



Manage fire hazards responsibly, public urged

Household blazes often caused by improper use of electrical appliances, unattended flames and poor housekeeping, says Putrajaya fire safety director.

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'Thaksin can help Asean bolster ties with external parties'

Former Thai PM's good relationship with both US and China positions him as bridge for bloc to deepen cooperation with world powers, says foreign minister.

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Medication vending machines idea sparks interest among stakeholders

Convenient way to access basic healthcare and beat long queues at hospitals and clinics, but experts say priority must be given to ensuring standards and robust regulatory oversight to avoid abuse.

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Chicken porridge seller Asiah Che Man (right) and Nurhidayawati Othman, who sells *kuih* and desserts, are among a rapidly growing number of women venturing into business. —BERNAMAPIC

Enterprising women

Fuelled by digital opportunities, policy support and evolving societal norms, female entrepreneurs reshaping business landscape and driving economic growth: Academic

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Musa receiving his instrument of appointment from the King yesterday.
—BERNAMAPIC

Incoming Yang Dipertua Negeri expresses gratitude to King

KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Musa Aman has expressed gratitude to His Majesty the King of Malaysia Sultan Ibrahim for consenting to present him with the instrument of appointment as the 11th Yang Dipertua Negeri of Sabah in a ceremony at Istana Negara yesterday.

In a Facebook post, the former Sabah chief minister also expressed appreciation for the appointment and thanked Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor.

Musa, 73, was appointed the Yang Dipertua Negeri of Sabah under Article 1 of the Sabah Constitution for a term of four years, effective January 1, 2025, until December 31, 2028.

He replaces Tun Juhar Mahiruddin, whose term will expire on December 31 after serving in the role since January 1, 2011.

At the ceremony, Musa was also

conferred the Seri Maharaja Mangku Negara award, which carries the title "Tun."

Meanwhile, Hajiji congratulated Musa on his appointment and expressed hope that he would provide invaluable service in developing Sabah.

Speaking after the ceremony, Hajiji also conveyed his highest appreciation to Juhar for his dedicated service as the Yang Dipertua Negeri of Sabah for 14 years.

"My deepest appreciation to Tun Juhar for his dedicated service as the longest-serving Yang Dipertua Negeri of Sabah for 14 years.

"Tun Juhar's service to the people has been immense, and on behalf of the government and people of Sabah, I wish to express our highest appreciation and gratitude to him," he said. —Bernama

KUALA LUMPUR: The appointment of former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra as an informal adviser to assist with Malaysia's Asean chairmanship next year is seen as a bridge to strengthen cooperation between the region and global powers.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan said Thaksin, a prominent figure in Thailand, is well-regarded by the US and maintains close ties with China.

"His role as an adviser is informal. Thaksin is influential in Thailand, is accepted by the US and has a close relationship with China. This positions him as a bridge for Asean to foster stronger ties.

"Thaksin and other prominent figures are long-time associates of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and can offer insights on how Asean can progress further," he said during a media briefing on Malaysia's Asean chairmanship on Monday night.

Anwar announced Thaksin's appointment – proposed by Malaysia and agreed upon by Thailand – during a joint press conference with his Thai counterpart Paetongtarn Shinawatra in Putrajaya on Monday.

Mohamad added that the appointment of other prominent

'Appointment of Thaksin to boost Asean global ties'

Foreign minister highlights value of former Thai premier's advisory role, supported by rapport with US and close China relationship

figures for similar roles would be announced later.

"This is not an advisory group for Asean, but an adviser to the prime minister in his capacity as Asean chair. It is not a formal body or new segment within Asean," he said.

Malaysia will officially assume the Asean chairmanship on Jan 1 under the theme "Inclusivity and Sustainability", reflecting its aspiration to foster a unified and prosperous Asean.

The media briefing was also

attended by Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Mohamad Alamin, Foreign Ministry secretary-general Datuk Seri Amran Mohamed Zin and Asean-Malaysia National Secretariat director-general Datuk Zanariah Zainal Abidin.

Also present were Malaysian National News Agency (Bernama) chairman Datuk Seri Wong Chun Wai, its CEO Datin Paduka Nur-ul Afida Kamaludin and editor-in-chief Arul Rajoo Durar Raj, as well as representatives from media

organisations, senior editors, journalists and members of the Foreign Correspondents Club.

On Myanmar, Mohamad said Asean member countries would scrutinise the effectiveness of the Five-Point Consensus in addressing the humanitarian crisis there, Bernama reported.

He said this was to ensure more effective implementation and to overcome previous shortcomings.

"Myanmar has a roadmap. We also want to hear about its roadmap and, if similar, why can't we coordinate it with our views? But as it stands now, the mandate of the Asean leaders is the Five-Point Consensus.

"So, we don't want any country or certain parties to attempt anything outside the Five-Point Consensus by using other mechanisms. We will try

our best first and see how we can apply this consensus to Myanmar," he said.

Mohamad emphasised that Asean must remain united in addressing regional security matters, including the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar and the South China Sea issue.

He said Asean must return to its original objectives of fostering regional peace, stability and collaboration while working towards a resilient economy and staying on track to become the world's fourth largest economy by 2030.

"On the Myanmar issue, as the voice of Asean, we use the Asean mechanism. In the South China Sea, we also need to use the Asean mechanism to ensure we do not fall into a situation where we become divided," he added.

Definition, classification of T15 to be finalised soon

KUALA LUMPUR: Proposals related to the definition and classification of the T15 income group are being refined and will soon be decided by the Cabinet, Economy Minister Rafizi Ramli said yesterday.

He added that several proposals are under discussion, and if the concept and classification of the T15 group are agreed upon by the government, the classification will be used to determine the provision of government aid and subsidies.

"The proposed classification of T15 from the Economy Ministry aims to shift from the previous approach based on

gross income – namely B40, M40 and T20 – to the net disposable income method. This will ensure a more inclusive and fair measurement and targeting of aid," he told the Dewan Negara.

He was responding to Senator Baharuddin Ahmad, who requested details regarding the T15 group, which will see the withdrawal of fuel, education and health subsidies, as announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim during the presentation of Budget 2025.

Rafizi explained that the definition and classification mechanism of the T15

group, based on net disposable income, can be derived using information from the Padu system, which incorporates an element known as "reasonable basic living expenses".

According to him, this refers to the level of expenditure required by households to sustain a reasonable standard of living, meeting their needs and wants while enabling participation in social activities within the community.

Additionally, Rafizi said it can account for the varying costs of living across different states, serving as an indicator in socio-economic planning

and development.

It will also help determine fairer wages and assist individuals and families in planning household expenses and financial management.

He emphasised that its use could help reduce inclusion and exclusion errors in aid distribution, ensuring that only those truly deserving receive assistance.

"I hope that with better household financial information, we can extend this method to other areas, including *haj* subsidies, using fairer data classification for the people," he added. —Bernama

AI impact study to aid govt strategies

KUALA LUMPUR: The government will use findings from the impact study of artificial intelligence (AI), digital and green economy on the Malaysian workforce to formulate more effective strategies in training, career pathways and investments.

Human Resources Minister Steven Sim said this is necessary as the government recognises the significant challenges graduates face in securing employment, particularly due to the impact of AI.

"The study will serve as a guideline not only for policymakers but also for private companies, workers and the public in understanding the implications of 21st-century economic trends on the job market.

"Will current roles and jobs be affected in the next three to five years? This report will provide crucial input, enabling us to develop better strategies for training, career pathways, and investments," he said in the Dewan Negara yesterday. —Bernama

More comprehensive plastics-related legislation mulled

KUALA LUMPUR: The government is examining the need for a more comprehensive plastics-related Act through a feasibility study under the 13th Malaysia Plan (13MP).

Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad said the study is

necessary as the country's existing policies on plastics have been implemented in a fragmented manner.

"Sometimes, at the federal level, the (plastics) policy framework is broad, but when it reaches the implementation stage at the local or state government level, there is no

uniform approach.

"So, under the 13MP, we are conducting a feasibility study to assess the need for a comprehensive Act related to plastics," he said during the question-and-answer session at the Dewan Negara yesterday.

He was responding to a

supplementary question from Senator Michael Mujah Lihan, who asked about the government's commitment to reviewing existing policies to ensure Malaysia does not remain a central location for dumping of plastic waste from developed countries. —Bernama

Call for details of multi-tier levy system

KUALA LUMPUR: The Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) has urged the government to provide prompt details on the Multi-Tier Levy Mechanism (MTLM) implementation.

FMM president Tan Sri Soh Thian Lai said the details should be announced six months in advance.

"This is to give industries sufficient time to adapt to the upcoming changes, particularly since the implementation will have cost implications and require adjustments to budgets and business operations," he said in a statement yesterday.

Soh highlighted that the 80:20 policy aims to reduce dependence on foreign workers, but it poses significant challenges for manufacturers in labour-intensive and low-skilled sectors, where local participation remains limited despite efforts to enhance wages and benefits.

"The deferment allows the industry to adopt long-term strategies such as increasing automation, modernising production processes and investing in the upskilling and reskilling of local workers to meet the demands of new, higher-value roles," he said.

Soh lauded the Investment Trade and Industry Ministry for its pragmatic decision to defer the enforcement of the 80:20 local-to-foreign worker employment ratio for the manufacturing sector until the implementation of the MTLM. — Bernama

No New Year eve event planned

KUALA PILAH: The Negeri Sembilan state government has no plans to organise a New Year's Eve celebration for 2025, said Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Aminuddin Harun.

He said the decision was made to respect those affected by the floods nationwide, while also aiming to prevent unnecessary waste as well as show solidarity with the Palestinian people.

"However, it is up to the NGOs or private sector groups to organise such events with fireworks to attract tourists," he said after distributing aid to residents affected by floods in the Kuala Pilah district yesterday.

On a separate matter, Aminuddin, who is also the Negeri Sembilan PKR Leadership Council chairman, said the party elections are expected to be held before June next year. — Bernama

Schools to be built on higher ground

ARAU: The government will prioritise safe and elevated locations for future school construction to ensure the buildings remain secure and operational during floods.

"For new schools, the locations must be safe and elevated because we know our schools are the preferred choice for relief centres," Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek said after visiting Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama (SMKA) Arau here yesterday.

She said the construction of the two new blocks at SMKA Arau, completed in October at a cost of RM19 million, includes facilities such as a student dormitory, dining hall, *tasmik* room, surau, toilets and a warden office. — Bernama

Women set to be force behind economic growth

BY KIRTINEE RAMESH
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PETALING JAYA: Malaysian women entrepreneurs are becoming a force to be reckoned with and are reshaping the business landscape with their growing presence driving sustainable economic growth and innovation, said an academic.

Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) entrepreneurship and business professor Datuk Dr Nik Maheeran Nik Muhammad said while men continue to dominate large-scale enterprises and high-growth sectors, women's participation in entrepreneurship is rapidly increasing.

She said the shift is fuelled by digital opportunities, policy support and evolving societal norms.

"Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME) account for 96.9% of total business establishments in Malaysia, with women increasingly participating in the services sector, which comprises over 80% of MSME."

Nik Maheeran, who is also UMK Women Entrepreneurship and Leadership Linkages president, said surveys showed that Malaysian women have stronger business

aspirations than the global average, with 80% expressing interest in entrepreneurship compared with 72% worldwide.

She said women reinvest up to 90% of their income into their families and communities, enhancing education, healthcare and overall social well-being.

"Empowering women entrepreneurs in Malaysia could unlock substantial untapped economic potential, contributing to GDP growth, especially since they are recognised for their meticulous and cautious approach to business planning, often prioritising long-term stability."

Research also indicates that their leadership approach translates into higher employee satisfaction, productivity and overall business performance.

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Research also indicates that their leadership approach translates into higher employee satisfaction, productivity and overall business performance.

"Balancing multiple roles, including running businesses and managing family responsibilities, equip Malaysian women with adaptability and resourcefulness. These traits, combined with strong problem-solving skills, enable them to creatively overcome obstacles and manage businesses effectively."

Naira 9 Ventures founder Kavitha Thuraisingam, 38, transformed her passion for *masala chai* into a thriving tea enterprise during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite the loss of her husband to Covid-19 and the challenge of raising a young child, her resilience and commitment enabled her to expand her product line to premium blends like Organic Turmeric Green Tea and Naira's

Royal Tea.

"Balancing motherhood and business was overwhelming, but perseverance, family support and continuous learning helped me succeed," she said.

Naira Ventures is today a testament to how passion and adaptability can lead to extraordinary achievements.

The Batik Craft founder Nor Azura Abdullah, 49, began her entrepreneurial journey in 2017 when she hand-crafted *batik* inspired soft toys while caring for her ailing husband and four children.

Despite challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, she embraced digital platforms and virtual workshops, which helped her reach wider audiences.

"Support from Yayasan Hasanah and initiatives like the Ideas Project allowed me to uplift communities, preserve *batik* heritage, and train women artisans," she said.

Her efforts won her accolades such as the Anugerah Wanita Ikon Kelantan 2024.

She also earned a master of entrepreneurship from UMK, with a CGPA of 3.93 at the age of 48, underscoring her perseverance and commitment to the community.

Nik Maheeran said government initiatives and schemes like Tekun Nasional and the MySME Lady Financing Scheme offer women financial schemes with lower interest rates and friendlier repayment terms.

Global programmes, such as the SheTrades initiative by the International Trade Centre (ITC), have helped women gain access to global markets and financial resources.

The ITC works towards global prosperity by connecting small businesses in developing countries to international ones.

Nik Maheeran said Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia has also played a crucial role in uplifting women entrepreneurs by offering low-interest loans to rural women, enabling them to start small businesses.

"Digitalisation and social media have further boost women's participation in entrepreneurship."

"Many of them lead informal businesses, especially in food and beverage, wellness and education sectors, which is why they are a force to be reckoned with in the business world today," she said.



SAFE PLACE ... Mohd Nor Afiq Mohd Anuar, 33, in the tree house he built in Kampung Kubang Tebakang in Kelantan, that serves as a temporary shelter from floods for him and his family. — BERNAMAPIC

'Sharenting' could lead to online crimes: Minister

PUTRAJAYA: The practice of excessive "sharenting" by a few parents has opened up opportunities for online crimes, especially involving children, said Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil.

He said there are parents who "over share" their children's school information, including uniforms and badges, allowing irresponsible

parties to misuse the information.

Speaking at the ministry's monthly assembly for December yesterday, Fahmi reminded parents not to allow children aged under 13 to have social media accounts and to be careful when sharing information online.

The word "sharenting" is a combination of two words, "sharing" and "parenting", and

refers to the phenomenon of parents sharing photos and videos of their children and other identifying information on their social media accounts.

Fahmi also proposed introducing an online safety pledge involving children as the ministry's official commitment to raise awareness on the issue.

On social media service

licences, which will come into effect on Jan 1, Fahmi said the decision was made to ensure that social media platforms comply with Malaysian laws.

"Our intention is not to restrict their rights to do business and operate in Malaysia, but we found that there are platforms that are not complying with the laws in our country." — Bernama

'Medication vending machines could ease healthcare strain'

➤ Experts highlight benefits but call for stronger security and regulatory frameworks to prevent abuse

BY DEEPALAKSHMI MANICKAM
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PETALING JAYA: As Malaysia continues to grapple with long queues in public hospitals and clinics, the idea of vending machines dispensing medication and medical certificates (MC) has sparked interest among health professionals.

Singapore has already implemented such machines as a convenient way to access basic healthcare.

However, concerns have been raised regarding potential data breaches and the need to tighten regulatory frameworks to uphold healthcare standards.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia public health medicine specialist Prof Dr Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh said: "Vending machines could be viable in urban areas due to greater IT and health literacy, but they may present a challenge in rural areas, even though one of the objectives of vending machines is to cater to such settings."

Sharifa Ezat noted that while such technology could enhance convenience, there are risks of hacking or database interception, which could increase the cost of treatment due to the expensive security investments required for implementation.

She also expressed concerns about the ability of vending machines to manage

patients with complex medical histories, as a doctor would still need to examine the patient first.

However, she added that the model might work for those with fewer comorbidities.

Sharifa Ezat stressed the importance of strict regulatory frameworks to ensure vending machines comply with healthcare standards.

"Malaysia needs to invest in 'health AI' and strengthen the existing Data Protection Act to ensure data is not leaked, hacked or sold elsewhere."

In terms of ethical considerations, she said vending machines would not entirely replace human interaction as consultations – whether in-person or online – would still involve a doctor.

Despite this, she acknowledged the potential for abuse as online consultations could lead to illegitimate MC claims.

"If implemented, vending machines could significantly impact the healthcare landscape by reducing the need for general practitioners and clinics. It would also reduce congestion, waiting times, and improve treatment access and compliance."

Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations vice-president Datuk Indrani Thuraisingham highlighted successful implementations of medication vending machines in Japan, Australia and the UK, where consumer safety, accessibility and robust regulatory oversight are prioritised.

She noted that vending machines can improve healthcare access, particularly in underserved areas.

"India has introduced mobile medical vans equipped with vending machines in rural areas, connecting patients with teleconsultations and medication dispensation."

Indrani pointed to Japan's highly regulated

approach, where vending machines dispense only over-the-counter drugs, while prescription medications require pharmacist involvement and integration with monitoring systems to track expiry dates and inventory.

"In China and Singapore, telemedicine kiosks integrated with vending machines have helped build consumer trust. These systems combine remote doctor consultations with medication dispensing to ensure a balance between automation and human oversight."

"The UK and South Korea have centralised databases and periodic audits to prevent misuse. Such measures are essential for maintaining accountability and ensuring compliance with healthcare standards."

Indrani also referenced Canada's telemedicine practices, where diagnoses are cross-verified by licensed professionals to prevent misuse.

"Privacy must be a priority, especially when sensitive medical information is involved," she added.

On the economic front, Indrani noted that vending machines could complement existing healthcare providers.

In China and Australia, vending machine operators partner with pharmacies and clinics to share revenue.

"This reduces competition and enhances accessibility. Malaysia should consider a similar collaborative approach."

Indrani believes Malaysia could significantly benefit from medication vending machines, particularly given the current strain on the public healthcare system.

"With careful planning and the adaptation of global best practices, Malaysia has the potential to revolutionise its healthcare system through innovative solutions like vending machines."

Retired contractor wins RM21.3m Toto jackpot with car registration numbers

PETALING JAYA: A retired renovation contractor from Penang won the RM21.3 million Toto 4D Jackpot 1 on Dec 8 after betting on car registration numbers of his family members.

The 64-year-old winner told STM Lottery that he has been persistently betting on the pair of numbers 5841 and 1562 for years without fail.

"I felt relieved when the numbers I had been betting on finally came out as the winners."

"I immediately spotted the numbers when they emerged as the second and third prizes in Toto 4D. I was speechless and overjoyed when I checked my ticket against the results," he said.

The winner added that his newfound wealth has guaranteed him a comfortable retirement and he plans to place the winnings in a fixed deposit to generate a steady income.

The total RM21.5 million Toto 4D Jackpot 1 prize was shared between the winner, who walked away with RM21,314,124, and another i-System winner from Selangor, who won RM203,962.75.

Additionally, RM6.15 million from a total RM20.1 million Toto 4D Jackpot 1 prize on Nov 24 was partially won by four i-System ticket holders from Sabah, Sarawak and Penang.

The largest share of RM4,473,774.75 went to a winner from Penang.

The 39-year-old, who works as a driver, revealed that his winning pair of numbers, 9666 and 1018, were also based on his car registration numbers.

"My car has rewarded me for my hard work. I'm very happy to use the winnings to start my own business," he said.

PLUS expects 14% increase in traffic during holidays

KUALA LUMPUR: PLUS Malaysia Berhad (PLUS) expects a 14% increase in traffic volume on its expressways, with the number of vehicles reaching 2.12 million per day compared with 1.85 million on normal days during the Christmas and year-end holidays from this weekend until Jan 2.

In a statement yesterday, it advised highway users to plan their journeys using the MyPLUS-TTA digital itinerary, which can be accessed through the MyPLUS application, Bernama reported.

"This digital travel schedule aims to make it easier for people to plan their journeys and helps distribute traffic for smoother and more comfortable travel."

"It is also designed to prevent vehicles from accumulating in one location on the highway at the same time, which could lead to traffic congestion," the statement said.

According to PLUS, highway users can get the latest traffic updates through the Virtual Assistant-PUTRI, the X@plustrafik application, electronic signage, or by calling PLUSLine at 1800-88-0000 for any inquiries or emergency assistance.

"We also advise highway users to utilise the PLUS application, Waze, or Google Maps to plan their journeys and get real-time traffic updates during the festive season," it added, while wishing all highway users a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Free shuttle service to Penang Hill

GEORGETOWN: Penang Hill Corporation (PHC), in collaboration with Rapid Penang and the state government, will provide a free shuttle service between Penang Hill and Komtar for five days from Dec 25 to 29.

In a statement yesterday, PHC said the initiative, now in its fifth edition, aims to ease traffic congestion around Penang Hill during the upcoming school holidays.

It also seeks to promote green initiatives by reducing carbon emissions, aligning with the Penang2030 Vision to create a family-focused, green, and smart state that inspires the nation.

"The complimentary shuttle service will operate from 9am to 9pm, with eight round trips daily at 1.5-hour intervals. The buses are also wheelchair friendly to ensure convenience for passengers with special needs," the statement said.

Passengers can board the shuttle at Komtar's Station 9 bus stop on Jalan Ria (underpass next to the Rapid Penang kiosk) to travel to the Penang Hill Lower Station and back. – Bernama



PHC said the service initiative aims to ease traffic congestion around Penang Hill during the upcoming school holidays. – MASYR CHE ANI/THESUN

Decision by ferry operator to cancel fare hike lauded

ALOR SETAR: The decision by a ferry operator to cancel the price hike for ferry services to Pulau Langkawi has been described as a "correct and smart" move to support the country's tourism sector, particularly in Kedah.

Kedah Tourism, Culture and Entrepreneurship Committee chairman Datuk Mohd Salleh Saidin said yesterday that had the ferry operator

proceeded with the fare increase, it would have undermined the state government's efforts to promote Visit Kedah Year 2025.

"In our efforts to boost Kedah's tourism sector, we hope all tourism industry partners will collaborate with the state government and refrain from taking any hasty actions that may hinder efforts to attract tourists to the state," he said when

asked to comment on the proposed fare hike for ferry services between Langkawi, Kuala Kedah and Kuala Perlis.

Mohd Salleh also acknowledged the reasons behind the ferry operator's initial decision to raise fares, such as the need to increase workers' salaries.

Earlier, he presented post-flood contributions to 30 recipients in the Kubang Rotan state

constituency near Alor Setar.

"However, the matter has now attracted the attention of Transport Minister Anthony Loke, who announced the provision of a diesel subsidy. This is good news and brings relief to ferry operators. I am confident there will be no fare increases as long as the federal government continues to provide support," he added. – Bernama

Be responsible in managing fire hazards, public urged

➤ Houseowners need to be prepared by having at least one fire extinguisher and installing smoke detectors: Fire safety chief

BY HARITH KAMAL
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PETALING JAYA: With fire outbreaks in the country remaining high, Putrajaya Fire and Rescue Department Fire Safety Division director Datuk Khirudin Drahan Hussain has called on the public to be more responsible in managing fire hazards.

"There were 34,389 fire-related calls in 2023, with 4,573 incidents involving properties such as factories and homes. The losses caused by these fires are estimated to be around RM2.6 billion."

On Dec 15, three premises believed to house a furniture and cardboard factory were completely razed at Taman Perindustrian Alam Jaya in Bandar Puncak Alam, Selangor.

On Nov 15, an elderly woman died when a fire broke out, affecting two houses in Kampung Muhibbah, in Ranau, Sabah. One was razed while the other sustained 50% damage.

Khirudin said household fires are often caused by improper use of electrical appliances, unattended flames and poor housekeeping.

"Many house fires begin as small incidents but escalate due to negligence. Most homeowners lack fire detection devices or fire extinguishers, and panic when a fire breaks out."

"Households need to have at least one fire extinguisher and if possible, instal smoke detectors in bedrooms for early warning. Having fire insurance is equally important."

He said public education, community-driven initiatives, awareness programmes and on-ground leadership are vital to fostering a culture of fire prevention.

Insurance company Zurich Malaysia reported in 2021 that 59%

of Malaysian homeowners do not have fire coverage, and 43% are unaware that basic home insurance does not automatically cover assets and fixtures inside their homes.

On Dec 10, Advokasi Perusahaan dan Industri managing director Datuk Fazli Nordin urged immediate action to address weak enforcement and apathetic attitudes toward fire safety in Malaysia's industrial zones.

"Lives are at stake. Major fires or industrial accidents can harm Malaysia's reputation as a manufacturing and investment hub. Greater oversight is needed in conducting safety checks and

issuing permits, with agencies like the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission playing a critical role."

Khirudin said fires involving factories mostly resulted from non-compliance with standard operating procedures.

"Industrial fires often occur during production, material transfers or manufacturing processes. Poor supervision and inadequate prevention measures contribute to the problem."

"Poor maintenance and housekeeping of machinery are significant factors, with factories that are improperly maintained being more prone to fires," he said.

He urged companies to prioritise the upkeep of their firefighting equipment, warning that "in manufacturing facilities, this isn't optional but essential."

Khirudin said trained personnel should also be available to address

minor fire incidents before they escalate, and emphasised the importance of equipping Malaysians with basic fire safety knowledge to handle fire outbreaks.

"In case of a fire, ensure everyone is evacuated, and immediately call the fire department."

He said early fire prevention is key, and one must always be prepared, even when there is no fire.

"Identify the nearest emergency exit in your home and discuss a fire evacuation plan with your family."

"Ensure everyone understands what to do in case of a fire and hold practical drills regularly to keep it fresh in their memory," he said.

"Empowering communities to safeguard their environments not only prevents fires but also strengthens resilience."

"Simple yet consistent efforts can make a difference."



Khirudin said public education, community-driven initiatives, awareness programmes and on-ground leadership are vital to fostering a culture of fire prevention. — ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

Five nabbed over knife brawl case

KUALA LUMPUR: Police yesterday arrested five men believed to be involved in a brawl outside a building in Jalan Yap Kwan Seng three days ago, which resulted in three victims sustaining injuries from the use of a knife.

Dang Wangi district police chief ACP Sulizmie Affendy Sulaiman said police received a report regarding the incident at 4.03am on Sunday, allegedly triggered by a misunderstanding between five local men before one of them pulled out a folding knife and attacked the victims.

"As a result, the first victim suffered a slash wound to his left arm. The second victim sustained a slash wound on his left cheek, extending from his eyebrow to his lips, while the third victim had a head injury that required 10 stitches."

