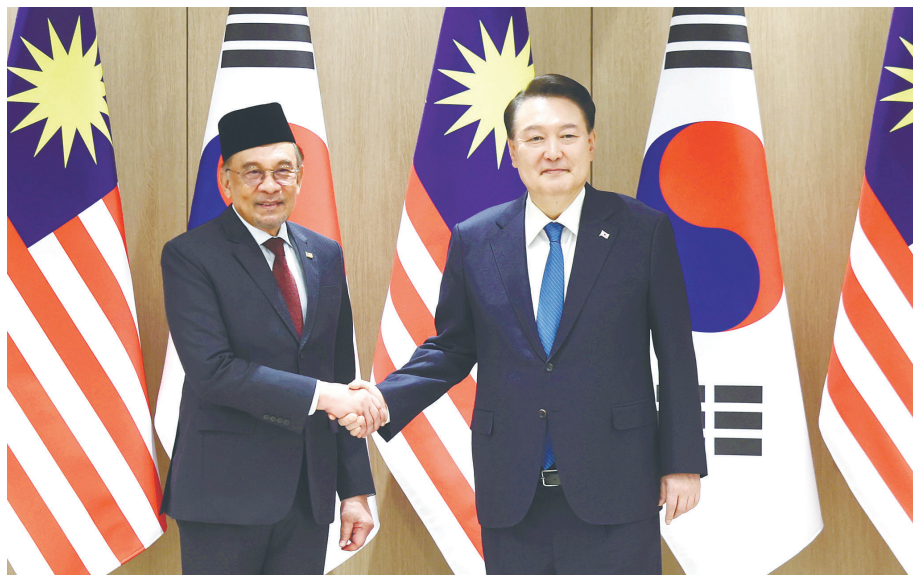
Saifuddin said this after the Home Ministry's monthly assembly yesterday, which was also attended by Deputy Home Minister Datuk Seri Dr Shamsul Anuar Nasarah.

In 2023, 139,344 special passes were issued and as of October this year 119,019 special passes had been issued to foreigners, Bernama reported.

He said any foreign national who is awaiting a decision on an application, extension or exchange of a long-term social visit pass or professional visit pass, or who has experienced problems such as ill health, road accident, natural disaster or a situation beyond his control could avail of the online special pass facility.

"Basically, the facility is a convenience for applicants in managing immigration-related matters, especially in emergency situations or those that require special consideration."

He said the ministry would not compromise on security aspects when the application process is done online.



Anwar being welcomed by Yoon in Seoul yesterday. - BERNAMAPIC

Anwar, Yoon hold talks on M'sia-South Korea ties

SEOUL: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim met South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol at the Yongsan Presidential Office yesterday.

The two leaders, accompanied by several ministers, held a bilateral meeting for about an hour, where they touched on the achievements and progress made since both countries established diplomatic ties 64 years ago, and the

future direction to be taken.

Malaysian Ambassador to South Korea Datuk Mohd Zamruni Khalid said the leaders took stock of Malaysia-South Korea bilateral ties that have significantly progressed in scope and substance since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1960, Bernama reported.

"They also discussed regional and international issues of mutual concern,

and exchanged views on Malaysia's chairmanship of Asean and South Korea's chairmanship of Apec, both in 2025."

Anwar was accompanied by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan, Investment, Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Zafrul Tengku Aziz, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Chang Lih Kang and National Unity Minister Datuk Aaron Ago Dagang.

Uphill battle in fight to curb cyberbullying

➤ Stronger enforcement, education and promotion of empathy needed to ensure social media remains safe for positive interaction, says expert

■ BY DEEPALAKSHMI MANICKAM
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PETALING JAYA: The alarming rise in cyberbullying cases demands immediate intervention, with experts urging organisations and individuals to protect vulnerable groups, especially children and teenagers, from the harmful impact of online harassment.

In the Dewan Rakyat last Tuesday, Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil said the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission received 8,399 reports and complaints related to cyberbullying, or some 27 cases daily from January to Nov 1 compared to 10 cases daily in the same period last year.

Murugason Thangaratnam, CEO of Novem CS, which specialises in solving cyber security challenges, said combating cyberbullying requires a calm and measured approach.

"Avoid responding immediately, take screenshots and report such incidents to the relevant authorities. Limiting social media usage and seeking support from trusted friends or family can help manage the emotional toll of online harassment."

He said while social media has revolutionised how one connects and shares information, it has inadvertently become a powerful platform for spreading harassment, abuse and hate speech.

Murugason also said social media engagement is a key factor behind the rise in cyberbullying cases, and anyone who can post content anonymously can become a bully and target others without accountability.

"This, coupled with inadequate efforts by (platform operators) to address the issue, has led to severe psychological distress and even suicides among victims."

He said the Pew Research Center, a US-based nonpartisan think tank that informs the public about issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world, said 71% of teens believe social media platforms were not doing enough to prevent cyberbullying.

Murugason said stronger enforcement,



Murugason said integrating AI-driven moderation systems into social media platforms could address the scale and speed at which cyberbullying occurs. — ADAM AMIR HAMZAH/THESUN

education and the promotion of empathy are needed to ensure social media remains a space for positive interaction rather than harm.

He added that artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced cybersecurity tools are emerging as powerful allies in the fight against cyberbullying, offering innovative solutions beyond traditional educational campaigns and reactive measures.

He also said AI has the potential to revolutionise how cyberbullying is identified and addressed.

"AI-powered tools, such as machine learning algorithms, can automatically detect and remove abusive or harassing content by analysing patterns and characteristics of harmful behaviour."

"These systems can process vast amounts of user-generated data in real-time, enabling platforms to respond proactively and minimise the emotional harm inflicted on victims."

Murugason said integrating AI-driven moderation systems into social media platforms, forums and messaging apps could address the sheer scale and speed at which cyberbullying occurs.

However, he also cautioned that potential ethical challenges regarding the collection and analysis of personal data by AI systems raises

critical questions about privacy, data ownership and user trust.

He said stricter data protection measures are required to ensure the responsible deployment of such technologies, adding that AI-powered solutions must adhere to robust privacy protocols, including anonymising data, obtaining explicit user consent and implementing strong encryption controls.

Malaysia Cyber Consumer Association president Siraj Jalil said there is a need to prioritise education and awareness in combating cyberbullying.

"Introducing digital literacy programmes into schools and communities can empower individuals, especially youths, to navigate the online space responsibly and identify harmful behaviour."

Siraj also called for stronger legislation and stricter penalties to deter cyberbullying while ensuring justice for victims and establishing support systems, such as counselling services and legal aid to assist those impacted by online abuse.

"By addressing cyberbullying through education, enforcement and partnerships, we can create a safer, more inclusive digital landscape for all Malaysians, ensuring that technology is a tool to empower rather than harm."

Law amendments on online threats to be tabled soon

KUALA LUMPUR: The proposed amendments to the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (Act 588) were approved by the Cabinet last Friday and are expected to be tabled in Parliament next month, said Communications Deputy Minister Teo Nie Ching.

She said in the proposed amendments, the evolution of technology and the increased use and reliance on technology have been considered to address cyber threats.

"This includes issues related to the spread of false information through online platforms, which can cause harm to users," she said in response to a question from Riduan Rubin (Independent-Tenom) on whether the ministry plans to formulate comprehensive, inclusive and up-to-date laws to address the spread of false information, during the question-and-answer session in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

She added that the government would soon table the Online Safety Bill aimed at curbing criminal activities on social media as well as fake news.

Teo said in addition, a special task force to address fake news and 3R issues (race, religion, and royalty) has been formed, involving strategic collaboration among several departments and agencies, including the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), Information Department, RTM and Bernama.

She added that 21,156 false content had been removed by social media platform operators between 2022 and Nov 15, based on their own assessments according to community standards.

"As for enforcement, 198 cases involving fake elements have been investigated, and five of

these were prosecuted by the Attorney-General's Chambers and resulted in convictions."

Replying to a supplementary question from Afnan Hamimi Taib Azamuddin (PN-Alor Setar) regarding the increasing number of fake accounts, Teo said one of the proposed amendments to Act 588 is the introduction of a new section to strengthen enforcement.

"We believe that with this new section, if approved by the Dewan Rakyat, police will have the authority to request platform operators to disclose user data, and from there, we hope to facilitate police investigations."

Teo also emphasised the importance of social media platforms such as Meta, ByteDance and Google tightening their guidelines for creating new accounts, such as requiring users to provide their phone numbers. — Bernama

Initiatives to keep health inflation low

KUALA LUMPUR: The government is committed to ensuring health inflation remains moderate, including in Sarawak, said Deputy Economy Minister Datuk Hanifah Hajar Taib, adding that health inflation in the state recorded a moderate rate of 1.5% last month.

"A total of 58 projects by the Health Ministry for Sarawak have been approved under the fifth rolling plan of the 12th Malaysia Plan, with a total cost of RM3.04 billion," she said during a question-and-answer session in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

She was responding to a query from Dr Richard Rapu @ Aman anak Begri (GPS-Betong) on the government's plans to address the inflation rate, including rising healthcare costs in Sarawak rural areas.

The projects include the construction of the Betong Health Clinic, Julau Health Clinic, Sarikei Health Clinic, Nanga Atoi Health Clinic in Saratok, as well as new clinic upgrades and developments throughout Sarawak.

She added that the implementation of the projects would ease cost of living pressures, particularly in rural areas, by providing more affordable and quality healthcare services and reducing transport costs for residents requiring access to health facilities.

Hanifah said to alleviate the impact of inflation on the cost of living and boost community income, the government is committed to implementing various initiatives.

These include increasing the total "Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah" and Basic Living Contribution from RM10 billion this year to RM13 billion in 2025.

Additionally, the government has raised the allocation for the "Payung Rahmah" initiative from RM200 million to RM300 million in 2025.

She said enhanced monitoring and enforcement by the Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry will ensure reasonable prices and curb profiteering activities.

Responding to an additional question from Datuk Che Mohamad Zulkifly Jusoh (PN-Besut) on the RON95 subsidy, Hanifah said the government plans to implement targeted RON95 petrol subsidies in mid-2025.

"In terms of engagement, we must implement it and gather feedback to determine the best way to distribute the benefits effectively." — Bernama

RM9m to maintain street, traffic lights

KUALA LUMPUR: The Works Ministry has approved all applications from the Sabah Public Works Department for maintenance of street and traffic lights this year, with an allocation of RM9.7 million, said Works Deputy Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan.

"For the Tawau district, RM1.05 million has been approved to address the backlog of street light maintenance. Through this allocation, many street lights have been repaired, and issues of poorly lit roads in high-risk areas have been addressed," he said in reply to a question from Lo Su Fui (GRS-Tawau) on allocations to resolve street light maintenance issues for federal roads in Tawau.

Ahmad said in 2022, the ministry approved RM1.7 million for street lights and traffic lights maintenance in Sabah while for 2023, RM1.4 million was approved.

He added that the assumption that street lights that were not maintained directly caused road crashes was not entirely accurate.

"A study by the Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research found 80% of incidents were caused by negligence, 13% by road surface issues and 7% by poor vehicle conditions." — Bernama



Govt to expand TVET tourism sector aspirations

SHAH ALAM: The government plans to expand the tourism sector aspirations of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Generation programme to provide more opportunities for local graduates to venture into the industry.

Tourism, Arts and Culture Deputy Minister Khairul Firdaus Akbar Khan said the initiative, undertaken in collaboration with higher education institutions, aims to address the shortage of skilled workers to lead the country's tourism sector, particularly in five subsectors.

He said the subsectors are tour guides; hotels; spas, wellness and massage premises; golf; and theme parks.

"We will prioritise exposing students to the unique aspects and opportunities in the tourism sector under these subsectors. To ensure students secure employment, we will facilitate matchmaking so that they know where they can land.

"We have received feedback from industry players about difficulty in sourcing skilled workers. This initiative serves as a short to medium term measure to meet industry demands," he said after launching the Tourism Sector TVET Generation Aspirations in collaboration with the Management and Science University Talent Sync Expo yesterday.

Khairul Firdaus also urged youths to continuously learn new skills, hone their talents in fields they are passionate about and embrace the belief that vocational skills are vital to success in today's competitive job market. — Bernama

S'gor to ban plastic bags from Friday to Sunday

SHAH ALAM: The Selangor government plans to enforce a ban on the use of plastic bags from Friday to Sunday at business premises in the state next year.

State Public Health and Environment exco Jamaliah Jamaluddin said the Selangor government is exploring approaches and mechanisms to enforce the initiative in an effort to reduce the use of plastic bags.

"We have held a workshop to strengthen or tighten the relevant laws and enforcement actions on the matter.

"It is important for us to know which authorities could be used under the state government's jurisdiction so that when the initiative is announced, it could be implemented in line with enforcement actions."

Selangor began implementing the "No Plastic Bag Day" campaign every Saturday in 2010, with the support of most supermarkets, minimarkets and business premises.

Customers are charged 20 sen for each plastic bag and the money is channelled to charities or consumerism and environmental conservation programmes. — Bernama

Mother goes 'back to school' to motivate daughter

BY **KIRTINEE RAMESH**
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► Move to pursue university bachelor's degree together presented opportunities for duo to support each other mentally and physically

MALACCA: After completing her Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia, then 19-year-old Fatihah Zamri decided not to pursue her studies any further, especially since she did not have friends who were continuing their studies either.

Her mother Surawati Rahimin, 46, was confident that a tertiary education would provide her with better career opportunities and attempted to persuade her, to no avail.

Then Surawati was struck with an idea.

"I thought why not study with

Fatihah? She was surprised and initially in disbelief at my suggestion."

However, the thought of having her mother study with her motivated Fatihah to pursue the same course as Surawati, which was a bachelor's degree in business administration, majoring in finance at Universiti Teknologi Mara in Malacca.

"I became excited at the

prospect of studying with my mother. We are like best friends, so I was happy when she said she wanted to be a student again. I realised I would not have to study alone and would not get bored either," she said.

For Surawati, stepping back into the world of education in her late 40s was quite challenging as she had other commitments as well.

"Balancing work and family commitments while pursuing an education was not easy but we supported each other mentally and physically."

As a mother of six who also works as an accounts assistant, she said she faced constraints in completing assignments on time.

"Even finding regular hours to study was difficult but I managed to divide my time properly so that I would not fall too far behind. And thanks to Fatihah, we could study together at home."

Fatihah recounted that as a habit, she called her mother "ibu" (mother) even on campus and in lecture halls, which caught the attention of other students and lecturers who were curious and surprised to see the mother and daughter studying together.

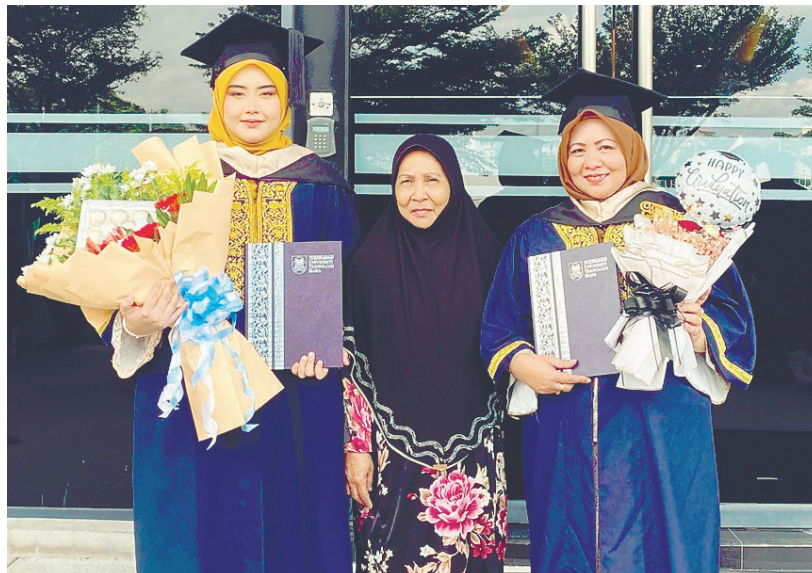
When the duo attended their convocation on Nov 19, Surawati offered some advice and said: "Not everyone gets the chance to study, especially at a late age. If you do, take it. Knowledge is important, no matter how old you are, so do not waste opportunities that come along as your future will be brighter with a good education."

"As Mahatma Gandhi once said: 'Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.'"

She said her educational journey was not just about challenging herself but also about inspiring her daughter.

Fatihah said the experience of having her mother as a fellow student made her realise that life's greatest lessons are often learned through the ones you love most.

"Graduating with my mother goes beyond happiness. In the four and a half years of our studies, we struggled through thick and thin, and finally our hard work and effort have paid off."



Fatihah with her mother and grandmother on convocation day. — PIC COURTESY OF FATIHAH ZAMRI

Steps taken to address non-revenue water issue

KOTA BHARU: Air Kelantan Sdn Bhd has taken several steps to address the causes of non-revenue water (NRW) due to physical and commercial losses in the state.

Kelantan Public Works, Infrastructure, Water and Rural Development Committee chairman Datuk Dr Izani Husin said to overcome the NRW issue caused by physical losses, Air Kelantan has proactively located and repaired leaking pipes through a special team

using specialised equipment.

"Air Kelantan has also replaced old and ageing pipes from asbestos cement to high density polyethylene, polyvinyl chloride and mild steel concrete lining using internal funds and Pengurusan Aset Air Berhad," he said yesterday.

Izani said to overcome the NRW issue caused by commercial losses, Air Kelantan has replaced consumer meters that are over 10 years old as well as meters that failed to provide

accurate readings.

"Air Kelantan has upgraded the billing system to reduce errors during the consumer meter reading process, in addition to the establishment of an enforcement team to deal with water theft cases."

When answering a question by Harun Ismail (PAS-Tawang) regarding the state government's actions against blurring white lines on roads that endanger motorists, Izani said the state Public Works

Department has identified several roads that need to be maintained and classified according to priority.

"Every year, the estimated allocation requested is more than RM400 million while the approved amount is only around RM120 million.

"Repairs in phases will be implemented based on the allocation channelled and according to priority based on the extent of damage." — Bernama

Sarawak to organise media games event next year

KUCHING: Sarawak will organise its "Media Games" next year in conjunction with the National Journalists' Day celebration at the state level, said Deputy Minister in the Sarawak Premier's Department (Corporate Affairs, Information and

Sarawak Public Communications Unit) Datuk Abdullah Saidol.

He said it is one of the main events to be organised by the Sarawak Public Communications Unit in 2025.

"Although Sarawak will not be hosting National Journalists' Day next

year, we will make this annual celebration an event that we share with other media members.

"One of the Sarawak Public Communications Unit's major annual responsibilities next year will be organising the Sarawak Media

Conference. We will do it slightly bigger next year."

Sarawak hosted the National Journalists' Day celebration this year, themed "Ethics as the Foundation of Sustainable Journalism".

Abdullah said the Sarawak Public

Communications Unit must continue to strengthen its role in providing two-way communication between the people and leaders on issues affecting the public and the latest developments in the state. — Bernama



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'Do not make false MyKad report to avoid penalties'

Public should be made aware of legal consequences as offenders can be jailed for up to six months or fined maximum of RM2,000, says CCID chief

BY QIRANA NABILLA MOHD RASHIDI
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PETALING JAYA: Bukit Aman Commercial Crime Investigation Department (CCID) director Datuk Seri Ramli Mohamed Yoosuf has warned the public against filing false reports "claiming their MyKad was stolen" to avoid incurring penalties from the National Registration Department (NRD).

Calling such action unethical and highly irresponsible, he said: "Such actions are criminal offences, and I warn the public to avoid doing this to escape penalties from the NRD."

"Those found guilty of filing false reports can be imprisoned for a maximum of six months or be fined a maximum of RM2,000," he said.

In 2023, the NRD said it recorded some 8,000 cases of lost identity cards annually for the preceding five years.

According to the penalties set by the NRD, first-time applicants who wish to replace their lost or stolen MyKad will be charged RM100.

A second replacement will incur a penalty

of RM300, while subsequent replacements will result in a penalty of RM1,000.

However, applicants who can produce a police report on their lost or stolen MyKad before applying at NRD counters will have their penalties waived.

On Nov 14, a 25-year-old salesman was arrested for lodging a false report over the loss of his identity card, claiming that he was robbed in Subang Jaya.

However, investigations found that no such incident occurred.

Ramli said boosting awareness about this issue could help prevent false reports from being filed, and that the public should be educated on the serious legal consequences of making false reports to discourage such actions.

"The issue lies in the fact that when individuals file reports, they often include claims of being mugged."

"I urge the public to consider the far-reaching consequences of filing false reports," he said.

Lawyer Kokila Vaani Vadiveloo said under Section 182 of the Penal Code, filing a false police report is a criminal offence.

She said falsely claiming a robbery had occurred not only amounts to filing a false report but could also involve elements of fraud, especially when the intent is to mislead authorities for personal gain.

"Falsely claiming that you have lost your MyKad can be considered fraud under the law. Such actions undermine the integrity of law enforcement, and can lead to serious legal consequences."

Kokila said beyond the immediate penalties for false reporting, those convicted may face long-term consequences, such as having a criminal record, which could impact future job prospects and financial dealings.

She added that law enforcement may have limited resources to conduct immediate and thorough investigations for every claim, especially in areas with high volumes of reports that can lead to delays in detecting fraudulent activities.

"Additionally, procedural gaps in logging and following up on reports create opportunities for individuals to fabricate stories without prompt detection."

Kokila said public awareness of the legal risks of filing false claims is lacking, even though previous cases have been highlighted. These incidents often fail to reach a broad audience.

Many assume the risks are low and believe they would get away with their actions.

She said they failed to understand the seriousness of the matter as they could end up facing severe penalties for such offences.

Court orders return of seized 'Pride Collection' watches

KUALA LUMPUR: The High Court here yesterday ordered 172 "Pride Collection" watches seized by the Home Ministry last year to be returned to the watch importer and seller, The Swatch Group (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd.

Judge Datuk Amarjeet Singh made the decision after allowing a judicial review application filed by The Swatch Group (Malaysia) as the applicant against the Home Ministry secretary-general, Home Ministry Enforcement Division secretary, home minister and the government as the first to fourth respondents.

Amarjeet said the court also allowed an application by the applicant to quash the seizure notice on the grounds that the seizure was made without a warrant and was invalid.

"Therefore, the court orders that the 172 watches be returned to the applicant within 14 days starting today (Monday). If there is damage to the watches, the applicant can claim compensation," the judge said.

In yesterday's proceedings, lawyer Nizam Bashir represented the applicant while federal counsel Mohammad Sallehuddin Md Ali represented all the respondents.

On June 24, 2023, The Swatch Group (Malaysia) filed a judicial review application to challenge the Home Ministry's action to seize 172 watches, including the "Pride Collection" series, which were allegedly associated with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

The applicant said the seizure of all the watches in question was unlawful because the items were not a "publication" which could be prohibited under the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984.

The company said the watch from the 2023 design is one of the six colours of the rainbow, and is only visible on a small part of the watch's bezel and does not promote any sexual connotations. — Bernama

Search resumes for man feared drowned

KUANTAN: The Search and Rescue (SAR) operation for a senior assistant teacher for co-curricular activities, feared drowned while fishing at a raft house at the Chenor jetty, Pekan Lama Chenor, Maran, resumed yesterday morning.

Maran District police chief Supt Wong Kim Wai said the search for Murdani Ab Rahman, 53, was suspended at 9.30pm on Sunday due to adverse weather conditions, and resumed at 8am yesterday.

Murdani, a teacher at Sekolah Menengah Tengku Ampuan Afzan Chenor, was fishing at the Chenor jetty raft house with a friend at about 5.50pm when he fell into the river and was swept away by the current.

"At about 8pm, police from the Maran District Police Headquarters, together with rescue agencies such as the Fire and Rescue Department and the Civil Defence Force initiated a SAR operation to locate the victim."

"The search focused on the area around the incident," he said. — Bernama



A woman carrying a child trudging through the floodwaters in Kampung Bendang Perol in Pasir Mas, Kelantan. — BERNAMAPIC

Number of flood evacuees in three states remains unchanged

KUALA LUMPUR: The flood situation in Terengganu, Johor and Kelantan showed no changes as of 8am yesterday, with the number of evacuees remaining at 171.

In TERENGGANU, the State Disaster Management Committee Secretariat reported that the number of evacuees remains at 67 people from 15 families who are taking shelter in three temporary relief centres in two districts.

Of that number, 57 evacuees from 13 families are being housed at two relief centres, namely Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK) Simpang Rawai and

Dewan Sivik Merchang in Marang, while in Dungun, 10 from two families are taking shelter at a relief centre in Alor Mak Bah.

Meanwhile, based on the *InfoBanjir* portal, the river water levels in Parit Utama, Padang Kemunting, Kuala Nerus; Sungai Terengganu at Rumah Pam Pulau Bahagia, Kuala Terengganu; and Sungai Nerus in Kampung Bukit, Setiu have surpassed the alert level.

In KELANTAN, the number of flood evacuees remains at 76 individuals involving 19 families in two relief centres, namely the Sekolah

Menengah Kebangsaan Beris Panchor, Bachok, with 44 evacuees from 12 families, and SK Gual To'Deh, Pasir Mas, with 32 evacuees from seven families, Bernama reported.

The portal also reported that the water level of the Sungai Golok in Rantau Panjang has slightly decreased to 8.5m as of 9.15am yesterday, compared with 8.75m on Sunday night, still exceeding the warning level at 8m.

In JOHOR, the number of evacuees remains at 28 from eight families from Kampung Seberang Batu Badak, who are taking shelter at Batu Badak

community hall in the Segamat district.