"All three victims have received treatment at a private hospital," he said in a statement yesterday.

Sulizmie Affendy urged anyone with information about the incident to contact the Kuala Lumpur police hotline at 03-2115 9999, the Dang Wangi District police headquarters at 03-2600 2222 or any police station. — Bernama

Senior citizen loses RM700,000 in scam

KUALA TERENGGANU: An elderly businessman lost RM704,000 after falling victim to a non-existent investment scheme.

Kemaman district acting police chief DSP Wan Muhammad Wan Ja'afar said the 73-year-old man came across an advertisement on WhatsApp last month for an investment promising high returns within a short period.

Attracted by the offer, the victim made 10 transactions to three different accounts between Nov 4 and Dec 5, following the given instructions.

"However, he has yet to receive any promised returns. The victim lodged a police report at 3pm on Monday," he said yesterday.

The case is being investigated under Section 402 of the Penal Code. — Bernama

Private prosecution appeal dismissed

PUTRAJAYA: The Court of Appeal yesterday dismissed a final appeal by Global Human Rights Federation president S. Shashi Kumar to initiate private prosecution against preachers Muhammad Zamri Vinoth Kalimuthu and Firdaus Wong Wan Hung, who have been charged with insulting beliefs and religious practices of non-Muslims.

In a unanimous decision, Judge Datuk Ahmad Zaidi Ibrahim, leading a three-judge panel, said Shashi failed to convince the panel of the error committed by Shah Alam High Court Judicial Commissioner Dr Wendy Ooi Su Ghee and Magistrate Mohamad Redza Azhar Rezali in the case.

"The magistrate's decision to dismiss the appellant's application and not continue the appellant's

examination in this case is correct and not a mistake."

"This court finds that both appeals are without merit, so the appellant's appeal is dismissed and the decision of the Magistrate's Court, confirmed by the High Court, is upheld," said Ahmad Zaidi.

The other two judges on the panel were Datuk Mohd Nazlan Mohd Ghazali and Datuk Mohamed Zaini Mazlan.

In 2020, police investigated the two preachers under Section 298A of the Penal Code for allegedly inciting enmity between different groups on religious or racial grounds.

On Jan 8, 2021, Shashi applied to conduct private prosecution at the Shah Alam Magistrate's Court.

On Sept 3, 2021, Magistrate

Mohamad Redza dismissed the application on the grounds that police investigation against Zamri was rendered "No Further Action", while the probe against Firdaus was still in progress at the time.

Following the decision, Shashi filed an appeal at the Shah Alam High Court, and in March 2023, the court upheld the decision by the magistrate, Bernama reported.

A private prosecution is a prosecution conducted by a private individual or entity, rather than a prosecuting authority with a statutory power to prosecute.

Prior to this, during a proceeding at the Court of Appeal, the court was informed by the prosecution that the Attorney-General's Chambers decided not to pursue the charges against the two preachers.

Court strikes out negligence suit over death of military cadet

KUALA LUMPUR: The family of Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) cadet officer J. Soosaimanicckam, who died during training six years ago, yesterday failed in their lawsuit against the Malaysian Armed Forces Council, defence minister, the government and 12 others.

Lawyer Latheefa Koya, representing Soosaimanicckam's father S. Joseph, said Sessions Court Judge Idah Ismail struck out the suit, with costs of RM10,000.

The decision was delivered via email yesterday.

Federal counsel Abdul Hakim Abdul Karim represented all the defendants.

Joseph filed the suit on May 19, 2021, alleging negligence on the part

of the defendants for failing to provide emergency treatment when his son collapsed on the day of the incident, and in monitoring his well-being and health during training sessions.

He also named 11 individuals, including RMN officers and the commander as defendants.

On July 29, the High Court ruled that Soosaimanicckam's death was a homicide and that the cause of death was pulmonary oedema due to leptospirosis.

The court also ruled that his death was a direct consequence of RMN officers in charge of the cadet training, in denying Soosaimanicckam medical treatment. — Bernama

Turning scrap items to fortune

➤ Local craftswoman inspiring netizens with creations made from discarded wood and tyres

KUALA PILAH: What began as a simple hobby has transformed into a thriving business for Norpadila Afandi, 42, a housewife from Kampung Temaris in Negeri Sembilan.

Who would have thought that crafting items from discarded materials could generate an income of thousands of ringgit?

Norpadila never imagined repurposing old and used materials, particularly wood, would gain such popularity. Today, she is inundated with orders and even has a loyal fan base.

The mother of four shared that, with a creative touch, discarded wood which is often considered worthless can be transformed into beautiful decorative items with monetary and sentimental value.

"It all started from having a house with a 'farmhouse' concept, blending English-style elegance with traditional Malay elements. I began by crafting furniture for my home, including chairs, tables, cupboards and wall decorations, using repurposed materials.

"From there, I expanded into creating home decorations from old wood sourced from various places. These items require minimal investment yet offer high aesthetic value, exuding a vintage charm," she said.

Norpadila, who was born in the district, said she never expected her seemingly ordinary creations to become so popular, providing a steady income and significantly boosting her family finances.

Among her most sought-after products are egg holders, key racks, wooden tables, decorative plates, wooden trays and coffee tables made from used tyres. These items are sold at reasonable prices, starting at RM40, Bernama reported.

Norpadila added that while most of her orders come from local customers, her unique decorative pieces have also captured the interest of international buyers from countries such as Brunei and Singapore.

"I now earn a five-figure income from crafting items like old wood, used tyres and small wooden scraps collected in our workshop," she said, adding that each order takes between two and five days to complete, depending on the design and size.

Known as NorpadilaDiyCrafter on TikTok, she has also gained recognition as a content creator. Her expertise in designing creative and affordable home decorations continues to attract a growing number of followers on



Norpadila with some of her repurposed wood products. – BERNAMAPIC

social media.

She said she prefers creating her own home decorations, wardrobe cabinets and furniture using second-hand materials, aligning with her commitment to environmental sustainability.

In addition to repurposing used items, she also shares home decoration ideas using department store products, transforming them into extraordinary pieces with her "magical" touch.

"Beautiful home decor doesn't necessarily have to be expensive. My ideas are practical, easy to follow and perfect for anyone looking to beautify their home affordably with just a bit of

creativity," she said, adding that many of her followers enthusiastically respond by sharing photos of their creativity, proving that her methods are accessible to anyone.

"When my followers tag me on social media and share photos of what they've made using my ideas, it's incredibly rewarding. It shows that I'm not the only one doing it. There are people out there who are following my approach and achieving success."

She said her aim is to inspire young people to explore their creativity, demonstrating that it does not take a large budget to create beautiful decorative products.

Career switch brings 'fizzy' success

MANJUNG: Rosniza Saaidin, 47, who owns a profitable carbonated drink business, has never regretted her decision to leave her 15-year career in the oil and gas industry.

The decision in 2013 unexpectedly opened up opportunities for the Maman Trading manager to dabble in her husband's family business while also managing the household and children.

Rosniza said after leaving her job, she started the soft drink business under the "Alif" brand, with a capital of RM30,000, on June 1 that year.

She took over her husband's small-scale enterprise and changed the original brand to "Zeeper" to be more commercial.

"For three years, we slowly moved forward. I

used my savings and sold other assets, including cars, to expand our business.

"During that time, more than RM300,000 was spent, and to this day, we still have not taken any bank loans."

Rosniza said her husband Abdul Rahman Basri, 49, helped her immensely in the first year of starting the business, from brewing to packaging the drinks.

She said her initial experience in the food and beverage field helped her run the business, especially since she attended additional classes and courses to improve her skills.

She added that government agencies such as the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute assisted her with

analytical services, with the Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority providing marketing assistance.

Although many carbonated drinks are on the market with various brands, colours and attractive packaging, she was confident that her products were unique.

"Zeeper carbonated water is produced using nine types of filtered water, with alkaline water at a pH level of 9.5 and lower sugar and gas content compared with others available on the market.

"We have 11 products, including orange, strawberry, sarsaparilla, cola, apple, grape, cream soda, blue soda and fruits, with soursop and agarwood cola as the latest. We are also in the

process of producing tamarind water and isotonic drinks," she said.

Her company can produce more than 30,000 litres of drinks a month, including meeting orders for special events.

Rosniza said her drinks come in two sizes – 1.25 litres priced at RM2.80 and a 320mm size priced at RM1.50, which are available at selected supermarkets.

"Apart from walk-in customers, we supply to supermarkets, cooperatives, petrol stations and entrepreneurs who are interested in becoming Zeeper agents or distributors," she said, adding that she intends to sell her products at 14 petrol stations throughout Peninsular Malaysia next year. – Bernama

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Anti-graft body raids Indonesia central bank HQ

➤ Investigators confirm
governor's office searched

JAKARTA: Indonesian anti-graft investigators raided the headquarters of the central bank here on Monday in relation to an investigation into alleged mishandling of a corporate social responsibility programme, the central bank said.

The office of central bank Governor Perry Warjiyo was among those raided, two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters. They declined to be named because they were not authorised to speak on the issue.

Bank Indonesia's spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for confirmation that Warjiyo's office was raided.

A spokesperson for the anti-graft body confirmed the search took place but did not provide further details.

The central bank said it respected the investigation and would cooperate with the anti-graft agency.

The agency in September had said it was investigating CSR programmes run by financial regulators in 2023, including the central bank, for potential misuse of funds for personal gain, according to local media.

Warjiyo in September said BI had cooperated with the probe, but defended the governance of its CSR funds.

"We can ensure that CSR or BI's social programmes have strong regulatory governance and their decision-making process is through stages," Warjiyo told a press conference at the time.

BI typically donates to education, social

empowerment or religious foundations, instead of individuals.

The beneficiaries are selected following a survey and must meet a set of requirements, Warjiyo said at the time, adding the board of governors decides on the size of donations.

The central bank allocated 1.6 trillion rupiah (RM443.5 million) in 2023 for social programmes and projects supporting micro, small and medium enterprises, as well as price stabilisation measures, according to BI budget documents provided to parliament.

There was no breakdown of or details about the use of the funds.

The raid happened a day before the central bank began its two-day policy meeting yesterday, with its decision due to be announced today. It is expected to keep policy rates unchanged, according to a narrow majority of economists polled by Reuters.

Taipei mayor calls for reduced tensions

TAIPEI: The mayor of Taiwan's capital told visiting Chinese officials yesterday he hoped for peace and wanted less of the "howls of ships and aircraft" around the island, saying dialogue trumps confrontation.

Addressing the annual Taipei-Shanghai City Forum with Shanghai Vice-Mayor Hua Yuan in attendance, Taipei Mayor Chiang Wan-an used poetic language to say he wished for peace across the Taiwan Strait.

"More dialogue and less confrontation; more olive branches of peace and less sour grapes of conflict. More lights from fishing boats to adorn the sunset; less of the howls of ships and aircraft," Chiang said.

"I always say that the more tense and difficult the moment, the more we need to communicate," he said.

China has continued to send warplanes and warships into the strait even with the forum taking place, with Taiwan's Defence Ministry saying yesterday that in the past 24 hours it had detected 10 military aircraft and seven warships.

Chiang is from Taiwan's main opposition party, the Kuomintang, which favours close ties across the Taiwan Strait although it denies being pro-Beijing. He is widely considered a future presidential contender.

The forum, first held in 2010, is one of the few high-level venues for talks between Chinese and Taiwanese officials after China cut off a regular dialogue mechanism with Taiwan's central government in 2016 following the election of Tsai Ing-wen as president.

Tsai, and her successor Lai Ching-te, refuse to acknowledge Beijing's position that both China and Taiwan are part of "one China". Lai, like Tsai, says only Taiwan's people can decide their future, rejecting Beijing's sovereignty claims.

Hua told the forum he hoped for closer practical cooperation.

"Compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait have always been one family," he said.

Shanghai tour group trips to Taiwan will restart, Hua said, offering his own olive branch given China has yet to allow a full resumption of tourism to the island.

Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council said on Monday the government was showing goodwill by allowing the forum to take place in the face of the "still serious situation". — Reuters



ENCHANTED

... Visitors are dazzled by coloured decorations as they stroll along a Harbin street ahead of the city's annual Ice and Snow World festival in China's northeast Heilongjiang province. — AFP/IC

Yoon to fight insurrection charge in court

SEOUL: South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol did not commit insurrection by declaring martial law and will fight the charge in court, his defence team said yesterday.

Yoon, who has been stripped of his duties by parliament, is under investigation for his Dec 3 declaration, which plunged the country into political turmoil and led to an impeachment vote on Saturday.

Yoon's imposition of martial law "does not meet the requirements to constitute insurrection ... (we) will contest it in court", said Seok Dong-hyeon, a lawyer in Yoon's legal team.

"While we do not consider the insurrection charges to be legally valid, we will comply with the investigation," he said.

The comments came hours after Yonhap news agency reported investigators had notified Yoon he faced possible arrest if he did not appear by Saturday for questioning over his attempt to suspend civilian rule.

Yoon is being investigated by South Korean prosecutors as well as a joint team of police,

Defence Ministry and anti-corruption investigators.

The president and some of his inner circle face possible life imprisonment, or even the death penalty, if found guilty. He remains under a travel ban.

An investigation unit earlier yesterday launched a raid on Yoon's security service in an attempt to obtain phone records, Yonhap said.

The same unit had previously asked that the suspended president appear today to answer questions but was rebuffed by his office, an official told reporters.

Investigators requested Yoon to appear at the office for questioning on charges of insurrection and abuse of power, they said.

But the summons was returned as "undelivered" by the presidential office, they said in a statement.

"The identity of the person who refused to accept it is unknown," they said.

South Korea's Constitutional Court, which began proceedings against Yoon on Monday, now has around six months to determine if it

will uphold his impeachment.

A spokeswoman for the court said judges had pencilled in a preliminary hearing for Dec 27, which Yoon is not required to attend.

Fresh elections must be held within two months if his removal is upheld by the Constitutional Court. Prime Minister Han Duck-soo is serving as interim leader in Yoon's stead.

Huge protests against the ousted leader, with smaller rallies supporting him, have rocked the South Korean capital since his short-lived Dec 3 martial law decree.

Demonstrators in both camps have vowed to keep up the pressure as the Constitutional Court considers Yoon's fate.

On Monday night, hundreds of South Koreans held a vigil in central Seoul calling for his formal removal.

"I came here again, hoping that we will never have a president like this again," Kim Chan-suk, 67, said at the rally.

"I am coming out every day to continue the fight until the Constitutional Court makes its ruling," protester Han Myung-hak, 52, told AFP.

China visa-free transit extended to 10 days

HONG KONG: China announced yesterday a relaxation of its visa-free transit policy, extending the permitted stay for eligible foreign travellers to 240 hours, or 10 days, from the original 72-144 hours, as authorities aim to lure more foreign visitors.

The measure, which is effective immediately, was announced by the National Immigration Administration (NIA) on its official WeChat account.

People from 54 countries including Russia, Brazil, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, "who transit from China to a third country (region), can enter China without a visa from any of the 60 open ports in 24 provinces and stay in the specified area for no more than 240 hours," it said.

China, since reopening its borders in 2023, has waived visa requirements for travellers to encourage visits to the world's second largest economy.

In November, China's Foreign Ministry said China had extended its visa-free policy to a total of 38 countries.

People from these countries, including Spain, Singapore and the Netherlands, do not need a visa to enter China and can stay for up to 30 days for business, tourism, family visits, exchange and transit purposes.

Foreigners made 8.2 million inbound trips to China, up 48.8% year-on-year in the third quarter of this year. More than half of these were facilitated by the visa-free policy, up 78.6% year-on-year, the NIA said in October. — Reuters

Meta agrees to A\$50m settlement

SYDNEY: Meta Platforms has agreed to a A\$50 million settlement (RM141 million), Australia's privacy watchdog said yesterday, closing long-drawn, expensive legal proceedings for the Facebook parent over the Cambridge Analytica scandal.

The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner had alleged that personal information of some users was being disclosed to Facebook's personality quiz app, *This is Your Digital Life*, as part of the broader scandal.

The breaches were first reported by the *Guardian* in early 2018, and Facebook received fines from regulators in the United States and the UK in 2019.

Australia's privacy regulator has been caught up in the legal battle with Meta since 2020. The personal data of 311,127 Australian Facebook users was "exposed to the risk of being disclosed" to consulting firm Cambridge Analytica and used for profiling purposes, according to the 2020 statement.

It convinced the High Court in March 2023 to not hear an appeal, which is considered to be a win that allowed the watchdog to continue its prosecution.

In June 2023, the country's federal court ordered Meta and the privacy commissioner to enter mediation.

A Meta spokesperson said the company had settled the lawsuit in Australia on a no admission basis, closing a chapter on allegations regarding past practices of the firm. – Reuters

China denies new spying claims

BEIJING: China said claims that a businessman had used his links with Prince Andrew to spy for Beijing were "preposterous", after the UK government voiced mounting concerns over the allegations.

Details emerged last week about Andrew's relationship with Yang Tengbo, a businessman and alleged spy, who had been banned from Britain.

Asked about the case while on a visit to Norway, Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Britain was "concerned about the challenge that China poses" but defended his approach of "engagement" with Beijing.

A spokesman for Beijing's Foreign Ministry said yesterday the "accusations of Chinese espionage are preposterous".

"The development of China-UK relations is in the common interests of both countries and is also conducive to promoting world economic growth and responding to global challenges," Lin Jian said.

Yang, who was reportedly once invited to Andrew's birthday party, said in a statement on Monday that he had "done nothing wrong or unlawful", and had "fallen victim" to a changing "political climate". – AFP

Trump muses about drones, wars and TikTok

PALM BEACH: In his first news conference since his election victory six weeks ago, President-elect Donald Trump covered the Ukraine war, mysterious drones flying over New Jersey, the future of TikTok and lawsuits aimed at the media he often loves to hate.

"The first term, everybody was fighting me. In this term, everybody wants to be my friend. I don't know – my personality

changed or something," he said.

He said his administration will "take a look" at whether the Chinese-owned social media app TikTok should be banned in the US and encouraged the US military to tell the American public more about the nature of the drone sightings that have plagued the East Coast over the last several weeks.

Trump also veered into personal grievances, vowing to

file lawsuits against media companies that he felt have abused him.

"Now you need fair elections, you need borders, and you need a fair press," Trump said.

Of the world's two biggest hotspots, he was blunt: "Hamas needs to reach a deal with Israel releasing the remaining hostages it is holding in Gaza, or face the consequences."

If no ceasefire deal is reached by the time he takes office, Trump said, "it's not going to be pleasant."

He also said Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy should be prepared to make a deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin to bring an end to the nearly three-year-old Ukraine war.

"Gotta make a deal," Trump said. – Reuters

Major earthquake crushes buildings in Vanuatu capital

US embassy staff safely evacuated

SYDNEY: A powerful earthquake hit the Pacific island of Vanuatu yesterday, smashing buildings in the capital Port Vila including one housing the US and other embassies, with a witness telling of bodies seen in the city.

The 7.3-magnitude quake struck at a depth of 57km, some 30km off the coast of Efate, Vanuatu's main island, according to the US Geological Survey.

The ground floor of a building

housing the US, French and other embassies had been crushed under higher floors, resident Michael Thompson said by satellite phone after posting images of the destruction on social media.

"That no longer exists. It is just completely flat. The top three floors are still holding but they have dropped," Thompson said.

All staff in Vanuatu are "safe and accounted for", the US embassy in Papua New Guinea said yesterday.

"All personnel were able to safely evacuate the building," it said in a statement.

The United States said it was closing the mission until further notice because of the destruction.

The New Zealand High Commission, housed in the same building, suffered "significant damage", a statement from Foreign Minister Winston Peters' office said.

"New Zealand is deeply concerned about the significant earthquake in Vanuatu, and the damage it has caused."

Thompson, who runs a zipline adventure business in Vanuatu, said: "There's people in the buildings in town. There were bodies there when we walked past."

A landslide on one road had covered a bus, he said, "so there's obviously some deaths there".

The quake also collapsed at least two bridges, and most mobile

networks were cut off, Thompson said.

"They're just cracking on with a rescue operation. The support we need from overseas is medical evacuation and skilled rescue, kind of people that can operate in earthquakes," he said.

Video footage posted by Thompson and verified by AFP showed uniformed rescuers and emergency vehicles working on a building where an external roof had collapsed onto a number of parked cars and trucks.

The streets of the city were strewn with broken glass and other debris from damaged buildings, the footage showed.

Nibhay Nand, a Sydney-based pharmacist with businesses across the South Pacific, said he had spoken to staff in Port Vila who said most of the store there had been "destroyed" and that other buildings nearby had "collapsed".

"We are waiting for everyone to get online to know how devastating and traumatic this will be," Nand said.

A tsunami warning was issued after the quake but it was soon lifted by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre.

Earthquakes are common in Vanuatu, a low-lying archipelago of 320,000 people that straddles the seismic Ring of Fire, an arc of intense tectonic activity that stretches through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin.

Vanuatu is ranked as one of the countries most susceptible to natural disasters such as earthquakes, storm damage, flooding and tsunamis, according to the annual World Risk Report. – AFP



Security personnel inspecting a collapsed building in Port Vila. – AFP/IC

Two students, teacher shot dead in US school

MADISON: A 15-year-old female student was identified by police as the assailant who opened fire on Monday at a school in the US state of Wisconsin, where a fellow student and teacher were killed and the suspected shooter was found dead.

Shon Barnes, police chief in the state capital Madison, told a press briefing that three people had died and seven others were wounded at the Abundant Life Christian School, a

private Christian school with about 400 students.

"The shooter has now been identified as a 15-year-old," Barnes told reporters, identifying the minor by name.

"She was a student at the school, and evidence suggests she died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound."

Barnes said a second-grade student called emergency services to report the shooting.

Of the six wounded victims who were hospitalised, two students remain in critical condition, two people are in stable condition, and two have been discharged from hospital, the police chief said.

A handgun was recovered at the scene, Barnes said, adding that the suspect's family was cooperating with the investigation.

"We are still working to determine a motive."

One witness interviewed by media said they had heard two gunshots during the attack.

"We heard them and then some people started crying and then we just waited until the police came and then they escorted us out to the church," said the child, who was not identified.

Monday's violence is the latest in a long line of school shootings in the United States.

The shooting happened in the final week of classes before students head to Christmas holidays, said Barbara Wiers, the school's director of elementary and school relations.

This year, there have been at least 487 mass shootings – defined as a shooting involving at least four victims, dead or wounded – across the United States, according to the Gun Violence Archive. – AFP

MOSCOW: A top Russian general accused by Ukraine of being responsible for the use of chemical weapons against Ukrainian troops was assassinated here by Ukraine's SBU intelligence service yesterday in the most high-profile killing of its kind.

Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov (*pic*), who was chief of Russia's Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Protection Troops, was killed outside an apartment building along with his assistant when a bomb hidden in an electric scooter went off, said Russia's Investigative Committee.

An SBU source confirmed to Reuters that the Ukrainian intelligence agency had been behind the hit.

"The liquidation of the chief of the radiation and chemical protection troops of the Russian Federation is the work of the SBU," the source said.

The source said that a scooter containing explosives was detonated, killing both Kirillov and his aide, as they stepped into the entrance of a house on Ryazanskaya Prospekt in Moscow.

Kirillov, 54, is the most senior Russian military officer to be assassinated inside Russia by Ukraine and his murder is likely to prompt the Russian authorities to review security protocols for the army's top brass and to find a way

Ukraine assassinates top Russian general

► Moscow vows revenge against Kyiv leaders

to avenge his killing.

Former president Dmitry Medvedev, now a senior Russian security official, was cited by the state RIA news agency as saying that Ukraine's military and political leadership now faced imminent revenge for Kirillov's murder.

Moscow holds Ukraine responsible for a string of high-profile assassinations on its soil designed to weaken morale and punish those Kyiv regards guilty of war crimes.

Ukraine, which says Russia's war against it poses an existential threat to the Ukrainian state, has made clear it regards such targeted killings as a legitimate tool.

Reuters photographs and video from the scene showed a shattered entrance to an apartment building with bomb-blackened bricks and

the doors hanging off their hinges and what looked like two bodies lying beneath black plastic sheets on the snow.

Investigators said they had opened a criminal case into the murder of two servicemen. Law enforcement sources told Russian media a terrorism case was likely to be opened.

Russia denies Ukrainian allegations it uses chemical weapons on the battlefield and Kirillov, who was married with two sons, was himself sometimes shown on state TV giving briefings at the Defence Ministry in which he accused Ukraine of violating nuclear safety protocols or the West of various alleged crimes.

Maria Zakharova, a spokeswoman for Russia's Foreign Ministry, paid tribute to Kirillov,



saying he had worked "fearlessly" for "the Motherland" to expose what she said were the West's chemical weapons-related and other crimes and what Moscow says were cover-ups in Syria and elsewhere. - Reuters

US hits N. Korea, Russia with new sanctions

WASHINGTON: The United States slapped new sanctions on North Korea and Russia on Monday.

The sanctions, which list North Korean banks, generals and other officials, as well as Russian oil shipping companies, are the latest US measure aimed at disrupting North Korea's support for Russia.

The North Korean banks targeted include Golden Triangle Bank, one of the biggest banks in the northeastern Rason Special Economic Zone, and Pyongyang-based Korea Mandal Credit Bank, which has representatives throughout China, the Treasury Department said.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry said it has blacklisted 11 individuals and 15 entities linked to military cooperation between North Korea and Russia.

The responses came as 10 countries, including the US, South Korea, Australia, Britain, France and Japan, as well as the European Union, issued a joint statement condemning the military ties.

The officials sanctioned by both Washington and Seoul include North Korean generals, including Kim Yong Bok, who has appeared at seven events with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un this year.

The Treasury sanctions freeze the US assets of the entities, ban their trade with Americans and block them from transactions with the US financial system.

The Treasury blacklisted Russia-based companies that it said were shipping oil and gas to North Korea. The companies include Vostok Trading, DV Ink and Novosibirskoblgaz. The sanctions also targeted Sibregiongaz, AO, the parent company and 100% owner of Novosibirskoblgaz. - Reuters



Residents searching through the debris of a house where Al Jazeera journalist Ahmad Baker Al-Louh was killed in Nuseirat on Monday. - AFP/IC

Israeli airstrikes kill 14 Palestinians

CAIRO: Israeli military strikes across the Gaza Strip killed at least 14 Palestinians yesterday, 10 of them in one house in Gaza City, medics said as tanks pushed deeper towards the western area of Rafah in the south.

Medics said the Israeli airstrike on the house in the Daraj suburb of Gaza City destroyed the building and damaged nearby houses. Four other people were killed in two separate airstrikes in the city and the town of Beit Lahiya north of the enclave.

In Rafah, near the border with

Egypt, Israeli tanks pushed deeper towards the western area of Mawasi, known as a humanitarian-designated area, residents said.

Heavy fire from tanks rolling into the area forced dozens of families sheltering there to flee northwards towards Khan Younis.

Israel's air and land offensive has killed more than 45,000 people and has displaced nearly the entire population and left much of the enclave in ruins.

On the ceasefire front, an Israeli technical team was in Doha for

working-level talks with Qatari mediators on "remaining issues" in a Gaza truce and hostage release deal, an official with knowledge of the talks told Reuters on Monday.

The talks are focused on bridging gaps between Israel and Hamas on the deal US President Joe Biden outlined on May 31, the official said.

Efforts by Egypt, Qatar, and the United States to reach a truce in Gaza and a release of hostages have gained momentum in recent weeks, though there has been no breakthrough.

The three countries have, for more than a year, led rounds of fruitless talks to broker an end to the 14-month-long war in Gaza.

In previous rounds, disagreements over new demands that Israel introduced about its future military presence in Gaza obstructed a deal, even after Hamas accepted a version of the proposal Biden introduced in May.

A round of talks in mid-October failed to produce a deal, with Hamas rejecting a short-term ceasefire proposal. - Reuters

Tighter rules for foreign aviation repair stations

WASHINGTON: The Federal Aviation Administration said it has finalised rules requiring repair stations in foreign countries to conduct drug and alcohol testing for employees performing maintenance functions for US airlines.

The rule, which requires compliance by December 2027, will affect 977 repair stations in 65 countries. The agency said foreign governments or repair stations can obtain a waiver.

"This rule will ensure these employees are held to high level of safety standards, regardless of where they are located," said FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker.

The rule, which requires repair stations to send their testing data electronically to USDOT, was proposed in December 2023 by the FAA, and Congress required the agency to implement its provisions.

The FAA has been considering the issue for decades. Aviation unions for years have called for testing for maintenance functions that are outsourced to repair stations outside the United States.

Airlines, which previously said privacy and employment laws in foreign countries could conflict with US drug and alcohol testing requirements, raised concerns the government may not be able to manage waivers and exemptions submitted. They said the rule could conflict with laws in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, the European Union, China, Singapore, Peru, Japan, Chile, Brazil and others.

Chinese repair stations noted that China forbids use of prohibited drugs. However, drug testing is not commonly requested by companies in China. - Reuters

The brain behind depression

COMMENT

By Dr Hiran Shanake Perera

IMAGINE waking up every day feeling down, struggling with constant anhedonia (the inability to experience pleasure), facing difficulty in social interactions, and having your memory fail you when you need it the most.

These symptoms are just a glimpse into the reality of depression, making it difficult to thrive in your personal, social and professional life.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), major depressive disorder (MDD) is the leading global cause of disease burden, affecting nearly 5% of the world's population and ranking as one of the top causes of global disability.

The burden of depression is now equally prevalent among adolescents and young adults, indicating an increase in the number of individuals relying on long-term prescribed medication to manage its symptoms.

When discussing mental health disorders, it is crucial to recognise the brain as the organ of the mind. The challenge lies not in seeking professional help, but in accurately diagnosing the disorder.

Mental health practitioners often utilise thorough assessments and clinical judgements to diagnose mental health disorders. While medical doctors can directly examine the physical organs they treat, they lack the ability to directly assess the organ that controls mental disorders – the brain.

However, with the advancements of technologies, neuroimaging studies are providing us an opportunity to understand depression alongside other severe mental health disorders from multimodal perspectives.

The brain matters

Neuroimaging research has been instrumental in advancing our understanding of depression, offering profound insights into the intricate workings of the brain.

By employing advanced neuroimaging techniques, such as structural and functional magnetic resonance imaging, and electroencephalography, brain scientists have delved deep into neural mechanisms at play.

The technology has allowed us to explore brain pattern activities and structural changes in key regions linked to mood regulations, such as the amygdala and prefrontal cortex.

Let us explore the findings from two non-invasive brain imaging methods: magnetic



Exploring biomarkers, which are measurable indicators of biological processes, has the potential to transform depression monitoring, diagnosis and treatment. – ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

resonance imaging (MRI), both structural and functional, and electroencephalography (EEG), which can detect brain activity without the need for invasive probes.

The brain's grey matter, the outermost layer composed of densely packed neurons, serves as the hub for processing and relaying information to other brain regions via interconnected neural pathways.

Structural MRI studies have revealed notable changes in grey matter structure, with reduced thickness observed in individuals with depression compared with their non-depressed counterparts.

Additionally, evidence suggests a correlation between depression and memory impairments, with structural MRI indicating a diminished volume in the hippocampus, a key area responsible for memory storage and retrieval.

Beyond structural differences, functional MRI has shed light on distinct patterns of brain activity in regions such as the anterior cingulate cortex and prefrontal cortex, implicated in functions like planning and decision-making.

Notably, depressed individuals exhibit heightened activity in the amygdala, the brain's emotions processing centre, when exposed to facial expressions conveying emotions, coupled with decreased activity in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, associated with higher-order decision-making processes.

EEG, on the other hand, measures the brain's electrical activities. These electrical activities are generated at the gaps (synapses) between neurons as a result of the exchange of neurotransmitters and other ions.

Minuscule voltage fluctuations that happen at the neuronal level can then be detected by the electrodes placed on the scalp. EEG distinguishes different frequency bands, each associated with specific brain states.

With regards to depression, high alpha power during sleep is a consistent finding, particularly with those with suicidal ideation.

Additionally, alpha asymmetry, which reflects the difference in alpha band activity between the left and right frontal hemispheres, offers insights into the approach-withdrawal modal – left hemisphere activity is related to approach motivational behaviour while right hemisphere activation suggests withdrawal tendencies.

Although this is an oversimplification of the neurobiological basis of approach motivation behaviours, there are promising findings.

Left alpha activity was found to be prominent among the depressed compared to the non-depressed, suggesting reduced approach motivation, potentially serving as a prognostic indicator for specific symptoms.

Despite the complexity, understanding these neural patterns offers promising avenues for

identifying and treating depression.

Promising, but not there yet

So, can neuroimaging reliably detect depression? Yes and No. Why? Because its widespread adoption faces significant barriers.

Firstly, sophisticated neuroimaging tools are rather expensive equipment, which can be costly to purchase and maintain. This means not every hospital and private clinic can afford such equipment.

Furthermore, understanding brain scans and test results is complex and requires specialised trained personnel to make sense of the data. Without proper expertise, there is a risk of misinterpretation, leading to inaccurate diagnoses.

Lastly, there are ethical issues and concerns about privacy, which could lead to potential misuse of sensitive brain data. Compliance with regulations and ethical guidelines adds another layer of complexity, often hindering the widespread use of these methods.

Neuroimaging studies have deepened our understanding of depression. Exploring biomarkers, which are measurable indicators of biological processes, has the potential to transform depression monitoring, diagnosis and treatment.

The future of neuroimaging technology in diagnosing depression holds a remarkable promise. Despite its challenges, the potential benefits cannot be overstated.

I am hopeful that ongoing technological advancements will overcome existing challenges, making these diagnostic tools more widely accessible and affordable to the public, and enabling the development of more tailored and effective treatment strategies.

Academic institutions should prioritise funding and resources for studies that explore the efficacy and applications of neuroimaging tools, and establish strong partnerships with the healthcare sector in the country to facilitate the translation of research findings into clinical practice.

I look forward to a future where neuroimaging technology complements existing diagnostic methods, where we can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of depression.

Dr Hiran Shanake Perera is a cognitive neuroscientist, and a senior lecturer at the School of Arts and Liberal Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences and Leisure Management at Taylor's University. He is also the deputy director of the Mental Health and Well-being Impact Lab at Taylor's University. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

EDUCATION

FOCUS 2025

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Satire on Trump's inauguration plan

“DAD has invited Chinese President Xi Jinping to attend his inauguration. All we want is peace around the world.” - Barron Trump on his X account

This post, now taken down by Donald Trump's son Barron, has given rise to a slew of news reports examining the unprecedented invitation, and speculation on the response it is likely to receive.

According to State Department records, it should be noted that no world leader has made an official visit to see a new American president sworn in.

Adding to the suspense from the reports, which have made it the top story in media reporting, is this hot microphone leak of a purported conversation held by several Trump administration officials on the inauguration invitation list.

For obvious reasons, the names of the officials involved are too sensitive to divulge.



ANOTHER TAKE
BY LIM TECK GHEE

Purported conversation picked up from hot mic

Official A: Look, guys. Susie (Whites, White House chief of staff) says that Donnie (Donald Trump) wants this to be the biggest inauguration bash in history. “The greatest show on earth.”

Official B: He also wants this to provide a great start to his term. He has responded to those sceptical about his invitation list and saying “Wow, that is a little risky, isn't it?”

Trump said, “Maybe it is. We'll see what happens. But we like to take little chances.”

Official C: Getting Xi (Jinping, China president) will definitely be a game changer. Inside news is that he is unlikely to attend unless Trump can assure that his speech will not have anything negative about China.

Beijing's Washington boys want Trump to emphasise that he is not going to continue (Joe) Biden's policies aimed at slowing down China's progress, and to assure that the new administration will explore areas for cooperation and mutual benefit. In deeds, not words.

Official A: Okay, then. Let's keep the door open for a Xi surprise. What about the rest of Asia? Can we get a lineup of our allies' leaders to show

the world that we have solid support in Asia Pacific?

Official B: No worries on that. The cocktail circuit of ambassadors has been buzzing with so many dropping hints on how they love Donnie's triumph and are dying to be at the inaugural.

Official C: We should be able to get a good Quad attendance.

Official A: Yup. India has been saying nice things about Trump, and (Narendra) Modi (Indian prime minister) needs all our help to make sure his regime stays stable.

Official B: More than that, Modi is going to be critical in slowing down BRICS. (Vladimir) Putin (Russian president) and Xi are making dedollarisation their target and Donnie wants to stop this.

Official C: Jaishankar (S. Jaishankar, India external affairs minister) has already gone to town in pointing out Modi for helping Trump on Quad during his first term.

He has also responded to Trump's threat to punish countries for dedollarising international trade by imposing 100% tariffs on BRICS countries, saying since the US was India's largest trade partner, New Delhi has no interest in hurting the dollar.

Official A: I hear Kash Patel (Trump nominee for FBI director) is a fellow Gujarati as Modi. That is going to make some difference to India definitely.

Official B: Leaders of QUAD. Five Eyes and Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) should be given front row seats. But we will want to make sure that (Justin) Trudeau (Canadian prime minister) and Modi are not seated together. Those two really hate each other's guts.

Official C: Hey, that is not a bad idea. Counter-intuitive. Seat them together. Get CNN and CBC to focus, and then to pan on Donnie - ‘Donnie brings peace to Canada India relations’.

What a coup that would be. That, together with Ukraine, will make Donnie go into the history books as one of the world's greatest peacemakers. He is going to love this, I tell you.

Official A: Let's do it. We have to



Trump's inauguration as the 47th president of the United States is scheduled to take place on Monday, Jan 20, 2025. - REUTERS/SPIC

repair the damage from Trump's tweet calling Trudeau the ‘governor of the great state of Canada’. It is true, but my Ottawa friends are pissed off with Canada being labelled as the United States's 51st state.

Official B: Terrible poll figures for Trudeau. Donnie knows Trudeau needs all the help he can get, so he will continue to squeeze him.

Down south, the Australian media has been giving Trump a hard time. Let's make sure that they know we don't like it. Give Albo (Anthony Albanese, Australian prime minister) less attention.

Official C: Yeah, big mouth (Kevin) Rudd (Australian ambassador to the US) too. Donnie can't stand the sight of him.

Official A: He should be gone before long. Their boys have been trying to suck up to us big time now that they don't have Biden and need us to deliver on Aukus (the trilateral partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom and the US).

Official B: I hear through the grapevine that Albo is angling to organise a victory tour for Donnie,

but he is unlikely to agree.

Official C: Let's put Albo with the Pacific island crew. One thing is for sure. Donnie wants Australia, Japan, Taiwan and others to pay a lot more for staying on in the Pacific.

Meanwhile, we have to make sure that Yoon (Suk Yeol, South Korean president) stays out.

Official A: I'm sure Yoon will be trying his best to have us save his skin but frankly, he is a lost cause.

Official B: I found him a refreshing change, especially when he sang *American Pie* during his visit. Nice voice.

Official C: I remember that. Really something. But it looks like it is *Jailhouse Rock* next for Yoon. Just as well that it was under Sleepy Joe. That man's now toxic, and don't forget, Trump is still looking to do a deal with Kim Jong Un (North Korean leader).

Official A: Okay. There is also Bongbong Marcos (Philippines president) to consider. He has been amongst the first to congratulate Donnie after his victory, and his boys have been ringing us off the hook to make sure he is invited.

Official B: Yes. Same with Modi. Did you know that Jaishankar announced that Modi's call was one of the first three from world leaders that Trump took.

In Bongbong's case, the Filipino media is making a big deal of the connection through Imelda (Marcos). According to them, the president's mother and Trump have known each other from way back during her visits to the UN in New York and during their time in exile in Hawaii. May have stayed in his hotel. You know, personal connections are important for Donnie.

Official A: We have to make sure that the inauguration is a global spectacle. This will remind the world of America's leadership - in politics, economics and showmanship.

Official B: That should be easy to do, with the millions of dollars pouring in from our tech titans and every leader wanting an invitation and the chance to shake Donnie's hand.

Lim Teck Ghee's Another Take is aimed at demystifying social orthodoxy. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

Empowering consumers to make informed decisions

EDUCATING consumers is a critical component of effective communication, and it involves providing knowledge, skills and awareness for consumers to make informed decisions.

Educated consumers are more likely to make choices that align with their values and needs, fostering trust, loyalty and long-term relationships with businesses.

Educated consumers are also able to achieve greater consumer rights and address issues before them critically, and seek solutions.

There are a few areas where the average housewife and other consumers are ignorant:

○ Many consumers today cannot distinguish an imitation product from a genuine one, but they should be able to know the difference.

○ Many do not know the difference between a guarantee and warranty.

○ Consumers should make it a point to learn how to make a complaint and get redress when they are cheated by businesses.

○ They should also know their legal rights as consumers, and learn to check for test reports before buying any product.

Many consumers fall prey to false and misleading advertising and are gypped by door-to-door salesmen.

Consumers need information to make the best choices so they can choose products that are fairly priced, safe and durable.

Consumer education is for the

protection of consumers and has never been more urgent, especially in this present time when doubtful trade practices are rampant.

Businesses have resorted to many insidious ways of cheating - through dishonest advertising, misleading labelling, short weight, imitations, poor quality and even dangerous products - which have to be brought to the notice of innocent and sometimes gullible public.

Our market today is penetrated by many imitation products, making it difficult to distinguish between imitation and genuine.

There are many prohibited food colouring and food additives that

are being used in the manufacture of edible products.

Consumer education programmes should be action-oriented to help consumers with concrete suggestions to buy wisely and get their money's worth. These programmes should cover market studies, research, testing of products, with reference to international studies.

In many Western countries, thousands of books, periodicals and test reports are published and disseminated for public information and education, and the mass media contribute directly to this process.

We too can make progress in consumer education to better equip our consumers in these times of high and perplexing price increases.

Education means sharing valuable information and resources to help

consumers better understand products, services, industry practices or broader issues related to the brand's offerings.

By being transparent and proactive, businesses can build lasting relationships with their customers.

It is time consumers learn to evaluate marketing strategies critically and compare products and services effectively.

Last but not least, consumer education should include questioning the value and quality of products and services for their worth, and making informed choices, so that consumers will not be misled by false advertising.

Bulbir Singh is a former president of the Negeri Sembilan Consumers Association. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com



CONSUMER RIGHTS
BY BULBIR SINGH

Celebrating innovators' ingenuity and resilience

➤ Top three winners of AmBank BizRACE Season 4 triumph over 1,000 competitors

PETALING JAYA: AmBank Group recently celebrated the ingenuity and resilience of some of Malaysia's best innovators as they announced the Top 3 winners of AmBank BizRACE Season 4 at an awards ceremony at Menara Ken, TTDL.

With 1,000 companies vying for the top honours, this year's competition was a showcase of remarkable leadership in growth, innovation, and sustainability, focusing on critical themes such as Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR4.0) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG).

The Final Pitch allowed participants to deep dive into their 12-18-month business strategy and projected impact in adopting these themes.

In the end, the Top 3 winners stood out for their groundbreaking strategies and contributions to the industry.

The Champion, Sydney Cake House Sdn Bhd, demonstrated a pioneering spirit and an exceptional commitment to embracing IR4.0 and ESG principles. The company impressed the judges with its advancements in adopting IR4.0 innovations, building on initial steps taken in 2014. Through the competition, they showcased the implementation of digital inventory management, smart factory systems, and a waste heat recovery system, resulting in over a 70% reduction in wastage.

The First Runner-Up, Diverse Integrated Sdn Bhd, was recognised for its innovative approach to developing sustainable wood solutions for the construction industry. The company has embraced IR4.0 and ESG by adopting electric vehicle (EV) forklifts, utilising solar energy, and implementing sustainable waste management practices, with the goal of reducing carbon emissions by 30% by 2030.

The Second Runner-Up, BloomThis Flora Sdn Bhd, was recognised for their effective use of AI Data Analytics, Internet of Things (IoT), and visualisation tools to enhance their on-demand e-commerce operations. As part of their commitment to sustainability, BloomThis also installed solar panels at their warehouse facilities. These initiatives have driven impressive financial growth, with profits increasing fivefold over the past four years.

AmBank Group business banking managing director Christopher Yap said: "Our Top 3 winners represent the pinnacle of innovation and progress.



Yap (left) posing with representatives from AmBank and Sydney Cake House Sdn Bhd.

Throughout this season, we witnessed incredible passion, growth potential and scalability from many of our participants, demonstrating their readiness to adopt IR4.0 and ESG principles. By working closely with our programme partners, we intend to continue to design impactful programmes to empower businesses. We are proud to celebrate the achievements of our winners and hope to inspire other manufacturers to pursue innovation and sustainable growth."

Bosch Rexroth Malaysia managing director and CEO Darren Chan said: "It has been truly inspiring to witness the creativity and commitment demonstrated by all the participating businesses during the final pitch. The innovative ideas and determination to pushing boundaries are a testament to the immense potential in Malaysia. We're proud to support AmBank BizRACE and remain committed to fostering collaborations that turn ideas into impactful solutions. We look forward to continuing this journey of growth and innovation together."

Malaysian Green Technology and Climate Change Corporation Group CEO Shamsul Bahar Mohd Nor shared: "We are proud to partner with AmBank BizRACE Season 4, a programme that highlights the extraordinary potential of Malaysian business to champion both innovation and sustainability. The outstanding achievements of the Top 3 finalists exemplify the transformative

power of Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Environmental, Social, and Governance principles. These companies have demonstrated remarkable innovation and a steadfast commitment to sustainability, setting a new standard for excellence in the manufacturing sector. This initiative complements our mission to empower businesses to contribute meaningfully to Malaysia's transition to a greener, more resilient economy. Congratulations to the winners for their inspiring achievements, which pave the way for a sustainable and prosperous future."

Pantas CEO Max Lee said: "The AmBank BizRACE has been a pivotal step for these businesses in preparing for international expansion. By leveraging Pantas' carbon management and ESG platform, they efficiently measure and monitor their Scope 1 and 2 emissions, track key ESG indicators, and automate reporting - boosting both their sustainability performance and competitive edge in global markets."

The total prize value this season amounts to RM2,000,000, which comprises development programmes centred around IR4.0 and ESG workshops, one-to-one consultations and coaching, Green, Carbon Management & ESG Solutions, and on-site factory assessments by industry specialists from Bosch Rexroth, MGTC, as well as Pantas Software.

UOB wins awards for prioritising energy efficiency and employee well-being

KUALA LUMPUR: UOB Malaysia recently announced that its corporate headquarters, UOB Plaza 1 Kuala Lumpur (UOB Plaza 1 KL), has been awarded top honours for energy efficiency.

The building was the winner in the Energy Efficient Building categories at the Asean Energy Efficiency and Conservation Best Practices Awards 2024 and the National Energy Awards 2024.

The Asean Energy Efficiency and Conservation Best Practices Awards, presented by the Asean Centre for Energy acknowledges private sector's excellence in advancing energy efficiency and conservation across the region.

Meanwhile, the National Energy Awards spearheaded by the Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Climate Change recognise industry leaders for their commitment to implementing sustainable energy practices within Malaysia.

UOB Malaysia's commitment to workplace well-being at UOB Plaza 1 KL also won the Bank the Workplace Wellness Programme Award at the ESG Business Awards 2024 for the second consecutive year.

UOB Malaysia CEO Ng Wei Wei said: "We are honoured to receive these recognitions at both regional and national levels, which affirmed our commitment to sustainability.

"By combining design, purpose, and function, we have created a space that not only embodies our values but demonstrates how we balance long-term growth with responsibility.

"UOB Plaza 1 Kuala Lumpur stands as a testament to our journey of advancing ESG best practices that create lasting value for our people, customers and the community."

Completed in September 2022, the 37-storey UOB Plaza 1 KL is the first bank headquarters in Malaysia to achieve platinum ratings from both Malaysia's GreenRE and Singapore's BCA Green Mark.

Heineken expands water-balancing efforts

■ BY **JOHN GILBERT**
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KUALA LUMPUR: Heineken Malaysia Bhd is investing RM6 million in phase four of the Working Actively Through Education & Rehabilitation (WATER) Project to further protect resources in its water-balancing initiatives through 2030.

Corporate affairs and legal director Renuka Indrarajah said the company is committed to expanding its impact and will continue adopting best practices and investing in water efficiency to meet its ambitious 2030 target of using 2.6 hectolitres of water per hectolitre of beer.

"In 2023, we exceeded our water balancing

target by 223%, thanks to our continued collaboration with the Global Environment Centre, government agencies, and local communities to protect water resources.

"We will also continue sharing our best practices on strategic platforms such as climate summits and workshops, enabling other companies to replicate our success and best practices in alignment with global practices to support water security in Malaysia," she told SunBiz.

To date, Heineken Malaysia has invested RM15 million in water management initiatives.

These efforts have significantly advanced the company's water-balancing initiatives to support water security in Selangor.

Renuka pointed out that since achieving

zero waste to landfill in 2017, Heineken Malaysia has continually enhanced its waste management practices.

In 2023, the company demonstrated its dedication to a circular economy by generating RM2 million through recycling initiatives.

"Our focus remains on creating value from byproducts and waste materials, such as converting spent grains and other organic waste into organic fertilisers and bioconversion products.

"This approach supports both sustainability and value creation by minimising waste," Renuka said.

She added that, given Malaysia's evolving sustainability landscape, Heineken Malaysia has been sharing its water management best

practices with business partners.

"In 2024, we work closely with the United Nations Global Compact Malaysia and Brunei to enhance ESG awareness among our top suppliers, providing capability-building support to create long-term value for suppliers and stakeholders, ultimately benefiting our communities," Renuka said.

On the social front, Renuka said in addition to championing diversity and inclusivity in the workplace and supporting trade partners and bartenders through the Star Academy programme, Heineken Malaysia is also collaborating with four NGOs under its Heineken Cares programme to enhance community resilience in water access and food security through Sokong.



Honoured as one of top performers in combatting fraud in Malaysia

PETALING JAYA: Berjaya Sampo Insurance Bhd was honoured as one of the top performing insurance companies in combatting fraud at the recently concluded FIS Industry Showcase held in Kuala Lumpur.

Presented by Insurance Services Malaysia Bhd (ISM), the award celebrates insurance companies that have effectively utilised the Fraud Intelligence System (FIS) to address fraudulent activities in the industry.

Berjaya Sampo CEO Tan Sek Kee said: "This award is a testament to our unwavering commitment to integrity and transparency in the insurance sector. Leveraging advanced tools like the FIS enables us to protect not only our customers but also contribute to a fair and trustworthy insurance ecosystem."

FIS plays a pivotal role in identifying and mitigating fraudulent activities, empowering insurers to enhance operational efficiency and build greater accountability. Berjaya Sampo's success in utilising this system reflects its proactive efforts to combat fraud and maintain the highest ethical standards in its operations.

Additionally, as an honoured member of the Fraud Prevention Committee at ISM, Berjaya Sampo was nominated to be part of the 2024 Global Insurance Fraud Summit held from Nov 10 to 13, in Singapore. This recognition reinforces Berjaya Sampo's position as a trusted insurance provider and its dedication to fostering a safer, more reliable industry for customers and stakeholders alike.

Malaysia-China 10-month trade reaches RM396 billion

■ BY **AIMIE SHAZRIE**
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KUALA LUMPUR: Trade between Malaysia and China reached RM396.14 billion (US\$86.26 billion) for the period of January to October 2024, marking a milestone in the enduring economic relationship between the two countries.

Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade) chairman Datuk Seri Reezal Merican Naina Merican under-scored the depth of the 50-year partnership.

"The five-decade long partnership has developed closeness between Malaysia and China that has withstood the test of time. This relationship has nurtured a resilient partnership rooted in cultural and economic collaboration," he said at the Malaysia-China Summit 2024 (MCS 2024) yesterday.

Reezal said China has maintained its position as Malaysia's top trading partner for 15 consecutive

➤ Matrade chairman highlights enduring economic relationship between the two countries

years, contributing 16.6% of Malaysia's total global trade.

As Malaysia prepares for its chairmanship of Asean in 2025, he highlighted opportunities for regional trade integration, noting that exports to Asean and China collectively made up RM518.55 billion of Malaysia's total exports for 2024.

"This figure reflects the success of regional trade agreements like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which has streamlined trade flows and strengthened economic cooperation. Moving forward, we will leverage Malaysia's role as Asean Chair to deepen intraregional connections, fostering a more

open, inclusive and rules-based economic framework. Malaysia's strategic position within Asean and its strong ties with China allow us to serve as a gateway for businesses to access larger markets, driving growth and shared prosperity across the region," he added.

Additionally, Reezal emphasised Matrade's key initiatives, including plans to introduce Malaysia's International Halal Showcase to Shanghai and explore untapped Chinese markets such as its Western Region. "This presents significant opportunities for Malaysian businesses and showcases Malaysia's leadership in the global halal economy," he said.

MCS 2024, a three-day summit

launched by Transport Minister Anthony Loke, serves as the grand finale of the celebration of Malaysia-China's 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties. It is projected to unlock trade and investment opportunities exceeding RM2 billion.

Loke said Malaysia and China's diplomatic relationship continues to grow stronger through economic cooperation and critical infrastructure development, particularly in enhancing rail connectivity across the Asean region.