State Disaster Management Committee chairman Tan Sri Dr Azmi Rohani said a clear sky has been forecast today for eight districts in Johor.

According to the portal, the water levels in the Sungai Muar at Buloh Kasap and Kampung Tekam jetty, Segamat have exceeded the alert level, while Sungai Kesang at Telok Rimba, Tangkak; Sungai Tangkak River at Kampung Seri Ma'amor, Tangkak; and Sungai Paya Dato, Mersing have surpassed the warning level.

Former Cambodian PM warns of genocide perils

➤ International lawmakers urge tolerance and non-violence amid rising global conflicts

PHNOM PENH: International lawmakers attending a high-profile conference on peace vehemently called for non-violence and tolerance to promote equitable and inclusive societies.

The clarion calls come when the genocide in Gaza is spiralling out of control, with the death toll surpassing 40,000 since the conflict broke out on Oct 7, 2023.

About 300 delegates from more than 50 countries are attending the 11th Plenary Session of the International Parliament for

Tolerance and Peace, that started on Nov 24 in the capital.

Former Cambodian prime minister Hun Sen, speaking at the conference, warned about the horrific sufferings caused by genocides that ruin nations, destroy economies and cause unimaginable civilian suffering.

"I was wounded five times and lost one eye (during a battle with the Khmer Rouge in 1975). My life was so fragile. Three million people were killed.

"History repeats to us that

military action is not a solution. Cambodia is a real-life example in the recent past. We have suffered and we don't want any other war," said Hun Sen, 72, who is currently the Cambodian senate president.

During a nearly two-hour speech to the delegates, he said conflicts can be ignited easily but take years to resolve, and the people and the country suffer colossal damage.

Echoes of the civil war still linger on in remote areas of the Kingdom.

The Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority said from January 1979 to June this year, there were 65,072 explosive ordnance casualties.

"War is easy to start but Cambodia took 30 years to extinguish the war. There has been

peace for the past 27 years, no armed conflict.

"We transformed from a poor and conflict (prone) country to a stable and developed nation. Now less than 10% of the population live in poverty and by 2029, we will graduate from the Least Developed Nation status," said the veteran leader.

The conference, from Nov 23 until today, is being held under the theme "A Quest for Peace, Reconciliation and Tolerance".

Hun Sen signed the "Universal Peace Charter: For Peace and the Planet" during the conference and he was also awarded the "Peace Medal: For People and the Planet" for bringing stability to Cambodia. - Bernama

Taiwan reports first China balloon in six months

TAIPEI: Taiwan's defence ministry yesterday reported that a Chinese balloon had been detected over the sea to Taiwan's north, the first time since April it has reported such an incident in what Taipei views as part of a pattern of harassment by Beijing.

Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory, complained that in the weeks leading up to its presidential election in January, Chinese balloon activity took place at an "unprecedented scale".

It described the incidents as part of a Chinese pressure campaign - the so-called grey-zone warfare designed to exhaust a foe using irregular tactics without open combat.

Taiwan strongly objects to China's sovereignty claims and says only the island's people can decide their future.

The ministry, in its regular morning update on Chinese military activities over the previous 24 hours, said the single balloon was detected on Sunday 60 nautical miles (111 km) to the north of Taiwan's Keelung port. - Reuters



PRIMATE PARTY ... Macaques enjoying a feast of fruits and candies inside a new enclosure built to temporarily house them after authorities started a drive to control their population during the annual Monkey Festival in Lopburi province, Thailand. - REUTERS/SPIC

Foreign workers flee Myanmar scam centre to Thailand

BANGKOK: Thirty nine foreigners have fled an online scam centre in Myanmar across the border to Thailand, where officials are working to identify potential trafficking victims, police told AFP on Monday.

Scam compounds have mushroomed in Myanmar's borderlands and are staffed by foreigners who are often trafficked and forced to work, swindling their compatriots in an industry analysts say is worth billions.

The group from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Malaysia and Russia crossed into Thailand's Tak province, according to the police chief in the city of Mae Sot.

They had fled from Myawaddy

just across the border, said Col Pittayakorn Petcharat.

Myawaddy is controlled by a military-aligned militia and is a hotbed of drug production and online scam outfits, according to observers.

Sri Lanka's embassy in Bangkok had asked Thai authorities for help after it was informed that 32 of its citizens were trapped in Myanmar, said Petcharat.

Five Nepalis, one Malaysian and one Russian were also in the group that escaped and arrived in Thailand.

The group crossed into Thailand on Sunday night, said a member of the security forces in Mae Sot, who

spoke to media on condition of anonymity.

Immigration officials were working to identify potential victims of human trafficking, Petcharat said.

Thai local media reported the group had responded to adverts on social media promising well-paid work but were then subjected to gruelling conditions in a scam centre.

Some of the Sri Lankan workers later successfully contacted the embassy.

Myanmar's northern border with China was previously a hotbed for online scam centres, often run by militias aligned with the ruling junta.

But a sweeping offensive by an

alliance of ethnic rebels last year cleared many of the scam centres out.

More than 40,000 people suspected of taking part in cyber scams in Myanmar were handed over to China in 2023, Beijing state media said this year.

Local Myanmar media have reported that scam bosses who escaped the offensive have since set up shop further south along the border with Thailand.

Last December, Myanmar junta chief and Thai military officials agreed to "jointly eradicate online gambling and online scams near Myawaddy", according to Myanmar state media. - AFP

Truce called after 82 killed in Pakistan

PESHAWAR: Pakistani officials announced a seven-day truce on Sunday after days of bitter sectarian gunfights in the country's northwest Kurram district that have killed at least 82 people and wounded 156 more.

Pakistan is a Sunni-majority country, but Kurram - in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, near the border with Afghanistan - has a large Shiite population and the communities have clashed for decades.

"Both sides have agreed to a seven-day ceasefire, during which they will also exchange prisoners and return bodies to one another," said Muhammad Ali Saif, spokesperson for the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government.

A second local official told AFP that efforts were being made to return up to 20 people who were missing on both sides.

The latest violence began on Thursday when two separate convoys of Shiite Muslims travelling under police escort were ambushed, killing at least 43 and sparking two days of gun battles.

"The clashes and convoy attacks on Nov 21, 22 and 23 have resulted in 82 fatalities and 156 injuries," said a local administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"Among the deceased, 16 were Sunni while 66 belonged to the Shia community," he said.

About 300 families fled on Saturday as gunfights with both light and heavy weapons continued into the night.

However, no fresh casualties were reported on Sunday morning.

"The mobile network across Kurram remains suspended and traffic on the main highway is halted," said the local administration official.

Police have regularly struggled to control violence in Kurram, which was part of the semi-autonomous Federally Administered Tribal Areas until it was merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2018. - AFP

Australia PM plays down privacy fears

SYDNEY: Australia Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said yesterday social media firms would be required to destroy personal data used to verify ages of users as part of what the government says is a world-leading ban on under-16s using the services.

Australia plans to trial an age-verification system that may include biometrics or government identification to enforce a social media age cut-off, some of the toughest controls imposed by any country.

"There will be very strong and strict privacy requirements to protect people's personal information, including an obligation to destroy information provided once age has been verified," Albanese told parliament yesterday.

The laws would impact Meta Platforms' Instagram and Facebook, ByteDance's TikTok and Elon Musk's X and Snapchat.

They have been criticised by figures who said on Friday the legislation was a backdoor attempt to control access to the internet for all Australians. - Reuters



G7 ministers to discuss Mideast, Ukraine crises

➤ Talks focus on Gaza ceasefire, ICC arrest warrants and supporting reconstruction of Ukraine

ROME: G7 foreign ministers are meeting near Rome for two days of talks starting yesterday with regional counterparts on the Middle East, before turning to Russia and the war in Ukraine.

The Group of Seven ministers will also discuss the International Criminal Court's (ICC) arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Hamas's military chief, "and the possible effects on the current crises in Lebanon and Gaza," Italy's foreign ministry said.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will attend the talks in Fiuggi and Anagni alongside ministers from fellow G7 nations Britain, Canada, Germany, France and Japan, hosted by Italy's Antonio Tajani.

The first session on Monday afternoon will be dedicated to the situation in the Middle East

and the Red Sea, notably efforts to reach a ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon.

One session will include ministers from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, as well as the secretary-general of the Arab League, Rome said.

"We have asked for the presence of partners in the region to foster dialogue with the members of the G7," Tajani said in a statement. "Only together can we find concrete solutions that can bring peace and stability to the region."

On the second day of talks today, the discussion will turn to Ukraine in the presence of the war-torn country's foreign minister, Andriy Sybiga.

Officials will discuss ways to continue supporting Kyiv, prospects for peace and initiatives for future reconstruction, Rome said.

The same day in Brussels, ambassadors from Nato countries and Ukraine will hold talks over Russia's firing of an experimental hypersonic intermediate-range missile.

Tensions in the Asia-Pacific are also on the agenda at the G7 meeting and the Italians have invited foreign ministers from South Korea, India, Indonesia and the Philippines.

The G7 ministers are also expected to discuss the ongoing crises in Haiti and Sudan, as well as the political situation in Venezuela.

The ICC issued warrants against Netanyahu and his former defence minister Yoav Gallant as well as Hamas' Mohammed Deif on Thursday in response to accusations of crimes against humanity and war crimes in Israel's assault on Hamas in Gaza.

Israel and its allies denounced the decision, but it was welcomed by Turkiye and rights groups.

Several countries have said they would comply with the ICC warrants and arrest Netanyahu should he enter their soil, while other nations were still considering their response to the decision. - AFP



STANDING GUARD ... Police officers sitting on motorbikes with shipping containers in the background, used to prevent a rally by anti-government supporters of former Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan's party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf in Islamabad, Pakistan. - REUTERS/PICT

Court moves to sentencing in French mass rape trial

AVIGNON: With evidence over in the trial of a man who drugged his wife for years so he could invite dozens of strangers to abuse her, French prosecutors will set out their sentencing requests to judges.

Chief defendant Dominique Pelicot has since September been in the dock in southern city Avignon along with 49 other men for organising the rapes and sexual abuse of his now ex-wife Gisele Pelicot.

The case has shocked a France still working through its version of the MeToo movement, with the latest demonstrations calling for increased protection against sexual violence, bringing out tens of thousands on Saturday.

Its impact has been relayed around the world, with 57 of the 138 media organisations

covering the trial from outside France.

On Thursday, the president of Chile's parliament hailed Gisele's "courage and dignity", calling her "an ordinary citizen who has taught the whole world a lesson".

Beyond Dominique, who has admitted to all of the charges, prosecutors must decide on appropriate potential punishments for the other defendants, men aged 26 to 74 and from all walks of life.

Many argued in court that they believed Dominique's claim they were participating in a libertine fantasy, in which his then-wife had consented to sexual contact and was only pretending to be asleep.

Among them, 33 have also claimed they were not in their right minds when they abused

or raped Gisele, a defence not backed up by any of the psychological reports compiled by court-appointed experts.

Sentencing requests are slated to take three full days in the court's agenda, with prosecutors themselves estimating an average of 15 minutes per defendant.

As 11 weeks of hearings about the facts of the case drew to a close last week, Gisele's lawyer Antoine Camus called for "truth and justice" to be rendered to the plaintiff as well as her three children, David, Caroline and Florian, her step-children Celine and Aurore, and her grandchildren.

The court's five judges will not issue their ruling on the sentences until late December. - AFP

Bus crash in Brazil leaves 23 dead

RIO DE JANEIRO: A total of 23 people died on Sunday when a bus on a remote mountain road in Brazil's northeastern Alagoas state dived into a ravine, regional authorities said.

Rescue services confirmed that 22 died at the scene and another person - a pregnant woman - succumbed after being taken to hospital, the Alagoas state government said in a statement.

It added that another 20 injured people were taken to the region's hospital. The incident occurred near the town of Uniao dos Palmares.

State governor Paulo Dantas declared on the social media platform X three days of mourning over the "tragedy".

The bus went off the road in an area difficult to access, near a site in the Serra da Barriga mountain range that has historical importance to Brazilians.

In the 17th century, there was a settlement there that was part of the Quilombo dos Palmares, a remote community set up by escaped slaves, which ended up being crushed by Brazil's Portuguese colonial masters.

November is the month Brazil celebrates "Black Awareness", with a public holiday on Nov 20, the anniversary of the death of Zumbi, the most prominent leader of the Quilombo dos Palmares.

Brazil's racial equality minister, Anielle Franco, said on X she was "hit hard" by news of the crash, adding that "this tragedy saddens us even more deeply" given the Black Awareness events held in the region. - AFP

BRIEFS

FAR-RIGHT CANDIDATE LEADS PRESIDENTIAL RACE

BUCHAREST: Far-right candidate Calin Georgescu surged unexpectedly in Romania's presidential election, pulling ahead of the pro-European prime minister with more than 98% of votes counted on Monday and looking all but certain to advance to a runoff. Exit polls had initially showed centre-left Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu with a comfortable lead and put a centre-right candidate in second, suggesting the far-right would be shut out of the run-off next month. But with 98.66% of ballots counted, the pro-Russian Georgescu was leading with 22.59% to Ciolacu's 19.55% in the race to take over from President Klaus Iohannis in the largely ceremonial post. In the absence of an outright winner in the first round - scoring more than 50% - the top two candidates go through to a second round on Dec 8. Whatever the outcome, "the far right is by far the big winner of this election", political scientist Cristian Pirvulescu told AFP.

RUSSIAN FORCES CAPTURE BRITISH MAN

NEW YORK: Russian forces captured a British mercenary fighting with the Ukrainian army in Russia's Kursk region, which is still partially controlled by Kyiv forces, a security source told Russia's RIA state news agency. "A mercenary from Great Britain, who called himself James Scott Rhys Anderson, was captured. He is now giving evidence," the Russian source told RIA in remarks published on Sunday. In a video posted on unofficial pro-war Russian Telegram channels on Sunday, a young bearded man wearing military clothing with what appears to be his hands tied in the back, says in English that his name is James Scott Rhys Anderson and that he formerly served in the British Army. Reuters could not independently verify the video and the RIA and other media reports. It was not clear when the video was filmed. The British Foreign Office did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Israel military orders evacuation of Gaza City suburb

CAIRO: The Israeli military issued new evacuation orders to residents in areas of an eastern Gaza City suburb on Sunday, setting off a new wave of displacement, while a Gaza hospital director was injured in an Israeli drone attack, Palestinian medics said.

The new orders for the Shejaia suburb posted by an Israeli army spokesperson on X on Saturday night were blamed on Palestinian militants firing rockets from that heavily built-

up district in the north of the Gaza Strip.

"For your safety, you must evacuate immediately to the south," the military's post said. The rocket volley on Saturday was claimed by Hamas' armed wing, which said it had targeted an Israeli army base over the border.

Footage circulated on social and Palestinian media, which Reuters could not immediately verify, showed residents leaving Shejaia on

donkey carts and rickshaws, with others, including children carrying backpacks, evacuating on foot.

Families living in the targeted areas began fleeing their homes after nightfall on Saturday and into Sunday's early hours, residents and Palestinian media said – the latest in multiple waves of displacement since the war began 13 months ago.

In central Gaza, health officials said at least

10 Palestinians were killed in Israeli airstrikes on the urban camps of Al-Maghazi and Al-Bureij since Saturday night.

Adding to the miseries of Gaza's 2.3 million people, most of whom have been repeatedly displaced, heavy winter rain flooded hundreds of tents across the enclave, spilling food and sweeping away plastic and cloth sheeting that had protected them against the elements. – Reuters

Hezbollah rockets land near Tel Aviv after strike on Beirut

➤ Rising casualties and intensified bombardments amid efforts for ceasefire negotiations

JERUSALEM: Lebanon's Hezbollah movement fired heavy rocket barrages at Israel on Sunday and the Israeli military said houses had been destroyed or set alight near Tel Aviv, after a powerful Israeli airstrike killed at least 29 people in Beirut the day before.

Israel also struck Beirut's Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs, where intensified bombardment over the last two weeks has coincided with signs of progress in US-led ceasefire talks.

Hezbollah, which has previously vowed to respond to attacks on Beirut by targeting Tel Aviv, said it had launched precision missiles at two military sites in Tel Aviv and nearby.

Police said there were multiple impact sites

in the area of Petah Tikvah, on the eastern side of Tel Aviv, and that several people had minor injuries.

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said a direct hit on a neighbourhood had left "houses in flames and ruins".

Israel's military said Hezbollah had fired 250 rockets at Israel, of which many were intercepted, with sirens sounding across most of the country. At least four people had been injured by shrapnel.

Video obtained by Reuters showed a projectile exploding as it smashed into the roof of a building in the northern Israeli city of Nahariya.

Israel's military warned on social media that

it planned to target Hezbollah facilities in southern Beirut before strikes that demolished two apartment blocks, according to security sources in Lebanon.

Afterwards, the IDF said it had hit command centres "deliberately embedded between civilian buildings".

On Sunday, the Israeli military said it carried out strikes against 12 Hezbollah command centres in the southern Beirut suburb of Dahiyeh.

On Saturday, it had carried out one of its deadliest and most powerful strikes on the centre of Beirut.

Lebanon's health ministry on Sunday raised the death toll from 20 to 29.

It said a total of 84 people had been killed on Saturday, taking the death toll to 3,754 since October 2023.

The IDF did not comment on Saturday's strike in the Lebanese capital or say what it had attacked. – Reuters

UAE arrests three suspects over killing of Israeli rabbi

DUBAI: Three people have been arrested in the United Arab Emirates in connection with the alleged murder of an Israeli citizen, the Emirati interior ministry said on Sunday.

The ministry statement did not give details on the suspects or say if they had been charged, but said all legal powers would be used "to respond decisively and without leniency to any actions or attempts that threaten societal stability".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office had denounced the killing of the rabbi, Zvi Kogan, 28, as a "heinous antisemitic terrorist act" and said Israel would do everything it could to bring those responsible to justice.

Kogan was a resident of the UAE and also a Moldovan national, according to local authorities.

He worked with the New York-based Orthodox Jewish Chabad movement and was first reported missing on Thursday. His body was discovered on Sunday.

The Israeli foreign ministry said all Israeli agencies were involved in the investigation and that it is believed Kogan had last been seen at a Kosher supermarket in Dubai.

Kogan's body was found in the Emirati city of Al Ain, which borders Oman, although it was not clear if he was killed there or elsewhere, former Israeli politician Ayoob Kara told Reuters in Dubai.

Kara, a member of Israel's ruling right-wing Likud party who promotes economic relations between Israel and the Arab world, said there were indications that investigators suspected Iranian involvement.

The Iranian embassy in the UAE said it "categorically rejects the allegations of Iran's involvement in the murder of this individual".

Israel reissued a recommendation to citizens to avoid non-essential travel to the UAE and said those now there should minimise movement, remain in secure areas and avoid visiting places associated with Israel and Jewish populations.

The White House said it was working in close coordination with Israel and the UAE.

"We condemn in the strongest terms the murder of Rabbi Zvi Kogan in the UAE and our prayers are with his family," said White House National Security Council spokesperson Sean Savett.

The UAE's Israeli and Jewish community has grown more visible since 2020, when the UAE became the most prominent Arab state in 30 years to establish formal ties with Israel under a US-brokered agreement, dubbed the Abraham Accords.

The UAE has maintained the relationship during the 13-month Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

Kara said the UAE's Jewish community was in "shock" at Kogan's murder, but that Israelis and Jews would still visit, build ties and invest in the Gulf country.

Members of the Jewish community said informal synagogues in Dubai were closed over security concerns, with Jews instead gathering to pray at home – Reuters



SENSELESS DESTRUCTION ... Residents walking past damaged buildings in the aftermath of Israeli strikes on Beirut's southern suburbs yesterday, amid ongoing hostilities between Hezbollah and Israeli forces. – REUTERSPIC

Israelis urge action to release Gaza hostages

TEL AVIV: Former Israeli hostages, freed from Hamas captivity under a deal that took effect exactly one year ago, on Sunday called for immediate action to secure a deal for the release of those still held.

The only truce in the Israel-Hamas war began on Nov 24 last year, less than two months after fighting began, following negotiations led by

Qatar and supported by Egypt and the US.

Over the week-long pause, 80 Israelis held by militants in Gaza were freed, in exchange for 240 Palestinians detained in Israeli jails.

Another 25 hostages, mostly Thai farm workers, were also released from captivity in Gaza.

Repeated efforts since then to secure another truce and hostage-release have failed.

Qatar earlier this month said it was suspending its mediation role until the warring sides show "seriousness".

"Everything has already been said and now action is required. We don't have any more time," said Gabriella Leimberg, a former hostage kidnapped from southern Israel on Oct 7, 2023. – AFP



Setback in pursuit of Wisma Sime Darby



ESTATE MANAGER WRITES
BY MAHBOB ABDULLAH

As a planter, I had been asked to buy plantations, but this was the first time I was asked to buy a building.

Wisma Sime Darby was a structure soaring with a golden glow as you passed it at Jalan Raja Laut in Kuala Lumpur.

But soon after I had started work for the company in Sabah, I was told that it belonged to the state government, and the managing director Tan Sri Tunku Ahmad Tunku Yahya had asked me to buy it.

I was told that the tenancy agreement was drafted by lawyers, with the terms so tight that no party could terminate the long lease.

Additionally, while the rent was set to rise each year, it was supposed to go up at a rate lower than what was expected. The recession in 1987 caused the rent to drop in the city but the terms of the agreement saw it that the company had to pay well above the going rate. The future promised more financial strain.

After the telephone call from Tunku Ahmad, I had to pause for a long while in my office in Bangunan Kuwasa, and as I looked out to the calm sea and Pulau Gaya from my window, I realised that with this task, my job was not as easy as I had thought.

Sabah was now under a new government, led by Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan, and he had not finished implementing changes following his takeover. The figures that I knew during my previous stay had gone, and they were replaced by young faces, who were full of energy and ideas, most of whom were Kadazans.

I hoped Datuk Pairin would be in favour of the sale. He had once stayed in my bungalow when I was working in Unilever at Pamol Sabah, up the Labuk River, in late 1979. Over breakfast, he told me in a low, deep voice how he would like to see Sabah develop and bring a more modern way of life to the people in all areas, including to those in his village in Tambunan.

He was with a cultural troupe, and in the evenings I went to see

the shows, with lasses in the full bloom of youth, showing off costumes from various regions. There was much merriment and dancing, including the *sumazau* that I was forced to take part in, to the tune of the hit song *Jambatan Tamparuli*. The show went on with Datuk Pairin's diligent effort, covering the other regions of Kadazans, Muruts and Dusuns.

Now he was in power. However, when I tried to get through, I was told by his secretary that he was engaged or away.

I looked at the list of people around him, including other politicians, one being Mark Koding, a firebrand I had read about in the papers. He turned out to be a warm person but his heart was fully for the development of his people in Ranau. I went and waited outside a church for his Christmas caroling to finish, and he said he would see what he could do. Much as we got on, he could not help me on this one.

I also went to meet the finance minister, Datuk Bernard Dompok, whose secretary was always helpful. He was in his office enjoying a cigar, with a pot of tea ready, and he knew why I was there. Although we had a useful conversation on the state-owned plantations that Sime Darby was managing, the subject of Wisma Sime Darby did not get anywhere.

Finally, I had a plan and went to the official residence of the chief minister during his Christmas open house up on the hill overlooking the sea. He could not avoid meeting me. With a brief smile and a nod, he agreed to meet in his office the following week.

His office was at Bangunan Yayasan Sabah, a distinctive tall blue cylinder that rose from a wide

platform open to the sea breeze, approached by many steps. A further walk took me to the lifts that sped to the higher floors.

The meeting was brief, Datuk Pairin went on quickly to the issue of the building.

"That was the best investment the previous government has ever made. I cannot say about the rest. No, it is not for sale."

In a few minutes, I was back down again at the base of the building. The wind had whipped up and pulled ruthlessly at my tie. I gazed at the sea one more time before I got in the car and sat back silently. This was not my best day.

However, I had done my best. I did not know what Tunku Ahmad would have to say. For one thing, it would mean I would not be in line to make it to the top in the company.

The disappointment from the meeting was still with me when I decided to take a break weeks later and took leave to go back to Kuala Lumpur into the arms of my family, to enjoy the fasting month at home and come back after *Hari Raya* was over.

However, the issue of the rent was also soon over. As the recovery began to gather pace following the recession, rents in the city went up rapidly, and the rental rate the company had been locked in looked good again. No more was said about buying the building.

The days passed quickly in Kuala Lumpur, and after *Hari Raya*, I was readying my mind to fly back to Sabah, not knowing I was to get other surprises.

The writer has extensive experience in the management of oil palm plantations. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

"The wind had whipped up and pulled ruthlessly at my tie. I gazed at the sea one more time before I got in the car and sat back silently. This was not my best day."

LETTERS letters@thesundaily.com

Stomp out bullying and cyberbullying

IN conjunction with United Nations World Children's Day, celebrated annually on Nov 20, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres rightly acknowledges the "enormous challenges children face in our deeply divided, tumultuous and often violent world".

In the local context, in terms of improving our children's welfare, Malaysia needs prompt and strong reforms to address current issues such as bullying.

Research shows that bullying is a major concern for Malaysian children, with seven out of 10 expressing fear of becoming victims. Therefore, it is an issue that must not be ignored.

Bullying calls for an effective proactive approach from all stakeholders. For example, school principals and teachers should receive training to spot and deal with bullying issues. Parents and caregivers also should closely monitor their children and serve as good role models of reasonable behaviour.

Our education system should not focus solely on IQ or academic results but also on developing emotional intelligence (EQ).