This effort, he added, aligns with national transport policy, which aims for more sustainable and efficient transport.

Loke emphasised Malaysia's pivotal role in strengthening Asean's rail network, connecting regional nations to China.

"In discussions with neighbouring countries such as Thailand and Laos, Malaysia is focused on resolving border customs procedures, which remain a significant challenge for rail freight movement," he told reporters at the summit.

He said improved rail connectivity will not only expedite regional trade but also complement maritime transport, which currently dominates 95% of Asean trade. "The Pan-Asian rail network exists, but it has yet to operate on a large scale. Malaysia is committed to advancing the rail system as an efficient alternative mode of transport,"

The minister highlighted the importance of mega projects such as the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL), which is expected to be a key catalyst for Malaysia's economic development. "Once completed, not only passengers can benefit from the ECRL, but we also aim to shift freight transport from roads to rail. This move will ease highway congestion and reduce logistics costs," Loke said.



Loke (left) presenting a token to China's ambassador to Malaysia Quyang Yujing, witnessed by Reezal.

Huawei Learning Centre to enhance Malaysian talent in advanced tech

KUALA LUMPUR: In a move to bolster Malaysia's technological capabilities, the Manpower Department (JTM) under the Ministry of Human Resources (MoHR) is partnering with Huawei Malaysia to set up the country's first Huawei Learning Centre within the Industrial Training Institute in Kuala Lumpur.

Human Resources Minister Sim Chee Keong said the collaboration is the result of their recent discussion with Huawei during Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's visit to China.

"Just within a month, we have translated that discussion into reality, demonstrating the dynamic co-

operation between Malaysia and China," he said at a memorandum of understanding exchange ceremony between JTM and Huawei, during the Malaysia-China Summit 2024 yesterday.

Sim said the new learning centre aims to train 2,000 participants, including industry engineers, new employees, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) trainers and students, in emerging technologies such as 5G telecommunications, artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing and data centres.

"Central to this collaboration is the equipping of our TVET institutions with cutting-edge technology and

industry-relevant curricular content. This will serve as a pilot project for integrating hands-on training in these advanced fields."

The trainees will undergo assessments and receive joint certifications from both the government and Huawei. "This is a key pillar of our collaboration, the synergistic integration between our institutions and the industry," Sim said.

He highlighted that the MoHR-Huawei partnership is part of the government's broader efforts to address the country's shortage of skilled technical workers. "We are short of at least 60,000 engineers in Malaysia, and this is a phenomenon

seen across the world," he noted.

The establishment of Huawei Learning Centre in Kuala Lumpur is expected to be the first of many such collaborations nationwide. "I hope to see this collaboration expanded to include the establishment of additional Huawei learning centers in other TVET campuses, such as in Johor and Penang," Sim said.

Huawei Malaysia CEO Simon Sun emphasised the importance of fostering a culture of continuous learning, underscoring their commitment to upskilling, reskilling and cross-skilling talent to meet the demands of the digital economy.

"The partnership will leverage

established ICT modules from the Huawei ICT Academy, covering key areas such as 5G, AI, IoT, and cloud computing to equip participants with essential competencies for the modern job market," he said.

Talent, he added, should be nurtured with the same intensity as product development, describing this collaboration as a powerful example of public-private synergy.

"This initiative aims to empower Malaysian talent, enhance their competitiveness, and prepare them for high-value roles in the ICT industry, contributing to Malaysia's digital transformation journey," Sun said. - by **AIMIE SHAZRIE**



Worldwide Stainless revives Bahru Stainless

➤ US\$95 million acquisition revitalises Malaysia's stainless steel industry, positions country as a key player in global market

PETALING JAYA: Worldwide Stainless Sdn Bhd has revitalised Malaysia's stainless steel industry with its US\$95 million (RM424.4 million) acquisition of Bahru Stainless Sdn Bhd.

The reopening of this iconic Pasir Gudang facility not only restores operations but positions Malaysia as a key player in the global stainless steel market.

"This acquisition is more than a restart. It's a transformation," said CEO Danny Tan. "We are combining innovation, sustainability, and efficiency to create a future-ready plant that meets global standards."

Worldwide Stainless is implementing a streamlined production process to enhance efficiency and sustainability. This strategy aligns with its goal to make Bahru Stainless a leader in cold-rolled stainless steel manufacturing.

The plant's annual capacity of 300,000 metric tons will be ramped up gradually, ensuring operational stability and quality consistency.

Tan explained, "This is not just a cosmetic overhaul. We're investing in workforce upskilling and adopting innovative technologies to secure long-term growth. Bahru Stainless is set to be a global benchmark of excellence."

The plant has rehired 90% of its retrenched workforce, reinstating skilled professionals with decades of expertise.

This rehiring underscores the company's commitment to retaining talent and ensuring continuity in operations. Worldwide Stainless is focused on balancing domestic and international market demands.

As Malaysia's sole producer of cold-rolled stainless steel, the company will support local industries, including construction, automotive, and manufacturing. Globally, it aims to penetrate high-growth markets in Europe, the US, and emerging regions.

"Our dual strategy ensures we contribute to Malaysia's economy while expanding our footprint internationally," said Tan. "We're

delivering quality products to meet the demands of diverse industries."

The company is also diversifying its portfolio to include high-value sectors such as renewable energy, medical equipment, and advanced manufacturing. This strategic move positions Bahru Stainless to address the evolving needs of modern markets while enhancing its competitive edge.

The company is integrating eco-friendly practices into operations while fostering

strategic alliances to promote Malaysia's industrial capabilities on a global stage.

Participation in international trade exhibitions and collaborations with key players are paving the way for Bahru Stainless to become a symbol of reliability and innovation.

"We are committed to elevating Malaysia's position in the global market," said Tan. "Through quality, sustainability, and innovation, we aim to set new benchmarks in the stainless steel industry."

Backed by AmBank Group, which financed 80% of the acquisition, Worldwide Stainless' leadership team brings decades of expertise to this ambitious venture.

Their vision ensures Bahru Stainless' resurgence as a symbol of Malaysia's industrial prowess.



Tan (in white coat) on his rounds at the plant with his team of professionals.

Graphjet achieves breakthrough in producing synthetic graphite using its patented technology

PETALING JAYA: Graphjet Technology, a developer of patented technologies to produce graphite and graphene directly from agricultural waste, has achieved key breakthroughs in catalysing graphitisation to produce high-quality synthetic graphite with its patented green graphite production technology.

"Graphjet's artificial green graphite, produced from palm-based biomass residues, has been tested by an authoritative third-party agency, resulting in a purity level of 99.99% and a graphitisation level of 98.8%, both of which exceed the standards of high-quality graphite," said CEO and co-founder Aiden Lee.

He added that these results verify that their patented technology is mature and reliable and that they are committed to providing industry-leading artificial graphite products to global

customers, backed by proven metrics that they can trust.

"These significant innovations further validate our technology as we position ourselves as the world's leading supplier of green graphite," he said.

Graphjet's green graphite technology is the first in the world to produce artificial graphite directly from palm kernel shells, a widely available waste product in Malaysia and Indonesia. Pilot-scale testing has demonstrated that Graphjet's artificial graphite can achieve purity levels of up to 99.99%, validating the company's technology and its ability to effectively compete with all forms of graphite production, including mining and other synthetic graphite operations.

Graphjet has achieved the highest levels of both purity and graphitisation among all

biomass graphite production technologies, which further demonstrates its suitability for the production of semiconductors and anode materials for high-performance electric vehicle batteries. Notably, the company's technological achievements have been validated by third-party labs in China.

Graphjet is rapidly expanding its operations to meet the growing global demand for green graphite. The company recently commissioned the world's first and largest green graphite facility in Malaysia, with an annual production capacity of up to 3,000 metric tons. This facility is capable of supporting battery production for approximately 40,000 electric vehicles per year. Per kilogramme of graphite produced, Graphjet's patented technology produces only 2.95kg carbon dioxide emissions, significantly lower than traditional methods.

Bank Negara announces reappointments to Shariah Advisory Council

KUALA LUMPUR: Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) has announced the reappointments of Mufti Selangor Sahibus Samahah Datuk Setia Dr Anhar Opir, Dr Marjan Muhammad and Dr Ahmad Basri Ibrahim as members of the Shariah Advisory Council (SAC) members.

In a statement yesterday, BNM said Anhar's reappointment will begin from Nov 1, 2024 until Oct 31, 2026, followed by Marjan from Nov 1, 2024 until Oct 31, 2027 and Ahmad Basri from Jan 1, 2025 until Dec 31, 2027.

The central bank said the appointments are in accordance with section 53(1) of the Central Bank of Malaysia Act 2009.

"With the reappointments, the SAC will comprise a total of seven members with expertise and experience in Shariah, Islamic finance and law.

"This includes Professor (Prof) Dr Ashraf Md Hashim as the chairman, followed by Prof Dr Engku Rabiah Adawiah Engku Ali (deputy chair), Datuk Prof Dr Mohamad Akram Laldin (member) and Burhanuddin Lukman (member)," it said.

Meanwhile, BNM also expressed its appreciation to Tan Sri Mohd Zawawi Salleh and Zainal Abidin Jamal for their invaluable contributions throughout their tenure. It noted that Mohd Zawawi will complete his term of service on the SAC on Dec 31, 2024, while Zainal Abidin has completed his term of service on Oct 31, 2024.

Both Mohd Zawawi and Zainal Abidin contributed immensely to the deliberations of the SAC and towards the overall development of Islamic finance in Malaysia, it noted.

The SAC is the highest authority for ascertaining Islamic law for purposes of Islamic financial business in Malaysia and the council also advises BNM on syariah issues relating to Islamic financial businesses, activities or transactions. – Bernama

Marine & General reports RM18.3m pre-tax profit for Q2

PETALING JAYA: Marine & General Bhd reported revenue of RM93.1 million for the second quarter ended Oct 31, 2024, representing a 1.3% improvement compared to the preceding year's corresponding quarter.

In line with the improved revenue, the group recorded a profit before taxation of RM18.3 million, representing a 52.4% increase from the RM12 million profit recorded in the preceding year.

The group recorded revenue of RM184.3 million for the cumulative six months, a 4.4% improvement over the RM176.5 million revenue in the previous corresponding period. Profit before taxation came to RM35.8 million for the six months, representing a 53% increase from the RM23.4 million profit recorded in the previous corresponding period.

Marine & General's board maintains a cautiously optimistic outlook for the current financial year, underpinned by Petrolim Nasional Bhd's strong pipeline of projects and Malaysia's improving economic fundamentals.

Bumper year for local cargo ports, 2025 will be even better

► Their operations are driving economic growth and activity in the real estate sector, says expert

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia cargo ports have had a record year in 2024, and 2025 promises to be even better, with major implications for the economy and real estate markets.

That's according to new data released yesterday by Member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (MRICS) Irhamy Ahmad.

Ahmad is a chartered valuation surveyor and CEO/founder of Irhamy Valuers International. In Malaysia, it collaborates with consulting firm Andersen Global.

"In total, we estimate that Malaysian cargo ports will have moved some 778 million metric tons of goods by the end of the year and delivered economic benefits worth RM657 billion," said Ahmad.

"In 2025, those numbers could increase by 3% to 5%, meaning the ports could handle 817 million metric tonnes of goods next year and add some RM690 billion to our GDP. Many in Singapore's shipping industry are shocked that Malaysia's Tanjung Pelepas port ranks as the fifth most efficient in the world on the World Bank's Container Port Performance Index ranks. On the same index, Singapore only ranks 17th. That shows how far Malaysia's ports have come," he added.

In terms of the amount of cargo moved, he said the efficiency with

which it was moved, and the resulting contribution to Malaysia's economy, 2024 was the best year yet for Malaysian cargo ports and a sector in which we are one of the world's best. One development that has helped Malaysian ports increase their throughput this year are increasing shipping links to India.

"The only limitation in the outlook is that the absence of a cruise terminal capable of handling large cruise ships prevents the ports from delivering even more for the economy," said Ahmad, adding that the cargo ports achieved 2024's unprecedented outcomes while being more efficient than ever.

As just one example, he said Port of Tanjung Pelepas (PTP) this year ranks as the most efficient container port in Southeast Asia. It is the fifth most efficient in the world.

"PTP in 2024 also became the first Malaysian port recorded as handling over 1 million TEUs in a single month. It is likely that Port Klang moves even more cargo than that, but I don't have hard data confirming it for any single month.

"By handling 1.1 million TEUs per month, both PTP and Port Klang rank in the global top 10. Malaysia is the fifth most connected country in the world, and has virtually the same level of



This year, PTP is ranked the most efficient container port in Southeast Asia and fifth globally.-- BERNAMAPIX

connectivity as the US, which just edges past Malaysia for fourth place," said Ahmad.

"Port operations, shipping, and marine transport contribute a staggering 40% to Malaysia's GDP, or about RM657 billion of economic activity every year. Malaysia's ports serve as transshipment hubs in Southeast Asia, meaning that trade going between other countries are first shipped to Malaysia before being shipped on to their final destinations. This earns our ports revenue and creates good jobs in Malaysia," he added.

"Just as our ports drive economic growth, they also drive activity in the real estate market. PTP and Port Klang now handle record cargo flows and serve as global transshipment hubs, which

means we are already seeing increased demand for warehousing, distribution centres, industrial parks, and cold storage facilities nearby," he said.

"As the ports continue to grow in 2025 and beyond, expect more demand in these asset classes especially in Selangor, Johor, and Penang. Higher demand means higher prices for land and facilities.

"We already see the impact on the ground. Land prices at Johor's Sedenak Tech Park, which is about a 50-minute drive from Port of Tanjung Pelepas, have nearly doubled from about RM40 per sq ft to as much as RM80 in just two years," said Ahmad, adding that Malaysia's cargo ports are a fundamental driver of its economy and of its real estate market.

Bateriku.com to provide support to CAM light commercial vehicle owners

SHAH ALAM: Bateriku M Sdn Bhd and CAM R&A Marketing Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of Sendok Group, have partnered up through a memorandum of agreement to enhance vehicle ownership experience for CAM light commercial vehicle clients.

R&A Marketing Sdn Bhd, distributor of CAM light commercial vehicles, offers a lineup that includes vans, minibuses, light trucks, special-purpose vehicles, and electric commercial vehicles under the CAM EV brand.

Bateriku.com meanwhile is Malaysia's Connected Roadside Assistance Solutions Provider, providing around the clock vehicle breakdown support for ICE, hybrid and electric vehicles.

Through this collaboration, CAM clients can look forward to a seamless after-sales support with round-the-clock breakdown support via Bateriku.com's 24/7 contact centre and its nationwide trained gig mobile technicians BHero, who is set to provide on-site, on-demand roadside assist services including jumpstarts, battery replacement, tyre and towing services, anytime, anywhere.

The appointment of Bateriku.com as CAM's strategic service provider also brings about innovative offerings such as onsite battery replacement services, scheduled vehicle pick-and-drop services for CAM utilising Bateriku.com's workshop ecosystem that includes established businesses including Petronas AutoExpert and Mannol Workshops.

Bateriku.com CEO Azarol Faizi Zakaria Ansari said, "I'd like to thank CAM Sendok Group for their trust in our services. This collaboration reflects our shared commitment to enhancing customer experiences by delivering innovative and sustainable automotive solutions. With CAM established expertise and our scalable sharing economy platform, we are setting new standards for convenience and efficiency in the industry."

CAM Sendok Group senior manager Gwee Chin Li shared, "Throughout 2024, we have piloted numerous after sales support with Bateriku.com which includes their on-site, on-demand roadside assistance solutions as well as their innovative pick-and-drop services. "This strategic partnership is projected to generate significant revenue growth, with additional annual service demands estimated at 3,000 to 4,000 vehicles."

EMCC aims to expand pawnbroking network to 80 outlets next year

KUALA LUMPUR: Evergreen Max Cash Capital Bhd (EMCC), a pawnbroking service provider, announced significant progress and an ambitious outlook, just over a year since its listing on the ACE Market of Bursa Malaysia.

Within the past year, EMCC's "Pajaking" conventional pawnbroking network has expanded from 22 to 28 outlets. The group also commenced the offering of Islamic pawnbroking business under "Ar Rahn Cahaya" which has surged to 39 outlets, with a target to surpass 50 outlets by the end of the first

quarter of 2025.

These developments put the group on track to achieve its goal of operating 80 pawnbroking outlets by 2025, largely supported by the high growth of its Islamic pawnbroking services.

Executive director and group managing director Datuk Low Kok Chuan said, "We are scaling up rapidly to capitalise on the growing demand for pawnbroking services. Our Islamic pawnbroking operations under Ar Rahn Cahaya are thriving, and EMCC is well-positioned to serve customers

seeking Shariah-compliant financial solutions. With our strong understanding of the market, we are able to strategically identify and establish outlets in prime locations."

So far, the group's pawnbroking outlets are located across Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Pahang, Perak and Terengganu.

To complement its core offerings, the group also operates "Cahaya Gold" retail outlets, trading in gold and gold products. This division has benefitted from the overall rise in global gold prices which have increased from US\$2,663 per ounce

in Q3'24 from US\$1,850 per ounce in Q3'23.

To fund further expansion, EMCC recently announced a private placement exercise to raise approximately RM30 million. Proceeds will be mainly used to grow its pawnshop network and raise cash capital to support higher deployment of pawn loans to meet rising customer needs.

Moving forward, the group will continue to focus on growing via organic expansion and acquisitions to serve a broader and more diverse customer base.

Global uncertainties could temper Malaysia's GDP growth

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's GDP is projected to grow 4.9% in 2025, driven by domestic tailwinds and tempered by global economic uncertainties, according to research houses.

Maybank Investment Bank (Maybank IB) noted that the forecast marks a moderation from the 5.2% expansion recorded in the first nine months of 2024, attributed to the interplay of strong domestic factors and external challenges tied to global developments, including potential

trade policy changes under a second Trump presidency.

Two key domestic factors are driving Malaysia's economy. First, the country's investment upcycle remains strong, reflected in the consistent gross fixed capital formation growth. The sustained momentum in approved investments since 2021 is now translating into increased actual and realised investments.

This aligns with the uptrends in the implementation rate of approved manufacturing investment, rising

imports of capital goods, higher banking system loans for industrial buildings and corporate earnings, it said in a note yesterday.

Secondly, Maybank IB anticipates that income-boosting measures in Budget 2025 will drive consumer spending such as civil service salary and pension reviews involving an additional RM12.3 billion allocation for emolument and retirement charges in the federal government's operating expenditure.

There are also higher cash handouts

to lower-income groups, increases, extensions, and enhancements in personal income tax reliefs, and a monthly minimum wage hike to RM1,700 from RM1,500.

In a separate note, Hong Leong Investment Bank Bhd (HLIB) said the forecast, a tad softer than 2024's 5% is amid a challenging global environment but still within the government's target range of 4.5% to 5.5%.

This growth will be driven by a stronger job market, income measures, tourism recovery, and approved

investments, it said.

HLIB said inflation is expected to rise to 2.7% year-on-year in 2025 from an estimated 1.9% in 2024, with potential upward pressure hinging on the timing of RON95 subsidy reforms, likely to be introduced in the second half of 2025.

As the inflation pressure is supply-driven, alongside rising external risks from Trump's tariff plans, we expect Bank Negara Malaysia will maintain the overnight policy rate at 3% for 2025, it said. -- Bernama

Europe's carmakers brace for tougher emissions rules

➤ Companies offer discounts on EVs, raise prices of petrol models

PARIS/GDANSK: European automakers are raising prices of petrol cars and readying discounts on electric vehicles as they brace for yet another challenge – tougher emissions rules that threaten to further shrink profits across the struggling industry.

The European Union (EU) will drastically lower its cap on automotive carbon dioxide emissions from Jan 1, meaning at least one-fifth of all sales by most car companies must be EVs to avoid heavy fines.

But so far this year only 13% of all vehicles sold in the region have been electric, data from the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA) lobby group shows.

"The gap is really big," said Marc Mortureux, director of French car lobby PFA.

The tighter rules come as the sector is already dealing with excess capacity due to lacklustre sales and growing Chinese competition, prompting profit warnings from Volkswagen, Stellantis and others in recent months.

Now the companies will need to sell more EVs, which cost more to make than traditional vehicles, at a time when political and economic uncertainties and declining EV subsidies are deterring consumption, said Mortureux.

In a sign of the growing concern over the rules, Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares abruptly resigned this month, partly due to disagreement with the board over how to deal with the issue.

With just weeks to go, Europe's politicians are urging Brussels to rethink the targets. But carmakers are getting to work, aiming above all to avoid fines that could reach €15 billion (RM70.3 billion) based on current sales, ACEA chairman Luca de Meo has said.

VW, Stellantis and Renault have raised the prices of petrol engine models by several hundred euros in the last two months, in what analysts say is an attempt to curb demand for heavier emitters and make pricier electric models appealing.

"Carmakers have started with their pricing strategy to steer demand towards battery EVs in order to reach the CO2 targets and avoid potential fines," said Beatrix Keim of the Center for Automotive Research.



An electric vehicle Circutor charger is pictured in a supermarket's parking lot in Teia, north of Barcelona, Spain. So far this year, only 13% of all vehicles sold in the EU have been electric, data from the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association lobby group shows. – REUTERS/SPIC

Last month, Stellantis's Peugeot hiked prices in France of all of its models apart from fully electric ones by as much as €500.

Renault Group increased prices on some pure petrol models, for instance adding €300 or 1.6% to the Clio SCE 65, but kept prices of hybrid versions unchanged.

Peugeot described the new pricing as an "economic rise", while Renault said a rise was "normal" over a car's lifetime.

The strategy could backfire, however. Increasing petrol car prices should help close the gap with more expensive EVs, but given weak market growth, may not generate enough EV sales, said a source close to a major European automaker.

Sales in the region are around a fifth lower than pre-Covid.

"In reality, increasing the price of thermal engine cars means cutting production (...) and all the value chain and suppliers will suffer from this," the source added.

The price rises will help fund future discounts on EVs, said Denis Schemoul, auto analyst at S&P Global, acting as "an indirect subsidy" for electric car buyers by combustion engine buyers, but very likely hurting margins.

Alastair Bedwell, head of powertrain forecasting at GlobalData, predicts EV sales in Europe, including the EU as well as Britain,

Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, will jump 41% from this year to 3.1 million units in 2025.

Discounting to push sales comes at a cost, however. In the UK, the sector has warned that EV targets will cost automakers £6 billion (\$7.6 billion) this year, including about £4 billion in discounts.

"Pooling" emissions, or buying credits from those who have a large share of the EV market to lower emission averages, could be less costly, say Barclays analysts.

Japan's Suzuki agreed in October to pool with Geely-owned Volvo in 2025, a spokeswoman said.

That arrangement will almost completely remove any threat of fines for Suzuki, said Charles Lester, data manager at battery consultancy Rho Motion, given Volvo's large number of EVs on offer.

All options will eat into meagre industry profits, however, and the industry is still hoping Brussels will ease targets.

"At some point, enough is enough," PFA president Luc Chatel told reporters in October ahead of the Paris auto show.

"I can't sell enough electric vehicles and I'm going to be penalised on my thermal vehicles. What do they want me to make, horse-drawn carriages?" – Reuters

Alibaba to sell department store unit at US\$1.3b loss

SHANGHAI: Alibaba Group said yesterday it would sell its Chinese department store unit Intime and book a US\$1.3 billion (RM5.8 billion) loss from the deal, as the retail giant reshuffles its business portfolio to focus on its core e-commerce operation.

The sale marks a further acceleration in Alibaba's restructuring after the group split into six business units last year in its biggest-ever revamp and announced a series of top management reshuffles afterwards.

The company last month unveiled a plan to integrate its domestic Chinese and international e-commerce platforms into a single business unit run by one leader for the first time, as it faces growing competition from discount-heavy retailers at home and abroad.

Rival platforms such as PDD Holdings' Pinduoduo and Temu, along with ByteDance's Douyin and TikTok, have stepped up

competition with Alibaba by targeting cost-conscious shoppers with rock-bottom prices on everything from headphones to sweaters.

China's challenging consumer environment has put pressure on all retailers and e-commerce platforms.

"I think in the short term Alibaba just doesn't have the attention to actually do offline retail and do it well," said Jianggan Li, founder and CEO of Momentum Works, a venture and insights firm, though "finding the right buyer at the right price" for offline assets remains a challenge.

Alibaba said yesterday it would sell Intime to a consortium comprising Youngor Fashion and members of Intime's management team for 7.4 billion yuan (RM4.5 billion), subject to customary regulatory approvals.

Alibaba purchased Intime in 2017 in a US\$2.6 billion deal to expand into the bricks-

and-mortar retail segment and currently holds a 99% stake in the business.

The e-commerce giant has been looking to sell a number of consumer sector assets, including Intime, grocery business Freshippo and retailer RT-Mart to focus on its core business, Reuters reported in February.

Alibaba, under former boss Daniel Zhang, had expanded its presence in the retail sector by taking over several brick-and-mortar chains, including electronics retailer Suning and hypermarket operator Sun Art Retail, which runs RT-Mart.

But China's challenging consumer environment has put pressure on all retailers and e-commerce platforms.

In April, Alibaba co-founder Jack Ma expressed support for the internet giant's restructuring efforts, and acknowledged past mistakes in a lengthy memo to employees. – Reuters

BRIEFS

WALMART CHINA ENTERS INTO PARTNERSHIP WITH DELIVERY FIRM MEITUAN

SHANGHAI: Walmart China announced yesterday it has entered into a new strategic partnership with China's biggest food delivery company Meituan. The China unit of Walmart said in a post on Wechat the partnership would help it accelerate its e-commerce business, which currently accounts for nearly half of its China sales. Stores in China have already been connected to Meituan's delivery ecosystem, the announcement added. In addition to Walmart stores, Walmart China has opened 50 Sam's Club stores in China, which have benefitted from Chinese consumers increasingly seeking out membership stores. Walmart was previously aligned with Chinese e-commerce firm JD.com before selling its roughly US\$3.7 billion (RM16.5 billion) stake in August. At that time the US retail company said it would focus on its own operations in China. – Reuters

GERMAN BUSINESS MORALE TAKES A TURN FOR THE WORSE

BERLIN: German business morale worsened more than expected in December, a survey showed yesterday, weighed down by companies' pessimistic assessment of the coming months amid geopolitical uncertainty and an industrial slump in Europe's largest economy. The Ifo institute said its business climate index decreased to 84.7 in December from a revised 85.6 the previous month. Analysts polled by Reuters had forecast a reading of 85.6. The survey of around 9,000 company managers found an improvement in the assessment of current conditions, but the expectations index posted a surprise fall to 84.4 in December from 87.0 in November. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast a reading of 87.5. – Reuters

US finalises US\$406m govt grants for Taiwan's GlobalWafers

WASHINGTON: The US Commerce Department said yesterday it has finalised US\$406 million (RM1.8 billion) in government grants to Taiwan's GlobalWafers to significantly increase production of silicon wafers in the United States.