EQ is a critical social skill that is needed to engage effectively with others. Learning EQ from a young age is highly beneficial as its positive influence can help reduce bullying in schools, homes, workplaces and throughout the broader community.

In today's 24/7 social media world, online cyberbullying can, and does, have a severe impact on victims' mental health, often creating a vicious cycle that affects many. Indirectly, it also harms loved ones and caregivers.

Research has shown that young people who are victims of bullying are more likely to become bullies themselves.

Perhaps, as has been considered in other countries, it is time for Malaysia to seriously consider restricting access to social media platforms for children under 16 years old.

For example, the Australian government has argued that setting the minimum age at 16 is based on extensive consultations with experts, parents and young people.

Crucially, this approach aims to "minimise the harms experienced by young people during a critical period of development".

Sze Loong Steve Ngeow
Kajang

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COMMENT by Dr Priya Madhavan

Global action for healthier future

WORLD AMR (Antimicrobial Resistance) Awareness Week, celebrated annually from Nov 18 to 24, is an initiative led by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to raise global awareness about antimicrobial resistance and encourage best practices to curb its spread.

AMR occurs when microorganisms evolve to resist the effects of medications designed to kill them, such as antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals and antiparasitics. This phenomenon poses a significant global health threat as it can lead to longer hospital stays, increased medical costs and higher mortality rates.

One alarming factor contributing to the rise of AMR is climate change, which disrupts ecosystems and human health dynamics, thereby increasing the infection rate.

Climate change can worsen AMR in several ways. It alters ecosystems by shifting habitats, which helps bacteria, viruses and parasites spread as temperatures rise. Warmer temperatures and extreme weather can extend the range of disease-carrying vectors, like mosquitoes, leading to more infections such as malaria and dengue.

Additionally, climate change can push wildlife closer to human populations, increasing the risk of zoonotic diseases. As pathogens transfer from animals to humans crossing the species barrier, the likelihood of AMR also increases.

Water and food supply issues due to climate-related disruptions can create unsanitary conditions, raising the risk of infections. Moreover, using antibiotics in livestock for growth can lead to resistance that may be passed to humans.

To tackle AMR as a community, several proactive steps can be taken:

🔗 **Collaboration with health authorities:** Work with healthcare

providers and local health authorities to ensure responsible antibiotic prescriptions, and educate patients on proper use.

🔗 **Collaboration with school authorities:** Work with school authorities to engage students in workshops on the prudent use of antibiotics, the importance of hygiene and sanitation.

🔗 **Community health initiatives:** Create programmes focused on vaccination, education and healthcare access to prevent infections, and lessen antibiotic dependence.

🔗 **Improve hygiene and sanitation:** Enhance sanitation and hygiene in homes and public places to limit infection spread. Simple actions like handwashing and safe food preparation can make a big difference.

🔗 **Public awareness campaigns:** Educate the public about AMR and its risks, dispelling myths and promoting responsible antibiotic use through workshops, information sessions and social media.

🔗 **Support research and innovation:** Encourage local institutions to invest in research on AMR and develop new treatments for lasting solutions.

🔗 **Support sustainable practices:** Encourage farming methods that reduce antibiotic use in livestock, and support local farms that prioritise animal welfare.

Healthcare professionals play an important role in tackling AMR. Effective training in antimicrobial stewardship is essential to promote the responsible use of antimicrobial drugs.

Using digital tools such as online courses, webinars and apps can make AMR education more accessible for healthcare providers.

Patient education during medical visits is important too, particularly in explaining when antibiotics are necessary and the risks of misuse.

"One alarming factor contributing to the rise of AMR is climate change, which disrupts ecosystems and human health dynamics, thereby increasing the infection rate."



AMR occurs when microorganisms evolve to resist the effects of medications designed to kill them, such as antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals and antiparasitics.

Healthcare professionals can also work with policymakers to support regulations promoting antibiotic stewardship, AMR research funding and public health initiatives.

The Malaysian Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2022-2026 emphasises the collaboration between government agencies, healthcare providers, educational institutions and the private sector.

This comprehensive, long-term strategy aims to address AMR through a "one health" approach that safeguards public health, food security and environmental health while aligning

with global AMR control efforts.

Through collective action at community, national and global levels, we can tackle AMR threat and ensure the continued efficacy of life-saving medications for the next generation.

Dr Priya Madhavan is an associate professor at the School of Medicine,

Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, Taylor's University. She also holds the position of hub leader of Communicable Diseases under Digital Health and Medical Advancement Impact Lab at the institution.

Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

LETTERS letters@thesundaily.com

Crack down on rising heavy vehicle road crashes

THE recent spate of serious road crashes involving heavy vehicles carrying containers and other heavy equipment is deeply concerning.

These incidents highlight critical gaps in road safety regulations and enforcement, jeopardising the lives of road users and exposing systemic issues in our transport and logistics sectors.

The primary causes of such crashes often include reckless driving, poorly maintained vehicles, overloading and inadequate training of drivers.

In many cases, drivers fail to adhere to traffic laws, putting others at grave risk. This demands immediate action to ensure the safety of all road users, and to hold errant drivers accountable.

Key measures to address

🔗 **Enhanced driver training and certification**

All drivers of heavy vehicles must undergo rigorous and standardised training programmes. Periodic recertification should be made mandatory to ensure continuous

adherence to safety protocols.

🔗 **Stricter vehicle inspection protocols**

Heavy vehicles must be subjected to regular and thorough inspections to certify roadworthiness. Special attention must be given to braking systems, tyres and securing mechanisms for cargo.

> **Mandatory installation of safety technology**

Vehicles should be equipped with advanced safety features, including speed limiters, GPS tracking and dashboard cameras, to monitor driver behaviour and vehicle movement.

🔗 **Improved enforcement**

Authorities must increase surveillance and impose heavy penalties for violations such as speeding, overloading and reckless driving. Random checks and stricter monitoring of high-risk routes can act as deterrents.

🔗 **Severe punishment**

To address negligence and prevent repeat offences, penalties for errant drivers should include: Hefty fines and licence suspensions for first-

time offenders, longer suspensions or permanent revocation of licences for repeat offenders, criminal charges, including imprisonment, in cases resulting in loss of life or serious injuries.

🔗 **Accountability of employers**

Transport companies must be held accountable for their fleet and drivers. Any negligence in vehicle maintenance or pressure on drivers to meet unrealistic schedules must attract legal and financial penalties.

Shared responsibility

Road safety is a shared responsibility. We call on the government, enforcement agencies, transport companies and drivers to work collaboratively to address this pressing issue. The lives lost in these avoidable crashes should serve as a wake-up call for all.

A safer road environment is not just an aspiration – it is an urgent necessity. Let us take bold steps today to prevent further tragedies tomorrow.

Tan Sri Lee Lam Thee
Member of Road Safety Council

Officers should revisit phone etiquette

IT is bad for good governance when many public officers, including some Penang Island City Council councillors and personal assistants, choose not to answer phone calls or return calls from the people who put them in office. This includes text messages that indicate they were read by the receiver but strangely not replied after a few days.

Calls to elected representatives are strategic when an urgent issue faced by an individual or a community needs to be raised quickly.

Pragmatically, a phone call from the public can hold more weight in getting immediate answers as compared to an email, a Facebook post or a tweet.

Many B40 families and non-profit organisations are concerned over this practice, especially when they have urgent issues to raise but are unable to call the people in the office. The callers are usually parked, so to speak, with wait music and pre-recorded messages until the line is cut off. This scenario is becoming an idiosyncratic feature in these offices.

Notwithstanding the excellent service displayed by a larger number of state government officers who manage to build a good rapport with the public, this damaging mannerism is only seen in a few officers. Nonetheless, it reflects

on the overall organisation.

Ironically, the publicity posters and name cards of the officers have boldly printed phone numbers to call when help is needed. However, the calls or messages usually never get through or remain unanswered.

This issue may sound trivial but the Penang Hindu Association (PHA) believes that by reducing this unethical practice, it will be an added element to sustain good governance and help the public office to function efficiently.

In line with this, PHA hopes that our honourable chief minister and mayor will look into this matter seriously and take proactive actions to come up with a feasible telephone etiquette standard operating procedure (SOP).

A constant monitoring of this SOP will help maintain service consistency.

Additionally, PHA also hopes that hotlines could be set up to report on ineffective public officers who flout the norms and do not respond or listen to the grievances raised by the public.

PHA hopes for immediate action as it involves the reputation of the state government.

Datuk P. Murugiah
President
Penang Hindu Association

MALAYSIA'S combination of high temperatures and humidity places an added vulnerability towards heat-related illnesses and warmer temperatures can worsen other health issues for Malaysians, according to Khazanah Research Institute's latest working paper *Navigating Public Health in a Hotter Malaysia*, which brings to light some of the public health challenges Malaysia could face as global temperatures increase.

Increased risks of heat-related illnesses

Heat is a critical and growing threat to human health. As global temperatures rise, instances of heat stress can become increasingly common.

The risks of heat stress can further worsen during instances of high heat and high humidity, which can then lead to the development of heat-related illnesses such as heat stroke, heat exhaustion and

Rising temperatures increasing risks to public health

➤ Illnesses projected to surge as country gets warmer due to climate change

heat cramps.

Thus, Malaysia's high humidity level (ranging between 65% to 95% relative humidity) and rising temperatures poses an increasing risk of these heat-related illnesses among Malaysians.

During the past 2015-2016 El Nino cycle, Malaysia reported 200 cases of heat-related illnesses, of which there were two fatalities.

Meanwhile, the recent 2023-2024 El Nino occurrence proved to be more deadly, with five fatalities out of the 127 reported cases of heat-related illnesses.

Such incidences are expected to rise as Malaysia is projected to have higher mean and maximum temperatures as well as an increased frequency of days exceeding 35.

Warmer temperatures exacerbate other health issues

Rising temperatures are not only a concern for heat-related illnesses but they can also worsen a myriad of other health conditions. Particularly, higher temperatures have been shown to adversely impact cardiometabolic, respiratory conditions and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Thus as temperatures are projected to rise, the strain NCDs have on healthcare resources is also likely to increase unless proper climate-health policies are in place.

Another public health concern that is brought on by rising temperatures is the rise in vector-borne diseases such as dengue, malaria and chikungunya. Various literature exploring the relationship between dengue and temperature has found that rising minimum temperatures can lead to an increase in dengue cases - posing higher risks of dengue infections in Malaysia.

Vulnerability of heat-induced health issues not equal

Children, particularly those under the age of five, are more vulnerable to heat stress. During the 2023-2024 El Nino event, six children aged 12 and below were reported to have heat-related illnesses. Out of these six cases, three resulted in fatalities. All three of these mortalities recorded were among children under the age of five. This underscores the added vulnerability children face in

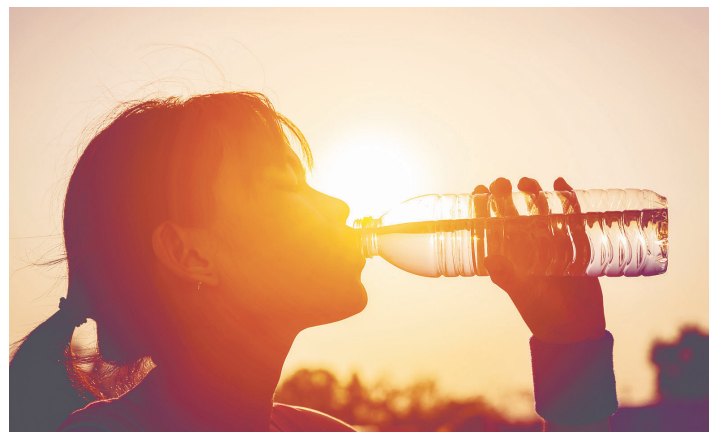
managing heat stress compared with adult.

While all Malaysians will experience warmer temperatures because of climate change, the degree to which they are vulnerable to heat-related health issues can vary depending on their sensitivity and adaptive capacity. Local temperature variations, age-related vulnerabilities among children and the elderly, and employment in particular industries can increase the risk of heat-related illnesses or other heat-exacerbated medical disorders.

Growing need to adapt to rising temperatures

The findings from this paper highlights Malaysia's public health risks induced by warmer temperatures. To overcome these risks, this paper brings forward four policy recommendations:

- Developing a heat-health action plan as it is imperative to manage heat-related impacts, particularly on health.
- Enhancing the monitoring of heat-related illnesses, hospital admissions and mortality rates as it is essential to understand the full impact of extreme heat events.
- Developing heat-sensitive public infrastructure and facilities in Malaysia is crucial to enhancing resilience against extreme heat.
- Adapting decent work practices to the rising temperatures is needed to protect worker safety and maintain productivity in a warming climate.



Rising temperatures can have detrimental effects on public health.
- 123RFPICT

'Movember' puts male infertility in focus

MALE infertility contributes to about 50% of cases worldwide. In Malaysia, a study by the National Population and Family Development Board found 60% of sperm test results were abnormal, highlighting male infertility as a significant concern. This Men's Health Awareness Month or November, it is important to address male infertility and explore the advancements in treatment options.

Male infertility is primarily caused by sperm production problems or blockages that prevent sperm from reaching the egg. The most common issue encountered is a low sperm count, often due to varicocele, an enlargement of the veins in the scrotum. Varicocele affects about 40% of men with fertility problems, leading to reduced sperm production.

Other causes of male infertility can include hormonal imbalances, genetic conditions and exposure to harmful environmental factors such as pollution, chemicals and radiation. Smoking, alcohol consumption, obesity and even stress can impair sperm quality. Poor diet, lack of exercise and disrupted sleep patterns also affect fertility.

How age and lifestyle impact fertility
As men age, sperm quality naturally

declines, with a decrease in motility (movement), morphology (shape) and overall count. Additionally, older men may experience higher rates of sperm DNA fragmentation, which can affect embryo development and increase the risk of miscarriage.

Age matters but lifestyle can amplify the impact. Smoking introduces toxins that lead to oxidative stress and damage sperm DNA. A healthy diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants and vitamins, such as the Mediterranean diet has been shown to improve semen quality. Processed meats, sugary beverages and excessive coffee consumption can also worsen sperm quality.

Understanding sperm quality

For conception to occur, sperm quality plays a crucial role. Fertility is most likely if the semen discharged in a single ejaculation contains at least 15 million sperm per millilitre. If the sperm count is too low, it can make it more difficult to conceive as fewer sperm are available to fertilise the egg.

The movement or motility of sperm is also vital. Sperm must be able to swim through the cervix, uterus and fallopian tubes to reach the egg. While pregnancy is possible

with less than 40% of the sperm in an ejaculation moving, 40% is considered the threshold. The more motile the sperm, the better the chances of conception.

Healthy sperm typically have oval heads and long tails that allow them to swim efficiently towards the egg. Abnormal sperm shapes can affect their ability to move properly, reducing the chances of fertilisation.

Treatments for male infertility

For men with infections in the reproductive tract, antibiotics are often prescribed while steroids such as prednisolone are used when the immune system mistakenly attacks sperm. Hormonal imbalances such as high levels of prolactin (a condition called hyperprolactinaemia), which affects testosterone and sperm production, can be treated with medications such as bromocriptine to help restore normal hormone levels.

For more complex conditions such as retrograde ejaculation, where sperm goes into the bladder instead of exiting during ejaculation, medications such as imipramine can help. Men with unexplained infertility may benefit from medications called selective estrogen receptor modulators, which help balance

hormones and improve fertility.

There is promising work being done on new hormone treatments that may offer more targeted options for men with hormonal imbalances. These advancements include new drugs that are being studied to regulate hormones involved in sperm production. Another area of research focuses on controlling follicle-stimulating hormone, a key hormone for sperm production.

Role of female fertility

In one-third of infertility cases, the problem lies with the female partner. Conditions such as anovulation (failure to release eggs), endometriosis, fibroids or scarring from previous surgeries can impact fertility. However, significant advancements in female fertility treatments are also improving outcomes for many couples.

New ovarian stimulation protocols and preimplantation genetic testing (PGT) are major developments. PGT helps in selecting embryos with the best chances of successful implantation by screening for genetic abnormalities. Additionally, advancements such as time-lapse embryo imaging and personalised fertility treatments are improving success rates for couples undergoing

assisted reproductive technologies such as IVF.

Modern technologies

Intracytoplasmic sperm injection and vitrification for egg and embryo freezing have made a big difference. Time-lapse embryo monitoring and artificial intelligence in embryology are revolutionising how embryologists select the best embryos for implantation, increasing the chances of successful pregnancies.

Ovarian tissue cryopreservation is now offering hope for women who need to undergo treatments that may affect their fertility, such as chemotherapy. By freezing ovarian tissue, women can preserve their fertility for the future.

What couples should know

Male infertility is a significant factor in many couples' struggles to conceive but advancements in fertility treatments offer new hope. Early intervention, a healthy lifestyle and modern fertility treatments can make all the difference.

This article is contributed by Subang Jaya Medical Centre consultant in reproductive medicine Dr Chua Ai Chen.



Sedania Innovator enters transformation mode

➤ Sets sights on becoming Malaysia's first fast-moving consumer goods multinational company

■ BY **AMIE SHAZRIE**
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PETALING JAYA: Sedania Innovator Bhd, an innovation and sustainability-driven technology company is embarking on a transformative journey to establish itself as a multinational consumer products and services giant.

Founder and managing director Datuk Azrin Mohd Noor said the company has an ambitious vision to position itself as Malaysia's first fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) multinational company.

"This vision is about reflecting on our journey and embracing a new beginning. We aim to inspire the younger generation by proving that a globally recognised FMCG brand can be born out of Malaysia," he told reporters after its 10th annual general meeting on Friday.

He said the company, which recently repositioned its operations within the consumer products and consumer services categories, now generates more than 70% of its revenue from these segments.

He highlighted the unprecedented growth across brands such as Offspring, Amera and Epic Health Now, underscoring the company's commitment to owning and scaling its proprietary brands.

"Unlike others who merely represent international brands, we own our brands. This ownership sets the foundation for our journey towards becoming a global leader."

Azrin said this resolve is backed by strategic shifts, including a revamped leadership team, the appointment of high-integrity board members, and enhanced governance structures.

Sedania's strategy also focuses on economic resilience through diversified verticals, which are business-to-consumer, business-to-business and business-to-business-to-consumer.

"This diversification mitigates risks from global uncertainties, including potential economic fluctuations or geopolitical shifts.



Azrin (left) and Sedania Innovation executive director Datuk Firoz Mohd Noor displaying the company's annual report.

Our business is properly hedged to navigate market challenges, ensuring sustainability and consistent growth," Azrin remarked.

To boost profitability, he said, the company has achieved a 20% reduction in the cost of goods sold and a 10% savings in distribution costs.

"These savings are reinvested in brand-building initiatives to compete effectively in international markets. We are not just scaling; we are scaling with speed to achieve an RM500 million annual turnover, the threshold for a true FMCG MNC," he added.

Furthermore, Azrin said, new opportunities are on the horizon with the success of Tanah Merah products, particularly in China and Vietnam, and partnerships with postnatal centres.

"Sedania also secured a RM150 million contract in China, positioning itself for further expansion across Asia. Its proprietary Jom Hibah platform is gaining traction, with major banks expected to sign up by the first quarter of next year, unlocking significant growth potential in the financial services

sector," he said.

Looking ahead, Azrin remarked that Sedania is preparing to navigate a challenging market environment, which includes global inflation, currency volatility, and evolving consumer behaviours. "Today's digital tools allow us to adapt marketing strategies in real-time, making our growth more achievable than ever before," he noted.

Azrin shared the company's optimistic outlook for 2024, citing increasing consumer demand for sustainable and health-conscious products. "The market is trending toward authenticity and innovation, which aligns with our core values and product offerings. We noted that this is a pivotal moment to solidify our standing and expand into untapped markets."

With a clear vision and decisive actions, he said, Sedania is poised to redefine what it means to be a Malaysian-born FMCG player on the world stage.

"The future is not just about growth. It is about scaling responsibly and inspiring a generation to dream bigger."

7-Eleven Malaysia Q3 revenue rises to RM744m

PETALING JAYA: 7-Eleven Malaysia Holdings Bhd (SEM) posted revenue of RM744 million for the third quarter ended Sept 30, 2024 (Q3'24), an increase of RM38.7 million or 5.5% compared to RM705.3 million achieved in the same quarter last year.

The revenue growth was mainly driven by the net addition of 79 new stores compared to Q3'23, alongside the festivities of Awal Muharram, Merdeka Day and other public holidays in the quarter under review, leading to a higher average per store day.

Compared to the same quarter last year, SEM successfully added 285 of its 7-CAFÉ store formats, bringing the total count to 471 7-CAFÉ stores in Q3'24.

"We had introduced a range of affordably priced ready-to-eat packed meals, prepared with high-quality locally sourced ingredients which had contributed positively to the fresh food sales growth in Q3 FY24," the company said in a statement.

SEM's operating expenses increased by RM119.1 million or 8.6% in Q3'24, primarily due to higher operational costs associated with store operations and logistics, including longer operating hours and expanded workforce is in tandem with a net increase of 79 new stores.

SEM's total store count in Q3'24 stood at 2,611, SEM said.

For the nine months of FY24 (9M'24), the convenience stores recorded revenue of RM2.18 billion, reflecting an increase of RM90.8 million or 4.3% compared to RM2.08 billion in the same period last year.

The revenue growth was accompanied by a gross profit of RM676.7 million, up RM23.8 million or 3.6%, maintaining a stable gross profit margin of 31%.

Operating expenses for the convenience stores increased by RM54.7 million or 8.5% in Q3'24, attributed to higher store rental costs as a result of a broadened retail network, an increase in store depreciation, and including IT and non-IT maintenance expenses.

SEM's profit after tax (PAT) for 9M'24 stood at RM42.1 million, an increase of RM2.4 million or 5.9% from RM39.7 million recorded in the same period last year.

Due to the successful disposal of discontinued operations at the end of FY23, the group's consolidated PAT for Q3'24 is lower in comparison. The absence of RM21.9 million from discontinued operations contributed to a total PAT of RM61.7 million in Q3'23, decreasing overall PAT to RM42.1 million for Q3'24.

Touching on prospects, SEM said Malaysia's gross domestic product grew by 5.3% in Q3 of 2024, supported by the strong expansion in overall investment activities, growth in goods exports, tourism and household spending.

In spite of the government's diesel subsidy rationalisation, Malaysia's inflation rate stayed stable at 1.9% in Q3'24, accompanied by a higher vehicle insurance inflation offset with a lower food and beverage inflation.

"The group remains committed to navigating these economic conditions by focusing on strategic initiatives that align with market trends.

"With the upcoming year-end festivities and considering the civil services' Phase 1 salary adjustments in December, the group's performance for Q4 of FY24 is anticipated to be relatively stronger in comparison with Q3 of FY24."



September Leading Index up 1.8% from a year ago: DoSM

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's Leading Index (LI) remained positive in September 2024, recording a 1.8% annual growth to reach 111.5 points versus 109.5 points in the same month a year ago, the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DoSM).

Chief Statistician Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin said this 10-month consecutive positive performance since December 2023 shows Malaysia's continuous economic growth.

"The Bursa Malaysia Industrial Index was the main contributor to this increase, rising by 30.4%," he said in a statement yesterday.

However, he noted that the LI's monthly

performance declined by 2.6% due to decreases in most components, except for the real money supply, M1 and Bursa Malaysia Industrial Index.

"Looking at the smoothed long-term trend in September 2024, the LI consistently exceeded 100 points, indicating that the Malaysian economy is expected to continue growing, backed by optimistic domestic economic performance," he said.

Nonetheless, Mohd Uzir pointed out that global challenges may pose potential risks to this growth trajectory.

On the current economic performance, he

said the Coincidence Index (CI) also experienced an annual 1.3% rise to reach 125.6 points versus 124.0 points a year ago. "This performance was driven by almost all components, except for the real salaries and wages in manufacturing, which decreased by 0.6%."

However, Mohd Uzir said, the CI's monthly performance saw a 0.7% fall due to decreases in four out of six components, except for the manufacturing sector's total employment, and real salaries and wages, which saw slight increases of 0.1% and 0.02%, respectively. – Bernama



M'sian banks fortify fraud defences with advanced tech

➤ ABM, AIBIM members united in mission to fight scams, adopt collaborative approach

BY JOHN GILBERT
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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian banks are leveraging advanced technologies to combat fraud and safeguard accounts, reinforcing customer confidence in a rapidly changing financial landscape.

Recognising the importance of a collective effort to combat financial crimes, the National Task Force to Combat Fraud (NTF) was set up to drive and coordinate holistic efforts by banks in fighting scams.

United in their mission against financial scams, member banks from The Association of Banks in Malaysia (ABM) and the Association of Islamic Banking and Financial Institutions Malaysia (AIBIM) participate in regular discourse on anti-scam measures in the country, together with partners such as Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, CyberSecurity Malaysia, Royal Malaysian Police and other relevant agencies.

NTF chairman Syed Ahmad Taufik Albar (*pic*) said, "We recognise that the fight against scams requires a collaborative approach. For instance, the recently launched National Fraud Portal has proven essential to combatting fraud, enabling real-time knowledge sharing between banks so that fraudulent activities are swiftly identified, and the chances of recovering customers' funds in mule accounts are higher."

Taufik, who is also Maybank's group CEO of community financial services, told *SunBiz*, "Equally important is prioritising educating customers on security best practices by empowering them to recognise and avoid potential threats."

"With the assistance of ABM and AIBIM, the anti-scam efforts of member banks were consolidated and amplified through the

#JanganKenaScam initiative, a concerted national scam awareness campaign led by ABM and AIBIM. This collaboration has empowered banks to deliver a consistent anti-scam message, amplifying its impact in the public sphere."

Taufik said banks are playing a more proactive role by empowering customers to respond swiftly to potential threats, providing real-time alerts through SMS, email and mobile app notifications.

Since July 2023, member banks of ABM and AIBIM have implemented five key anti-fraud measures, including replacing SMS one-time passwords with more secure authentication, tightening fraud detection rules, introducing a cooling-off period for first-time online banking registrations, limiting accounts to a single registered device, and launching a 24/7 dedicated fraud channel.

More recently, some banks have commenced implementing malware-shielding technology on their mobile banking applications in further efforts to protect customers from malware scams.

When asked about steps financial institutions are taking to protect customer data, Taufik said protecting customer data is a top priority for banks, which employ stringent measures to prevent misuse or unauthorised access.

"Adhering to the principle of least privilege, only designated employees access necessary information based on their roles, with senior management approval required for sensitive data. Comprehensive training and awareness programmes further ensure employees handle customer information with care, reinforcing the commitment to



confidentiality and security." Taufik said scammers are becoming increasingly sophisticated in the modern age, posing challenges for banks, law enforcement, telecoms, e-commerce platforms, courier services and other service providers.

Fraudsters build trust with their victims by adapting their tone, language, and tactics to suit different demographics. Using psychological tricks that exploit emotions such as fear and anxiety, they often manipulate individuals into acting impulsively, leaving countless unsuspecting victims at risk.

Taufik said, "This is where banks play a critical role in empowering customers to recognise and avoid scams, as they are often the first line of defence against financial fraud. By educating the public on the latest scam tactics and providing clear, accessible guidance on safe banking practices, banks help protect their customers' finances and reinforce trust and confidence in digital banking."

"In today's rapidly evolving scam landscape, proactive education from banks is essential to equip customers with the knowledge and tools needed to stay vigilant and secure in their financial transactions."

Banks are using artificial intelligence-powered fraud detection and eKYC technology to swiftly identify suspicious activities and securely verify customers, ensuring safe and convenient digital banking, Taufik said.

While added security measures may introduce minor inconveniences, he added, they are essential to safeguarding customers' financial interests.

Taufik said with support from Bank Negara Malaysia, banks remain committed to collaborating with enforcement agencies and partners to enhance security and counter evolving fraud tactics.

Local institutions' net buying streak on Bursa enters fifth straight week

KUALA LUMPUR: Local institutions were the primary supporters of Bursa Malaysia for the fifth consecutive week, recording a net inflow of RM250.6 million last week, up from RM207.7 million in the previous week.

In its fund flow report for the week ending Nov 22, MIDF Amanah Investment Bank Bhd (MIDF) noted that while there was a net outflow of RM19.6 million from local institutions on Tuesday, the inflows on other days of the week more than offset this decline.

Meanwhile, local retailers turned net sellers during the week, with total outflows amounting to RM85.3 million. This investor group saw daily outflows except on Thursday, which recorded a net inflow of RM12.7 million.

For foreign investors, it continued to sell on local bourse with outflows totalling RM165.3 million. Every trading day experienced a net foreign outflow, except on Tuesday, which saw an inflow of RM66.3 million.

The heaviest outflow was recorded on Thursday at RM134.5 million, followed by Wednesday at RM47.1 million, Friday at RM39.6 million, and Monday at RM10.6 million.

The top three sectors that saw net buying activities by foreign investors were property (RM47.2 million), construction (RM36.7 million) and industrial (RM35.3 million).

"The top three sectors that saw net selling activities by foreign investors were utilities (RM90.6 million), transport and logistics (RM67.4 million), and consumer (RM58.8 million)," it said.

MIDF said the average daily trading volume showed declines across all investor categories.

Foreign investors recorded a decline of 3.6% while local institutional investors and retail investors saw decreases of 5.7% and 6.1% respectively.

Across Asia, foreign investors continued their net selling for the eighth consecutive week, with total outflows of US\$2.84 billion (RM12.67 billion).

Taiwan recorded the highest net foreign outflow at US\$1.28 billion, continuing its streak for the fourth week in a row. This occurred despite positive economic data from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, which reported that Taiwan's export orders grew for the eighth consecutive month in October. — Bernama

BPMB, Aim Concept in RM75m financing deal for Penang General Hospital

PETALING JAYA: Bank Pembangunan Malaysia Bhd (BPMB) and Aim Concept Sdn Bhd (ACSB) signed a RM75 million financing facility to initiate a larger RM428 million expansion project for the specialist clinic and ward block at the Penang General Hospital.

The financing reflects BPMB's purpose of delivering impact capital for national development.

The financing was assessed through BPMB's Measuring Impact on National Development framework, ensuring alignment with environmental, social, and governance standards and the government's 12th Malaysia Plan objectives.

The project includes a 216-bed, 15-floor facility with specialist clinics and wards for cardiothoracic, neurosurgery, ophthalmology, ear, nose and throat, intensive care, high-dependency services, and advanced operating theatres equipped for robotic surgery. It will create 2,100 jobs, address gaps in specialist care, reduce overcrowding, and improve access to timely treatments.

BPMB group CEO Roni Abdul Wahab said the bank has championed Bumiputera

economic participation since its inception in 1973, with ACSB being one such example, as it rose to the call of the PuTERA35 initiative.

"This is yet another reflection of the development financial institution (DFI) ecosystem's support and partnership in strengthening our overall mandate, from small and medium-sized enterprises to highly competitive large-scale corporations.

"Through the DFI ecosystem, there is a continuity of support and capital towards the development of Bumiputera entrepreneurs to their next stage of growth and beyond," he said.

ACSB managing director Datuk Abd Rahim Jaafar said the company has endured many financial crises since 1997, but now, with BPMB, it stands ready to build a brighter and more resilient future.

"This collaboration represents a blend of ambition, innovation, and motivation. As we move forward, I am reminded of an old saying: If we want to go fast, go alone — that era is behind us. But if we want to go far, we go together. I hope, with BPMB, we go far together."



From left: Roni, Abd Rahim, BPMB managing director Mohamed Nazri Omar and ACSB business development manager Iqmal Ridzuan Abd Rahim at the signing ceremony.

TMK Chemical aims to raise **RM385m** from IPO

► Inorganic chemicals player makes public issue of 220 million new shares at RM1.75 each

■ BY HAYATUN RAZAK
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KUALA LUMPUR: TMK Chemical Bhd, a player in Malaysia's inorganic chemicals market, aims to raise RM385 million from its initial public offering (IPO) in conjunction with its listing on the Main Market of Bursa Malaysia.

The RM385 million will be raised through the public issue of 220 million new shares at RM1.75 per share.

TMK's non-independent executive director and managing director, Wong Kin Wah, said that over the past 35 years, the company has expanded its service offerings to include chemical terminal services and this year they took a major step forward by vertically integrating into the manufacturing of inorganic chemicals.

"As our business has grown, so has our regional footprint, which now spans Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam. Our decision to pursue this IPO is driven by a clear vision of the future. We see significant opportunities within the sector and are committed to capitalise on them," he said at the launch of TM



From left: Maybank Investment Bank deputy CEO Tengku Ariff Azhar Tengku Mohamed, Wong, TMK Chemical independent non-executive chairman Johan Ariffin Rozali Wathooth, Maybank Investment Bank CEO Michael Oh-Lau, TMK Chemical non-independent executive director and deputy chairman Leong Chao Seong, Malayan Banking Bhd global banking group CEO Datuk John Chong Eng Chuan, TMK Chemical non-independent non-executive director Lee Yan Ling, and Maybank Investment Bank equity capital markets managing director and regional head Raymond Chooi Wing Fok at the IPO prospectus launch.

Chemical's prospectus in conjunction with the IPO.

Speaking about the company's planned new facility in Singapore, Wong said TMK Chemical currently operates two fully utilised warehouses. "Although our business in Singapore is already substantial, it is a natural progression for us to expand further there."

He said the company's brand is well established in Singapore and the business performance has been strong. "The expansion aligns with our focus on organic growth as we've achieved consistent growth in Singapore year after year."

TMK Chemical has allocated 23.4% of the proceeds for the construction of a plant in Banting, Selangor, while 12.9% will go towards the construction of a facility in Singapore.

Some 25.7% of the proceeds have been budgeted for the pursuit of acquisitions to be identified, and 20.6% will be allocated for working capital. Additionally, 13% of the amount raised is earmarked for the repayment of borrowings, and the remaining proceeds will cover IPO and listing-related expenses.

Based on the enlarged issued share capital of 1 billion shares and

share price of RM1.75 apiece, the market capitalisation of TMK Chemical will amount to RM1.75 billion.

The company plans to set aside 30% to 50% of its profit after tax as annual dividend for shareholders.

The public issue portion of the IPO opened for subscription from yesterday and applications will close at 5pm on Nov 29. TMK Chemical is set to be listed on Dec 12.

Maybank Investment Bank Bhd is the principal adviser, sole bookrunner and sole underwriter for TML Chemical's IPO.

CEH signs IPO underwriting deal with Mercury Securities

PETALING JAYA: Mechanical and electrical (M&E) engineering service provider CBH Engineering Holding Bhd (CEH) signed an underwriting agreement with Mercury Securities Sdn Bhd for its initial public offering (IPO) on the ACE Market of Bursa Malaysia.

Mercury Securities will underwrite 122.5 million shares made available to the Malaysian public and pink form allocations.

CEH managing director Ir Cheah Boon Hwa said that with over 33 years of experience in the M&E engineering industry, the company has delivered projects of varying scales and complexities, establishing itself as a cost-effective and reliable contractor.

"This proven track record positions us favourably for future opportunities, as reflected in the growing number of projects awarded to us. The signing of today's underwriting agreement marks a crucial step in our journey, unlocking greater capabilities to undertake M&E engineering projects," he said in a statement.

CEH's IPO comprises 486.1 million ordinary shares, including 298 million public issue shares and 188.1 million offer-for-sale shares. These represent 15.8% and 10%, respectively, of CBH's enlarged share capital of 1,880.9

million shares post-listing.

Of the IPO shares, 94 million will be offered to the Malaysian public via balloting, while 28.4 million will be allocated to eligible directors, employees, and contributors (pink form allocations). Some 128.5 million shares will be privately placed with selected investors. The remaining 47 million shares and 188.1 million offer shares will be privately placed with Bumiputera investors approved by the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry.

CEH is scheduled to be listed on the ACE Market of Bursa Malaysia in January 2025, with Mercury Securities as the principal adviser, sponsor, sole underwriter and sole placement agent for the IPO.

Cheah said the outlook for the industry is positive.

He said data centres are vital enablers of digital infrastructure, and Malaysia is emerging as a hub for these facilities, driven by rising data usage, internet services and cloud adoption powered by 5G and cloud computing.

"Moreover, local and global technology giants such as Microsoft, Google, Amazon and Telekom Malaysia are making significant investments to develop hyper-scale data centres and cloud services in



Standing from left: CBH Engineering Holding executive director Cheah Min Heng, CBH Engineering Sdn Bhd director Cheah Boon Kiat, CBH Engineering Holding executive director Cheah Boon Huat and Mercury Securities head of corporate finance Chong Soo Ken. Seated are Cheah Boon Hwa (left) and Mercury Securities managing director Chew Sing Guan.

the country."

"Additionally, increasing foreign and domestic investments are boosting the development of commercial and industrial properties along with supporting infrastructure, creating more opportunities for M&E engineering service providers like us."

CEH, through its subsidiaries, provides electrical engineering services for electricity supply distribution systems, which cover the

design, supply, installation, testing, commissioning, and maintenance of high-voltage, medium-voltage, low-voltage, and extra-low-voltage electrical systems. The group also offers mechanical engineering works for building systems.

As of May 31 2024, CEH has 13 subsisting contracts with a total unbilled order book of RM207 million, expected to be recognised progressively up to Dec 31, 2025.

Life Eternity Group plans RM40m fundraising to build six-star memorial hall

PETALING JAYA: Life Eternity Group Bhd plans to raise RM40 million for the development of Malaysia's first six-star Life Eternity Memorial Hall.

The landmark project is set to revolutionise bereavement services in Malaysia, providing a modern and dignified experience for grieving families.

Founder and chairman Melvin Loh Kok Man said the RM40 million initiative represents more than just a building project.

"It is a step towards setting new standards in bereavement services. With Selangor's high population density, particularly within the Chinese community, there is a pressing need for a facility that combines tradition, modernity, and comfort, he said.

Strategically located on a 1.5-acre site owned by Life Eternity Group, the memorial hall will be situated west of Klang and east of Petaling Jaya, making it easily accessible to Selangor's growing population.

Designed to meet the needs of Malaysia's increasingly open-minded market, the hall will cater especially to the state's significant Chinese community.

Since its establishment in 2017, Life Eternity Group has been at the forefront of the bereavement industry, offering innovative pre-planning solutions through its flagship Life Eternity Card.

With about 2,500 active subscribers and growing, Life Eternity Group has already gained recognition for its high-quality services. Backed by a nationwide network of 80 agents, Life Eternity Group's subscriber base spans Malaysia. The addition of the six-star memorial hall will further solidify its position as the industry leader.

The six-star Life Eternity Memorial Hall is designed to provide a serene and luxurious environment that supports grieving families. The facility will feature elegant interiors, cutting-edge amenities, and flexible spaces to honour loved ones according to their wishes and traditions.

"The memorial hall will not only provide a perfect final journey for the departed but also offer a welcoming and comfortable environment for families to host guests," Loh said.

The RM40 million raised will be allocated entirely to the project's design, construction, and operations, ensuring the facility meets world-class standards.

As Life Eternity Group approaches its 10th anniversary in 2026, the initiative highlights the company's ongoing commitment to innovation and excellence in bereavement services, Loh said.

"This milestone reflects our unwavering mission to revolutionise and digitalise the bereavement industry in Malaysia. We are deeply honoured by the trust our subscribers have placed in us and remain committed to delivering unparalleled service and innovation."

The Life Eternity Memorial Hall is not just a facility – it represents a new benchmark for the bereavement industry in Malaysia and Asia, setting the stage for a future where dignity and modernity meet, Loh said.



Mr DIY Indonesia targets 4.7 trillion rupiah from IPO

➤ Proceeds to be used for bank loan repayment, new stores and working capital

JAKARTA: The Indonesian arm of Malaysia-based home improvement retailer Mr DIY Group is seeking to raise up to 4.7 trillion rupiah (RM1.3 billion) in an initial public offering, according to a prospectus published yesterday.

The listing by Daya Intiguna Yasa will be Indonesia's largest IPO in more than a year, following Amman Mineral Internasional's listing in July 2023, according to data compiled by LSEG.

IPO proceeds raised in Indonesia, Southeast Asia's biggest economy, dropped to US\$298.4 million (RM1.3 billion) in the first nine months of the year, from US\$3.26 billion in 2023, LSEG data showed.

The drop came against the backdrop of Indonesia's elections and leadership transition this year.

Daya Intiguna Yasa is offering 10% of its equity or up to 2.52 billion shares in a range of

1,650 rupiah to 1,870 rupiah each, according to the prospectus.

The book building period started from yesterday and the company expects to be listed on the Indonesian stock exchange on Dec 19.

The company plans to allocate 60% of the IPO proceeds to repay a bank loan, 30% to launch more stores and 10% for working capital, according to the prospectus.

CIMB Niaga Sekuritas and Mandiri Sekuritas are the underwriters for the IPO.

Mr DIY has held a presence in Indonesia since 2017 and has opened stores in almost all provinces, according to its website. – Reuters

Asian markets mostly on front foot, bitcoin rally stutters

HONG KONG: Most Asian markets rose yesterday following a record close on Wall Street as traders welcomed Donald Trump's pick for Treasury secretary, while bitcoin's push to US\$100,000 (RM445,000) ran out of steam after coming within a whisker of the mark at the end of last week.

Investors gave the thumbs-up to news that Trump had chosen billionaire investor Scott Bessent to lead the Treasury, with optimism he will take a considered approach to the economy.

Bessent, CEO of hedge fund manager Key Square Group, has called for an extension of tax cuts from Trump's first term, wants to reassert American energy dominance and believes it is necessary to deal with the budget deficit.

This month, he called tariffs "a negotiating tool with our trading partners" in an opinion piece for Fox News, adding it was "a means to finally stand up for Americans".

While his views are seen as hawkish, markets started on a bright note.

"(Bessent) brings this sense of almost gradualism to the administration as opposed to taking a big bang approach to making big policy changes," said Brian Jacobsen, chief economist at Annex Wealth Management.

Markets may be relieved that the pick signals "an America First" kind of administration but not an "America Exclusively" kind of administration", he told Bloomberg.

Tokyo advanced more than 1%, even as the yen pushed up against the dollar, while Sydney, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei, Mumbai, Bangkok, Wellington, Manila and Jakarta also sat in positive territory.

However, after a healthy start, Hong Kong and Shanghai turned negative.

Bitcoin sat at around US\$98,000, having set a record high of US\$99,728.34 last Friday, with traders awaiting the next catalyst to push it past the historic US\$100,000 mark. – AFP



A man jogging along the promenade near the financial business district in Singapore. – AFP/PPIC

S'pore October core inflation at 2.1%, lowest since 2021

SINGAPORE: Singapore's key consumer price gauge rose 2.1% in October from a year earlier, lower than economists' forecasts and the smallest rise in almost three years, official data showed yesterday.

The core inflation rate, which excludes private road transport and accommodation costs, compared with a forecast of 2.5% in a Reuters poll of economists and September's rate of 2.8%.

Core inflation in October was the lowest since December 2021 when it was also 2.1%.

Authorities pegged the drop to moderation

in services, electricity and gas, and retail and other goods inflation.

Headline inflation was 1.4% in annual terms in October, lower than forecast of 1.8% in the poll.

Last week, Singapore upgraded its 2024 economic growth forecast to 3.5% from a previous range of 2% to 3% after third-quarter growth came in stronger than expected.

The core inflation figure coming close to the central bank's guidance of 2% by year-end leaves room for monetary policy easing at its next meeting in January, Maybank economist Chua Hak Bin said.

The economist expects the central bank to slow the rate of appreciation of the Singapore dollar nominal effective exchange rate (SSENER), through which it manages monetary policy.

The MAS left its policy settings unchanged at a review last month as inflation pressures continued to moderate and growth prospects improved.

The central bank and Trade Ministry said yesterday core inflation was expected to remain around 2% into year-end and step down further to 1.5% to 2.5% in 2025. – Reuters

Thailand to provide 38b baht support for rice farmers

BANGKOK: Thailand will give support of 38 billion baht (RM4.9 billion) to rice farmers in an effort to boost productivity, Agriculture Minister Narumon Pinyosinwat said yesterday.

Farmers will receive 1,000 baht per rai for up to 10 rai (1.6ha), she told reporters, adding about 4.68 million households would benefit.

The assistance plan would be proposed to Cabinet at a meeting scheduled for Friday.

Thailand, the world's second-biggest rice exporter, shipped out 8.37 million metric tonnes of rice in the first 10 months of the year, up 20% annually, the Commerce Ministry said.

It is expected to export more than 9 million tonnes over the full year, worth US\$6.4 billion (RM28.5 billion), the ministry said.

Meanwhile, the Federation of Thai Industries (FTI) said yesterday car production in the country fell 25.13% in October from a year earlier to 118,842 units as truck output slumped heavily.

The figure followed a 25.48% fall in September, and was the 15th straight month that production had contracted.

Production of pickup trucks dropped 27.8% in October from a year earlier while truck output tumbled 77.5%, Surapong Paisitpattanapong, spokesman for the FTI's automotive industry division, told a news conference.

Domestic car sales dropped by 36.08% in October from a year earlier, after a drop of 37.11% in the previous month, FTI said.

The FTI has said car production and sales have been hit by weak demand as financial institutions have tightened lending for vehicles. – Reuters

China central bank injects 900 billion yuan into banking system

BEIJING: China's central bank injected 900 billion yuan (RM553 billion) into the banking system yesterday via one-year policy loans, as local governments step up selling bonds to ease debt burdens.

The People's Bank of China (PBOC) lent the medium-term facility (MLF) loans to financial institutions at 2%, the central bank said in a statement.

The PBOC conducts MLF operations toward the end of each month.

China's banking system faces increasing liquidity pressure toward year-end, with local government bond issuance up sharply as Beijing steps up efforts to reduce debt risks and stimulate the struggling economy.

November issuance is expected to exceed 1.3 trillion yuan, the biggest monthly volume in

a year, according to Reuters estimates.

"Liquidity may face some pressure this week due to maturing reverse repos, increasing bond issuance and month-end volatility in cash demand," Citic Securities said in a note.

The PBOC is increasingly likely to reduce banks' reserve requirements toward the year-end to ease liquidity pressure, the *China Securities Journal* reported yesterday. – Reuters



A cyclist with his face covered in cloth rides along a street on a cold smoggy morning in New Delhi. —AFPPIC

Mounting economic costs of India's killer smog

► One study estimates losses of US\$95 billion, or 3% of GDP, annually

NEW DELHI: Noxious smog smothering the plains of north India is not only choking the lungs of residents and killing millions, but also slowing the country's economic growth.

India's capital New Delhi frequently ranks among the world's most polluted cities.

Each winter, vehicle and factory emissions couple with farm fires from surrounding states to blanket the city in a dystopian haze.

Acrid smog this month contains more than 50 times the World Health Organisation recommended limit of fine particulate matter – dangerous cancer-causing microparticles, known as PM2.5 pollutants, that enter the bloodstream through the lungs.

Experts say India's worsening air pollution is having a ruinous impact on its economy – with one study estimating losses to the tune of US\$95 billion (RM422 billion) annually, or roughly 3% of the country's GDP.

The true extent of the economic price India is paying could be even greater.

"The externality costs are huge and you can't assign a value to it," said Vibhuti Garg, of the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

Bhargav Krishna of the Delhi-based research collective Sustainable Futures Collaborative said "costs add up in every phase".

"From missing a day at work to developing chronic illness, the health costs associated with

that, to premature death and the impact that has on the family of the person," Krishna told AFP.

Still, several studies have tried to quantify the damage.

One by the global consultancy firm Dalberg concluded that in 2019, air pollution cost Indian businesses US\$95 billion due to "reduced productivity, work absences and premature death".

The amount is nearly 3% of India's budget, and roughly twice its annual public health expenditure.

"India lost 3.8 billion working days in 2019, costing US\$44 billion to air pollution caused by deaths," according to the study which calculated that toxic air "contributes to 18% of all deaths in India".

Pollution has also had a debilitating impact on the consumer economy because of direct health-related eventualities, the study said, reducing footfall and causing annual losses of US\$22 billion.

The numbers are even more staggering for Delhi, the epicentre of the crisis, with the capital province losing as much as 6% of its GDP annually to air pollution.

Restaurateur Sandeep Anand Goyle called the smog a "health and wealth hazard".

"People who are health conscious avoid stepping out so we suffer," said Goyle, who heads the Delhi chapter of the National Restaurant Association of India.

Tourism has also been impacted, as the smog season coincides with the period when foreigners traditionally visit northern India – too hot for many during the blistering hot summers.

"The smog is giving a bad name to India's

image," said Rajiv Mehra of the Indian Association of Tour Operators.

Delhi faces an average 275 days of unhealthy air a year, according to monitors.

Piecemeal initiatives by the government – that critics call half-hearted – have failed to adequately address the problem.

Academic research indicates that its detrimental impact on the Indian economy is adding up.

A 2023 World Bank paper said that air pollution's "micro-level" impacts on the economy translate to "macro-level effects that can be observed in year-to-year changes in GDP".

The paper estimates that India's GDP would have been 4.5% higher at the end of 2023, had the country managed to curb pollution by half in the previous 25 years.

Another study published in the *Lancet* health journal on the direct health impacts of air pollution in 2019 estimated an annual GDP deceleration of 1.36% due to "lost output from premature deaths and morbidity".

Desperate emergency curbs – such as shuttering schools to reduce traffic emissions as well as banning construction – come with their own economic costs.

"Stopping work for weeks on end every winter makes our schedules go awry, and we end up overshooting budgets," said Sanjeev Bansal, the chairman of the Delhi unit of the Builders Association of India.

Pollution's impact on the Indian economy is likely to get worse if action is not taken.

With India's median age expected to rise to 32 by 2030, the Dalberg study predicts that "susceptibility to air pollution will increase, as will the impact on mortality". – AFP

European car sales flat in October, EVs gain ground

BERLIN: New car sales in Europe were flat in October, after falling for two consecutive months, industry data showed, while the transition to fully electric or hybrid models gained ground in the month.

An uptick in total sales in Spain and Germany, of 7.2% and 6% respectively, offset a contraction in France, Italy and Britain, the European Automobile Manufacturers Association (ACEA) said.

European automakers are struggling with weak demand, high production costs, and managing the shift to EVs, while trying to fend off competition from China.

The number of new vehicles registered in October in the EU, Britain and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) rose 0.1% year-on-year to 1.04 million.

Sales of fully electric cars (BEVs) rose for the second consecutive month, up 6.9% in October, while those of hybrid cars (HEVs) rose by 15.8%.

Registrations in the EU, Britain and EFTA at Volkswagen rose 12.6%, while they fell by 16.7% at Stellantis and by 0.4% at Renault.

Sales were down 23.1% at EV maker Tesla and down 10% at China's SAIC Motor.

In the EU, total new car registrations rose 1.1% year-on-year.

Germany saw sales increase with 6%, after three months of losses.