The funds for projects in Texas and Missouri will establish the first high-volume US production of 300mm wafers for advanced semiconductors and expand production of silicon-on-insulator wafers, the Commerce Department said.

The wafers are a crucial component of advanced semiconductors and part of the Biden administration's efforts to boost the domestic chips supply chain.

The subsidy will support nearly US\$4 billion in investments by GlobalWafers in both states to construct new wafer manufacturing facilities and create 1,700 construction and 880 manufacturing jobs.

"We look forward to innovating with our US-based chip customers for decades to come," GlobalWafers CEO Doris Hsu.

GlobalWafers said in 2022 it would build a US\$5 billion plant in Texas to make 300mm silicon wafers used in semiconductors, switching from a defunct plan to invest in Germany.

Currently, five major companies including GlobalWafers control more than 80% of the global 300mm silicon wafer manufacturing market and about 90% of silicon wafers are produced in east Asia.

GlobalWafers plans to build and expand facilities in Sherman, Texas, to produce wafers used to manufacture leading-edge, mature-node, and memory chips and a new facility in St Peters, Missouri, for wafers used for defence and aerospace chips. – Reuters

Vietnam's bold bureaucratic reform stirs investors' hopes, worries

HANOI: Vietnam is planning its boldest bureaucratic reform in decades, slashing ministries, agencies and broadcasters in a bid to reduce bottlenecks and red tape, but risking short-term "paralysis", officials and investors said.

Under the plan, five ministries, four government agencies and five state TV channels would be among the bodies that will cease to exist, according to ruling Communist Party documents reviewed by Reuters and reports in state media. The proposal is still in its preliminary stages and is subject to changes by the time it is set to be voted in parliament in February.

No figure has been circulated about the number of jobs that could be cut, but thousands of state employees are likely to be affected, based on the magnitude of the cuts envisaged in the documents.

Vietnam, a Southeast Asian industrial hub, relies heavily on foreign investment in manufacturing, which fuels a booming export-oriented economy. However, in recent years investors' discontent has grown louder over delays in project approvals and regulatory reforms compounded by a sweeping anti-corruption campaign.

Responding to that criticism, Vietnam's new Communist Party leader To Lam this month launched a massive overhaul of state bodies, soon after he was appointed to the country's most powerful job.

Vietnam's home and foreign affairs ministries did not reply to requests for comment.

The bold move comes about a year before the Communist Party congress, which in early 2026 will decide whether to confirm Lam in his job. It also coincides with similar post-pandemic government cost-cutting measures being implemented or pledged across the world, including by Argentina's libertarian President Javier Milei and US President-elect Donald Trump.

Among the planned measures, the investment ministry, which is responsible for approving industrial projects, will be merged with the finance ministry.

For a while "investors may experience delays or uncertainty as the new structures are established and the dust of this top-level governance merger settles", said Leif Schneider, head of international law firm Luther in Vietnam.

But "the long-term outlook is more optimistic", he added, saying Vietnam could become a more investor-friendly destination if the reform is executed effectively.

Nine investors, diplomats and officials interviewed by Reuters shared the same mixed assessment with many anticipating new administrative delays in the short term.

Two foreign investors, who declined to be identified, expected the reform would bring about long-awaited simplified procedures for businesses, although it was likely to slow project approvals for some months. – Reuters

China capital market outflow hits new high in November

SHANGHAI: China's capital markets outflow reached a record high of US\$45.7 billion (RM203.2 billion) in November, according to official data tracking cross-border payments, as Donald Trump's US presidential election win roiled global portfolio flows.

Cross-border receipts from portfolio investments were US\$188.9 billion, while payments totalled US\$234.6 billion, resulting in the biggest monthly deficit on record, according to data from China's foreign exchange regulator.

The data release comes as China's policy-driven stock market rally that started in late September is losing steam, while the yuan has slumped against the dollar in the face of tariff threats from Trump.

The massive deficit, which widened from a US\$25.8 billion outflow in October, also reflects weakening investor confidence,

➤ Amount reaches US\$45.7b as Trump's election win roils global fund movements

despite a slew of policies announced by Beijing since late September to stimulate an economy mired in a property crisis, weak consumption and persistent deflation.

"Whether the recovery momentum can be sustained into Q1 2025 depends on the speed and magnitude of implementation of the stimulus mapped out at the CEWC, as well as the timing of the potential US tariffs," BNP Paribas said in a note to clients.

During last week's Central Economic Work Conference (CEWC), China's leadership pledged to increase the budget deficit, issue more debt and loosen

monetary policy. The portfolio data, released by the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, follows other Chinese capital statistics that showed a similar trend.

China's central bank on Monday said that foreign institutions cut holdings in Chinese onshore bonds for the third consecutive month in November.

Separately, the Institute of International Finance (IIF), which tracks global portfolio flows, also recorded outflows last month in both China's bond and stock markets.

The strengthening of the US dollar in the wake of Trump's

victory helped shape portfolio flows in emerging markets including China, the IIF said.

Goldman Sachs said that its preferred measure showed notable China foreign exchange outflows of US\$39 billion in November, a jump from US\$5 billion in October.

"The sizeable FX outflows were mainly from cross-border RMB outflows, likely due to RMB outflows via portfolio investment channel," Goldman said in a note to clients.

China's Stock Connect scheme – the key channel for foreign investors to buy mainland shares – is a big contributor to cross-border yuan flows as forex transactions under the programme take place in Hong Kong.

China no longer publishes daily foreign investment data under Connect, but the flow is reflected in China's cross-border receipts and payments data. – Reuters

Beijing said to be planning record budget deficit in 2025

BEIJING: Chinese leaders agreed last week to raise the budget deficit to 4% of gross domestic product (GDP) next year, its highest on record, while maintaining an economic growth target of around 5%, two sources with knowledge of the matter said.

The new deficit plan compares with an initial target of 3% of GDP for 2024, and is in line with a "more proactive" fiscal policy outlined by leading officials after December's Politburo meeting and last week's Central Economic Work Conference (CEWC), where the targets were

agreed but not officially announced.

The additional one percentage point of GDP in spending amounts to about 1.3 trillion yuan (RM797 billion). More stimulus will be funded through issuing off-budget special bonds, said the two sources, who requested anonymity as they were not authorised to speak to the media.

These targets are usually not announced officially until an annual parliament meeting in March. They could still change before the legislative session.

The State Council Information Office, which handles media queries

on behalf of the government, and the finance ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

The stronger fiscal impulse planned for next year forms part of China's preparations to counter the impact of an expected increase in US tariffs on Chinese imports as Donald Trump returns to the White House in January.

The two sources said China will maintain an unchanged GDP growth target of around 5% in 2025.

A state media summary of the closed-door CEWC said it was

"necessary to maintain steady economic growth", raise the fiscal deficit ratio and issue more government debt next year, but did not mention specific numbers.

Reuters reported last month that government advisers had recommended Beijing not to lower its growth target.

The world's second-largest economy has stuttered this year due to a severe property crisis, high local government debt and weak consumer demand. Exports, one of the few bright spots, could soon face US tariffs in excess of 60% if Trump delivers on his campaign pledges.

The US president-elect's threats have rattled China's industrial complex, which sells goods worth more than US\$400 billion annually to the United States. Many manufacturers have been shifting production abroad to escape tariffs.

Exporters say the levies will further shrink profits, hurting jobs, investment and economic growth in the process. They would also exacerbate China's industrial overcapacity and deflationary pressures, analysts said.

The summaries of the CEWC and the Politburo meetings also flagged that China's central bank would switch to an "appropriately loose" monetary policy stance, raising expectations of more interest rate cuts and liquidity injections.

China is likely to rely heavily on fiscal stimulus next year, analysts say, but could also use other tools to cushion the impact of tariffs. – Reuters



A steel billet is seen on a medium plate production line at a steel mill in Ezhou, Hubei province, China. US President-elect Donald Trump's tariffs threats have rattled China's industrial complex – REUTERS/SPIC

UK pay increases by more than expected in three months to October

LONDON: British pay rose by more than expected in the three months to October, official data showed yesterday, potentially adding to the Bank of England's (BoE) caution about how quickly to cut interest rates.

Average weekly earnings, excluding bonuses, were 5.2% higher in

the three months to the end of October than a year earlier, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said.

A Reuters poll of economists had mostly forecast regular wage growth of 5%.

The increase in the pace of wage growth ended a steady deceleration

that began in mid-2023.

In the private sector alone – watched closely by the BoE – earnings excluding bonuses rose by 5.4% in the August-to-October period, the fastest growth since the three months to May this year, the ONS figures showed.

Recent business surveys have

suggested a fall in demand for staff after finance minister Rachel Reeves announced an increase in social security contributions paid by employers in her Oct 30 budget.

The ONS said provisional data from Britain's tax office showed employers cut 35,000 staff from their payrolls in

November.

It also said job vacancies decreased by 31,000 in the three months to November to 818,000 compared to the previous quarter, but remained 22,000 above their pre-pandemic level in January-March 2020. – Reuters

Bitcoin soars past US\$107,000, extending its impressive rally

➤ Trump signals US BTC strategic reserve plan, igniting crypto bull market

NEW YORK: Bitcoin's (BTC) record rally topped US\$107,000 (RM476,261) on Monday after President-elect Donald Trump reiterated that he plans to create a US bitcoin strategic reserve similar to its strategic oil reserve, stoking the enthusiasm of crypto bulls.

Investor sentiment also got a lift from the inclusion of MicroStrategy into the tech-heavy Nasdaq 100 index that will likely lead to more inflows for the software firm turned bitcoin buyer.

Bitcoin, the world's biggest and best known cryptocurrency, extended gains to a session high of US\$107,148 and was most recently at US\$106,877, up 5.43% from late Friday. The No. 2 digital currency ether was up 1.85% at US\$3,975.70.

"We're in blue sky territory here," said Tony Sycamore, an analyst at IG. "The next figure the market will be looking for is US\$110,000. The pullback that a lot of people were waiting for just didn't happen, because now we've got this news."

Bitcoin and crypto have been catapulted into the spotlight as investors wager the incoming Trump administration will usher in a friendlier regulatory environment, boosting sentiment around the alternative currency. Bitcoin is up about 150% in 2024.

"We're gonna do something great with crypto because we don't want China or anybody else - not just China but others embracing it - and we want to be the head," Trump told CNBC late last week.

When asked if he plans to build a crypto reserve similar to oil reserves, Trump said: "Yeah, I think so." He advocated the same thing earlier this year.

Governments around the world held 2.2% of bitcoin's total supply as of July, according to data provider CoinGecko, with the US possessing



Bitcoin has surged more than 50% since the Nov 5 election that saw Trump elected along with many other pro-crypto candidates. - UNSPLASHPIX

nearly 200,000 bitcoins valued at more than US\$20 billion at current levels.

China, UK, Bhutan and El Salvador are the other countries with a significant amount of bitcoins, data site BitcoinTreasuries showed.

Other countries have also been considering cryptocurrency strategic reserves.

Russian President Vladimir Putin earlier this month said the current US administration was undermining the role of the US dollar as the reserve currency in the global economy by using it for political purposes, forcing many countries to turn to alternative assets, including cryptocurrencies.

"For example, bitcoin, who can prohibit it? No one," Putin said.

There are skeptics though, with Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell likening bitcoin to gold earlier this month. Analysts also point out that any such move will take time to implement.

"I think we still need to be cautious on a BTC strategic reserve, and at least consider that this is not likely to happen anytime soon," said Chris Weston, head of research at Pepperstone.

"Of course, any comment from Trump that offers an increased degree of hope that plans for a strategic reserve are evolving an obvious

tailwind, but this would come with consequences which would need to be carefully considered and well telegraphed to market players."

Bitcoin has surged more than 50% since the Nov 5 election that saw Trump elected along with many other pro-crypto candidates. The total value of the cryptocurrency market has almost doubled over the year so far to hit a record over US\$3.8 trillion, according to CoinGecko.

Trump - who once labelled crypto a scam - embraced digital assets during his campaign, promising to make the US the "crypto capital of the planet."

Trump this month named a White House czar for artificial intelligence and cryptocurrencies, former PayPal executive David Sacks, a close friend of Trump adviser and megadonor Elon Musk.

Trump also said he would nominate pro-crypto Washington attorney Paul Atkins to head the Securities and Exchange Commission.

On Friday, exchange operator Nasdaq said MicroStrategy, led by CEO Michael Saylor, will be added to the Nasdaq-100 Index, with the change coming into effect before the market opens on Dec 23.

MicroStrategy, an aggressive investor in the world's largest crypto asset, has seen its shares soar more than six-fold this year, taking its market value to almost US\$94 billion. It is now the largest corporate holder of the cryptocurrency.

As part of the Nasdaq 100, investors would buy MicroStrategy shares to mirror the holdings of the broader index, thereby driving up the value of the stock and allowing the company to buy more crypto, through debt and equity offerings, Matthew Dibb, chief investment officer at crypto asset manager Astronaut Capital, said.

"The inclusion seems a bit unexpected, but that hasn't stopped the excitement of what many believe to be the start of a looping cycle of capital that could potentially drive up the spot bitcoin price," he said.

MicroStrategy shares were up 4.2% on Monday. - Reuters

TikTok turns to US Supreme Court in last-ditch bid to halt divest-or-ban law

WASHINGTON: TikTok made a last-ditch effort on Monday to continue operating in the US, asking the Supreme Court to temporarily block a law intended to force ByteDance, its China-based parent company, to divest the short-video app by Jan 19 or face a ban.

TikTok and ByteDance filed an emergency request to the justices for an injunction to halt the looming ban on the social media app used by about 170 million Americans while they appeal a lower court's ruling that upheld the law. A group of US users of the app filed a similar request on Monday as well.

Congress passed the law in April. The Justice Department has said that as a Chinese company, TikTok poses "a national-security threat of immense depth and scale" because of its access to vast amounts of data on American users, from locations to private messages, and its ability to secretly manipulate content that Americans view on the app.

The US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in Washington on Dec 6 rejected TikTok's arguments that the law violates free speech protections under the US Constitution's First Amendment.

In their filing to the Supreme Court, TikTok and ByteDance said that "if Americans, duly informed of the alleged risks of 'covert' content manipulation, choose to continue viewing content on TikTok with their eyes wide open, the First Amendment entrusts them with making that choice, free from the government's censorship."

"And if the D.C. Circuit's contrary holding stands, then Congress will have free rein to ban any American from speaking simply by identifying some risk that the speech is influenced by a foreign entity," they added.

The companies said that being shuttered for even one month would cause TikTok to lose about a third of its US users and undermine its ability to attract advertisers and recruit content creators and employee talent.

Calling itself one of the "most important speech platforms" used in the US, TikTok has said that there is no imminent threat to US national security and that delaying enforcement of the law would allow the Supreme Court to consider the legality of the ban, and the incoming administration of President-elect Donald Trump to evaluate the law as well.

Trump, who unsuccessfully tried to ban TikTok during his first term in 2020, has reversed his stance and promised during the presidential race this year that he would try to save TikTok. Trump takes office on Jan 20, the day after the TikTok deadline under the law.

The law would "shutter one of America's most popular speech platforms the day before a presidential inauguration," the companies said in their filing. "A federal law singling out and banning a speech platform used by half of Americans is extraordinary."

Asked on Monday at a press conference what he would do to stop a ban on TikTok, Trump said that he has "a warm spot in my heart for TikTok" and that he would "take a look" at the matter.

Trump was meeting with TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew in Florida on Monday, a source familiar with the plans told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity. TikTok did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the meeting.

The companies asked the Supreme Court to issue a decision on its request by Jan 6 to allow, in the event it is rejected, for the "complex task of shutting down TikTok" in the US and to coordinate with service providers by the deadline set under the law.

The dispute comes amid growing trade tensions between China and the US, the world's two biggest economies.

Trump, SoftBank CEO unveil US\$100b US investment

PALM BEACH: President-elect Donald Trump, with SoftBank Group CEO Masayoshi Son at his side, announced on Monday that SoftBank would invest US\$100 billion (RM445 billion) in the US over the next four years in what would be a boost to the US economy.

Trump said in his joint appearance with Son that the investment would create 100,000 jobs focused on artificial intelligence (AI) and related infrastructure, with the money to be deployed before the end of Trump's term.

The Monday announcement echoes a similar pledge Son made with then-President-elect Trump in December 2016 at Trump Tower, when Son said he would spend US\$50 billion and create 50,000 jobs.

While that money was eventually spent, it is unclear whether those jobs were created.

Trump said SoftBank's latest investment pledge was evidence of "monumental confidence in America's future." He playfully encouraged Son to make the investment of US\$200 billion. Son chuckled and said that he would try.

The US\$100 billion pledge, made at a flag-bedecked event at Trump's Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida fits in with Trump's vow to bolster the US economy and reduce the effect of inflation on Americans during his second

term, which begins on Jan 20.

It is unclear how SoftBank plans to fund the investment promise. As of Sept 30, SoftBank Group had about US\$27 billion in cash on its balance sheet, according to its most recent earnings report. The company's Vision Fund 2 also has US\$3 billion left to deploy. The capital could also come from chipmaker Arm Holdings, a source familiar with the matter said.

Trump called Son "one of the most accomplished business leaders of our time."

SoftBank has been rebuilding its finances after the failure of high-flying office-sharing startup WeWork and after some of the tech firms it is invested in through its Vision Fund unit fell out of favour among investors. SoftBank shares jumped more than 3% in trading in Tokyo yesterday morning following the announcement.

Trump has an affinity for splashy announcements promising thousands of jobs, even though such investments do not always pan out. Early in his first term, he announced a US\$10 billion investment by Foxconn in a Wisconsin factory that promised thousands of jobs but was mostly abandoned.

"I don't think there's a tangible plan in the offing," said Amir Anvarzadeh, Japan equity strategist at Asymmetric Advisors of the

SoftBank announcement.

"The question arises what are they going to buy? There's already a lot of money chasing fantastic companies. The low-hanging fruit in AI has come and gone," Anvarzadeh added.

Son has been a strong proponent of the potential for AI and has been pushing to expand SoftBank's exposure to the sector, taking a stake in OpenAI and acquiring chip startup Graphcore. After a sharp decline in shares between 2021 and 2023, SoftBank stock has recovered, gaining nearly 55% year-to-date.

In October, Son reiterated his belief in the coming of artificial super-intelligence, saying it would require hundreds of billions of dollars of investment.

Son said at the time he was saving up funds "so I can make the next big move," but did not provide any details.

"We do not expect that the company's AI investment plans have materially changed," Astris Advisory analyst Kirk Boody wrote in a note. "The company is making a pledge largely based on existing commitments."

Trump promised last week that he would extend fast-track permitting to any company that invests US\$1 billion or more in the US. - Reuters

MARKET ROUND-UP: DECEMBER 17

BURSA MALAYSIA

Trade Statistic 17 Dec 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

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Bursa Indices

INDEX	CHANGE
FBMEMAS	12,262.03 -66.15
FBMVKCI	1,597.33 -9.52
CONSUMER PRODUCTS	542.51 -3.88
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCT	172.14 -2.96
CONSTRUCTION	303.12 -0.93
FINANCIAL SERVICES	18,936.01 -116.55
ENERGY	816.66 -2.37
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	541.20 +0.64
HEALTH CARE	2,299.70 -10.39
TRANSPORTATION & L	1,036.14 -4.23
PROPERTY	1,086.36 -10.13
PLANTATION	7,628.09 -25.65
FBMSHA	12,283.14 -71.00
FBMACE	5,241.86 -66.46
TECHNOLOGY	64.12 -0.21

TURNOVER: 2.982 bil **VALUE: RM2.437 bil**

Bursa closes lower, weighed down by global uncertainties

AS global financial hubs braced for this week's series of central bank decisions, Bursa Malaysia closed lower yesterday, caught in the crossfire of mounting uncertainties stemming from the US Federal Reserve (Fed), according to an analyst.

At 5pm, the FBM KLCI declined 0.59% or 9.52 points to 1,597.33 from Monday's close of 1,606.85.

The index opened 1.59 points lower at 1,605.26 and moved between 1,594.51 and 1,606.81 throughout the day.

Market breadth was also negative as losers overwhelmed gainers 704 to 346, while 529 counters were unchanged, 892 untraded and 11 suspended.

Turnover decreased to 2.99 billion units worth RM2.43 billion versus 3.16 billion units valued at RM2.45 billion on Monday.

SPI Asset Management managing director Stephen Innes said the Fed is in a tough spot: the US job market is strong, and inflation isn't slowing down as expected. This makes it challenging for the central bank to decide whether to continue lowering interest rates or pause.

"Fed officials are split. Some worry that cutting rates too soon could backfire, while others question whether past rate cuts have worked at all. Investors had hoped for more rate cuts, but now they're uncertain, causing market instability," he told Bernama.

Among heavyweights, Press Metal Aluminium was 17 sen lower at RM4.86, Petronas Chemicals fell 20 sen to RM4.78, Hong Leong Bank shed 32 sen to RM20.12, Sime Darby slid 9 sen to RM2.34, and Public Bank eased 2 sen to RM4.52.

ACE Market debutant Vanzo Holdings topped the most active stocks, gaining 1.5 sen to 16.5 sen, followed by Zen Tech, which was flat at 1 sen. MYEG was 1 sen lower at 95 sen, Pestech rose 2.5 sen to 17 sen and Bumi Armada increased 3 sen to 66.5 sen.

Top 20 Actives

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
VANZO	0.165	0.015	10.00	2,015,575
ZENTECH	0.010	-	-	1,604,620
HSI-CWAO	0.055	-0.015	-21.43	1,375,684
HSI-PWB1	0.180	0.005	2.86	682,220
HSI-CWAM	0.080	-0.015	-15.79	581,065
MYEG	0.950	-0.010	-1.04	452,609
PESTECH	0.170	0.025	17.24	421,638
ARMADA	0.665	0.030	4.72	415,171
JCY	0.500	-0.015	-2.91	409,029
HSI-CY8	0.070	-0.020	-22.22	405,133
BERTAM-WA	0.025	0.005	25.00	385,731
TAWIN	0.020	-	-	374,754
VELESTO	0.150	-0.010	-6.25	357,826
TMWL	0.025	-	-	356,775
OMESTI-WC	0.030	0.005	20.00	345,696
TOPGLOV	1.310	-0.040	-2.96	324,258
EAH	0.005	-0.005	-50.00	244,556
CIMB	8.040	-0.060	-0.74	221,502
SODG	0.495	-0.065	-11.61	211,149
YEWLEE-WA	0.210	-	-	194,406



Top 20 Gainers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
BLDPLNT	11.440	0.560	6
UTDPLT	32.400	0.400	7,964
MPI	26.400	0.340	2,317
AYER	7.470	0.290	15
GESHEN	4.030	0.250	1,824
BMGREEN-WA	0.480	0.175	73,780
HEIM	23.980	0.160	734
DKSH	4.980	0.120	40
PANAMY	17.900	0.100	94
SPRITZER	3.060	0.090	2,405
RAPID	0.955	0.085	64,437
ATECH	3.400	0.080	2,026
PETGAS	17.460	0.080	3,568
TENAGA	13.800	0.080	70,662
UMS	2.200	0.080	10
CABNET	0.430	0.070	110,526
CRESNDO	1.540	0.070	22,729
HSI-PWBK	0.375	0.065	2
AJI	15.420	0.060	239
CANONE	2.380	0.060	113

Top 20 Gainers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
AXTERIA-WA	0.015	200.00	14,153
AXIATA-CIE	0.010	100.00	3,427
TRIVE-WD	0.010	100.00	1,609
EDGENTA-CR	0.025	66.67	49,257
BMGREEN-WA	0.480	57.38	73,780
ARMADA-C92	0.100	53.85	7,633
YB-LA	0.015	50.00	10
MAXIS-C48	0.065	44.44	401
HSI-CWA3	0.115	43.75	100
ASTRO-C63	0.020	33.33	4,395
SUNCON-C22	0.020	33.33	1,015
BPURI-WB	0.140	27.27	565
FBMKLCI-HA1	0.095	26.67	386
BERTAM-WA	0.025	25.00	385,731
FBMKLCI-HM8	0.050	25.00	890
INARI-C2N	0.025	25.00	5
PADINI-C16	0.050	25.00	500
PESTECH-WA	0.100	25.00	36,691
RANHILL-CL	0.050	25.00	73
HSI-PWBK	0.375	20.97	2

World Stocks/Commodities

INDEX	CLOSING	DAILY CHANGE	DAILY CHANGE (%)
DJIA (US)	43,717.48	-110.58	-0.25
S&P 500 (US)	6,074.08	+22.99	+0.38
NASDAQ (US)	20,173.89	+247.17	+1.24
NYSE (US)	19,627.68	-101.69	-0.52
EURO STOXX 50 (EUR)	4,941.85	-5.18	-0.10
FTSE 100 (UK)	8,196.60	-65.45	-0.79
DAX (GER)	20,292.54	-21.27	-0.10
NIKKEI 225 (JPN)	39,364.68	-92.81	-0.24
TOPIX (JPN)	2,728.20	-10.13	-0.37
HANG SENG INDEX (HK)	19,700.48	-95.01	-0.48
CSI 300 (CHN)	3,922.03	+10.19	+0.26
SH SE COM (CHN)	3,361.49	-24.85	-0.73
KOSPI INDEX (SK)	2,456.81	-32.16	-1.29
MSCI ASIA PACIFIC	184.72	-0.83	-0.45
ASX 200 (AUS)	8,314.00	+64.52	+0.78
ALL ORDINARIES INDX (AUS)	8,558.61	+64.62	+0.76
SENSEX INDEX (IND)	80,721.75	-1026.82	-1.26
FBM KLCI	1,597.33	-9.52	-0.59
STRAITS TIMES INDEX (S'PORE)	3,799.24	-21.79	-0.57
WTI (US\$/BBL.)	69.98	-0.73	-1.03
BRENT (US\$/BBL.)	73.29	-0.62	-0.84
GOLD (COMEX) (US\$/T OZ)	2,665.20	-4.80	-0.18
SILVER (COMEX) (US\$/T OZ)	30.83	-0.23	-0.75
PLATINUM (US\$/T OZ)	925.52	-14.24	-1.52
COPPER (COMEX) (US CENTS/LB.)	415.85	-3.25	-0.78
COPPER 3MO (LME) (US\$/MT)	9,062.50	10.00	0.11
CORN (US CENTS/BU.)	445.75	+0.75	+0.17
WHEAT (US CENTS/BU.)	548.25	-1.75	-0.32
SOYBEAN OIL (CBOT) (US CENTS/LB.)	42.03	-0.04	-0.10
COCOA (ICE) (US\$/MT)	11,821.00	+521.00	+4.61
RUBBER (S'PORE) (US CENTS/KG)	203.30	-0.30	-0.15

As at 5pm, Dec 17

Top 20 Losers (By RM)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (RM)	VOLUME ('00)
NESTLE	97.800	-1.420	689
PADINI	2.300	-0.970	2,113
MAGNI	2.510	-0.330	6,615
HLBANK	20.120	-0.320	17,140
HLFG	17.940	-0.300	1,199
DLADY	30.300	-0.260	10
HLIND	14.240	-0.240	576
BAUTO	1.660	-0.230	149,685
CARLSBG	20.440	-0.220	265
F&N	27.540	-0.220	660
PICHEM	4.780	-0.200	63,456
PMETAL	4.860	-0.170	62,021
HSI-CWAL	0.285	-0.155	8
BIMB	2.490	-0.150	24,584
BURSA	8.790	-0.120	4,190
DAYANG-C39	0.010	-0.120	2,510
GCB	3.880	-0.120	28,397
HSI-PWDK	0.495	-0.115	54
BKAWAN	20.000	-0.100	164
KESM	3.520	-0.100	896

Top 20 Losers (By %)

STOCKS	CLOSING (RM)	+/- (%)	VOLUME ('00)
DAYANG-C39	0.010	-92.31	2,510
EKOVEST-C63	0.005	-66.67	200
BAUTO-C40	0.010	-60.00	3,868
HIAPEK-CE	0.010	-60.00	1,080
BORNOLD-WD	0.005	-50.00	10
BORNOLD	0.005	-50.00	17,015
CEB-CE	0.005	-50.00	100
OSONIC-C63	0.005	-50.00	450
EAH	0.005	-50.00	244,556
FBMKLCI-CQH	0.005	-50.00	5,000
FOCUS-PA	0.005	-50.00	10,017
GENTINGC3G	0.015	-50.00	3,000
HSI-CWAQ	0.040	-50.00	7,411
HSI-HZX	0.005	-50.00	3,000
HSI-PWBB	0.005	-50.00	39,308
JIANKUN-WB	0.010	-50.00	19,387
KANGER-WB	0.005	-50.00	499
KGROU	0.005	-50.00	37,267
PECCA-CE	0.010	-50.00	2,410
PMETAL-C1F	0.005	-50.00	660

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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Eve Energy opens advanced battery plant in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR: Eve Energy Malaysia Sdn Bhd, a lithium battery manufacturing company, inaugurated its new manufacturing facility in Padang Meha, Kedah. The state-of-the-art facility will serve customers in the power tool and electric two-wheeler sectors across Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America. When fully operational, the facility will employ 2,000 Malaysians with majority in technical field background.