Electrified vehicles – either BEV, HEV or plug-in hybrids (PHEV) – sold in the bloc accounted for 55.4% of passenger car registrations in October, up from 51.3% in the previous year. – Reuters

French govt offers to buy Atos' advanced computing activities

PARIS: French IT firm Atos has entered negotiations with the government over the potential acquisition of its advanced computing activities for an enterprise value of €500 million (RM2.3 billion), the company said yesterday.

Atos, which secures communications for the French military and secret services and manufactures servers to make supercomputers, is undergoing a restructuring to tackle its large debt.

The government has for months been making a concerted effort to reach a deal to retain control over Atos' strategic technology assets within the country.

The target is to have a share purchase agreement signed by May 31, when an exclusivity period ends, Atos said in a statement, adding that an initial payment of €150 million would be made when the deal was signed.

The offer could potentially be increased to €625 million including earn-outs, it added.

"It is the role of the French State to guarantee, as a shareholder when it is justified, the perennity and development of the industrial activities that are most strategic for our sovereignty," French Finance minister Antoine Armand said.

Advanced Computing, Critical Systems and Cyber Products are part of Atos' cybersecurity unit BDS. They employ about 4,000 people and generate about €900 million of annual sales, a French Finance Ministry official told Reuters in April.

Atos also said it would launch a formal sale process for BDS's Critical Systems and Cyber Products.

The parliament's Finance Commission said earlier this month that it had adopted an amendment that could lead to the nationalisation of Atos. – Reuters

Sri Lanka's new leader sticks within IMF 'guardrails'

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's new leftist government has agreed to press ahead with a controversial IMF bailout programme that involves tough austerity and economic reforms, the international lender announced.

The International Monetary Fund said it reached an agreement with President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's administration to continue with the four-year loan negotiated by his predecessor last year.

"The authorities have committed to stay within the guardrails of the programme," IMF team leader Peter Breuer told reporters at the end of talks with the new government.

He said the new government's

commitment ensured policy continuity.

"Sustaining the reform momentum is critical to safeguarding the hard-won gains of the programme, and putting the economy on a path towards lasting recovery and stable and inclusive growth," Breuer added.

Sri Lanka went to the IMF for a rescue package after the country defaulted on its US\$46 billion (RM204 billion) external debt in April 2022 during an unprecedented economic meltdown.

The shortage of foreign exchange, which left the country unable to finance even the most essential imports of food and fuel, led to months of street protests and forced

then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign.

The US\$2.9 billion loan secured early last year required Colombo to sharply raise taxes, remove generous energy subsidies and agree to restructure more than 50 loss-making state enterprises.

Dissanayake's predecessor Ranil Wickremesinghe secured the rescue that involves the disbursement of a US\$2.9 billion loan over four years.

In his first address to Parliament after his National People's Power party won a landslide at the Nov 14 election, Dissanayake backed the IMF deal, marking a U-turn from his election pledge. – AFP

Mass deportations could hurt US economic growth

➤ Sectors like agriculture and construction heavily reliant on foreign workers

WASHINGTON: President-elect Donald Trump's hardline immigration proposals – including a controversial mass deportation plan – could prove economically damaging, analysts say, with US sectors that rely heavily on foreign workers like agriculture and construction especially hard hit.

US authorities estimate that there are around 11 million unauthorised people living in the United States, the vast majority of whom come from Mexico.

Around 8.3 million unauthorised people were in the labour force in 2022, according to a recent estimate from the Pew Research Centre. That was equivalent to just under 5% of the overall workforce.

"Today our cities are flooded with illegal aliens," Trump said on the campaign trail earlier this year, adding: "Americans are being squeezed out of the labor force and their jobs are taken."

The reality, however, is more complex; many of the sectors that could be the hardest-hit have long struggled to attract US workers.

"The construction and agriculture industries would lose at least one in eight workers, while in hospitality, about one in 14 workers would be deported due to their undocumented status," the non-profit American Immigration Council (AIC) said in a recent report on Trump's deportation plans.

The deportations would also impact "more than 30%" of plasterers, roofers, and painters, along with a quarter of housekeeping cleaners, according to the report.

A recent joint study by the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), Brookings Institution, and the Niskanen Center estimated that Trump's immigration plans could curb US GDP growth in 2025 by as much as 0.4 percentage points.

The impact on growth would primarily come from the direct effect of having fewer foreign workers producing goods and services, with an additional, smaller decline in output coming from less consumer spending by those groups.

In such a scenario, the authors said, "legal immigration is slightly below where it was during the pre-pandemic Trump administration, while enforcement and deportation efforts reach levels not seen in recent decades."



Construction workers putting up house wrap during a heat wave in the US city of Houston. – AFP/IC

A total of 3.2 million people would be deported during Trump's term under this projection, with net migration – arrivals minus departures – falling from 3.3 million in 2024 to negative 740,000 in 2025, boosted by a sharp rise in voluntary emigration.

In a more extreme scenario, which analysts say is highly unlikely, the impact on growth could be much more significant.

A recent Peterson Institute for International Economics report modelled the impact of expelling all 8.3 million unauthorised immigrant workers.

It predicted that economic growth by 2028 could be 7.4% beneath baseline estimates, "meaning no US net economic growth occurs over the second Trump term because of this policy alone."

At the same time, US inflation would be 3.5 percentage points higher by 2026 than it would otherwise be, as employers raised wages to attract American workers.

But even in a less significant scenario, mass deportations could push up prices, analysts say.

Trump's immigration plans "could lead to big price increases in certain sectors of the

economy, but could also lead to inflation," Michael Strain, AEI's director of economic policy studies, told AFP.

But mass deportations' aggregate effect on inflation would likely be small, economists at Pantheon Macroeconomics wrote in an investor note, "with upward pressure in sectors like agriculture and construction partly offset by weaker demand in general and slower inflation in some other areas, such as housing."

Most analysts expect legal, logistical and financial challenges will blunt the most extreme proposals – as they did during the first Trump administration – with the end result being that net migration eases modestly next year compared to pre-pandemic levels.

"We expect tighter policy to lower net immigration to 750k per year, moderately below the pre-pandemic average of 1 (million) per year," economists at Goldman Sachs wrote in an investor note.

"We're sceptical that the kind of deportations proposed on the campaign could occur," Oxford Economics chief US economist Ryan Sweet wrote in a note to clients. – AFP

Amazon doubles down on AI with extra US\$4b bet on Anthropic

SAN FRANCISCO: Amazon is doubling its investment in Anthropic to US\$8 billion (RM35 billion) in a deepened collaboration on artificial intelligence, the companies said.

The e-commerce and technology behemoth will remain a minority investor in Anthropic, having pumped an initial US\$4 billion into the artificial intelligence developer late last year and becoming its primary cloud computing provider.

"The response from AWS customers who are developing generative AI applications powered by Anthropic in Amazon Bedrock has been remarkable," said Matt Garman, chief of AWS cloud computing division.

"We'll keep pushing the boundaries of what customers can achieve with generative AI."

Amazon is investing the additional US\$4 billion in Anthropic as part of an expanded alliance that includes working together on "Trainium" hardware to optimise machine learning, according to the companies.

"We're looking forward to working with Amazon to train and power our most advanced AI models using AWS Trainium, and helping to unlock the full potential of their technology," said Anthropic chief executive Dario Amodei.

The announcement came just days after UK's Competition and Markets Authority cleared Google-parent Alphabet's investment in Anthropic, following a probe.

The regulator concluded that the tech giant had not acquired "material influence" over Anthropic as a result of the deal, which was reported to have cost US\$2 billion. – AFP

TikTok CEO sought Musk's counsel: WSJ

NEW YORK: ByteDance-owned TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew has sought input on US matters from Elon Musk, a close adviser to President-elect Donald Trump, the *Wall Street Journal* reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

Chew initiated messages with the Tesla CEO in recent weeks and asked for his opinions on topics ranging from the incoming administration to potential tech policy, the report added.

Elon Musk, TikTok, ByteDance and the Trump administration did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comments.

Both executives have not discussed specific measures to keep TikTok running in the United States, *WSJ* reported, adding that Chew has kept ByteDance's senior leadership informed of the talks, with executives cautiously optimistic about finding a way forward.

ByteDance executives had been hedging their bets before the US election, meeting with people close to Trump and with people close to Democratic nominee Kamala Harris, the report added.

Trump, who unsuccessfully tried to ban TikTok in 2020, has said if elected in November he would not allow TikTok to be barred. – Reuters

Nvidia CEO says global tech cooperation will continue

HONG KONG: Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang said that global cooperation in technology will continue even if the incoming US administration imposes stricter export controls on advanced computing products.

US President-elect Donald Trump, in his first term in office, imposed restrictions on the sale of US technology to China citing national security – a policy continued under President Joe Biden.

The curbs forced Nvidia, the world's leading maker of chips used for artificial intelligence applications,

to change its product lineup in China.

"Open science in global collaboration, cooperation across math and science has been around for a very long time. It is the foundation of social advancement and scientific advancement," Huang told media during a visit to Hong Kong.

"Cooperation is 'going to continue'," he said.

"I don't know what's going to happen in the new administration, but whatever happens, we'll balance simultaneously compliance with laws and policies, continue to advance our

technology and support and serve customers all over the world."

The head of the world's most valuable company was speaking after receiving an honorary doctorate in engineering from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

During the visit, Huang participated in a fireside chat with the university's council chairman Harry Sham in front of an audience of students and academics.

Asked about the huge energy requirements of graphics processing units – chips behind artificial

intelligence – Huang said: "If the world uses more energy to power the AI factories of the world, we are a better world when that happens."

Huang said "the goal of AI is not for training, the goal of AI is for inference."

He said AI can discover, for instance, new ways to store carbon dioxide in reservoirs, new wind turbine designs and new materials for storing electricity.

Earlier, Huang told graduates that "the age of AI has started" in a speech after receiving the honorary degree.

"A new computing era that will

impact every industry and every field of science."

Huang, 61, also told graduates that he wished he had started his career at this time.

"The whole world is reset. You're at the starting lines with everybody else. An industry is being reinvented. You now have the instruments, the instruments necessary to advance science in so many different fields.

"The greatest challenges of our time, unimaginable challenges to overcome in the past, all of a sudden seem possible to tackle." – Reuters

MARKET ROUND-UP: NOVEMBER 25

BURSA MALAYSIA

Trade Statistic 25 Nov 2024



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

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

DISCLAIMER: The data and reports are provided as a service to investors. Sun Media Corporation Sdn Bhd shall not be liable or responsible for any consequences resulting from usage of the information.

Bursa Indices		
INDEX		CHANGE
FBMEMAS	12,173.30	+62.33
FBMKLCI	1,597.45	+7.67
CONSUMER PRODUCTS	536.88	-4.52
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS	172.89	-0.39
CONSTRUCTION	298.35	-1.54
FINANCIAL SERVICES	19,289.00	+251.95
ENERGY	829.48	+9.36
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	532.28	-3.41
HEALTH CARE	2,132.00	-4.11
TRANSPORTATION	1,052.77	-0.65
PROPERTY	1,080.64	+6.67
PLANTATION	7,501.65	-36.87
FBMSHA	12,109.90	-15.56
FBMACE	5,163.45	+0.38
TECHNOLOGY	60.32	+1.16
TURNOVER: 3.009 bil		VALUE: RM5.395 bil

FBM KLCI lifted by buying in selected heavyweights

BURSA Malaysia maintained its upward momentum throughout the trading session to close higher yesterday, buoyed by persistent buying in selected heavyweights, led by financial counters, amid the mostly upbeat performance in regional bourses.

The FTSE Bursa Malaysia KLCI (FBM KLCI) rose 7.67 points or 0.48% to close at 1,597.45 from Friday's close of 1,589.78.

CIMB and Public Bank gained 16 sen and 7 sen to RM8.38 and RM4.45, respectively, giving a combined contribution of 5.21 points to the benchmark index's gain.

However, the broader market was negative, with decliners beating gainers 540 to 501, while 479 counters remained unchanged, 944 untraded, and 28 suspended.

UOB Kay Hian Wealth Advisors head of investment research Mohd Sedek Jantan said the FBM KLCI briefly broke above the psychological level of 1,600 points during the trading session as renewed short-term interest in equities emerged following recent price corrections.

"However, last-minute selling pressure pushed the index back below 1,600, though it still managed to end the day in positive territory.

"Gains were led by utilities and financial stocks, which rebounded after last week's sharp profit-taking had brought valuations to more attractive levels. This positive trend was mirrored across Bursa Malaysia's sectoral indices, with the Utilities Index and Financial Services Index emerging as the top gainers," he told Bernama.

Mohd Sedek said investors remained cautious as they monitor the final leg of corporate earnings, scheduled for release through the end of the month.

Top 20 Actives				
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
HSI-CWAM	0.125	-0.085	-40.48	1,534,920
HSI-PWBB	0.105	0.005	5.00	846,772
SUNWAY	5.020	0.030	0.60	831,347
CIMB	8.380	0.160	1.95	819,979
PBBANK	4.450	0.070	1.60	545,709
CNASIA	0.070	-0.005	-6.67	486,733
YTL	1.850	0.050	4.52	468,884
MAXIS	3.580	0.050	1.42	454,076
GENETEC	0.875	0.060	7.36	427,658
HSI-CWAO	0.095	-0.015	-13.64	403,754
HSI-CY8	0.155	-0.020	-11.43	374,398
HSI-PWB4	0.180	-	-	369,101
YNHPROP	0.630	0.090	16.67	363,710
TENAGA	14.040	0.040	0.29	358,369
ARMADA	0.585	0.020	3.67	355,089
HSI-HZW	0.100	-	-	354,750
MYEG	0.915	0.005	0.55	323,050
YTLPOWER	3.060	0.160	5.52	312,687
IHH	7.000	-0.190	-2.64	294,614
YTL-C98	0.015	-	-	290,696



Top 20 Gainers (By RM)			
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
HLBANK	20.880	0.400	26,653
MPI	24.680	0.280	2,120
VITROX	3.580	0.230	6,439
CARLSBG	20.600	0.200	1,628
PETGAS	17.800	0.200	22,343
CIMB	8.380	0.160	819,979
YTLPOWER	3.060	0.160	312,687
AMBANK	5.400	0.150	261,684
GCB	2.940	0.140	20,024
KUCHAI	1.080	0.140	27,893
MI	2.010	0.130	44,277
RVIEW	3.190	0.120	105
CHINHIN	2.440	0.110	30,276
RHBANK	6.610	0.110	120,835
SNKPLNT	2.430	0.110	9,496
HSI-PWBJ	1.080	0.105	5,066
AJI	15.100	0.100	567
HLFG	18.500	0.100	1,489
MAYBANK	10.300	0.100	275,657
SCIENIX	4.620	0.100	7,994

Top 20 Gainers (By %)			
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
INARI-C2Q	0.015	200.00	2
EAH	0.010	100.00	4,537
HIBISCS-C66	0.010	100.00	3,700
KGROUP	0.010	100.00	10,188
MI-C2I	0.020	100.00	5,002
MI-C22	0.020	100.00	860
YTL-C79	0.010	100.00	8,194
YTL-C92	0.010	100.00	1
YTLPOWER-C42	0.050	100.00	15,203
YTLPOWER-C60	0.010	100.00	200
DPS-WB	0.025	66.67	2,097
FBMKLCI-CQF	0.075	66.67	10,767
ARMADA-C91	0.015	50.00	30,023
BCMALL	0.015	50.00	25,339
DAYANG-C40	0.015	50.00	100
GENETEC-CE	0.030	50.00	10,880
GIIB-WA	0.015	50.00	180
GREATC-C11	0.015	50.00	1,000
INARI-C2M	0.015	50.00	12,267
MAXLAND-WB	0.015	50.00	64

World Stocks/Commodities			
INDEX	CLOSING	DAILY CHANGE	DAILY CHANGE (%)
DJIA [US]	44,296.51	+426.16	+0.97
S&P 500 [US]	5,969.34	+20.63	+0.35
NASDAQ [US]	19,003.65	+31.23	+0.16
NYSE [US]	20,123.45	+155.15	+0.78
EURO STOXX 50 [EUR]	4,817.55	+28.47	+0.59
FTSE 100 [UK]	8,294.46	+32.38	+0.39
DAX [GER]	19,405.44	+82.85	+0.43
NIKKEI 225 [JPN]	38,780.14	+496.29	+1.30
TOPIX [JPN]	2,715.60	+19.07	+0.71
HANG SENG INDEX [HK]	19,150.99	-78.98	-0.41
CSI 300 [CHN]	3,848.09	-17.61	-0.46
SH SE COM [CHN]	3,263.76	-3.43	-0.10
KOSPI INDEX [SK]	2,534.34	+33.10	+1.32
MSCI ASIA PACIFIC	182.20	+0.16	+0.09
ASX 200 [AUS]	8,417.64	+23.79	+0.28
ALL ORDINARIES INDX [AUS]	8,661.21	+28.14	+0.33
SENSEX INDEX [IND]	79,993.94	+876.83	+1.11
FBM KLCI	1,603.72	+13.94	+0.88
STRAITS TIMES INDEX (S'PORE)	3,731.39	-14.63	-0.39
WTI [US\$/BBL]	70.67	-0.57	-0.80
BRENT [US\$/BBL]	74.67	-0.50	-0.67
GOLD [COMEX] [US\$/T OZ]	2,698.00	-39.20	-1.43
SILVER [COMEX] [US\$/T OZ]	31.29	-0.49	-1.53
PLATINUM [US\$/T OZ]	953.77	-12.53	-1.30
COPPER [COMEX] [US CENTS/LB.]	415.60	+2.30	+0.56
COPPER 3MO [LME] [US\$/MT]	8,968.00	-40.50	-0.45
CORN [US CENTS/BU.]	433.75	-1.50	-0.34
WHEAT [US CENTS/BU.]	560.75	-4.00	-0.71
SOYBEAN OIL [CBOT] [US CENTS/LB.]	42.26	+0.42	+1.00
COCOA [ICE] [US\$/MT]	9,085.00	+450.00	+5.21
RUBBER [S'PORE] [US CENTS/KG]	191.50	+2.20	+1.16

As at 5pm, Nov 25

Top 20 Losers (By RM)			
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
NESTLE	95.000	-2.500	4532
PPB	13.000	-0.620	30325
ORIENT	7.150	-0.410	21328
F&N	28.000	-0.400	837
PETDAG	17.420	-0.300	14477
ALLIANZ	20.260	-0.240	829
HSI-CWAV	0.270	-0.220	34066
HSTECH-C18	0.170	-0.200	100
LPI	13.220	-0.200	160
HSI-CXL	0.310	-0.195	320
IHH	7.000	-0.190	294614
HSI-CWAJ	0.655	-0.135	30
KMLOONG	2.500	-0.130	3257
QUALITY	1.170	-0.130	150
HSI-CWAC	0.395	-0.125	10930
FAVCO	1.710	-0.120	7474
KLUANG	5.700	-0.120	41
PHEM	4.800	-0.120	124240
KESM	3.570	-0.110	1204
HSI-CWAX	0.465	-0.100	8000

Top 20 Losers (By %)			
STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
DJIA-HH	0.020	-73.33	1,050
SP500-H47	0.010	-71.43	35
DIALOG-C1Q	0.005	-66.67	2,500
HSI-HZ1	0.005	-66.67	2,679
HSTECH-C18	0.170	-54.05	100
BORNOIL-WD	0.005	-50.00	37
CHEETAH-WA	0.005	-50.00	35,296
CFM-WA	0.005	-50.00	240
DAYANG-C38	0.005	-50.00	68,571
DNEX-C33	0.005	-50.00	800
GENETEC-CC	0.005	-50.00	400
MPI-C7	0.005	-50.00	220
MRDIY-C29	0.005	-50.00	20
NDX-HH	0.020	-50.00	50
OCR-WE	0.005	-50.00	41,050
PBBANK-C1M	0.075	-50.00	15,200
SPSETIA-C84	0.005	-50.00	30,670
YB-WA	0.005	-50.00	333
HSI-CWAY	0.270	-44.90	34,066
HSI-CWAM	0.125	-40.48	1,534,920

MARKETS/FROM THE BROKERS

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

Compiled by SunBiz Team

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Tiong Nam Logistics slips into the red on higher expenses

KUALA LUMPUR: Tiong Nam Logistics Holdings Bhd (TNH) slips into the red with a net loss of RM5.08 million for the second quarter (Q2) ended Sept 30, 2024 (FY25) from a net profit of RM1.21 million posted in Q2 FY24, mainly due to higher operating and overhead expenses, in line with the ongoing expansion of its warehouse network.

Revenue for the quarter rose 18.67% to RM217.80 million from RM183.53 million posted in Q2 FY24, driven by higher demand for integrated logistics and warehousing services, particularly from new and existing domestic and multinational clients.

For the six-month period (1H) of FY25, Tiong Nam's revenue increased 11.0% to RM417.9 million, compared to RM376.3 million in the same period last year.

The logistics and warehousing services segment contributed 95.7% to 1H of FY25 revenue, reaching RM399.7 million, a 15.5% growth from RM346.1 million in the previous year.

The logistics and warehousing services segment also achieved a profit before tax of RM5.0 million in 1H25, turning around from a loss before tax of RM8.3 million previously. This demonstrates the positive results of the group's expansion initiatives.

Tiong Nam is undertaking a RM460 million investment over the next two financial years to expand its total warehousing capacity by 14% to 9.7 sq ft in the financial year ending March 31, 2026 (FY26), from 8.5 million sq ft as of Sept 30, 2024.

The group is constructing five new warehouses in Johor Bahru, Kedah, Sabah and Singapore, with a total capacity of 1.3 million sq ft, to be operational in stages between FY25 and FY26.

Additionally, Tiong Nam plans to build two more warehouses in Johor Bahru and Selangor, with a total capacity of 0.5 million sq ft.

Ringgit rises against dollar amid falling US bond yields

THE ringgit closed higher against the American dollar yesterday, buoyed by a decline in US bond yields after the appointment of Scott Bessent as the US Treasury secretary.

At 6 pm, the local currency bounced to 4.4495/4570 against the greenback, compared with Friday's close of 4.4660/4710.

The US 10-year treasury yield dropped yesterday to 4.34%, a two-week low.

SPI Asset Management managing director Stephen Innes said that the ringgit has strengthened notably, buoyed by a decline in US bond yields following the appointment of Bessent.

"Bessent is expected to moderate the aggressive domestic and international agendas of a US administration under Donald Trump. While aligned with Trump's overarching philosophies, (Bessent's) approach indicates that the rollout of tariffs and tax cuts may proceed more gradually than markets had anticipated, creating room for negotiation," he told Bernama.

Innes reckons this measured strategy could result in a softer implementation of policies, easing initial investor concerns about abrupt changes.

The ringgit dropped against the British pound to 5.5939/6033 from 5.5870/5932 and fell against the euro to 4.6662/6741 from 4.6455/6507 at Friday's close.

However, it went up against the Japanese yen to 2.8811/8861 from 2.8906/8942.

The local unit climbed against the Singapore dollar to 3.3028/3088 from 3.3101/3141, rose against the Thai baht to 12.8390/8670 from 12.9068/9276 and gained against the Philippine peso to 7.547/5.6 from 7.587/5.9. It ticked up vis-a-vis the Indonesian rupiah to 280.1/280.7 from 281.2/281.7.

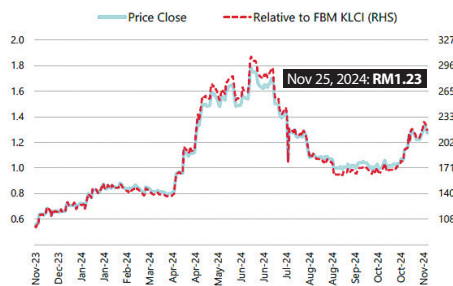
Exchange Rates

FOREIGN CURRENCY	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.5285	4.3895	4.3795
1 Australian Dollar	2.9800	2.8570	2.8410
1 Brunei Dollar	3.3710	3.2700	3.2620
1 Canadian Dollar	3.2460	3.1560	3.1440
1 Euro	4.7520	4.5930	4.5730
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.6640	2.5630	2.5470
1 Singapore Dollar	3.3710	3.2700	3.2620
1 Sterling Pound	5.7110	5.5230	5.5030
1 Swiss Franc	5.1190	4.8960	4.8810
100 UAE Dirham	124.7300	118.1600	117.9600
100 Bangladesh Taka	3.8690	3.5980	3.3980
100 Chinese Renminbi	62.9200	60.2100	N/A
100 Danish Krone	65.3100	60.0400	59.8400
100 Hongkong Dollar	58.8000	55.8200	55.6200
100 Indian Rupee	5.4500	5.1100	4.9100
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0295	0.0267	0.0217
100 Japanese Yen	2.9450	2.8470	2.8370
100 New Taiwan Dollar	15.0000	N/A	N/A
100 Norwegian Krone	42.2600	38.8300	38.6300
100 Pakistan Rupee	1.6600	1.5500	1.3500
100 Philippine Peso	7.7900	7.3400	7.1400
100 Qatar Riyal	125.5200	119.1600	118.9600
100 Saudi Riyal	121.9300	115.7500	115.5500
100 South Africa Rand	26.0400	23.5000	23.3000
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	1.6000	1.4700	1.2700
100 Swedish Krona	42.6100	38.7500	38.5500
100 Thai Baht	13.7400	12.1700	11.7700

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

Synergy House Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM1.55



Source: Bloomberg, RHB Research

WE trim our FY24F EPS by 3.5% but keep our FY25F earnings and TP, on expectations of margin recovery. We remain positive on Synergy House's prospects driven by its expansion into higher price-point segments on business-to-consumer (B2C) e-commerce platforms. Manpower costs should stabilise from FY25F as it approaches its target headcount. Coupled with stronger year-end festive sales and expected improving operational efficiency in FY25F, we believe SYNERGY remains an attractive investment opportunity.