Mida CEO Datuk Sikh Shamsul Ibrahim Sikh Abdul Majid said, "We extend our congratulations on the significant breakthrough achieved in the construction of the Malaysian factory. Amid the growing challenges of climate change, energy transition and low-carbon development will be central to future industries. The Malaysian government places great importance on this issue and is moving forward in partnership with Eve Energy Co Ltd. Together, we are committed to promoting local economic growth and technological innovation while driving Malaysia's energy transition and sustainable development."

Eve Energy senior vice-president Vincent Wong said that the Malaysia plant had been completed in just 16 months since the groundbreaking in August 2023, marking significant progress in bringing equipment into the field. It is anticipated to commence operations in Q1'25 and will serve as the first overseas factory to achieve mass production and delivery of Eve Energy.

Eve Energy co-founder and CEO Liu Jianhua said, "China and Malaysia have been good neighbours and friends for thousands of years and are comprehensive strategic partners. The construction of Eve Energy's Malaysian factory will further promote cooperation and exchange between China and Malaysia in the field of new energy."

Ringgit slips ahead of Fed meeting amid weak sentiment

THE ringgit ended slightly lower against the US dollar yesterday, marking its seventh consecutive trading day of losses amid subdued investor sentiment ahead of the two-day US Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting.

At 6pm, the local currency eased to 4.4645/4690 versus the greenback from Monday's close of 4.4500/4550.

SPI Asset Management managing partner Stephen Innes said the ringgit fluctuated throughout the day but ended slightly weaker as markets braced for a pivotal week of central bank meetings, particularly the US Federal Reserve (Fed).

"The focal point of global attention remains on the Fed, enveloped in a cloud of uncertainty."

"Within the Fed, opinions are split: some policymakers question the wisdom of further rate cuts, while others remain skeptical about the benefits of the rate reductions undertaken so far," he told Bernama.

Given the market's expectations, Innes said a conservative 25 basis point cut seems the most straightforward path for the Fed.

"The forthcoming economic projections are expected to paint a picture of caution, potentially indicating a slowdown in the pace of future rate reductions," he added.

The ringgit traded lower against other major currencies.

It receded versus the British pound to 5.6646/6703 from 5.6301/6365, but fell against the euro to 4.6815/6862 from 4.6743/6795.

The ringgit was traded mixed against Asean currencies. It decreased against the Singapore dollar to 3.3048/3087 versus 3.2992/3032, but went up versus the Thai baht to 13.0236/0440 from 13.0575/0795.

Exchange Rates

FOREIGN CURRENCY	SELLING TT/OD	BUYING TT	BUYING OD
1 US Dollar	4.5130	4.3790	4.3690
1 Australian Dollar	2.8920	2.7750	2.7590
1 Brunei Dollar	3.3430	3.2460	3.2380
1 Canadian Dollar	3.1660	3.0810	3.0690
1 Euro	4.7550	4.6010	4.5810
1 New Zealand Dollar	2.6180	2.5220	2.5060
1 Singapore Dollar	3.3430	3.2460	3.2380
1 Sterling Pound	5.7350	5.5530	5.5330
1 Swiss Franc	5.0870	4.8720	4.8570
100 UAE Dirham	124.3100	117.8700	117.6700
100 Bangladesh Taka	3.8550	3.5900	3.3900
100 Chinese Renminbi	62.4600	59.8000	N/A
100 Danish Krone	65.3400	60.1300	59.9300
100 Hongkong Dollar	58.6700	55.7500	55.5500
100 Indian Rupee	5.4000	5.0700	4.8700
100 Indonesian Rupiah	0.0292	0.0264	0.0214
100 Japanese Yen	2.9340	2.8390	2.8290
100 New Taiwan Dollar	14.9000	N/A	N/A
100 Norwegian Krone	41.5700	38.2400	38.0400
100 Pakistan Rupee	1.6500	1.5500	1.3500
100 Philippine Peso	7.7900	7.3400	7.1400
100 Qatar Riyal	125.1700	118.8300	118.6300
100 Saudi Riyal	121.4500	115.2900	115.0900
100 South Africa Rand	26.2100	23.6700	23.4700
100 Sri Lanka Rupee	1.5900	1.4700	1.2700
100 Swedish Krona	42.7800	38.9700	38.7700
100 Thai Baht	13.8400	12.2700	11.8700

Source: Malayan Banking Bhd/Bernama

Coraza Integrated Technology Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM0.66



Source: TA Securities, Coraza

TO RECAP, the past few quarters have been very challenging for CORAZA as the group faced the downturn of the global semiconductor sector in 2023. Amid this challenging period, the group also experienced persistent deferrals of orders from semiconductor customers. The loss of economies of scale, coupled with additional fixed costs for capacity expansion, caused CORAZA to slip into a loss in Q3'23. Since then, the group continued to report losses until the recent quarter, Q3'24, when it managed to return to profitability by recording a core profit of RM2.3 million. This turnaround was driven by a recovery in demand as the global semiconductor sector returned to an upcycle, as well as higher contributions from the introduction of new products. The encouraging results in Q3'24 mark the third consecutive quarter of QoQ earnings improvement.

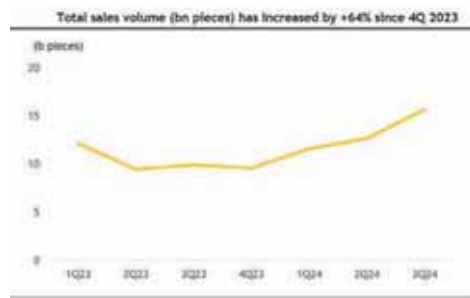
The group has recently seen an increase in orders, with its order book standing at around RM70 million, approximately 50% of which comes from the semiconductor sector and 32% from instrumentation. Growth will continue to be largely driven by its key end-user markets, including semiconductor, instrumentation, and life sciences and medical devices.

Overall, management is confident that the order book will continue to grow, underpinned by the strong upcycle in the global semiconductor sector. The global semiconductor market is expected to close in 2024 on a high note, driven by robust demand fueled by investments in AI data centres.

BUY with RM0.66 TP. – TA Research, Dec 17

Gloves sector

Neutral



Source: HART, TOPG, Maybank Investment Bank

MALAYSIA'S glove sector is recovering, driven by inventory replenishment since early-2024 and is set to benefit from a higher 50% US tariff on China-made gloves from 2025 and 100% from 2026. This will boost utilisation rates and ASPs. However, risks persist from China rivals in non-US markets, their overseas expansion and potential higher US tariff extending beyond China-made gloves.

The US-imposed 50% and 100% tariffs on China-made gloves starting in 2025 and 2026 is a major industry game-changer, making Malaysian gloves more price-competitive in the key US market. ASPs are expected to improve to US\$21-23/k pcs in Q4'24-25 based on our estimates (but still below US' cost of imports from China post higher tariffs), from <US\$21/k pcs prior to Q4'24, leading to improved margins and a larger market share in the US. Higher ASPs for the Malaysia glove makers will also help offset rising costs from the RM1,700 monthly minimum wage hike (from RM1,500) effective Feb 2025. Due to cautious and just gradual capacity expansion, we expect plant utilisation rates to remain high at 65-85% in Q4'24-25 (vs. 30-50% in 2023).

2024 was a year of mixed surprises for Malaysia's glove sector, marking its recovery after a three-year downturn that began in 2H'21. Sales volume surged by +26% to +28% YoY in 9M'24 for the glove stocks under our coverage – driven by restocking activities and a narrower price gap between Malaysia and China glove makers (from US\$3-4/k pieces in 2023 to US\$1-2/k pieces in Q2'24). – Maybank Investment Bank, Dec 17

T7 Global Bhd

Buy. Target price: RM0.68



Source: Phillip Capital Research, Bloomberg

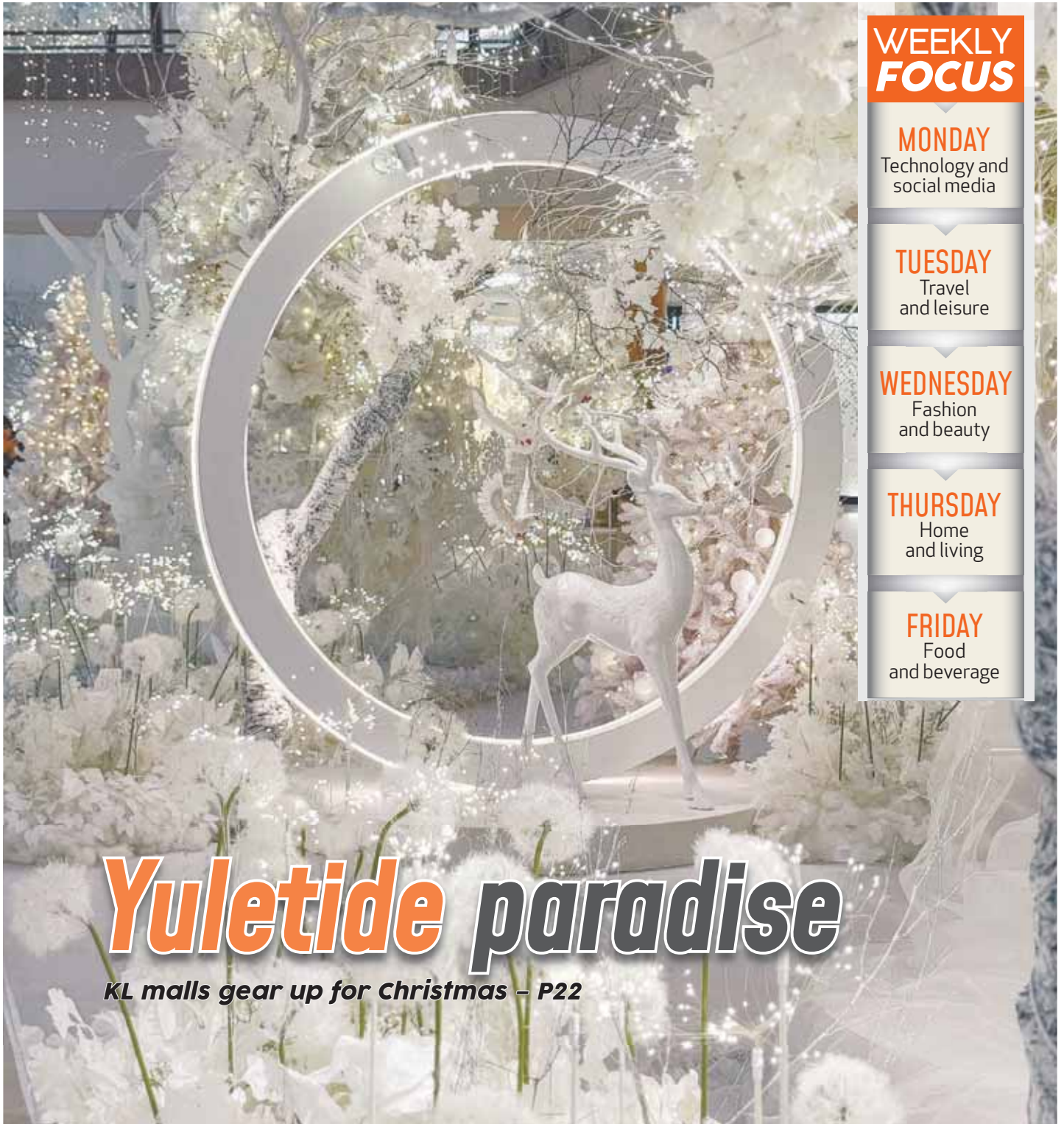
T7 GLOBAL (T7) has announced that its wholly owned subsidiary, Tanjung Offshore Services Sdn Bhd, has been awarded a Maintenance, Construction, Modification (MCM), and Hook-Up Commissioning services contract for Package C1 (Peninsular Malaysia Asset) by Petronas Carigali Sdn Bhd.

While no official contract value was disclosed, we estimate the contract to be worth RM500 million, contributing an annual revenue of RM100 million. Based on a net profit margin of 9% (in line with management's guidance), this contract is expected to generate an annual PATAMI of RM9 million over 2025-29, accounting for 18% of our 2025 earnings estimate. With this award, T7's total Pan Malaysia package wins now stand at RM1.3-1.4 billion. We remain positive on T7's contract flow prospects, backed by its solid RM14 billion tender book, which includes MOPU and FPSO projects, MCM-related work, well plug & abandonment, and offshore facility decommissioning.

We continue to like T7 for its positive earnings prospects, supported by its sizeable RM4.5 billion order book that offers long-term visibility, with >50% comprising MOPU and Pan Malaysia packages providing 5-10 years of earnings clarity. Key risks include unforeseen operational delays in existing MOPUs, unforeseen delays in the BHS project and work orders, and higher-than-expected operating costs.

T7 Global offers a wide range of specialist products solutions across general industry, aerospace, oil & gas, and stakeholders. They leverage their respective expertise together with strategic partnerships with reputable technology companies to provide fit for purpose solutions to its customers.

BUY with RM0.68 TP. – Phillip Capital Research, Dec 17



WEEKLY FOCUS

MONDAY
 Technology and social media

TUESDAY
 Travel and leisure

WEDNESDAY
 Fashion and beauty

THURSDAY
 Home and living

FRIDAY
 Food and beverage

Yuletide paradise

KL malls gear up for Christmas – P22

Festive wonderland

➤ Dazzling Christmas decorations at Kuala Lumpur malls

EVERY Christmas, shopping malls across Kuala Lumpur enhance the holiday spirit with their decorations. These shopping havens transform into magical destinations, where visitors can engage themselves in sparkling lights, whimsical displays and heart-warming experiences. Here is a look at how some of the most popular malls are making this year's Yuletide season unforgettable with their festive extravaganzas.

Sungei Wang Plaza

This Christmas, Sungei Wang Plaza transforms into a tropical beach paradise with its vibrant "Holiday Waves" campaign, featuring the beloved Pinkfong and Baby Shark in collaboration with Astro. Departing from traditional snowy themes, the mall brings a festive twist with towering inflatable Pinkfong and Baby Shark figures, a 20-foot-tall Christmas tree adorned with shimmering ornaments and a dazzling beach-inspired Centre Court complete with palm trees, colourful beach balls and a jolly "sand" snowman. Highlights include interactive performances, creative activities such as sand art, Toyworld's Pinkfong Island with exclusive merchandise and festive classics, including carollers and Santa's Walkabout.

MyTown

MyTown has an enchanting Christmas celebration featuring a whimsical ship created by four extraordinary friends from the imaginative world of Tadaland, in collaboration with Hong Kong-based lifestyle brand Tadaland. Under the theme "Shine! Uniquely You, Joyfully Together", the decor showcases Dante, Apollo, Taro and Mellow (characters inspired by MBTI personality types) symbolising diversity, unity and individuality. Visitors can explore the magical ship, take a Tadaland personality test and enjoy a series of festive events, including a magical snowfall parade, meet-and-greet sessions with Santa, Miss Claus and Tadaland mascots, plus live performances and awards ceremonies.

The Exchange TRX

The Exchange TRX unveils "Sparkle & Splendour", transforming the lifestyle destination into a festive wonderland filled with dazzling decorations and exclusive seasonal rewards. Highlights include a breathtaking seven-metre Tiffany & Co. Christmas tree wrapped in the iconic Tiffany blue at the Central Exchange, a magical Louis Vuitton holiday carousel and a grand Christmas tree adorned with sparkling snowflakes at Raintree Plaza, complemented by festive displays at TRX City Park. Adding to the enchantment, the *Wicked*-themed installation at The Urban Node captivates visitors with interactive zones inspired by Glinda and Elphaba while Lego's "Gift the

Superpower of Play" delights families with creative activities and vibrant displays.

Sunway Velocity Mall

At Sunway Velocity Mall, the holiday season comes alive with beautifully designed photo spots and festive-themed retail booths brimming with holiday treats. Adding to the excitement is the Spend & Win Wonderland Contest, in which top spenders have a chance to win prizes and the Colourama Memories Photo Contest, offering RM100 American Tourister vouchers to lucky winners. To complete the experience, live carolling performances and Santa Claus appearances every festive weekend fill the air with joy, making it a magical destination for shoppers and families alike.

Sunway Putra Mall

At Sunway Putra Mall, the festive spirit takes a creative turn with vibrant, larger-than-life decorations and an array of hands-on workshops for families and friends. From crafting unique gifts to learning new skills, the mall offers something for everyone to enjoy. Festivities are elevated with cheerful Christmas parades spreading joy throughout the mall while the best dressed competition invites visitors to showcase their holiday style and win exciting prizes.

Sunway 163 Retail Park

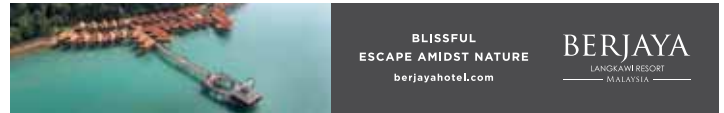
Sunway 163 Mall transforms into a festive haven, offering exclusive rewards and weekend workshops designed to spread holiday cheer. From engaging activities for all ages to dazzling performances and special appearances, the mall promises an unforgettable Christmas experience.

Avenue K

Located in the heart of the city, Avenue K greets visitors with an elegant and whimsical winter wonderland theme. The mall's Christmas decorations blend traditional elements such as towering Christmas trees adorned with sparkling lights and ornaments with modern, sleek designs. Visitors are welcomed by a grand entrance lined with oversized ornaments and snowflake-shaped lights, creating a magical atmosphere that invites families to enjoy a relaxing shopping experience amid the holiday magic.

The Gardens Mall

Renowned for its sophistication, The Gardens Mall embraces a lavish winter fairytale theme "The Wishing Forest" this year. The decorations feature beautifully adorned Christmas trees, shimmering baubles and delicately twinkling lights. The festive atmosphere extends beyond the decor as the mall also hosts themed events and pop-up stores offering premium Christmas goodies and gifts. The plush, gold accents and elegant floral arrangements create a magical setting that elevates the shopping experience for



Pavilion KL Main Entrance transforms into a dazzling display of gold and luxury.



Sunway Velocity Mall dazzles with colourful Christmas decorations.

those seeking holiday glamour.

Pavilion Kuala Lumpur

Pavilion Kuala Lumpur's "Christmas Enchantment" transforms the mall into a glittering holiday wonderland, featuring a stunning blend of gold and luxury. At the main entrance, visitors are greeted by Santa on a magical journey with his reindeer, complete with whimsical snowfall and a sparkling ambience. The Centre Court showcases Dior's "Ball of Dreams", with the tallest 12-metre Dior Christmas tree in Southeast Asia while the Spanish Steps and Dior carriage step up the seasonal glamour. Shoppers can also enjoy nightly snowfall spectacles, augmented reality shows, live performances and festive pop-ups, including a Christmas Toy Festival and exclusive events.

Pavilion Bukit Jalil

Pavilion Bukit Jalil brings festive joy with its "CoComelon Christmas Playland", a magical family destination. The Centre Court transforms into a CoComelon-inspired wonderland, complete with a giant JJ inflatable, a twinkling Christmas tree and dazzling stars. Kids can explore the playland through interactive activities, collect stamps and stickers and shop

at the CoComelon Pop Up Store for exclusive holiday gifts. The excitement continues with the world's first CoComelon Christmas Parade every weekend, featuring dancing elves and beloved characters, plus meet-and-greet sessions. The Christmas Marketplace offers unique gifts, festive decor and exclusive pop ups, ensuring a merry holiday experience for all.

Intermark Mall

Intermark Mall transforms into a cosy European-style holiday wonderland with its "Christmas Wonder" celebration. The mall is adorned with sparkling lights, charming decorations and festive stalls, creating a magical atmosphere that captures the season's spirit. The ground atrium comes alive with musical performances, adding to the enchantment as shoppers enjoy the festive decor and holiday cheer.

These malls showcase the diversity and creativity that define Christmas celebrations in Kuala Lumpur. Each beautifully decorated space gives a wonderful experience this Yuletide season. Visitors can take in the enchanting decorations and festive ambience that is sure to leave a lasting impression. Make sure to visit and soak in the Christmas magic before the year comes to an end!



Shoppers are greeted by inflatable figures of Baby Shark at the main entrance of Sungei Wang Plaza.



MyTown's Christmas decorations enhance visitors' holiday experiences with joy and creativity.



Sunway Putra Mall transforms into a festive wonderland.

BY VERONICA ELANKOVAN

TIS' the season to be jolly – and there is nothing more jolly than Christmas presents! As Yuletide dawns near (seven days to be exact), the biggest headache one faces is the process of buying gifts.

But, fret not. Consider your gifting woes lifted with *theSun's* curated Noel-themed gifting guide.

Bath & Body Works Holiday Collection 2024

This holiday collection is ideal for those who love seasonal, Christmassy scents. Bath & Body Works fragrances, such as Frosted Cranberry, Holiday Pine and Warm Vanilla Sugar, are just the gift for that one person who is Christmas personified. These scents are available in forms of three-wick and single-wick candles. For the studs, there is a curated collection of bold fragrances that whispers confidence with a balance of warmth and spice. From Holidays Minis and gift sets to Christmas-scented body care products, its collection is ideal for a last minute gift.

Price range: Starts from RM16

Mangosteens' curated holiday gift sets

Got a vegan baddie in your circle? Get them curated gift sets from homegrown brand Mangosteens that prioritises conscious living while embracing the spirit of holiday indulgences. Mangosteens just dropped its Tropics Vegan Collection that includes its Pomelo Shower Gel, Pomegranate Body Lotion, Cucumber & Mint Shampoo and Watermelon Conditioner. Meanwhile, its Santa's reindeer-inspired gift sets (Rudolph, Comet and Donner), which also include two sets (Dance and Prancer) curated in collaboration



Bath & Body Works Holiday Collection 2024.



Bobby Brown's City Lights Holiday Collection.

Penhaligon's Bakery

Penhaligon's Bakery is serving up trays of freshly baked and bottled up luxurious scents, taking you to Uptown London for a Christmas brunch. Its Baker's Box of Delights is an advent calendar with a scrumptious choice of scents, from *eau de parfum* to candles and mini soaps.

For the bon vivant, Penhaligon's deliciously divine gift sets, The Luna Festive Gift Set and The Halfeti Festive Gift Set, will tickle their nosebuds. Meanwhile, the miniature-loving lassies and lads will love indulging in The Ladies' Miniature Festive Collection, The Gents' Miniature Festive Collection or its Festive Scent Library.

Or else, cozy up your choices with the Trio of Candles Festive Gift Set or Limited Edition Festive Candle, ideal for someone with a penchant for holiday nostalgia. While you are at it, how about Penhaligon's Giles the Gingerbread Man ornament for little pick-me-up gift?

Price range: RM205 – RM2,675

Jolly gifting guide

➤ Sort out your present woes with this list

with Bake X Dignity, will make fun gifts for those who love cruelty-free products.

Price range: RM170 – RM375



The Ordinary's Hydrate & Brighten Set.

The Ordinary Holiday Campaign

The Ordinary gift sets are ideal for someone who is on the lookout for a sustainable, effective skincare routine. For those new to the brand, perhaps The Mini Discovery Set featuring cult favourites is a thoughtful, introductory gift. The Glycolic Acid Set or The Hydrate & Brighten Set is ideal for the dry skin girls and boys who want plumper, brighter skin for the holiday.

Price range: RM91 – RM208

Shiseido 2024 Holiday Collection

Your skincare-obsessed bestie will thank you for this one. Joining hands with Ryukobo, skincare master Shiseido just unveiled its holiday collection that celebrates beauty and heritage. Spoil him and her with the Japanese luxury skincare essentials by setting them up with its Activate, Strengthen & Regenerate First Experience Kit this Christmas. Alternatively, you can get them Shiseido's Double Sun Protection Set, Youth Renewal Set or Hydrating Set.

Price range: RM145 – RM550

Bobbi Brown's City Lights Holiday Collection

This one is for the cosmopolites who love a beat face. For a shimmery Christmas, you can get Bobbi Brown's

Dual-Ended Long Wear Cream Shadow Stick Set, Swipe-and-Shine Crushed Oil-Infused Gloss Trio or Glide-And-Glow Lip & Cheek Set. For the skincare babes, you could opt for gift sets such as its Vitamin Enriched Face Base Duo, Season Recharge Skincare Set or Sheer Shine Extra Plump Lip Serum Set. Too many to choose from? Just surprise them with a Bobbi Brown 12-Day Advent Calendar that has three full-sized favourites including skincare and makeup selections.

Price range: RM120 – RM899



Penhaligon's Bakery.



Mangosteens' Tropics Vegan Collection.



Shiseido's First Experience Kit.



IN the heart of Malaysia's vibrant urban landscape, innovation meets leisure in an exciting showcase of creativity. A cutting-edge museum celebrates the evolution of two-wheeled transportation, offering enthusiasts a journey through mechanical history.

Meanwhile, fashion and jewellery enthusiasts can explore a new boutique that artfully blends traditional craftsmanship with modern design. Families and adventure seekers have a fresh indoor entertainment destination that promises thrilling experiences across interactive games and activities.

For those seeking aquatic adventures, a unique urban facility provides immersive water-based programmes. From retail experiences to entertainment, these emerging destinations reflect Malaysia's dynamic spirit of innovation and exploration.



Melawati Mall GameOn Theme Park.



Urban City Divers.

Urban thrills

➤ Refurbished malls, new outlets, adventure playgrounds emerge

Space Y

As part of Hong Leong Yamaha Motor's 45-year milestone and the production of its 6th million motorcycle, the company has unveiled Space Y, Malaysia's first motorcycle museum.

Space Y offers an opportunity for motorcycle enthusiasts to explore Yamaha Motor's rich history, innovation and artistry while providing a captivating new destination for fans to immerse themselves in Malaysia's motorcycle heritage.

The museum also features the evolution of motorcycles, from the past to the present and into the future. Located at Yamaha Motor Lifestyle Station headquarters, Space Y has free admission to the public until Dec 31.



Yamaha Space Y museum.

Hazara Boutique

Partnering with jeweller Habib, Hazara Boutique has opened a new boutique at Plaza Shah Alam. Along with the opening, the store also has an exclusive unveiling of Hazara's Raya 2025 collection Scintillate that showcases the brand blending traditional craftsmanship with modern design for the festive season.

Known for its craftsmanship and designs, Habib added a touch of elegance to the boutique's launch by complementing the Scintillate collection. Inspired by the grace and vibrance of the festive season, the collection incorporates elegant chiffon silk fabrics, intricate tambour beading and modern silhouettes.

Additionally, Habib has curated a dazzling array of jewellery to complement Hazara's latest designs,

ranging from one-of-a-kind diamond pieces to exclusively crafted Oro Italia 916 collections from Italy.

GameOn Theme Park

Families and thrill-seekers across Kuala Lumpur are welcomed to explore a new realm of excitement at Melawati Mall's GameOn Theme Park, an ultimate playground for families looking for

indoor entertainment.

Filled with 14 thrilling attractions, GameOn Theme Park offers a mix of interactive games and activities for visitors such as *kung fu* challenges, ninja courses, table pool, trampoline, maze running, karaoke and more.

The park also includes classic board games such as Jenga and chess as well as their 3D versions that cater to a wide variety of interests, ensuring guests of all ages can find

something to enjoy.

The Melawati Mall outlet's masterpiece however, is set to be revealed in stage two of the park's expansion by March 2025. In addition to being the largest theme park located in East KL, the second half of the park's expansion includes plans to build Malaysia's longest indoor slide, spanning Level 6 to the Ground Floor. This unique feature is set to become a highlight for

adventure lovers and is part of GameOn's ongoing efforts to bring fresh, exciting attractions to its visitors.

Urban City Divers

Now open at Combat Baze in the KL Base, the historic former Malaysian Air Force airport, Urban City Divers offers a unique aquatic experience.

Set against the skyline of KL, the facility provides a wide array of water-based programmes ideal for individuals, families and even corporate teams looking for innovative ways to engage and grow.

Urban City Divers provides comprehensive programmes tailored to all skill levels, such as swimming lessons, mermaid swimming, freediving classes, team-building activities and professional training with swim instructor certifications and lifeguard training.

Ecco

Known for its premium footwear and leather goods, Ecco has opened its latest concept store in Sunway Pyramid, featuring a modern, Scandinavian-inspired layout that combines functionality and aesthetics.

At the heart of Ecco's product offerings, particularly at the new outlet, is its patented Fluidform Direct Comfort Technology, which ensures durability, flexibility and comfort.

The Sunway Pyramid outlet will feature a comprehensive selection of the brand's latest styles, from casual sneakers and formal footwear to outdoor and athleisure collections. This includes the latest Biom collection, designed to provide comfort and natural movement.

Eraman

The leading duty-free and retail brand Era has revamped its mall in KL International Airport's Terminal 1, which aims to provide travellers with an enhanced shopping experience, with a showcase of over 550 brands across premium travel retail and categories.

With selections of premium international brands in categories such as chocolates, perfumes, cosmetics and spirits, the mall provides a diverse range of products designed to elevate the shopping journey for all travellers passing through.

The mall also features self-checkout kiosks and has plans to launch RFID technology to further streamline the shopping experience with faster, more efficient transactions.



Ecco Sunway Pyramid.



First-ever Charlotte Tilbury pop up at Eraman duty-free mall.

MALAYSIAN fashion brand Ample Couture's Aspirit fashion show 2024 held earlier this month attracted over 300 guests, including celebrities, socialites, artistes and influencers, making it a memorable evening.

Ample Couture symbolises abundance and prosperity (Ample) as well as uniqueness and quality (Couture), reflecting its commitment to offering customers an array of choices and high-quality designs.

Following the 2023 theme "Avolution: Fashion Evolution", this year's show drew inspiration from "Aspirit: The Spirit of AC" to present a new collection. Ample Couture creative director Foong Ooi Yan infused the brand's essence with bold, self-assured designs, crafting a visual feast that embodies attitude and aesthetics for the modern woman.

The Aspirit collection blends the confidence and individuality of contemporary women. With a striking combination of classic tailoring and premium materials, the collection introduces a Mix & Match style. From party looks and office attire to modernised *cheongsam* that merge tradition with innovation, the collection celebrates the grace and resilience of today's women.

"This is not just a fashion show but a lifestyle statement," said Foong.

This series aims to convey that every woman can showcase herself through fashion, wear her confidence and live her own brilliance.

One of the highlights was Malaysian supermodel Amber Chia marking her 25th career anniversary with the debut of her fashion line *Aspire to Inspire*. Collaborating with Ample Couture, she unveiled a powerful collection, empowering women to feel more confident, independent and strong.

Behind this success lies Ample Couture's ACS Programme (Ample Couture Spirit) – a platform enabling anyone, from designers and influencers to entrepreneurs and everyday fashion lovers, to create their dream designs. Through this initiative, everyone can tell their story through fashion.

"The ACS Programme is about helping everyone discover confidence, showcase beauty and pass on that positivity to others," said Foong.

A portion of Ample Couture's proceeds is donated to community care organisations, spreading warmth and love to those in need. A show of this grandeur requires a dedicated team that works towards one goal and for



Ample Couture Aspirit fashion show 2024

» Celebrating grace, resilience of today's women



Chia (left) and Foong in Amber Chia x Ample Couture collection.

Ample Couture, the team was its strong support of partners including One Hair Academy, Shero Cosmetics and Cup Up Nu Bra.

This show is not the end but the beginning of a new journey. Ample Couture promises to

continue innovating, bringing more surprises and inspiration to its customers. Its goal is to be a platform, in which everyone can achieve their fashion dreams, discover their style and radiate confidence.



Sephora x Tutti Frutti.



Redeem samples at Sephora's Beauty Playground by scanning the QR codes provided.



Find your right shade and discover exclusive holiday sets at Fenty Beauty's Fresh Market.



Play pinball to win deluxe prizes.



Visit Sephora 'Give Something Beautiful' activation until Dec 31 at Fahrenheit88.

Festive meets beauty this December

SEPHORA Malaysia has returned to Bukit Bintang for the second year with the Festive Meets Beauty @ Sephora Fahrenheit88 this December.

There is no better way to "Give Something Beautiful" than a fuss-free experience – frivolous, fun and simple – as gifting should not feel like rocket science. The holiday takeover brings together the magic of the festive season with glamour, beauty and enchantment.



Sephora Cafe.

With collaborations from "Only At Sephora" brands such as Fenty Beauty, Sephora x Tutti Frutti and the Sephora Collection pop-up, enjoy the interactive beauty stations, 3D content displays and engaging games with prizes opportunities.

Let Sephora take the stress out of holiday shopping – do not overthink it, just give something beautiful.



G.E.M. announces KL date on world tour

➤ Mandarin pop diva to stage Malaysian show after six years

ASIA'S Mandarin pop diva G.E.M. is set to make her long-awaited return to Malaysia after six years, where she will perform for the first time at Kuala Lumpur's Bukit Jalil National Stadium – a milestone event in her celebrated career.

Scheduled for Feb 15 next year, this concert promises an unforgettable evening of innovation, heartfelt emotion and musical brilliance, brought to life on a spectacular stage designed under G.E.M.'s direction.

The I Am Gloria World Tour marks a pivotal chapter for G.E.M., embracing her given name Gloria to explore themes of self-discovery and renewal. Since its debut in Guangzhou, the tour has sold out stadiums worldwide.

As the tour's creative director, G.E.M. shapes every detail to deliver an unforgettable experience. The Kuala Lumpur show will stay true to this vision, featuring cutting-edge production, immersive storytelling and a curated setlist. Fans can look forward to beloved hits such as *Bubble*, *Light Years Away* and *Gloria*, each reflecting her journey from darkness to light.

"Having seen the light, it is our duty to reflect it back to the world," G.E.M. shared.



The I Am Gloria World tour highlights G.E.M.'s growth and transformation.

G.E.M.'s journey to stardom began at just 16, mesmerising audiences with her vocals. Now a Mandopop icon, she has delivered chart-topping hits such as *Bubble*, *Tik Tok*, *Light Years Away* and *Long Distance*, solidifying her reputation as one of the genre's most celebrated singer-songwriters.

In the past 16 years of her career, G.E.M. has penned over 100 original songs and is the first female Chinese artiste to headline shows across China's five biggest stadiums, including Guangzhou, Shanghai, Nanjing, Beijing and Hangzhou.

Thus far, G.E.M.'s I Am Gloria tour has held consecutive 75 shows, breaking her previous touring records. Furthermore, she is the youngest female artiste and the first one born in the 90s to headline the

Hong Kong Coliseum. Her creative artistry has earned her multiple Golden Melody Award nominations for Best Mandarin Female Singer, cementing her influence in the industry.

The Hong Kong singer's accolades include a Guinness World Record for *Light Years Away* as the most-viewed Chinese music video on YouTube and recognition as Spotify's Most-Streamed Chinese Female Artiste. G.E.M.'s 2022 album *Revelation* broke new ground with its 14-episode music video series, redefining Mandopop storytelling.

With performances spanning Beijing, Shanghai, Paris, London, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, G.E.M. continues to transcend cultural boundaries, connecting with audiences worldwide through her talent and vision.



G.E.M.'s journey to stardom began at just 16, mesmerising audiences with her vocals.

Presented by Maybank and organised by Tootop Productions with Star Planet as co-organiser,

tickets for the I Am Gloria World Tour in Kuala Lumpur will go on sale this Friday.

Lord of the Rings gets anime makeover with War of the Rohirrim film

NO elves, no dwarves and not a hobbit in sight: *Lord of the Rings* returns to the big screen this month with a new anime movie about the warring men of J.R.R. Tolkien's fictional universe.

Released last Friday, *The War of the Rohirrim* is a prequel that takes place nearly two centuries before Peter Jackson's original Oscar-winning films, which were adaptations of Tolkien's fantasy books.

But unlike the first *Lord of the Rings* movies, or *The Hobbit* films that followed, there are no magical rings or all-powerful Dark Lords this time around.

Human drama

"You look at the original trilogy, you are talking hobbits, elves, dwarves and monsters," director Kenji Kamiyama told a recent press conference.

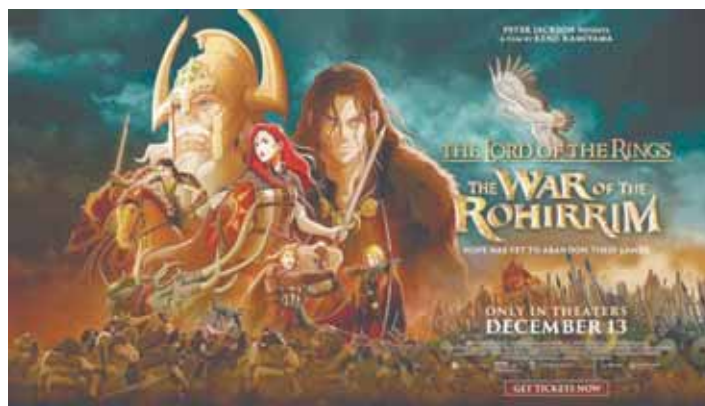
The new film is rooted in human drama and emotion, greed and power, said the Japanese artist who has previously worked on animated versions of *Star Wars* and *Blade Runner*.

Hollywood studio Warner Bros announced in 2021 the next *Rings* film would be an anime – a distinctively Japanese visual style and genre.

Filmmakers scoured the vast, invented histories that Tolkien wrote as footnotes for his beloved novels.

They soon homed in on a brief description of a civil war between a king and a rebellious nobleman.

"It was not a case of, 'we have got the story, what form of animation are we going to tell it in?'"



The new anime is rooted in human drama.

– PIC FROM FACEBOOK @THELORDOFTHERINGS:THEWAROFROHIRRIM

"It was actually the opposite way around. There was something about this particular story that felt intrinsically right for that great tradition of Japanese filmmaking that is anime," said producer Philippa Boyens who also co-wrote the scripts for *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* trilogies.

That tradition means themes such as honour, loyalty, hubris – and a fearsome female protagonist, in the ilk of Studio Ghibli's famous *Princess Mononoke*.

Boss girl

The War of the Rohirrim is set in Rohan, the kingdom of horse-riding, Viking-looking warriors that featured prominently in Jackson's 2002 movie *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*.

The animated movie revisits key locations from that film, such as the battleground fortress of Helm's Deep, and is narrated by Miranda Otto who played a heroic female Rohan warrior Eowyn in Jackson's trilogy.

The plot begins with ambitious Lord Freca plotting to marry his son to Hera, the daughter of the king of Rohan.

When the offer is contemptuously spurned by the proud monarch, Freca mounts a mutinous challenge to the throne but is fatally struck down.

Sent into exile, his son cultivates a massive rebellion that will unleash catastrophic war on the entire kingdom.

Although she is central to the conflict, Tolkien did not even bother to give the princess a name in his lengthy historical footnotes.

But Boyens was fascinated by the idea of expanding this mysterious character, who witnesses and links the new film's various heroes, villains and battles.

"We did not want her to be some warrior princess, superhero, boss girl. We wanted her to feel real. She is full of curiosity, she makes mistakes," said Boyens.

Jackson himself served as an executive producer for the new film but stepped back from day-to-day involvement, encouraging Kamiyama to put his own anime stamp on the film, according to Boyens.

"Elements of the live-action (films) creep into the world," she said.

But they crept in very beautifully around the edge.

"Storywise, we obviously wanted to stay true to the Tolkien universe but at the same time, staying true to what we do best, which was just to make anime," agreed Kamiyama. – AFP



LOW KENG HUAT BERHAD

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UNTUK:

TETUAN LOW KENG HUAT BHD

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SITE LOCATION

You are cordially invited to a briefing session with
Tetuan Low Keng Huat Bhd on:

DATE : 28 DECEMBER 2024 (SATURDAY)
TIME : 9.00 PM TO 12.00 PM
VENUE : PUNCAK WANGSAMAS SALES GALLERY
LOT 29057, JALAN WANGSAMAS,
MUKIM SETAPAK, KUALA LUMPUR.

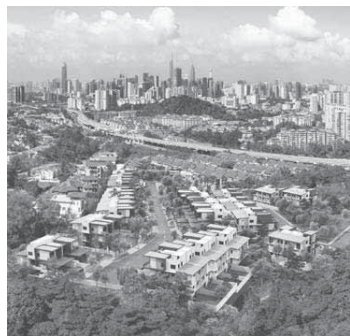


SCAN FOR LOCATION

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劉景發有限公司

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322 Notices

DALAM BANGKARAN MAJLIS DOKUMEN
DALAM NEGERI SELANGOR, ENGAN,
MALAYSIA
GUAJAM SUK:
BL-4720UC-11-10/2024

ANTARA
TEMAGA NASIONAL BERHAD
(No. Syarikat: 19901009294 (200896-W))
...PLAINTIFF

DAN
CHEW KOK SAN
(No. K/P: 64801-07-5615)
(Berbilang dibawah nama 4 gya)
BAPIVO TRANSPORTATION
(No. Pendaftaran Perniagaan:
20200320098 (00318251-PI))
...DEFENDAN

NOTIS PENYAMPANGAN GANTI-BENTUK INJAN

Kepada,
CHEW KOK SAN
(No. K/P: 64801-07-5615)
(Berbilang dibawah nama 4 gya)
BAPIVO TRANSPORTATION
(No. Pendaftaran Perniagaan:
20200320098 (00318251-PI))
No. 240, Tingkat 1, Jalan Halduang 27
K37, Taman Sentosa,
41200 Klang,
Selangor Darul Ehsan.

Darutau,
CHEW KOK SAN
(No. K/P: 64801-07-5615)
(Berbilang dibawah nama 4 gya)
BAPIVO TRANSPORTATION
(No. Pendaftaran Perniagaan:
20200320098 (00318251-PI))
No. 212/4, Perumahan Raja Muda Musa,
43000 Pelabuhan Klang,
Selangor Darul Ehsan

Dalam perkara Wht yang dikeluarkan pada 17
harbulan Oktober 2024

AMBIL PERHATIAN bahawa suatu lantikan Wht telah dilaksanakan terhadap Defendan dalam Mahkamah Majliset di Klang dalam Guaman No. BL-4720UC-11-10/2024 oleh Temaga Nasional Berhad (No. Syarikat: 19901009294 (200896-W)) di mana lantikan Plaintiff ialah untuk jumlah bayaran sebanyak RM 59,107.45 bagi jumlah kehilangan hasil ternak, kos operasi dan cukai berkaitan berkenaan pemasangan pepasangan meter/meter yang dipajakan di Premis tersebut pada 8/10/2021 secara alternatif melalui bagi jumlah sebanyak RM 59,107.45 bagi jumlah kehilangan hasil ternak, kos operasi dan cukai berkaitan berkenaan pemasangan pepasangan meter/meter yang dipajakan di Premis tersebut pada 8/10/2021, secara alternatif, pengadu untuk dipajakan pada kadar 5% terhadap jumlah pengakhiran pepasangan meter/meter yang dipajakan di Premis tersebut pada 8/10/2021 sehingga terah pengakhiran pepasangan meter/meter yang dipajakan pada kadar 5% terhadap jumlah pengakhiran pepasangan meter/meter yang dipajakan di Premis tersebut pada 8/10/2021 dan Penyataan Tuntutan bertarikh 17/10/2024 dan Penyataan Tuntutan bertarikh 16/10/2024 ("Wht tersebut") disampaikan kepada nama melalui Penyampangan Ganti-bentuk dengan memaparkan sesialan Wht tersebut di Pejabat Notis Mahkamah Klang, diaman di alamat Defendan di No. 240, Tingkat 1, Jalan Halduang 27K37, Taman Sentosa, 41200 Klang, Selangor Darul Ehsan (selapan ini "alamat Perant Defendan") dan No. 212/4, Perumahan Raja Muda Musa, 43000 Pelabuhan Klang, Selangor Darul Ehsan (selapan ini "alamat Perant Plaintiff") berdasarkan kepada Perintah bertarikh 4/12/2024 dan juga mengikutkannya sekali (1) dalam surat lantikan tersebut dan saya percaya bahawa penyampangan ini menjadi penyampangan yang sempurna dan malar ke atas Defendan tersebut empataleas (14) hari selepas dat terah pengakhiran dan penyampangan tersebut.

Sekiranya kamu berhajat untuk membuat perubahan terhadap lantikan tersebut, kamu mestia diarah oleh Peguam Kanan kamu di hadapan Mahkamah Majliset Klang pada 21/10/2024 (pecaca E-Filed) dan RM 100.00.

Sekiranya kamu gagal berbuat demikian maka Pengakhiran Inkar boleh diberikan terhadap kamu.

Berlaku pada 18 harbulan Desember 2024

Tetuan Saneah Anasid,
Peguamcara bagi Plaintiff

Notis Penyampangan Ganti Bentuk Inkar ini dikeluarkan oleh Tetuan Saneah Anasid, Peguamcara bagi pihak Plaintiff yang beralamat di Unit A02, Blok A, Kelana Square, No. 17, Jalan SST/26, Kelana Jaya, 47201, Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan.
Tel: 03-78059193 / 03-7806007
Fax: 03-7807469
(Ruj. SAK/7/100/BAPIVO TRANSPORTATION/2024/2024/SA)

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2016 AND IN THE MATTER OF IMPIAN PALMS SDN. BHD. Registration No.: 200401003654 (642157-W) (IN MEMBERS' VOLUNTARY WINDING UP) NOTICE OF FINAL MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT pursuant to Section 459 of the Companies Act, 2016, the Final Meeting of the Members of the Company will be held at No. 9, Jalan Indah 16, Taman Orenas Indah, 56100 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan on Tuesday, 21 January 2025 at 11.00 a.m. for the purpose of:-

- 1. To receive and consider the Liquidator's Statement of Accounts showing the manner in which the winding up has been conducted and the asset/property of the Company disposed of and of hearing any explanations that may be given by the Liquidator.
- 2. To determine pursuant to Section 510(3)(b) of the Companies Act, 2016, the manner and period in which the books, accounts and documents of the Company and of the Liquidator thereof shall be disposed of.

YAP KAI WENG Liquidator
Kuala Lumpur
Dated this 18th day of December, 2024

A member entitled to attend and vote at this meeting is entitled to appoint a proxy to attend and vote in his stead. A proxy need not be a member of the Company. Proxy forms must be deposited with the Liquidator at the above address not less than 48 hours before the meeting.



New Zealand's Tim Southee (centre) and teammates huddle. - AFP/ICC

NZ send Southee out on a high

NEW ZEALAND tore through England's batting yesterday to crush the visitors by 423 runs in the third Test and send Tim Southee into retirement on a triumphant note. The hosts sealed a dominant performance in Hamilton by claiming seven wickets in 41.2 overs on day four as England crumbled for 234.

It was New Zealand's equal highest victory by runs and a complete reversal from the first two Tests, which England won easily to clinch the three-match series.

Playing on his home ground at Seddon Park, seamer Southee finished with 2-34 in his 107th and final Test, ending the career of one of New Zealand's finest players.

He finishes with 391 Test wickets, second only to Richard Hadlee among New Zealanders. "I want to thank New Zealand Cricket for everything you have done. My family, who are there for the ride and see the ups and downs," said the 36-year-old Southee.

"And my teammates. These guys have made the ride so much more enjoyable, I have loved every minute. "And finally the fans. It is always great to turn out in front of numbers. This week has been pretty special to play at Seddon Park in front of a great crowd."

Stokes won't cut back on bowling

ENGLAND captain Ben Stokes admitted yesterday he became "emotional" after suffering another injury setback during the third Test defeat to New Zealand, but he would not be reducing his bowling workload.

Stokes is still to learn the severity of the "incredibly disappointing" hamstring injury recurrence which forced him from the field mid-spell on Monday's third day in Hamilton.

He suffered the same affliction while bowling in August, sidelining him from four Tests during a two-month recovery.

Stokes did not bat in England's second innings, with the risk of further damage not deemed worth it as the tourists crashed to 234 all out and a 423-run defeat. "I worked my a**e off to get

to where I was in this game, in particular, with my body," he said.

"It's just sod's law that the first time in a while when I feel like I'm young again, something happens."

However, Stokes said a night's sleep had worked wonders mentally, aided by the realisation England's next Test isn't until May.

"When you take the emotion out of it, you realise that when you're walking out there, you're always putting yourself at risk of an injury," he said.

"I worked really hard to get myself into position to play the role that I did this game, and it's just one of those unfortunate things. So no, I ain't holding back."

India avoid follow-on as third Test heads for draw

INDIA'S Jasprit Bumrah and Akash Deep pulled off an unlikely 10th-wicket partnership yesterday to avoid the follow-on and put the third Test against Australia in Brisbane on course for a draw.

When the pair came together the tourists still needed 33 runs to make Australia bat again at the Gabba on another day marred by rain delays.

But under gloomy skies, the two managed to see off Australia's much-vaunted pace attack to frustrate the home side on day four.

Akash scored the crucial runs with an edge to the boundary just past the outstretched hand of Nathan McSweeney off Australian captain Pat Cummins.

He celebrated two balls later by smashing Cummins over deep mid-wicket for a massive six before umpires took them from the field for bad light with India 252-9, trailing by 193 runs.

The five-match series is currently locked 1-1.

Opener KL Rahul, who top-scored with 84, said the batting of the lower order showed how much fight this India team has.

Akash was not-out 27 and Bumrah was on 10.

"The lower order scoring runs is something that we discuss in our meetings," Rahul said.

"The bowlers work really hard on their batting as well so it's good to see them get that partnership. "To avoid that follow-on makes a huge difference."

BRIEFS

Kyrgios to team up with Djokovic at Brisbane

RECORD 24-times Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic will team up with former Wimbledon finalist Nick Kyrgios to play doubles at the Brisbane International, the *Australian* said. The pair, who have developed a friendship after once being at loggerheads when Kyrgios labelled Djokovic "boneheaded" and a "tool", will use the Dec 29-Jan 5 ATP 250 event as a warm-up for next month's Australian Open. Djokovic and Kyrgios have faced each other three times on the ATP Tour, with the Australian winning the first two encounters in 2017 before losing in four sets in the 2022 Wimbledon final. In a post on *Instagram* yesterday, Kyrgios shared a picture of their meeting at Wimbledon, writing: "Doubles at Brisbane. See y'all there."