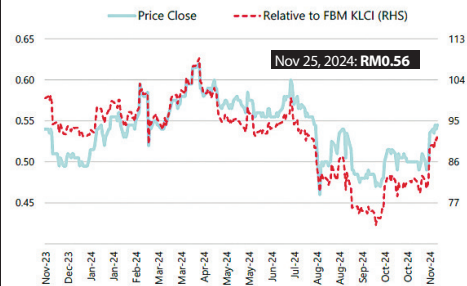
SYNERGY achieved a record high revenue of MYR114m, driven by a 56.2% rise in the business-to-business (B2B) segment and 78.5% in the B2C segment. This brings 9M24 revenue to MYR275m (+53.3% YoY). Core profit for the quarter was slightly below our expectation at MYR7.4m, with 9M24 core profit at MYR21.1m, reflecting a 23.8% increase. Major one-off items for the quarter included MYR11.1m for fair value gain on derivatives and MYR6.9m for unrealised loss on forex. The YoY lower core profit margin is mainly caused by lower GPM from B2C stock clearance activities (in 3Q-4Q) and new lower-margin B2B order; higher freight rate (+c.200% YoY); and +59% rise in manpower costs.

We raise our FY24F revenue target by c.3% following the stronger-than-expected revenue but lower our core earnings forecast by 3.5% due to higher operating costs, particularly manpower and freight expenses. For FY25F, we maintain our earnings forecast, expecting margin recovery from softening freight rates and improved cost efficiencies. Management guided that SYNERGY remains in its growth stage, focusing on long-term expansion despite short-term profitability pressures.

Maintain BUY and RM1.55 TP. - **RHB Research, Nov 25**

Bumi Armada Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM0.73



Source: Bloomberg, RHB Research

BUMI Armada continues to deliver sturdy results, and a final impairment on *Kraken* has been widely guided for. The stock is still trading at a fairly attractive 4.7x FY25F P/E - assuming the charter for *Armada Kraken* is extended at a lower rate. Its potential merger with MISC's offshore businesses could improve its own financing access and tender win rate but, ultimately, the structure and pricing of the deal would be crucial determining factors.

At 80% and 82% of our and Street full-year estimates, BAB 9M24 core earnings of MYR761m (+70% YoY) are in line with expectations. No dividends were declared for the quarter, as expected.

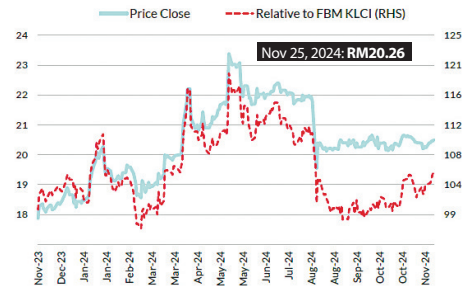
BAB recorded a 3Q24 core profit of MYR255m (flat QoQ, +34% YoY) after stripping off MYR44m in unrealised FX losses. The QoQ performance was flat as the lower variation order from *Alombendo*, weakening USD vs MYR, and softer JV & associates contribution was largely offset by lower finance costs as well as lower depreciation charges. Its 9M24 core earnings strengthened by 70%, thanks to higher contributions from *Armada Kraken* following the resolution of an outstanding issue with the charter, as well as higher *Armada Olombendo* contributions.

Armada Kraken's charter has been extended by one year to April 2026, at lower rates. Management expects to book a final impairment on the vessel by the year-end at a smaller magnitude, as *Armada Kraken's* value-in-use or VIU remains lower than its net book value. Recall that BAB impaired the vessel by MYR514m in 4Q23. Meanwhile, the group repaid US\$45m in borrowings in 3Q24, while US\$400m in corporate syndicated facilities were drawn down to redeem the sukuk *murabahah*.

Keep BUY and RM0.73 TP - **RHB Research, Nov 25**

Allianz Malaysia Bhd

Neutral. Target price: RM21.70



Source: Bloomberg, RHB Research

ALLIANZ Malaysia's 9M24 results met our expectations, but missed the Street estimate. While underwriting margins remained muted on the back of elevated claims, this was offset by a sustained strong investment performance and continued topline strength. We make no changes to our earnings forecasts, TP and recommendation for now, but see scope to turn more positive on the counter - its defensive traits could help investors tide through the current volatility in the market.

ALLZ's 3Q24 net profit of MYR183.2m (+10% QoQ, -7% YoY) brought the 9M24 figure to MYR540m (+1% YoY) - this came in line with our full-year estimate, but missed that of the consensus. 9M24 insurance revenue climbed by 14% YoY, thanks to double-digit revenue growth from both the general and life insurance segments. However, a continued rise in claims incurred by both segments led to a 3-ppt underwriting margin compression. At the same time, while investment returns surged by 59% YoY, adverse adjustments from FX movements on investment-linked funds led to flat bottomline growth.

Allianz General (AGIC) recorded a 3Q24 PBT of MYR139.5m, up 20% QoQ (-1% YoY). This was largely driven by a QoQ moderation in claims, as 2Q24 saw several large-ticket claims from the fire and engineering classes of business.

Allianz Life (ALIM) shows continued topline strength. Annualised new premiums (ANP) for the segment increased 16% YoY in 9M24, surpassing the industry average of 11%. Of its various distribution channels, ALIM's bancassurance partners recorded the strongest ANP growth of 57% YoY.

Maintain NEUTRAL and RM21.70 TP. - **RHB Research, Nov 25**

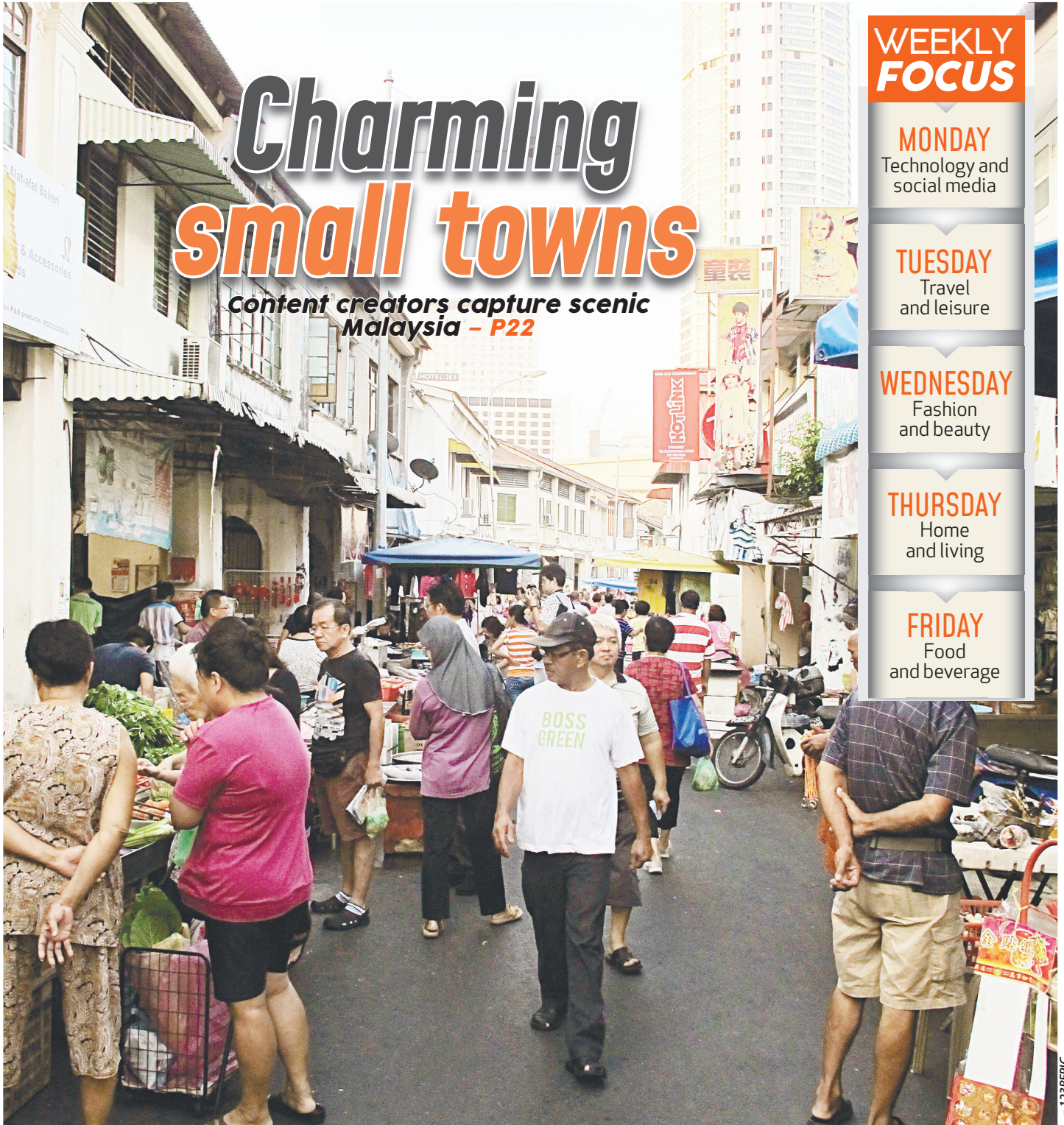


the Sun **LYFE**

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Charming small towns

*Content creators capture scenic
Malaysia - P22*

WEEKLY FOCUS

MONDAY

Technology and social media

TUESDAY

Travel and leisure

WEDNESDAY

Fashion and beauty

THURSDAY

Home and living

FRIDAY

Food and beverage

INSIDE **P23** K-drama fuels Korean tourism boom

P24 *Gladiator II* is epic return to Rome

P25 Music of EWF lives on

- 123RF/PICT



MALAYSIA'S quintessential charm lies in its rich everyday culture - from the bustling *pasar malam* and 24-hour *mamak* eateries to the timeless *kopitiam* where locals gather over coffee and a set of kaya toast and half-boiled eggs. Whether in vibrant Kuala Lumpur or a quaint old town, Malaysia holds a culture that is unlike elsewhere. While we are familiar with big cities, did you know that our nation is home to over 200 towns, with many still waiting to be discovered?

Small Towns Malaysia, helmed by business partners Ash Raja and Jonathan Dexter, is dedicated to capturing this side of Malaysia. Through their lens shared on video-sharing platforms such as TikTok, the 34-year-olds aim to document quaint towns and villages, showcasing the landscapes, warmth, fun facts and people that make Malaysia one of a kind. Each video feels like a journey home, reminding us there is more to Malaysia than meets the eye.

From schoolmates to business partners

While Ash and Dexter have known each other since secondary school, their friendship only blossomed in college, thanks to a photography elective in their course. Armed with their own cameras, they began experimenting with visual storytelling, which quickly gained attention.

"People liked our photos and started engaging us for jobs," Ash recalled.

What started as side jobs to earn extra cash during college soon grew into a full-fledged business. Initially, the pair planned to move into corporate careers after graduation but their work proved more lucrative than expected. So, J&A Productions, a photography and videography company, was born. They began with wedding photography, expanded to corporate shoots and eventually took on outdoor projects in the hospitality industry.

Birth of Small Towns Malaysia

Their foray into the hospitality industry sparked the idea of Small Towns Malaysia, a project driven by their desire to showcase the beauty of Malaysia on their own terms.

"Corporate clients put in the money, so they control our creativity. When we started Small Towns Malaysia, we wanted our videos to be 100% our vision and the concept worked - people loved our videos. Now, we have clients who appreciate what we do and let us have a free hand, which is great," Ash explained.

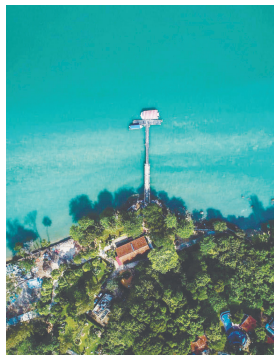
What began as a creative escape from commercial work quickly gained traction on TikTok, resonating with audiences across and beyond Malaysia. Through intimate closeups, slow-moving scenes of daily life and historical heritage and breathtaking drone shots of landscapes, Ash and Dexter bring life to Malaysia's forgotten places, creating authentic, engaging stories in short videos.

While filming, the both of them take it upon themselves to learn fascinating facts about old towns, such as discovering from locals that Taiping is the wettest town in Malaysia. Kuala Lipis used to be the capital of Pahang. Temerloh is home to the nation's longest street market and more.

However, Small Towns Malaysia's journey is far from finished. The 34-year-olds shared they have a list of

Documenting Malaysia with small town stories

➤ Spotlight on hidden gems, rustic countryside charm



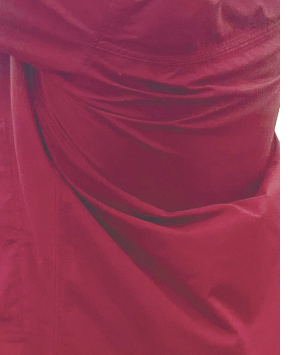
Pulau Jerejak in Penang.



Ash (right) in a chopper for aerial shoot.



They are trying to cover 600 towns.



Dexter says bad weather is a bane.

over 600 towns and villages to shoot. With a list that long and an aim to shoot a minimum of four locations every month, Dexter acknowledges that the monthly target is still on the low end.

"If we do one a week, that is only 52 towns a year and that would mean we would never finish our list of towns. And that is not even accounting for the productions happening at J&A Productions."

Ash agreed, adding that although they have fallen short of their monthly goal this year due to busy work schedules and new client collaborations, the supportive community on TikTok drives the duo to continue their passion for filming and creating content.

"It is the people. Commenters would ask, 'Hey, why have you not visited my town? Can you come to my town?' And we feel obligated because we have done other people's towns, why can we not do other towns?" Ash said.

To keep up with this goal, the team adheres to a planned shooting schedule, staying at least three days in a town every week.

"Our shoots are structured in blocks. Within those blocks, we are free to exercise our shoots, allowing us to exercise spontaneity. When shooting on the streets, we never



Small Towns Malaysia's documentary on Papan in Perak has since garnered over 800,000 views on TikTok.

know what is going to happen. Suddenly we see a nice interaction between people or this uncle is telling me about a nice place around the corner," shared Dexter.

When asked about memorable experiences from their video shoots, Dexter noted it is the morning wet markets and *pasar malam*.

"We want to pay for their food but they always insist on letting us try their food for free out of the kindness of their hearts and that is really nice. They would always interact with the cameras as well - they would smile, they would wave, all really cute stuff," he recalled.

However, this journey is without its challenges. From difficult client projects to unpredictable weather, Dexter noted they are often at the mercy of the weather. Despite these challenges, the duo has reached significant milestones, including nearing the 100,000-follower mark on TikTok. For Ash, the biggest achievement lies in bringing awareness to these small towns, encouraging Malaysians to explore and appreciate their own country.

"We feel like we are making a difference in getting these towns recognised," he said.

Community-focused platform

Ash and Dexter also develop friendly and working relationships with many townfolks, who would always welcome them back with open arms. On top of videos and weekly TikTok Live sessions, the duo plans to launch a TikTok Shop to support local artisans by featuring products from each town and village.

"We are going to produce jerseys of

each state and town, along with other locally sourced items," Ash revealed, adding that they are also open to collaborations. The shop aims to provide a platform for small businesses, bridging the gap between urban audiences and rural sellers.

When asked if they have tips for budding content creators, Ash said that it is important to stick to your guns and creativity.

"Most of the time, they are too embarrassed of putting their content out there for fear of getting judged. People are always going to criticise and give advice," he said.

"Sometimes the criticism you get might not be for you but it is always good to weigh them out and see if you can improve. It is also easy to forget why you are creating content in the first place," Dexter added.

Ash said Small Towns Malaysia's most important asset is its followers who keep feeding the duo with inspiration for the project.

"They give us ideas and our account has become such a community-based platform. The community is strong here and it helps us make our videos better."

For Ash and Dexter, Small Towns Malaysia has become more than just a creative outlet - it is a platform to share the genuine spirit of Malaysia, one small town at a time.

DEEP in South Korea's hinterlands lies a perfect replica of 1900s Seoul: welcome to Sunshine Land, the latest K-drama theme park to cash in on K-culture tourism.

Fans of K-pop mega group BTS have long flocked to the South to see sites associated with the boy band, from the dorms where they slept as trainees to recent music video shoot locations.

As the popularity of South Korean drama (the most-viewed non-English content on Netflix, revealed the platform's data), more and more tourists are planning trips around their favourite shows.

The idea that foreign tourists would pay good money and drive hundreds of miles out of Seoul to see a K-drama set seemed "crazy" to tour guide Sophy Yoon – until she saw one of her guests break down in tears at Sunshine Land.

"At that moment, it hit me: For me, it was just a studio but for them, it was something much more," she said.

Preserved from the set of popular 2018 historical series *Mr Sunshine*, the location in Nonsan, 170km from Seoul, is replete with painstaking replicas of everything from a turn-of-the-century tram to South Korea's most famous Buddhist bell.

"It is like when we go to the Spanish steps in Rome where Audrey Hepburn had ice cream," Yoon said, referring to the 1953 classic movie *Roman Holiday*.

For South Korea's growing number of K-drama tourists, every door, every wall has a meaning from a drama that impacted their lives, she added.

"I get a lot more requests for specific 'K-drama tours' now," she said.

Global cultural powerhouse

The rise of South Korea as a global cultural powerhouse has contributed to the appeal of Korean tourism, said the Korea Tourism Organisation (KTO) *Hallyu* content team director Kwak Jae-yeon.

South Korea welcomed 1.4 million tourists in September, up 33% year-on-year and the highest since the pandemic, with more than a third saying they had decided to come after being exposed to Korean Wave content, according to a 2023



South Korea welcomed 1.4 million tourists in September, the highest since the pandemic. – AFPIC

Screen to reality

▶ South Korea targets K-pop, K-drama tourism boom

KTO poll.

In Seoul's central Jongno district, tourists such as Sookariyapa Kakij are typical. Wearing a hanbok, a traditional Korean dress, the 40-year-old had travelled from Thailand specifically to see where her favourite dramas were filmed.

"I want to find locations where *Itaewon Class* was shot," she said, referring to the popular 2020 drama, filmed largely on location in its namesake district of Seoul.

Jennifer Zelinski said she had never left the US before but after she discovered K-drama, through the

2019 series *Crash Landing on You* while stuck at home during the pandemic, she decided to visit South Korea.

"I binged the whole show in a week. I barely slept and went through two whole boxes of tissues," she said.

This "snowballed" into her watching more and more K-drama, Korean variety shows and listening to K-pop, she said, until finally she felt like she wanted to see the country in person.

"My family and friends were shocked when I said I was travelling

to Korea and on my own," said Zelinski, but for her it felt right.

Beyond Seoul

The travel industry is racing to catch up. One South Korean tour company on the travel platform Klook said interest in its BTS day tour has skyrocketed recently and they were completely booked until next February.

"We are planning to add additional tours for other K-pop idol groups, including Seventeen and NCT 127," they said.

But most of this new type of

tourism is concentrated in Seoul, revealed Kyungpook National University professor Jeong Ji-youn.

Tourism in rural areas has tended to focus on more traditional Korean experiences, which is not interesting to younger travellers eager to explore the land of K-pop and K-drama.

"There is a need to develop more tourism resources related to contemporary culture that allow people to experience *hallyu* outside of Seoul," she said.

The port city of Pohang is better known for shipbuilding and steel plants than tourism but Emma Brown, 30, from Scotland, travelled more than 8,800km to see it because of *When the Camellia Blooms*.

She said the 2019 romance series changed her life adding that, she felt she had to feel the drama in person.

"I just could not miss the opportunity to visit Pohang when I was already in South Korea," she added. – AFP

Face your *Gladiator II* destiny

FOR the first time in nearly 2,000 years, the Roman Colosseum will once again echo with the sounds of battle, not for survival, but for an immersive experience.

On May 7 and 8 next year, daring participants can step into the shoes of ancient warriors in an exclusive gladiator-themed event hosted by Airbnb.

This opportunity offers two three-hour sessions, each accommodating up to 16 guests, allowing participants to follow in the footsteps of history's legendary gladiators. As night falls, the Colosseum transforms under candlelight, creating an atmosphere steeped in history and mystery.

Guests will begin their journey at the hypogeum, the underground chambers once used for preparation and strategy. There, they will don historically accurate armour representing their gladiator type – whether *murmillo*, *trax*, *provocator*, *retiaris* or *contrarete*.



Live life as a gladiator in the Colosseum, Rome.

Guided through the labyrinthine halls, participants will reflect on the fates of ancient warriors while preparing for their trial.

The evening unfolds with a captivating performance by seasoned gladiators showcasing the artistry of swordsmanship and

shield combat. Guests are encouraged to observe and learn as they will soon put their skills to the test. A brief feast of gladiator-appropriate fare, including grapes, pomegranates, nuts and almonds, will fuel participants before their battle.

The highlight of the experience



Participants can step into the shoes of ancient warriors in an exclusive gladiator-themed event.

comes as each guest engages in gladiatorial training and combat within the arena itself. With the watchful eye of a *summa rudis*, a historical referee, participants will compete in mock battles.

Victory or defeat will be determined with the traditional gesture of the

Roman thumb (*infestus pollex*), granting winners the glory of joining the Colosseum's storied legacy.

This unique event is free, with booking requests open until Dec 10. Participants are responsible for their travel to and from Rome.

See also
page 24



BY YASMIN ZULRAEZ

Gladiator II's epic return to ancient Rome's bloody glory

➤ Ridley Scott's signatures are all over this gripping sequel

RIDLEY Scott's *Gladiator II*, a much-anticipated sequel to the 2000 classic, somehow manages to be nostalgic and fresh. Packed with big names such as Paul Mescal, Pedro Pascal and Denzel Washington, the film does not just rely on its stellar cast, it delivers gripping drama, action and intrigue that makes the lengthy run-time fly by.

With a well-rounded story and characters that resonate, this historical epic brings thrilling combat and the rich complexity of ancient Rome to life.

New hero rises in Colosseum

Set two decades after Maximus's tragic end, *Gladiator II* follows Lucius, played by Mescal, the son of Maximus and Lucilla, who is now living a quiet life in Numidia. When his home is destroyed by Roman forces, led by General Marcus Acacius (Pascal), Lucius is captured and thrust into the brutal world of gladiatorial combat. Inspired by memories of his father, Lucius finds himself fighting for survival, honour and ultimately, a chance to avenge his family.

The journey is filled with familiar tropes of vengeance, lost honour and redemption. Some of the plot twists may be easy to spot but the film leans into these moments with a knowing wink, delivering them in a way that still feels exciting and fitting for the genre. It is a blend of old and new, with the right amount of nods to the original *Gladiator*.

Show-stealing cast

The casting is undoubtedly one of the biggest attractions. Mescal brings intensity and vulnerability to Lucius, creating a character that feels like a natural continuation of the Maximus legacy.

Washington's portrayal of Macrinus, a former gladiator turned powerful rebel, is layered and engaging. Washington infuses Macrinus with charisma and ruthlessness, a character both compelling and morally ambiguous.

Pascal's Acacius is a standout as well, a Roman general with a complex code of honour, making him more than a typical "villain". His performance is magnetic, balancing respect for the tradition of Rome with the personal ambition that drives him.

Meanwhile, Fred Hechinger and Joseph Quinn shine as the deranged co-emperors Caracalla and Geta, whose power games bring a dose of dark humour to the film. Connie Nielsen's return as



Gladiator II, a much-anticipated sequel to 2000 classic, manages to be nostalgic and fresh.

– ALL PICS COURTESY OF UNITED INTERNATIONAL PICTURES

Lucilla adds emotional depth, reminding viewers of the personal stakes that underpin the epic conflicts.

Hidden agendas

The story masterfully weaves in themes of loyalty, betrayal and the corrupt allure of power. Watching Lucius navigate a world filled with shifting allegiances and hidden agendas adds tension and keeps audience invested.

Scott's Rome is a dangerous place where enemies hide behind every corner and the ruling emperors revel in a twisted sense of superiority. The setting is atmospheric, from the blood-stained Colosseum to the shadowed halls of Roman politics, creating a vibrant and immersive backdrop.

The political drama and gladiatorial battles are balanced well, making sure viewers are just as interested in what happens off the battlefield as they are in the thrilling combat sequences.

Some of the side plotlines may



Mescal brings intensity and vulnerability to Lucius, creating a character that feels like a natural continuation of the Maximus legacy.

feel predictable but they add richness to the overall story and serve as fitting tributes to the original film's themes of honour and redemption.

Grand visual spectacle

Gladiator II is as visually stunning as it is emotionally impactful. Scott, with his trademark cinematic style, brings ancient Rome to life through



Gladiator II proves itself as one of the most riveting movies of the year.

sweeping landscapes, intense close-ups and epic battle scenes that do not shy away from brutality. The visual effects are top-notch, creating a realism that heightens the stakes and immerses audience in Lucius's journey.

The film's emotional beats hit hard, especially as Lucius's past and present collide. His journey is not just about revenge, it is about finding himself in the legacy of his father. Each relationship, from his bond with Macrinus to the tense encounters with his mother, adds depth to Lucius's character arc.

Sequel worthy of its legacy

Gladiator II delivers an experience that is epic, thrilling and unexpectedly heartfelt. With a run-time that flies by and characters that linger in the mind long after the credits roll, this film is a must-watch for fans of historical dramas and action epics alike. For those who come for the star casting, be prepared to stay for the complex and engaging characters who drive this story forward.

Gladiator II proves itself as one of the most captivating movies of the year. It is a rare sequel that not only lives up to its predecessor but also manages to carve its own path, offering a cinematic experience filled with grit, glory and the undeniable allure of ancient Rome.

Director: Ridley Scott
Cast: Paul Mescal, Pedro Pascal, Denzel Washington, Joseph Quinn, Fred Hechinger

E-VALUE 8
ACTING 8
PLOT 8



Washington's portrayal of Macrinus, a former gladiator turned powerful rebel, is layered and engaging.



Pascal's Acacius is outstanding as a Roman general whose moral code mean he is not the archtypical villain.



The strong casting mean there are no weak characters, with each lending added depth to the story.

See also page 23



Audiences experience a nostalgic journey through time.

Celebrating nostalgic hits

➤ Al McKay Allstars delivers entertaining renditions of Earth, Wind & Fire's music catalogue

BY JOHN TAN

CATCHING legendary funk maestros Earth, Wind & Fire may no longer be possible but the next best thing is having founding member and former guitarist Al McKay lead an all-star band in a veritable hit parade.

Performing at the Mega Star Arena in Kuala Lumpur, Al McKay Allstars took the audience on a nostalgic journey through time with a thunderous performance that captured the essence of the original line-up.

In support of *Badan Amal Kasih Sayang*, the band celebrated its love for all things funky and the music of Earth, Wind & Fire.

Old is gold

Nostalgia sure was in the air as fans grooved along to the performances. Judging from the audiences' reaction, it was evident each performance brought back memories. Their energy and interactions matched the band's lively performances.

Even younger audience members were seen singing and dancing along, proving good music is simply timeless. While the songs were not performed by the original members, the essence was very much well preserved by members of the Al McKay Allstars.

Passion on point

The evening felt complete as members of Al McKay Allstars excelled musically, delivering each song with heart and gusto. Their performances resembled the original members of Earth, Wind & Fire.

Their performances showed their appreciation and understanding of their source materials. Vocal member Tim Owens even took time to interact with the audience, greeting them in Bahasa Melayu and engaging with them during the

Al McKay, founding member of Earth, Wind & Fire.



Vocal members of Al McKay Allstars.



Malaysia is the only stop in Southeast Asia.

performance of *September*.

The evening's highlights were definitely when the band played *September* and *Got to Get You Into My Life*. The band shined the most musically when performing the tracks.

The audience's strong reactions further underlined this.

Lost in noise

That said, the evening was not without any missteps. The band's live mix, for one, got in the way of things. At several points during the concert, the singers' voices were drowned out by the instruments.

Instead of complimenting their voices, the instruments became a divider, preventing them from connecting with the crowd emotionally.

This was evident during the performance of *Serpentine Fire*. The need to highlight the instruments is understandable, considering how pivotal it is for a funk outfit. The mixing desk quite obviously dialled the knobs wrong.

Apart from the muddled mix, the medley was another

offsetting aspect of the show. Classics such as *In the Stone*, *Fantasy*, *Jupiter* and *Magic Mind* were lumped in one sequence, making it hard to distinguish them. Though hardcore fans may be able to tell them by heart, casual and first-time listeners struggled to differentiate the tracks.

Balance of sounds

The setlist of the evening may have contributed to the inconsistent pacing. For over an hour and 15 minutes, the audience were treated to upbeat fan-favorites such as *Pride*, *Sungoddess - Brazilian Ryhme*, *Boogie Wonderland* and *Let's Groove Tonight*.

The selected numbers were good choices. However, the constant run of each of them left the audience no room to breathe. Inclusion of slow numbers such as *I'll Write a Song for You* and *You* could have provided the evening a balance. New listeners would have received a clearer and well-balanced perspective of Earth, Wind & Fire's music catalogue.

Evening well-spent

The evening ended on a high note. The band surprised the audience with two encores, concluding the evening with *Boogie Wonderland* and *Let's Groove Tonight*.

The experience of watching the band live is one not to be missed as it is energy and professionalism combined. Judging from Al McKay Allstars's performances, Earth, Wind & Fire's musical legacy will continue to resonate with future generations.

Alex To set for Malaysian show in December

TAIWAN-BASED singer and actor Alex To will perform at Arena of Stars, Resorts World Genting on Dec 28 for the final leg of his Get Up World Tour in celebration of 40 years of music.

To last performed at the Arena of Stars in Dec 2015 for the My Virtual Planet Tour Part II concert in celebration of Genting's 50th Anniversary.

Born Alejandro Delfino to a Filipino father and Chinese mother, the 62-year-old is well-known for his striking appearance and physique. A consummate R&B singer, To had his first break when he won first place at the 4th Annual New Talent Singing Awards in Hong Kong in 1985.

He has released more than 20 studio albums in reflection of a highly illustrious career in music. To released his first Cantonese album *Just Stay* (1986) and first Mandarin album *Fall in Love* in Taiwan (1990). To has also appeared in the second season of *Call Me by Fire*, a Chinese singing reality television show that premiered in 2022 on Mango TV, featuring 32 seasoned male celebrities from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand and the US who compete to form a boy band.

His latest album *Get Up* was released in 2018 and To has been on the Get Up World Tour in Singapore and China with stops in Chengdu and Guangzhou in 2023.

He performed for the first time in 31 years at the Taipei Arena in May this year and journeyed to Wuxi, China for a Get Up World Tour concert in September. As he makes his way to our shores, R&B fans can anticipate a highly-charged performance from the veteran artiste.

Those who grew up listening to his songs will be in awe of the electrifying showcase this December as he is set to perform a repertoire of 30 of his biggest hits.

Embark on a nostalgic evening of enchantment and sing along to romantic ballads such as *I Never Meant To Hurt You*, *The Lover*, *Innocent*, *Don't Go*, *Sexy Baby*, *You Are Spoiled* as well as new releases such as *Get Up*, *Give Me Your Love*, *Hey* and more as To makes his last hurrah to wrap up his remarkable Get Up World Tour in Malaysia.

Tickets are on sale, ranging from RM108 to RM668.



To is set to perform a repertoire of 30 of his biggest hits.

The need to adapt to change

➤ MSU's master's programmes meet global standards in industry

THE combined approaches of Management and Science University (MSU) to 21st-century learning and industry-driven education have resulted in updated curricula and programmes. They enhance current and future pools of talent to be equipped to rise to the needs of global and international companies.

Thus MSU remains on the lookout for innovative approaches to talent enhancement in sustaining business leadership beyond the national boundary to the global arena.

There is no doubt the cost of doing business has changed. Global organization and establishments at all levels of management in corporate and industrial sectors seek cost effective ways to stay afloat, adapting to the constant changes in stock exchanges and capital markets.

One vital question remains: Are organisations and management able to adopt and adapt to the trend of disruptive changes?

The MSU Master of Business Administration (MBA), offered at its Graduate School of Management (GSM), is geared towards providing the most critical skills needed at the business and management marketplace.

It remains high on the priority list

of 21st-century education for professionals and leaders seeking to equip themselves with the latest in technology know-how and leadership mindset in line with changing global trends.

Adopting international standards of industry best practices, the MSU MBA modules pioneer new directions in building capacity and enhancing key abilities for all levels across the management spectrum, in business innovation and strategy. It covers decision-making skills across entrepreneurial, managerial, financial, information communication technology (ICT), governance, and human resource management.

The MSU MBA seeks to introduce real-world learning into classrooms, for an immersive 360-degree experiential learning that provides exposure to those in need of best practices.

With emphasis on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG), the MSU MBA incorporates practical dimensions in developing top-tier management skills encompassing entrepreneurial leadership, strategic management, Islamic finance, project management, and key business and management knowledge for the 21st-



Those attending the MSU MBA are guaranteed exposure to best industry practices as they have face-to-face discussions with top CEOs from around the world

century market.

The MSU MBA's combination of affordable fees, world-class teaching, and leading industry collaborations has enabled the creation of a sustainable network of graduates and managers well-prepared to meet the demands of management and business using the latest tools of technology and learning.

The MSU series titled 'CEO Talks' and 'Entrepreneur Talks' provide MBA students with the opportunity to be up-close and personal with global CEOs on cross-sectional approaches across the business and management spectrum.

MSU currently holds a position in the QS Top 100 among the best young universities in the world, the QS Top 150 among the best universities in Asia, the QS Top 30 among the best universities in Southeastern Asia and the QS Top 301+ for graduate employability ranking. MSU is also listed in the QS World University Rankings (WUR) 2025 and the Times Higher Education (THE) University Impact Rankings 2024.

Besides the MBA programme, the GSM also offers PhD and master's programmes in Management / Business,

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THAILAND'S Jeeno Thitikul fired a 7-under 65 to claim a one-shot win at the CME Group Tour Championship and the US\$4 million (RM18m) first-place prize, the largest in professional women's golf history, yesterday in Naples, Florida.

Tied with Angel Yin entering the final round at Tiburon Golf Club, Thitikul birdied three of her first seven holes and finished strong, sinking an eagle on the par-5 No. 17 hole before closing her round with a birdie on No. 18.

"Actually, I don't know what's (happening) to me on 17 and 18," Thitikul said after her fourth LPGA Tour win. "I mean, like I really make a birdie on 17, which is giving me a

Thailand's Jeeno wins by one shot

good chance.

"But like having eagle, it's more than I can ask for. And then hitting really, really good second shot on 18 and hole the putt, it's just like, you know, all the hard work that I've been, it's just like pay off."

The 21-year-old Thitikul collected a total of six birdies, one eagle and one bogey, on the par-4 No. 4 hole, to close at 22-under 266 in the LPGA's season finale. With the win, she is the 2024 Race to the CME Globe champion.

As for the US\$4 million payout,

Thitikul already has plans for the money.

"Definitely spend it," she said with a laugh. "That's an honest answer for sure. Definitely going to spend it for a little while, but like saving it for my parents as well."

"Because I told them that I'm shopping a lot. Don't tell my parents that I've been spending all the money."

Yin played a bogey-free round with six birdies but shot a 6-under 66 to finish one shot behind Thitikul at 21-under 267.

"Lots of positives, hitting it good,"

Yin said. "This is – you know, I'm happy because this is a golf course that I'm not very fond of and never played well. My track record, I think this is my best finish ever."

New Zealand's Lydia Ko posted the round of the day, notching a 9-under 63 and moving up nine spots to finish third, five spots off the lead.

China's Ruoning Yin (68 on Sunday) finished fourth, followed by world No. 1 Nelly Korda (66) and Narin An (68) of South Korea in a tie for fifth. – Field Level Media

SHORTS

Davis Cup winner Sinner 'heartbroken'

WORLD NO. 1 Jannik Sinner said his off-court turmoil over doping accusations was "heartbreaking", after winning the Davis Cup with Italy on Sunday to complete a stellar year.

The 23-year-old won the Australian Open, US Open and ATP Finals before starring for Italy as they claimed a second consecutive Davis Cup triumph, but admitted he is not able to play with a completely clear head.

Sinner is still waiting for the outcome of the World Anti-Doping Agency's (Wada) appeal against his initial exoneration for twice testing positive for traces of the steroid clostebol in March.

"Of course it's in the head a little bit," said Sinner. "The most important part is all the people who are around me, who know me as a human being trust me – that's also why I kept playing the level I have."

"Those who know me, I was emotionally a bit down, a bit heartbroken. Sometimes life gives you difficulties and you just have to (deal with) it."

After Italy defeated the Netherlands in the final, Dutch captain Paul Haarhuis said from the outside the doping case against Sinner was impossible to analyse.

"About doping, we never know what happened," said Haarhuis. "What's my feeling? Jannik is an unbelievable nice guy, a great player, but we never know what happened."

McNealy picks up first PGA Tour win

WITH a final-round, 2-under 68, Maverick McNealy earned his first victory on the PGA Tour yesterday, edging a trio of players by one shot at the RSM Classic in St. Simons Island, Georgia.

Playing at Sea Island's Seaside Course, the 29-year-old sank a 5-foot, 5-inch birdie putt on the par-4 18th hole to finish at 16-under 266, just ahead of amateur Luke Clanton (66 on Sunday), Nico Echavarria of Colombia (65) and Daniel Berger (67).

"My mind's gone blank, honestly," McNealy said. "It was an unbelievable adrenaline rush there, especially on 18."

"It was a moment I will never forget getting to celebrate with my friends, my family, my wife, my team."

Berger had a shot to force a playoff with McNealy, but he missed his birdie putt after his approach landed about 20 feet from the hole.

Despite the loss, Berger finished inside the top 125 of the FedEx Cup standings to secure his full tour status for 2025.



How the F1 title was won and lost

BY KIERAN JACKSON

Verstappen emerged triumphant in intriguing battle with Norris

Red Bull's Max Verstappen crosses the line to finish the race in Las Vegas. – REUTERS/SPIC

MAX VERSTAPPEN is the world champion once again, claiming the 2024 F1 drivers' title under the bright lights of Las Vegas on Saturday night.

Verstappen's fifth-place finish, a spot ahead of closest challenger Lando Norris, means the Dutchman has an unassailable lead with two rounds to go.

For many weeks, it seemed that Norris was set to launch a stirring title comeback but agonisingly for the Brit and his McLaren team, it never fully materialised.

So where did Verstappen build up his advantage? What races will Norris want back?

Here's a look at five key races in 2024 which led Verstappen to the title:

Chinese Grand Prix (April 19-21)

Round five of the 2024 season – as F1 returned to Shanghai for the first time in five years – was significant for both Verstappen and Norris in the wider schism of the season.

Verstappen won the sprint race and grand prix and by a margin where it was conceivable to many that another 2023-esque season of domination was on the horizon.

Yet it was also significant in showing the first signs of Norris at the front: the Brit claimed pole in the sprint but, in what would become a regular pattern, a poor start saw him drop to seventh. He finished the grand prix in second.

Spanish Grand Prix (June 21-23)

Fast-forward two months and the season picture was looking altogether more dramatic and, to the relief of all of us watching, more competitive.

Norris had claimed his first F1 win in round six in Miami, while Verstappen has doggedly claimed tough victories in Imola and Canada. Barcelona saw McLaren have superior pace, with Norris starting on pole position.

Yet in a familiar tale, Norris lost the lead at the start, dropping to third, and though he battled through traffic, he finished 2.2 seconds behind Verstappen.

Austrian Grand Prix (June 28-30)

A week after Barcelona saw the first dramatic flashpoint of the 2024 season between the championship protagonists.

With Norris catching leader Verstappen in the closing stages, the pair collided at turn three at the Red Bull Ring.

Verstappen was penalised with a 10-second time penalty but managed to finish the race in fifth, while Norris was forced to retire.

McLaren were fuming... the touchpaper had been lit.

United States Grand Prix (Oct 18-20)

Skip another four months and it was still all to play for. Norris had won twice

in Zandvoort and Singapore but significantly had seen potential wins in Silverstone, Budapest and Monza slip by.

The gap was 52 points, with Norris riding high off the back of an easy win in Singapore.

The paddock swung into Austin, therefore, with six races left and plenty of points on the table for the Brit. Yet while Ferrari soared to the top-two places, Norris and Verstappen duelled intensely for third place.

The McLaren eventually passed Verstappen but illegally, off the track, and the Dutchman was awarded third place. Again, Verstappen's racing nous and experience came up trumps.

Brazilian Grand Prix (Nov 1-3)

Now with just four races left, it was do-or-die time for Norris on a horrendously wet weekend in Sao Paulo.

Yet after a stroke of good fortune in qualifying, Norris started on pole while Verstappen was all the way down in 17th. With the gap at 44 points, this was the moment for Norris to take a huge chunk out of Verstappen's lead.

But what transpired instead was perhaps the best drive of the Red Bull driver's life. He masterfully surged through the field, with exquisite expertise and precision in the rain, to win the race while Norris faltered, finishing only sixth.

It would be, in all but name, the title-clinching drive. – The Independent

Boom-Boom leads India to thumping win over Aussies in 1st Test

INDIA fast bowlers Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj took three wickets apiece as the tourists hammered Australia by 295 runs in the first Test at Perth Stadium yesterday.

Australia were bowled out for 238 after tea on day four, paceman Harshit Rana wrapping up the fourth innings by clean-bowling keeper Alex Carey for 36 to secure India's 1-0 lead in the five-match series.

The last time Australia won a home

series after losing the opening Test was 55 years ago against West Indies.

"Fairly disappointing," said Australia captain Pat Cummins. "It was just one of those games where not much went right. "We didn't really give ourselves a chance in a few different facets... so there's a few different areas we've got to clean up."

After electing to bat on a seaming first day, India were all out for 150 before fighting back to dismiss Australia for 104

courtesy of a Bumrah five-fer.

Dual centuries Virat Kohli and Yashasvi Jaiswal lifted the tourists to 487-6 declared, setting a massive fourth-innings target of 534 for the hosts.

Bumrah was captaining the side in place of Rohit Sharma, who missed the match as he recently welcomed his second child but has since rejoined the squad.

"Very happy with the beginning, we were put under pressure in the first

innings but the way we responded after that, I'm really proud of the team," said Bumrah, who was named Player of the Match for his 8-72 over both innings.

"Obviously, this wicket was a little less spicy than the last one that I played here, but we were really well prepared."

"So I was just telling everyone to have faith in their process and ability, because over here at this moment, you have an opportunity to do something special." – Reuters

322 Notices

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF SINCERE ENERGY SOLUTIONS SDN. BHD.
Company No: 20210100964 (1407253-H)
(IN MEMBERS' VOLUNTARY LIQUIDATION)

An Extraordinary General Meeting of the members of SINCERE ENERGY SOLUTIONS SDN. BHD. held on 25 November 2024, the following Special Resolutions were duly passed:

1. "THAT the Company be liquidated by way of members' voluntary winding up pursuant to Section 439 (1)(b) of the Companies Act, 2016."

2. "THAT MR KAM CHAI HONG of C.I. Kam Consultancy (2009) Sdn. Bhd., 55-A, Jalan Perang, Taman Pelangi, 80400 Johor Bahru, Johor be appointed as Liquidator to act for the purpose of winding up the company's affairs and distributing its assets."

"THAT the Liquidator be indemnified by the Company against all costs, charges, losses, expenses and liabilities incurred or sustained by him in the execution and discharge of his duties in relation thereto."

NG TING POO
Chairman
Dated : 26 November 2024

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF SINCERE ENERGY SOLUTIONS SDN. BHD.
Company No: 20210100964 (1407253-H)
(IN MEMBERS' VOLUNTARY LIQUIDATION)

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Creditors of the abovesaid Company which is being voluntarily wound up, are required on or before 27 December 2024 to send in their names and addresses, with particulars of their debts and claims and the names and addresses of their solicitors (if any) to the undersigned Liquidator and, if so required by notice in writing from the said Liquidator, or by their solicitors or personally to come in and prove the said debts and claims at such time and place as shall be specified in such notice, or in default thereof, they will be excluded from the benefit of any distribution made before such debts and claims are proved.

Liquidator
Kam Chai Hong
55-A, Jalan Perang,
Taman Pelangi,
80400 Johor Bahru.
Dated this 26th day of November 2024.

BAYERN MUNICH host Paris Saint-Germain tomorrow (4am Malaysian time) in a battle between two sides flying high domestically but seemingly struggling to adjust to the new Champions League format.

After four games, Bayern have lost twice – including a 4-1 defeat by Barcelona, led by their former boss Hansi Flick – and sit 17th, which would leave them unseeded for the knockout phase playoff.

PSG's situation is even worse, with the French champions in 25th – one spot outside the knockout places entirely.

For two teams who contested the Champions League final just four years ago, and who both lead their leagues by six points, the lowly rankings are already cause for concern.

Bayern's struggles are a far cry from their exploits in the old group stage, where the six-time European champions signed off with a record 40-match unbeaten run, featuring 36 wins and four draws.

High stakes game

... as Bayern host PSG amid European wobbles

Their last loss in the group phase came back in 2017 – a 3-0 defeat to tomorrow's opponents PSG.

This season, other than Bayern's loss in Barcelona, which led to whispers new coach Vincent Kompany may struggle against top sides, the German giants have impressed.

Unbeaten in the league, Bayern's only other defeat came in the Champions League away at Aston Villa – a 1-0 loss in a repeat of the 1982 European Cup final.

As it would be for PSG, a league phase elimination remains an unthinkable possibility – and one which could have real ramifications for Kompany.

The crowded football calendar provides a real incentive for finishing in the top eight and avoiding the extra playoff round for teams finishing from ninth to 24th.

Thomas Muller knows PSG, who still have to play Manchester City, will be eager to gain ground after an underwhelming start in Europe.

"Paris' position in the table does not reflect their performance. They're a super team with super individual players," the Bayern veteran told *BR24* on Sunday. "A lot is at stake. I'm happy it's at home."

PSG's loss to Bayern in the 2020 final – when their former academy product Kingsley Coman

scored the winner against them – remains the closest the French side have come to Champions League glory.

Collectively, Bayern and PSG have won 21 of the past 24 league titles on offer at home, and the two have made a habit of running into each other in Europe.

Tomorrow's meeting marks the fourth time in six seasons the pair will meet. Bayern have won four of the five past games but PSG did eliminate them in the quarter-finals of the 2020-21 competition.

"In the Champions League, you almost feel we're a married couple," Bayern CEO Jan-Christian Dreessen said earlier this year after the draw was made.

Bayern defender Dayot Upamecano is better placed than most to know what to expect from France teammates Ousmane Dembele and Bradley Barcola.

"It's an important game for us," Upamecano told *Telefoot* yesterday.

"If you look at the table, it's not great – we are not where we want to be." – AFP

Sporting hope for life after Amorim

SPORTING LISBON welcome Arsenal tomorrow (4am), hoping their superb form can continue in the Champions League despite the departure of coach Ruben Amorim to Manchester United.

The Portuguese club are flying high, second in the standings in Europe after a draw and three victories in their first four games – including a 4-1 romp over Premier League champions Manchester City.

Sporting appointed reserve team manager Joao Pereira earlier in November to replace Amorim and the coach enjoyed a 6-0 victory in his first outing against minnows Amarante in the Portuguese Cup on Friday.

Striker Viktor Gyokeres was among the goalscorers, continuing his own red-hot form this season.

The former Coventry striker boasts 21 goals in 15 matches between the Champions League and Portuguese top flight.

Sporting's big stylish victory increased hope the club's continuist approach by appointing Pereira will help them maintain their form.

"Everything stayed the same, including the ball progression, which was identical to what the team was doing under Ruben Amorim," said Tiago Fernandes, Sporting's former interim manager in the 2018-19 season.

"He didn't have time to work with most of the footballers (after international break)," he continued.

"The best thing was to keep what was already in place."

Former right-back Pereira was part of Amorim's Portuguese title winning team in 2021, helping to end a near two-decade wait for domestic triumph.

The 40-year-old coach spent three spells at Sporting as a player and even came with a seal of approval from the departed Amorim himself.

"Joao Pereira is making his mark, I think he is an excellent coach," said Amorim in May. "He has all the conditions to become Sporting's coach."

Arsenal have not won on the road in their last five Champions League matches, with Sporting aiming to extend that bad run at the Jose Alvalade stadium in the Portuguese capital.

Amorim's Sporting were able to knock out Mikel Arteta's side in the Europa League last 16 last season on penalties after draws both home and away.

The thrashing of third-tier Amarante was a sign that the squad is still focussed and Pereira's assistant Tiago Teixeira said the players had approached that match as if they were facing the Gunners.

"I think we were all calm, all the members of the coaching staff, it was an excellent debut, not only because of the result, because of another victory, but because of everything the players managed to do," said Teixeira.

"We had little time to train and they were already able to take on board some ideas.

"They approached this game as if it were a final, as if it were the game against Arsenal – that's what we wanted." – AFP

Mbappe on target as Madrid cruise

KYLIAN MBAPPE scored his first goal in five games for Real Madrid as the champions beat Leganes 3-0 yesterday in La Liga.

Fede Valverde and Jude Bellingham also struck as Madrid moved second, four points behind leaders Barcelona with a game in hand.

Los Blancos capitalised after Barcelona slipped to a draw at Celta Vigo on Saturday with a straightforward win against 14th-placed Leganes.

Madrid face Liverpool at Anfield on Thursday (4am Malaysian time) in the Champions League in a crucial game for the Spanish side after two defeats in their first four European matches and warmed up with a solid performance.

"The team managed the good feelings

that we had in the (previous 4-0 win) against Osasuna well, and we confirmed them today," said Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"It was a good performance from start to finish. The team was solid and focused. Things are going well."

Mbappe started in his favoured left wing position, a change of strategy from Ancelotti after using Vinicius Junior there until now.

It paid dividends as the forward netted his second goal in his last eight games, although he had a strike ruled out for offside beforehand.

"We changed the position of the forwards, with Mbappe outside and he did well, like Vinicius inside," said Ancelotti.

The Frenchman, who is reportedly unhappy about playing as a central forward,

scored for the first time since netting against Celta Vigo on Oct 19.

"He's more used to playing on the left. Playing on the outside is more tiring than through the middle. Vini Jr. returned from international duty on Thursday and Mbappe was fresher than Vini Jr.

"He scored a goal with a fantastic assist from Vini Jr. They're both improving bit by bit."

Ancelotti was happy with 21-year-old centreback Asencio's performance on his first start for the club.