US Ryder Cup team to get paid

US Ryder Cup players will be paid to play in the biennial match play competition for the first time starting with next year's edition at Bethpage Black in New York. The PGA of America said in a statement yesterday that US team members will each get US\$500,000 (RM2.25m), with US\$300,000 (RM1.35m) of that going to charity and the remaining US\$200,000 (RM900,000) serving as a stipend. The pay is an increase from the US\$200,000 that was designated only for charity and had been in place since 1999. The PGA of America said no golfers asked to be compensated, and credited past and present players and captains for making the Ryder Cup one of the top sporting events in the world. Players on the European Ryder Cup Team do not get paid for participating in the event.

Maresca keeps playing the Blues

ENZO MARESCA continued to insist Chelsea cannot win the Premier League title after they moved to within two points of the summit with a 2-1 win over Brentford at Stamford Bridge.

The head coach cited the visitors' goal scored in the 90th minute which set up a tense finish as evidence his team cannot compete for the crown but after a dominant display to earn a fifth League win in a row it was increasingly difficult not to see them as the main challengers to leaders Liverpool.

Marc Cucurella headed his second goal for the club just before half-time then Nicolas Jackson looked to have finished off Brentford when he lashed inside the near post in the 80th minute, before Bryan Mbeumo took advantage of a defensive slip to jangle home fans' nerves.

"No matter how many games we are going to win, I think we're not ready to compete for the title," said Maresca.

"One of the reasons is I think the team that knows how to compete to win titles will not concede a goal like we concede.

"On 90 minutes, a throw-in for us and we concede a goal. A team that knows how to win titles, that goal they're not to going to concede. It's why I continue to say that we are not ready for titles.

"Even if you don't believe me. I would love the pressure to compete for the title. But we cannot concede the goal we concede and open the game and give them the chance to take a point here." – The Independent

Liverpool to blood youngsters against Saints

LIVERPOOL could have a youthful flavour to their squad for tomorrow's (3.30am Malaysian time) Carabao Cup quarterfinal away to Southampton.

The Reds are fighting strong on several fronts with early talk about a quadruple already starting to grow.

Arne Slot's side sit on top of both the Premier League and Champions League tables and could book their spot in the last four of the Carabao Cup with a win over Saints.

But with the fixtures starting to come thick and fast over the festive period, Slot could look to freshen things up on the south coast by throwing in some young faces.

Four youth team players weren't involved in Liverpool's U-21 clash against Crystal Palace on Monday, with speculation they could feature against Southampton starting to grow.

Trey Nyoni, Amara Nallo, Jayden Danns and James Norris were all absent from the youth team match.

Nyoni, Danns and Norris have all featured in the senior set-up before, but should Nallo see the pitch tomorrow, it will mark his Liverpool debut.

Slot hasn't often rotated his side since taking charge during the summer, with the Dutchman instead favouring the odd tinker

here and there.

But the ex-Feyenoord manager has admitted in the past he'll have to start rotating more often when the matches begin to pile up.

Comparing his new job to his time in the Netherlands, Slot remarked: "My former teams we were able to actually play almost every game with the same players but it is a different league so I might have to adjust to that, but it also depends on what they show in terms of physique.

"In the first three games we were really strong in terms of physique but we only played one game every seven days. Now they have a point

to prove.

"I assume they all want to play every game, so if they want to they have to show up every time in terms of quality and especially workrate. We have more than 11 very good players so I can use more."

Slot's predecessor knows more than anyone the talent that lies within the Liverpool youth ranks, with "Jurgen Klopp's kids" – as they came to be known – helping guide the six-time European champions to League Cup glory last season.

And if given the chance tomorrow, "Slot's students" might get to have another say of their own. – Express Newspapers

Inter hit Lazio for six

Milan stay on tail of Serie A leaders Atalanta

Inter are hot on the heels of Serie A leaders Atalanta after crushing Lazio 6-0 in Rome yesterday to demolish one of the division's form teams and send a message to the rest of the league.

Reigning champions Inter came through what was supposed to be a tough test at the Stadio Olimpico with flying colours and are three points off the *Scudetto* pace with a game in hand.

Simone Inzaghi's side sealed the points with goals equally distributed either side of half-time from Hakan Calhanoglu, Federico Dimarco, Nicolò Barella and Denzel Dumfries, before Carlos Augusto and Marcus Thuram completed the rout with two late strikes.

"It's three-and-a-half years that these boys have given me this level of commitment and I'm proud to be their manager," said Inzaghi to DAZN.

Inter have an Italian Cup tie with Udinese on Friday (4am Malaysian time) and league fixtures against Como and Cagliari before jetting off to Saudi Arabia, where they face Atalanta in the semifinals of the Italian Super Cup on Jan 2.

"It's going to be complicated but I hope we put in the same effort and level of performance like the one tonight," added Inzaghi.

An unexpectedly heavy defeat for Lazio, who came into yesterday's showdown off the back of fine away wins at Napoli and Ajax, left them fifth and six points behind Atalanta.

It also damaged any ideas of Lazio being dark horses for a first league title in a quarter of a century as Marco Baroni's side crumbled

once Calhanoglu rammed home the penalty which opened the scoring in the 41st minute.

"I'm sorry for our supporters and I take responsibility for the defeat. We played well for the first 40 minutes but then collapsed, we fell apart" said Lazio coach Baroni.

"We did things that you just can't do against a team like Inter and that means I didn't do a good enough job."

The awarding of Inter's spotkick, for a Samuel Gigot handball following a VAR check, came just after Inter had had a goal chalked off for offside during the same penalty box melee and angered Lazio.

And the hosts,

who had been the better side in the opening half an hour, were punished for lax defending when Dimarco volleyed home a brilliant second four minutes later after sneaking in unmarked at the back post to meet Dumfries' pinpoint cross.

Any hope of a second-half fightback was ended when Barella crashed in his third goal of the season from distance in the 51st minute and Dumfries capitalised on more poor Lazio defending two minutes later with a bullet header.

Carlos Augusto then became the third Inter wing-back to score of the evening in the 77th minute when he expertly controlled

Dimarco's pass to spin Adam Marusic and calmly slot home the fifth.

Thuram's brilliant individual strike wasn't just a slap in the face for Lazio, it also made Inter Serie A's top scorers ahead of Atalanta and emphatically showed that they won't give up their title easily. – AFP



Lazio's Mario Gila (left) in action with Inter Milan's Denzel Dumfries. – REUTERS/PIC

Southampton interim boss set for much-needed boost

INTERIM Southampton manager Simon Rusk might get a significant lift on the injury front as his squad prepares to host Liverpool for the Carabao Cup quarterfinal clash tomorrow.

Manager Russell Martin was given the boot on Sunday following an embarrassing 5-0 home defeat to Tottenham that marked their 13th Premier League loss in 16 games.

Injured Saints' shot-stopper Aaron Ramsdale, who has been sidelined for five matches with a finger injury and served as a pundit for *TNT Sports* during the disastrous Tottenham encounter, is eyeing a return.

Prior to Martin's departure, Ramsdale said: "The finger is getting more bendy, it's getting there. It was too soon for this game.

"I'm looking forward to (this) week. We have two games that I'm hoping to be involved in.

"It was a tough one to watch. It must have been a lot harder to play. After the work you put in, to go behind that quickly and be 5-0 down at halftime, I can't imagine the feeling playing that second half"

"We have to just forget about it really quickly, which is easier said than done. I am sure it will be a real tough one for the boys, but we've got to go again.

"We've got a big game and one we can try to get into the semifinal of the Carabao Cup."

Ramsdale, a new signing for the summer, watched Southampton collapse within the first minute at St. Mary's and concede two more goals by the 14th minute, ultimately going down by five before the break.

The Saints' manager Martin was already feeling the heat from St. Mary's faithful, with disgruntled supporters chanting for the 38-year-old's

departure before he retreated to the dressing room as the first half wound down with his team trailing.

The harrowing 5-0 defeat leaves Southampton languishing at the foot of the Premier League table, but the squad can't dwell on the setback with Liverpool's looming arrival tomorrow.

Rusk, who assumed responsibilities for Southampton's U-21s in July, initiated his coaching journey with Brighton's academy in 2015 and previously held a managerial post at Stockport before stints with the Football Association and notably Nottingham Forest as a set-piece specialist last season.

Now, having transitioned to St. Mary's, Rusk barely has time to regroup before facing Liverpool midweek, yet the players are eager to make amends. – Express Newspapers



Disappointed Cherries

Hammers penalty contradicted referees' advice, says Andoni

BY ED ELLIOT

UNHAPPY Bournemouth boss Andoni Iraola claimed a controversial penalty awarded to West Ham in a dramatic 1-1 draw at the Vitality Stadium directly contradicted advice given by Premier League referees.

Following VAR intervention, match official Chris Kavanagh penalised Cherries midfielder Tyler Adams after Aaron Wan-Bissaka's cross brushed his outstretched arm.

Hammers substitute Niclas Fullkrug almost headed home Wan-Bissaka's right-wing delivery, with Adams' adjudged infringement going unnoticed by most inside the ground.

West Ham midfielder Lucas Paqueta subsequently converted the contentious 87th-minute spot-kick before Enes Unal's stunning 90th-minute free-kick salvaged a point for the hosts.

Referring to conversations with Professional Game Match Officials Limited before the current campaign, Iraola said: "I'm very, very disappointed with the penalty because it's an action that we spoke before the season started

with the referees.

"They gave expressly the instruction not to tell our players to defend with their hands behind their back because it was not natural.

"I said 'OK, we give these instructions (to put hands behind backs) because it's costing us penalties' and he's gone, 'no, don't worry, it's natural, it's not going to cost you'. Bam, the first one: penalty.

"It's obviously natural because everyone that has played football (knows) you go running to block a shot, a cross, you finish with one hand down, one up, it's like this always.

"It doesn't change a lot the trajectory, they almost scored a goal with the header from Fullkrug and I'm very disappointed.

"Nobody noticed, I think. But it's not that nobody noticed, it's that you have expressly told us that the defenders cannot defend with their hands behind their back because we don't want the game like this.

"What do I do next week? What do I tell the defenders?"

Paqueta coolly dispatched the ball into the bottom-right corner from 12 yards to spark wild scenes in the away end but the

Hammers' joy was short-lived.

Iraola was not surprised to see Cherries substitute Unal fire a spectacular set-piece into the top-left

corner from around 30 yards during the thrilling finale.

"I think everyone involved in the team straight away was thinking 'this is going to be close' because he trains a lot," said Iraola. "He's our specialist and the consistency is good.

"It's always difficult because it was quite far but I think everyone felt that if it's not a goal, it's going to get close."

Bournemouth climbed to sixth - to sit above Aston Villa on goal difference - while West Ham

remained 14th.

Hammers boss

Julen Lopetegui, who enjoyed a much-needed 2-1 win over Wolves last Monday, said: "It was a pity for us because we were very close to achieving the three points. But it's true that Unal scored a fantastic freekick.

"It has been a very demanding match for both teams. We did very, very well in a lot of minutes. We were better than them in the first half.

"We had more expected goals than them in all the match, despite them having more shots.

"I think very positive things about the team. The team showed a very good behaviour." - The Independent



Bournemouth's Evanilson (top) vies with West Ham's Konstantinos Mavropanos during the English Premier League match at the Vitality Stadium yesterday. - AFP/PICT



Rashford set for cut-price transfer

MANCHESTER UNITED have put Marcus Rashford up for sale in the January transfer window as part of Ineos' ruthless efforts to transform the club, according to reports.

Ruben Amorim is said to have agreed that the 27-year-old forward must leave Old Trafford as early as this winter to help stop the rot and boost his major rebuild.

Rashford's future at his boyhood club is in serious doubt as Amorim starts to separate the players he wants to feature in his long-term project from those whom he can cash in on.

The United No. 10 was a glaring omission from the matchday squad in Sunday's stunning 2-1 comeback victory against Manchester City.

Amorim suggested he had left Rashford and Alejandro Garnacho out due to their recent form in matches and training rather than as a disciplinary measure.

But while the latter, United's top goalscorer so far this season, is primed for a big role going forward, Rashford's race could be run.

According to the *Guardian*, the Red Devils have transfer listed the academy graduate in line with an intense cultural reboot to end a decade of mediocrity.

Amorim is claimed to have green-lit Rashford's exit, paving the way for a cut-price transfer in January if a suitable offer arrives.

The report adds that Sir Jim Ratcliffe is serious with his stance that there can be no passengers in his mission to restore former glories in M16.

He is said to be ready to cut United's losses on Rashford next year with a short-term pain for long-term gain philosophy.

Whether Rashford's exit will come to fruition remains to be seen. The £365,000-a-week (RM2m) salary on the five-year contract he signed last summer is a major stumbling block. - Express Newspapers

BY LAWRENCE OSTLER

RUBEN AMORIM has admitted it is "not a good thing" that his Manchester United line-up is being leaked before matches.

The United team spread on social media on Saturday evening ahead of their clash with Manchester City at the



Ruben Amorim. - AFP/PICT

Dressing room leaks irk Amorim

Etihad Stadium on Sunday.

As revealed online, Amorim left out Marcus Rashford and top scorer Alejandro Garnacho from the matchday squad, later explaining: "It's important for me the performance in training, the performance in game, the way you dress, the way you eat, the way you engage with the teammates, the way you push your teammates."

The leaked teamsheet did not appear to affect United's success as they came back from a goal down to beat the champions 2-1

thanks to a late winner by Amad Diallo.

Afterwards, Amorim said he was aware of the leak coming out of his dressing room.

"I know that story," the manager said, via the club's official website. "I don't know, I think it's impossible to fix nowadays because you have a lot of people in the club, the players talk with agents.

"I don't know, you can talk with friends, so it's hard to know. It's not a good thing but let's move on and go to the next one and see if they find the next starting XI."

Rashford was substituted after 56 minutes of United's Europa League match against Viktoria Plzen on Thursday and has scored three goals in six appearances under Amorim,

while Garnacho, who scored in United's FA Cup final win against City in May, came off the bench in that game.

"If they train well with the talent they have, we will be so much better with both of them (Rashford and Garnacho). But they have to work hard," Amorim said, adding that both players had been in training on the morning of Sunday's derby game.

"Today, they train really hard, so it's a good thing."

Team leaks are common in the Premier League and United's line-up has often been public knowledge hours before kickoff, but it was the early timing ahead of such a significant match which raised eyebrows at Old Trafford. - The Independent

Maddison hopes 'big night' can be catalyst for Spurs

BY GEORGE SESSIONS

JAMES MADDISON lauded a "big night" for Tottenham after their 5-0 victory at Southampton built some much-needed momentum ahead of a crucial week for the club.

Spurs were without nine first-team players for the trip to St Mary's, but produced a five-star display with three goals inside 14 minutes before adding another two before-half-time.

Maddison proved the catalyst for Tottenham to register a first win in six attempts with the opener after 36 seconds before he grabbed a second to take his tally for the season to

seven.

It was a first triumph for the north London outfit since a 4-0 victory at Manchester City on Nov 23 where Maddison also scored twice, but - much like many of his teammates - he has flattered to deceive since.

A run of one win in eight increased the external noise around the position of head coach Ange Postecoglou, but this result was the perfect boost before Friday's (4am Malaysian time) Carabao Cup quarterfinal at home to Manchester United and Monday's (12.30am) visit of Premier League leaders Liverpool.

"It was a big night for us,"

Maddison told *BBC's Match of the Day*.

"We had a poor loss away at Bournemouth and ended up losing at home to Chelsea, a draw with Rangers and you know what it's like when you are a big team like Tottenham, you get fingers pointed at you and a lot of outside noise, external noise.

"So, make no mistake about that, that was a big night for us to go and win and we've struggled against the lesser teams a little bit.

"It was important and I'm really proud of the lads to come here and put in that performance to get three points. Hopefully it kickstarts a little

bit of momentum."

Postecoglou did not have a completely perfect night after left-back Destiny Udogie was forced off in the 28th minute.

However, the Spurs boss hoped it was only precautionary, which means Udogie could be fit enough to face United on Friday.

"He felt a bit tight in his quad," Postecoglou said of Udogie. "To be fair, he wanted to continue but we can't take any risks at the moment, so we took him off (along) with Sonny.

"I don't think it's anything significant at this stage and more precautionary." - The Independent

RESULTS & STANDINGS

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE: Bournemouth 1 (Unal 90) West Ham 1 (Paqueta 87-pen).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	15	11	3	1	31	13	36
Chelsea	16	10	4	2	37	19	34
Arsenal	16	8	6	2	29	15	30
Nottm Forest	16	8	4	4	21	19	28
Man City	16	8	3	5	28	23	27
Bournemouth	16	7	4	5	24	21	25
Aston Villa	16	7	4	5	24	25	25
Fulham	16	6	6	4	24	22	24
Brighton	16	6	6	4	26	25	24
Tottenham	16	7	2	7	36	19	23
Brentford	16	7	2	7	32	30	23
Newcastle	16	6	5	5	23	21	23
Man Utd	16	6	4	6	21	19	22
West Ham	16	5	4	7	21	29	19
Crystal Palace	16	3	7	6	17	21	16
Everton	15	3	6	6	14	21	15
Leicester	16	3	5	8	21	34	14
Ipswich	16	2	6	8	16	28	12
Wolves	16	2	3	11	24	40	9
Southampton	16	1	2	13	11	36	5

SERIE A: Lazio 0 Inter 6 (Calhanoglu 41-pen, Dimarco 45, Barella 51, Dumfries 53, Carlos Augusto 77, Thuram 90).

TOP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atalanta	16	12	1	3	39	17	37
Napoli	16	11	2	3	24	11	35
Inter Milan	15	10	4	1	40	15	34
Fiorentina	15	9	4	2	28	11	31
Lazio	16	10	1	5	30	23	31
Juventus	16	6	10	0	26	12	28

SHORTS

Junior squash players crowned champions at Singapore open

TWO Malaysian junior squash players, Hashvind Kugan and Ayesha Rania Syed Kebir, delivered impressive performances by winning the men's and women's U-19 singles titles at the 2024 Singapore Open Squash Championship on Sunday.

In the final at the Kallang Squash Centre, Hashvind, who was the top seed, defeated fellow Malaysian Heng Veroon 11-3, 11-5, 7-11, and 11-5.

Ayesha Rania capped off her performance with a decisive three-set win, defeating top seed and hosts' representative Raifa Putri Yattaqi 11-4, 11-6, 14-12.

Malaysia also secured four other titles in various categories, with Mohammad Nor Bakri winning the Boys' U-11 singles, Saimar Singh Bamotra in the Boys' U-15, Maisarah Mohd Khairul Nizam in the Girls' Under-13, and Harleein Tan in the Girls' U-17 singles.

Pahang sports complexes being upgraded

EIGHT sports complexes in Pahang are being upgraded to meet the needs of athletes and youth in the state, said Deputy Youth and Sports Minister Adam Adli Abd Halim.

He said the initiative reflects the commitment of the Madani government in implementing strategic efforts related to youth and sports development in Malaysia.

"There are eight (projects) in total being upgraded in Pahang. Among them are the upgrading of the Pahang Sports Complex (Sukpa) in Indera Mahkota, Kuantan, at a cost of RM25 million, which is expected to be completed by May next year.

"Additionally, the Indera Mahkota Hockey Stadium is being upgraded at a cost of RM3.5m, and the pitch at Darul Makmur Stadium in Kuantan is being replaced for RM500,000, as previously announced by the Ministry of Youth and Sports," he told reporters after officiating the completion ceremony of the Rompin Kompleks Rakan Muda (KRM) project.

"We hope this upgrade will benefit not only the local youth but also visitors to Rompin.

"It is understood that this area (Rompin) has various attractions, including a popular fishing festival. Visitors can make use of the facilities at KRM in the future," he said.

No overlapping duties for Cklamovski, Vicente: FAM

FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF MALAYSIA (FAM) have given an assurance that there is no overlapping of duty between new Harimau Malaya head coach Peter Cklamovski and interim coach Pau Marti Vicente due to the ongoing 2024 Asean Championship.

FAM deputy president Datuk Mohd Yusoff Mahadi said the championship, which ends on Jan 5, 2025, remains the final assignment for Pau Marti before Cklamovski takes over.

"Pau Marti's assignment is to handle the squad for the Asean Championship. So, if they go far in the tournament, I think he will continue until the tournament ends.

"Although we will have a new coach, that will be a new setup.

"There is an understanding of the new coaching structure and Pau Marti also knows this, so there is no issue. When we

appointed the new head coach, it meant that he (Pau Marti) will no longer be in the coaching structure after this," he said after the



Cklamovski (left) and Vicente.

ceremony to announce the collaboration between FAM and Japanese multinational entertainment and video game company Konami eFootball in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Mohd Yusoff said Cklamovski will be allowed to pick his panel of coaches to assist him, including a local assistant coach, and which FAM will evaluate.

He also hopes that Cklamovski will be given sufficient time to prove himself in propelling Harimau Malaya to success.

Earlier, the latest collaboration forged between FAM and Konami eFootball aims to connect traditional football with the digital world and, thus, opening new opportunities to attract the attention of Malaysian supporters.

This collaboration will also see the Harimau Malaya squad officially displayed in all eFootball games, where fans can choose to play as their national team filled with local players, thus providing a unique opportunity to represent their country in the virtual field globally. - Bernama



Goh Sze Fei (left) and Nur Izzuddin. - BERNAMA FILEPIC

New top guns

Sze Fei-Nur Izzuddin now Malaysia's No. 1 men's doubles pair after Hangzhou heroics

career-high ranking when they moved up from eighth to sixth place with 73,940 points, following their runner-up finish at the World Tour Finals in Hangzhou.

National mixed doubles professional duo Goh Soon Huat-Shevon Lai Jemie moved up to seventh spot from 10th with 71,470 points, while China's Feng Yan Zhe-Huang Dong Ping remained atop the rankings with 98,700 points.

Malaysia's men's singles professional ace Lee Zii Jia continued his steady improvement by moving from eighth to sixth place with 79,016 points as China's Shi Yu Qi, the 2024 Paris Olympic gold medalist, still leads the rankings with 103,015 points.

Malaysians Pearly Tan-M. Thinaah stayed in sixth place in the women's doubles rankings for the fifth consecutive week with 79,016 points, a long way behind China's Liu Sheng Shu-Tan Ning, who lead the way with 102,746 points.

South Korean star An Se Young continued to dominate the women's singles rankings with 109,267 points, with Malaysia's independent shuttler Goh Jin Wei trailing in 43rd place with 33,898 points. - Bernama

Sports Minister hopes new coach will take Malaysia's game up a notch

YOUTH and Sports Minister Hannah Yeoh hopes the Harimau Malaya squad will continue to improve under the tutelage of new head coach Peter Cklamovski.

Yeoh believes that the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) have properly scrutinised the Australian coach's profile to ensure the former manager of Japan's FC Tokyo has the right credentials to lead the Harimau Malaya.

"I want to wish the new head coach all the best. So, with the announcement of a new coach and new (RM15 million) funding, I hope the Harimau Malaya will continue to show improvement," she told reporters yesterday.

Previously, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, when tabling Budget 2025, announced a RM15m allocation to support the country's football development.

Meanwhile, Yeoh urged organisers of motorsports events to prioritise safety according to guidelines set by the Motorsports Association of Malaysia (MAM) to ensure the fatality that occurred in Round Three of the Sandakan Drag Battle 2024 does not recur.

"I wish to express my deepest condolences to the driver's family. Although the guidelines have been issued, such incidents still happen. I believe the police are investigating this incident and if organisers still refuse to comply with the guidelines, the police can take action," she said.

On Saturday, the Sandakan Drag Battle, which was not sanctioned by the MAM, saw Team Prostreet KB's Abang Adib Abang Ali lose control of his Honda car and crash just past the finish line.

The 36-year-old Abang Adib died while receiving treatment at the Duchess of Kent Hospital in Sandakan. - Bernama



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SCAN ME

Trust in Pep

City players continue to believe in 'process' and Guardiola, says Foden

PHIL FODEN says Manchester City's players continue to believe in the "process" and manager Pep Guardiola despite rivals Manchester United extending their wretched recent run.

Hopes of securing a record-extending fifth consecutive Premier League crown already look to have gone up in smoke given the way things have gone off the rails recently.

Monday's crushing 2-1 derby defeat at home to neighbours United leaves City fifth in the standings and nine points behind leaders Liverpool, who have a game in hand on their title rivals.

Bruno Fernandes' late penalty cancelled out Josko Gvardiol's header at a shell-shocked Etihad Stadium, where Amad Diallo struck at the death as Guardiola oversaw an eighth loss in 11 matches.

"We are still nowhere near our level, but I still believe that we are playing good enough to get points and results," attacking midfielder Foden said.

"It's about remaining focused throughout the full 90 minutes. We just need to get the focus right."

"We stick together, regroup and believe in ourselves after what we've achieved in the past."

"We keep believing in the process and the manager - I'm sure if we do that we will get back to winning ways and get back to our level."

Guardiola committed his future to City by signing a new deal until 2027 during a rotten run that started with the Carabao Cup exit at Tottenham on Oct 30.

That loss means they now have a free midweek to reflect and refresh before Saturday's (8.30pm Malaysian time) tough-looking Premier League trip to Aston Villa.

"I can't put a finger on what's

going on," Foden said after the defeat to United.

"The game was in our hands. At 1-0 up we were controlling the game. We had a lot of possession."

"It seems to be the story at the

moment. I don't know what happens but we switch off and they score two goals... It keeps happening."

"We've not been used to losing this amount of games in a short period."

"But sometimes you have to

experience this in life, you can't always win.

"You can concede at 1-1 but you can't concede straight after, that's unacceptable. It's just one of those, it's the way it is."

"At the start when you lose a couple of games no (it's not a confidence issue), but when it happens a lot it feels like a mental thing."

"The changing room is obviously going to be down and sad at the moment, but we can't dwell on this too much - we have to try and pick ourselves back up."

"In football there is always another opportunity to make it right."

City's trip to Villa at the weekend is followed by a Boxing Day game at home to Everton before rounding off 2024 away to Leicester.

"It's about keeping our mentality strong throughout the whole 90 minutes and we're not doing that at the moment," Foden said.

"We have to go again and show character to come back from this blip."

"It's not a time for moaning - it's about sticking together, remaining strong and going again. I'm positive we are going to come back."

Given Guardiola's success since arriving in Manchester and the fact he's just been handed a new contract, the chances of him being sacked out are essentially non-existent. But what if Guardiola was to resign instead?

It was a question put to ex-City ace Shay Given in the midst of his former club's winless run.

"I don't think he'll ever get sacked because of the level he's been at and what he's done for the club," Given said.

"I don't see Pep as a quitter or someone who walks away from a challenge. But it is in his career, he's never had a spell like this."

"Sometimes you learn more when you go through a bad spell, than when you're flying at the top of the league." - The Independent/Express Newspapers