"It surprised me in that he's a player with maturity, always well positioned, very well positioned, and it means the youth academy has done a good job with him," said the coach. – AFP/Agencies



Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe (left) scores his team's opening goal during their La Liga match against Leganes. – AFP/ICC

Lukaku strike keeps Napoli top of Serie A

ROMELU LUKAKU ensured Napoli maintained their one-point lead at the top of Serie A with the only goal in yesterday's 1-0 win over his old club Roma.

Belgium striker Lukaku poked home his fifth Napoli goal from Giovanni Di Lorenzo's low cross seven minutes after half-time in Naples, handing veteran Claudio Ranieri a defeat on his return to management with his boyhood club Roma.

Napoli lead Atalanta, Inter Milan, Fiorentina and Lazio by a point – with Juventus four points off the pace in sixth – in a crowded title race which is yet to offer up a clear favourite for the *Scudetto*.

"We knew before kickoff that this was going

to be a big match for us because the other teams all won," said Lukaku to *Sky Sport*.

"It's too early to talk about the title. All we can do is look out for how we develop as a team, work to improve and win every match we play. But now is not the moment to talk about the title."

Napoli were the better team at the Stadio Maradona and should have been ahead as early as the second minute when Khvicha Kvaratskhelia somehow sent a free header wide from less than six yards out.

Kvaratskhelia was also involved four minutes after half-time with a pinpoint cross from which Lukaku glanced just wide.

Ranieri has a job on his hands at Roma, who are four points above the relegation zone in 12th, but his team were unlucky not to level in the 66th minute when Artem Dovbyk thwacked a header off the bar.

"We have problems, that's why they called me, and we played against a team fighting to win the title," said Ranieri.

"Given all that, I'm happy with the performance. We made mistakes but the desire to get the season on the right track is there."

Roma's struggles will hurt fans all the more given the hot form of their local rivals Lazio, who beat 10-man Bologna 3-0 to claim their seventh straight win in all competitions. – AFP



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Potter top target to replace Cooper at Leicester

BY MIGUEL DELANEY

LEICESTER CITY have identified Graham Potter as their top target to replace Steve Cooper, although the manager's wage demands may see them turn to a list that also includes Ruud van Nistelrooy.

The Championship winners dispensed with Cooper on Sunday, after five difficult months where he never clicked with the club.

Supporters didn't take to him due to his Nottingham Forest connections, but he also struggled to impose his tactical approach on the squad.

A defeat to former manager Enzo Maresca proved the final straw, as Leicester lost 2-1 at home to Chelsea in a poor performance.

Potter had been the first choice to replace Maresca in the summer, but there was no progress made on the pursuit then due to both the 49-year-old's age as well as a sense he wanted a bigger club.

Leicester instead opted for Cooper, despite some internal counter-arguments to the appointment.

There is hope they may have a better chance with Potter now, due to how long his time out of

the game since his own departure from Chelsea in March 2023 has been. It is understood he would still need considerable convincing, however.

While Potter is seen as the ideal candidate, Leicester are naturally looking at other options, with Van Nistelrooy understood to be a name on the list. The Dutch coach has impressed in a brief coaching career so far, including an interim spell at Manchester United.

He wrought a winning response out of a deflated squad after Erik ten Hag's sacking, before Ruben Amorim was appointed.

Van Nistelrooy had previously shown

promise in winning the Dutch cup in one season at PSV Eindhoven, only to resign with one game of the campaign remaining due to a lack of support.

In a short statement on the club website, Leicester said: "Leicester City Football Club has parted company with Steve Cooper with immediate effect.

"Men's first team training will be overseen by first team coach Ben Dawson as the club begins the process of appointing a new manager, which we hope to conclude as soon as possible." – The Independent

Kulusevski cannot wait to play Cityzens again

BY ANDY HAMPSON

DEJAN KULUSEVSKI cannot wait for the opportunity to play against Manchester City again after Tottenham ran riot at the Etihad Stadium.

The Sweden midfielder hailed Sunday's 4-0 thrashing of the champions as the best game of his career.

The 24-year-old delivered an outstanding performance as Spurs shattered the champions' 52-game unbeaten home run, helping start the rout with a superb cross for James Maddison's opening goal.

Kulusevski said: "I believed (we would win) this because in the past years, we've come here and played really well.

"So this is the game I look forward to most in the year and, once again, it happened. I'd say it's the best result ever in my career. It's a big night for the whole club, for the coach, for the players.

"Because City have a lot of the ball sometimes, we can rest when we defend. There's also so much space up there, we play one against one and then it's always dangerous because we have a lot of quality.

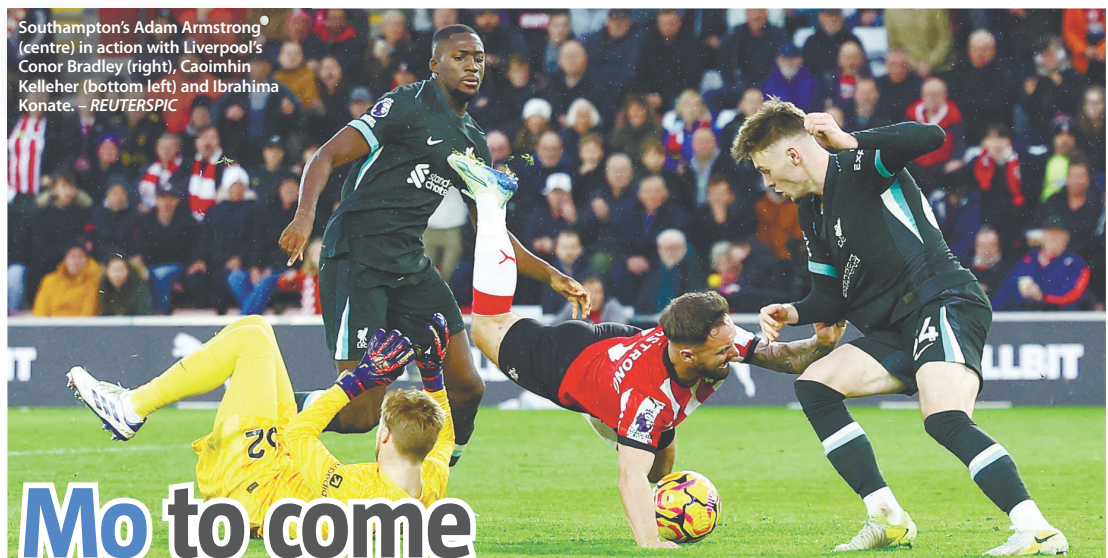
"It's always great to play great teams because they always want to play football. When you play lower teams, sometimes it's not.

"There's not much football played because they are a lot of fouls, a lot of injuries and it's slow going."

Asked if his form made him feel "unstoppable", Kulusevski said: "I feel like that. I feel very good and I'm trying to keep this way. I'm very happy, I'm trying to improve.

"I started the season good but there is over half of the season left and I hope I can do much better.

"I think I have something that no other player has. With my engine, with my heart – I don't get tired – I feel like I can do a lot still in my career." – The Independent



Southampton's Adam Armstrong (centre) in action with Liverpool's Conor Bradley (right), Caoimhin Kelleher (bottom left) and Ibrahima Konate. – REUTERS/SPIC

Mo to come

MOHAMED SALAH urged Liverpool to deliver a hammer blow to Manchester City's fading title hopes after inspiring the Premier League leaders' dramatic 3-2 win against Southampton yesterday.

Arne Slot's side moved eight points clear of second-placed City thanks to Salah's second half double at St Mary's.

After taking the lead through Dominik Szoboszlai's early strike, Liverpool were rocked by Adam Armstrong's equaliser before Mateus Fernandes put bottom of the table Southampton ahead in the second half.

As he has so often done before, Salah came to Liverpool's rescue with a typically predatory equaliser and a coolly converted penalty in the closing stages.

Liverpool's 10th win in 12 League games ensured they capitalised on City's dismal 4-0 defeat against Tottenham 24 hours earlier.

Chasing a first Premier League crown since 2020, the Reds have a golden opportunity to throttle City's hopes of a fifth successive title when Pep Guardiola's team visit Anfield on Dec 1.

City have lost five in a row in all competitions

Salah wants Liverpool to pile on misery for City

and Salah said: "Hopefully, we keep going in that direction. We have a game against them so hopefully, we win it and go 11 points clear.

"Man City is Man City. They have a bad time now but they have great players."

Salah now has 12 goals in all competitions this term, including six in his last five League games.

"They were very important, especially after being down 2-1. It's the most important thing to have won the game," he said.

"Each game is different. They had a game plan and played very well. We managed to come back and win the game."

Having Salah on form has been crucial to Slot's dream beginning to life at Anfield.

Slot has made a remarkable start, winning 16 of his first 18 games in all competitions.

The former Feyenoord manager's deft touch has established Liverpool as title favourites in his maiden season at Anfield after replacing Jurgen Klopp.

Slot conceded Liverpool lacked intensity in the first hour at St Mary's, but he was pleased

with the way his players responded to falling behind.

"In the second half I saw the intensity I was looking for in the first half. Southampton make it really difficult for many teams, including top clubs, and they made it difficult today, though we dominated the game completely in my opinion," Slot said.

"There was not enough urgency to arrive in the box in the first half, we just kept the ball instead of attacking the box.

"Although we fell behind in the second half we showed more urgency and intensity. That led to numerous chances and eventually two goals."

With Salah's contract due to expire at the end of this season and the forward yet to sign a new deal, Slot was quick to praise the contribution of his talisman.

"If you want to win you need to score goals and we know Mo can score," he said.

"For me his first goal is the most important as we scored out of nowhere, then after that it was just waiting for us to score another." – AFP

It's my responsibility to solve poor run, says Guardiola

BY ANDY HAMPSON

PEP GUARDIOLA (pic) admits the buck stops with him as Manchester City bid to arrest their dramatic slump in form.

The champions crashed to a fifth straight defeat in all competitions – something not experienced by the club in more than 18 years – as they were thrashed 4-0 by Tottenham at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday.

The loss, which was also a third in succession in the Premier League and shattered a 52-game unbeaten home run, damaged the club's hopes of winning an unprecedented fifth title in a row.

It is the worst run of Guardiola's glittering managerial career and the City boss, who extended his contract until 2027 last week, is determined to turn the situation around.

"When we start to lose I say to the people I have to find a way, I have to. It's my duty, my responsibility, to find a way to be more consistent, that our game will be better and win games. This is what we have to do," the Catalan said.

City have been hampered by injuries to key players in recent weeks, particularly by the absence of Ballon d'Or-winning



midfielder Rodri, who has been sidelined for the remainder of the season.

Problems have emerged at both ends of the field with a lack of clean sheets – just five in 19 outings this term – and a shortage of goals being scored on occasions, like Saturday, when the prolific Erling Haaland has an off-day.

"We don't expect to lose important players but it's happened and you have to find a way. We have to find other abilities," Guardiola said.

"I don't think we didn't create enough chances. We created a lot of chances, clear

ones at 0-0, 0-1, 0-2. Of course we want a lot of players to score but it's happened now.

"I know at the Etihad when we are there and we score goals our momentum is there, but now we are not solid enough. That is the truth.

"In both sides normally we are solid but we concede the goals. Now in both sides we are not good enough.

"In these situations, what do you have to do? Keep going my friends, keep going.

"We have done it in the past – not in terms of results being as bad as now – but we have done it and we face the situation and move forward." – The Independent

RESULTS & STANDINGS

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE: Ipswich 1 (Hutchinson 43) Manchester United 1 (Rashford 2), Southampton 2 (Armstrong 42, Fernandes 56) Liverpool 3 (Szoboszlai 30, Salah 65, 83-pen).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	12	10	1	1	24	8	31
Man City	12	7	2	3	22	17	23
Chelsea	12	6	4	2	23	14	22
Arsenal	12	6	4	2	21	12	22
Brighton	12	6	4	2	21	16	22
Tottenham	12	6	1	5	27	13	19
Nottm Forest	12	5	4	3	15	13	19
Aston Villa	12	5	4	3	19	19	19
Newcastle	11	5	3	3	13	11	18
Fulham	12	5	3	4	17	17	18
Brentford	12	5	2	5	22	22	17
Man Utd	12	4	4	4	13	13	16
Bournemouth	12	4	3	5	16	17	15
West Ham	11	3	3	5	13	19	12
Everton	12	2	5	5	10	17	11
Leicester	12	2	4	6	15	23	10
Wolves	12	2	3	7	20	28	9
Ipswich	12	1	5	6	13	23	9
Crystal Palace	12	1	5	6	10	17	8
Southampton	12	1	1	10	9	24	4

CHAMPIONSHIP: Swansea 3 Leeds 4.

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Leeds	16	9	5	2	28	12	32
Sunderland	16	9	5	2	26	12	32
Sheff Utd	16	10	4	2	21	9	32
Burnley	16	8	6	2	19	6	30
Middlesboro	16	8	3	5	29	19	27
West Brom	16	6	8	2	18	11	26

LA LIGA: Osasuna 2 (Budimir 8, 20-pen) Villarreal 2 (Baena 67, Moreno 90+3-pen), Sevilla 1 (Sow 27) Rayo Vallecano 0, Leganes 0 Real Madrid 3 (Mbappe 43, Valverde 66, Bellingham 85), Athletic Bilbao 1 (Sanchez 26) Real Sociedad 0.

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	14	11	1	2	42	14	34
Real Madrid	13	9	3	1	28	11	30
Atletico	14	8	5	1	21	8	29
Villarreal	13	7	4	2	25	21	25
A. Bilbao	14	6	5	3	20	13	23
Osasuna	14	6	4	4	19	22	22

Serie A: Como 0 Fiorentina 2 (Adli 20, Kean 68), Genoa 2 (Freundrup 12, Miretti 59) Cagliari 2 (Marin 8-pen, Piccoli 88-pen), Lazio 3 (Gigot 88, Zaccagni 72, Dele-Bashiru 90+2) Bologna 0, Napoli 1 (Lukaku 53) Roma 0, Torino 1 (Masina 60) Monza 1 (Djuric 63).

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Napoli	13	9	2	2	20	9	29
Atalanta	13	9	1	3	34	16	28
Inter Milan	13	8	4	1	31	14	28
Fiorentina	13	8	4	1	27	10	28
Lazio	13	9	1	3	28	14	28
Juventus	13	6	7	0	21	7	25

BUNDESLIGA: Holstein Kiel 0 Mainz 3, Borussia Monchengladbach 2 St Pauli 0.

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern Munich	11	9	2	0	36	7	29
E. Frankfurt	11	7	2	2	27	16	23
RB Leipzig	11	6	3	2	18	9	21
Leverkusen	11	5	5	1	26	18	20
Dortmund	11	6	1	4	22	18	19
B. M'gladbach	11	5	2	4	17	14	17

FRENCH LIGUE 1: Lille 1 Rennes 0, Auxerre 1 Angers 0, Nantes 0 Le Havre 2, Nice 2 Strasbourg 1.

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Paris SG	12	10	2	0	36	10	32
Monaco	12	8	2	2	21	10	26
Marseille	12	7	2	3	27	16	23
Lille	12	6	4	2	19	11	22
Nice	12	5	2	5	23	12	20
Lyon	12	5	4	3	19	16	19

Low ends year on high

Zi Yu wins third straight AJBC title with U-15 crown

WORLD JUNIOR BADMINTON CHAMPIONSHIPS silver medallist Low Zi Yu (pic) won her third straight Allianz Junior Badminton Championship (AJBC) Grand Finals by clinching the Girls' singles U-15 title at Stadium Juara, Bukit Kiara, on Sunday.

Fourteen-year-old Zi Yu, representing Johor, needed just 28 minutes to defeat Teoh Sue Mei from Kuala Lumpur with a score of 21-10, 21-17.

The victory capped off an excellent year for her, following her triumph at the 2024 Malaysia Games (Sukma) in Sarawak in August.

"I am thrilled to win this tournament for the third time. I think the format of this competition is excellent as it helps produce more athletes to represent the country on the international stage," she told reporters.

Zi Yu previously won the Girls' Singles U-13 title at the AJBC in 2022 and 2023.

She said her focus was now on 2025, where she aims to participate in more U-18 and U-21 tournaments to challenge herself and further improve her game.

Apart from Zi Yu, champions in six other categories were crowned at the AJBC Grand Finals.

Putera Raees Rafeal Sulaiman and Cheong Kai Sheng secured victories in the Boys' singles U-13 and U-15 events, respectively. Ng Cia Tin-Putra Assolihin Mohamad Hamim emerged as the Boys' doubles U-13 champions, while Chong Yan Cheng-Mohamad Najib Haqimi Mohamad Osman claimed the Boys' doubles U-15 title.

Meanwhile, Siti Nur Aminah Abdullah triumphed in the Girls' singles U-13 and partnered with Adiq Puteri Waheeda Hermazan to win the Girls' doubles U-13. A. Baavanya-Nur Aina Maisarah Muhammad Hattat clinched the Girls' Doubles U-15 title.

Each singles winner received RM1,000 in cash, while doubles winners took home RM1,200 per pair.

Allianz Malaysia Berhad CEO Sean Wang said that the company also awarded a special grant

worth RM2,000 to each champion, in addition to the cash prizes.

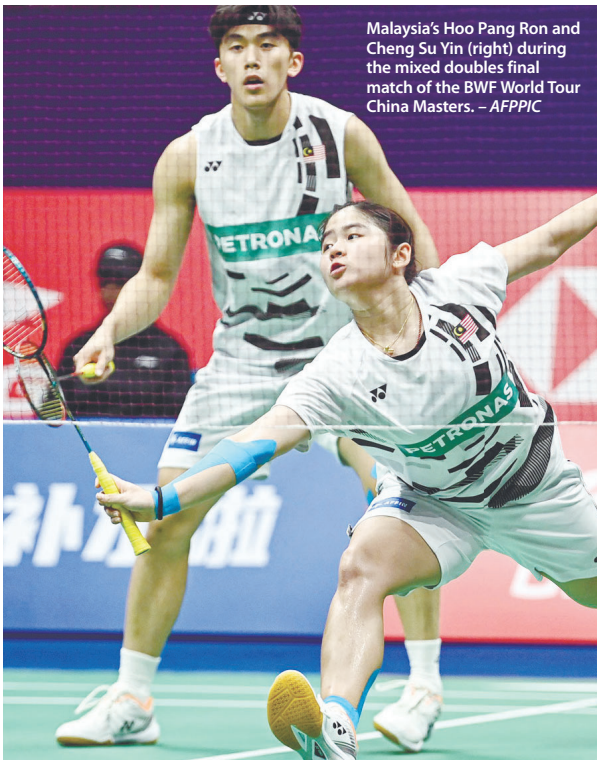
"Badminton is a high-cost sport, and we hope this special grant will help cover training costs, purchase equipment, and fund participation in tournaments, as players need to compete to improve their performance," he said.

Wang also highlighted the introduction of a new U-11 category, which drew a total of 3,113 participants.

He noted that transportation and accommodation costs for players from Sabah and Sarawak participating in the AJBC Grand Finals were fully covered by Allianz

Malaysia.

He added that this initiative aimed to unearth more talents like Zi Yu and alumni Dania Sofea Zaidi, who recently won a silver medal at the World Junior Championships. - Bernama



Malaysia's Hoo Pang Ron and Cheng Su Yin (right) during the mixed doubles final match of the BWF World Tour China Masters. - AFP/ICC

Pang Ron, Su Yin proud despite defeat

NATIONAL mixed doubles pair, Hoo Pang Ron and Cheng Su Yin can still be proud of their extraordinary feat despite ultimately losing to the hosts' Feng Yan Tze and Huang Dong Ping, who were the top seeds of the tournament in the final of China Masters 2024 on Sunday.

This is because Pang Ron-Su Yin, who were first paired together last year, managed to drag the match to a tight deciding set that lasted 93 minutes before finally losing 23-21, 23-25 and 16-21 at the Shenzhen Gymnasium.

Pang Ron admitted that entering as non-seeded players gave them an advantage without pressure, allowing them to focus fully on the game plan that had been drawn up with the coaching staff.

"Of course, we are disappointed but we really did our best today. We had no pressure, the pressure was on them, we just fight what we can.

"We had our game plan (but) maybe in crucial time they had more experience, their game play changed very fast, we couldn't get strong points.

"(We are) Happy that we can start more confidently and prepare for next year," he said in an audio recording shared by Badminton World Federation.

The runner-up title at China Masters, a Super 750 tournament, is the biggest achievement in their careers after winning the Malaysia International Challenge 2023.

Pang Ron and Su Yin, ranked 23rd in the world, began their advance by defeating Liu Kuang Heng-Jheng Yu Chieh of Taiwan 21-17, 21-12 before surprising the host pair and the tournament's second seeds, Jiang Zhen Bang-Wei Ya Xin, 16-21, 21-14, 21-19.

They then defeated Chen Cheng Kuan-Hsu Yin Hui of Taiwan, 21-10, 21-16 in the quarter-finals and defeated world number seven pair, Tang Chun Man-Tse Ying Suet, 21-14, 17-21, 21-19 in the semifinals. - Bernama

No replacement for Kim Swee

SABAH FC has decided to retain the existing coaching staff and no new appointments will be made to fill the vacancy of head coach this season to replace Datuk Ong Kim Swee who did not renew his contract which ends at the end of November.

Sabah FC team manager Rafie Robert said the management and members of the Sabah Football Association (SAFA) Supreme Council unanimously agreed with the decision.

"The existing coaching staff have understood the training pattern and tactics when working with Kim Swee. We are confident that the existing players are already compatible with the approach applied by coach Kim Swee and are trying to maintain the momentum that has

been introduced for a long time.

"What is important at this time is that all players need to be prepared for their duties by ensuring that the targets set by the management can be realised in the future," he said in a statement on Sunday.

Rafie said his side does not want to disturb what had been implemented so far because if it was changed, it would certainly take time for all players to adopt and apply.

"We want all parties, including the players, to undergo the training process as usual, focus and be able to maintain the momentum of victory.

"We don't want them to be affected by the drastic changes made if they need a coach in

the near future," he said.

He said Kim Swee's absence was a big loss for the Sabah FC team.

"However, we should not stop there, but continue to work with the existing coaching staff to continue training sessions to face the Malaysia Cup and Super League matches," said Rafie.

In the last match of Sabah FC yesterday in the Malaysia Cup competition against PT Athletic FC, Sabah FC lined up the coaching team with Mohammad Faisal Ahmad as assistant head coach, goalkeeper coach Irwan Jamil, and fitness coach Martin Stano together with Kim Swee who watched his last match before his exit, which Sabah won 4-0. - Bernama



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SCAN ME

No pain, no gain



Ipswich Town's Sam Morsy (left) in action with Manchester United's Alejandro Garnacho. - REUTERS/SPIC

BY GEORGE SESSIONS

RUBEN AMORIM served up a plate of humble pie and admitted Manchester United would "suffer for a long period" after a 1-1 Premier League draw at Ipswich on his debut as head coach.

Amorim enjoyed the perfect start when Marcus Rashford poked the visitors ahead after 81 seconds at Portman Road following excellent play by makeshift right wing-back Amad Diallo.

The 39-year-old would have expected United to kick on, but the opposite occurred as Ipswich roared back and claimed a deserved leveller via Omari Hutchinson's deflected 43rd-minute strike.

In the end the visitors were indebted to goalkeeper Andre Onana, who produced two outstanding saves either side of halftime to deny Liam Delap from close-range and ensure they did not taste defeat on Amorim's big day.

While the former Sporting Lisbon boss was happy with the effort of his players, especially in his favoured 3-4-3 system for the first time, he provided a damning assessment of their immediate prospects.

"It is hard to expect anything now. It is like not a surprise but you have to see it in the game.

"That is why I was a little bit anxious, because you cannot understand what will happen in the game. I felt that," Amorim reflected.

"What I understood today is that they are trying, they are really trying. They stay in the positions, they receive information and they try to use it in the game. That is very important.

"Even in the difficult moments, I felt they were doing the things we said for them to do.

"I know it is frustrating for the fans, but we are changing so much in this moment with a lot of games.

"We are going to suffer for a long period and we will try to win

Devils will suffer for a long period in bid to win games: Amorim

games. This will take time, but I know we have to win games.

"We could lose if it was not (for) Onana. We have to understand that and think and be pragmatic that these guys had two days training to change so much."

The early big calls by Amorim paid off as Diallo, in an unorthodox wing-back role, burst forward past Jens Cajuste's lunging tackle and set up Rashford, who had been preferred down the middle over Rasmus Hojlund.

Christian Eriksen fizzed an effort wide soon after but Ipswich enjoyed the better of the first half and after Onana produced a miraculous save to deny Delap - following a Leif Davis pass - Town got their reward when Hutchinson turned Casemiro and his left-footed strike deflected in off Noussair Mazraoui.

A frantic start to the second period, where Onana denied Delap again after he produced a back flick to Wes Burns' cross, was followed by a lull before late chances for both teams were squandered as it finished all square in Suffolk.

"We started very well but then we should have more possession with the ball," Amorim added.

"When we make a new structure and you are so clear on that, they need time to have some fluidity in the game. I felt that but it is two trainings (sessions after the international break) and they did OK."

What also left an impression on Amorim was a buoyant Portman Road.

"The atmosphere, you are lucky guys," he said with a smile. "You have the best, by far, the best League in the world and you see this every weekend."

Ipswich boss Kieran McKenna, who used to manage United's U-18s side, felt his newly-promoted team could have beat his old club and paid tribute to Onana's sensational two saves to deny Delap.

"I thought it was his head to be honest, but if he's saved that from that range, it's an incredible save," McKenna admitted.

"The save in the second half was probably a big one. I've not seen it back but that was maybe the clearest chance in the second half, so that's a really good save. We probably had the better chances, but it was an even game." - The Independent

